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**Event of the Radically New:
Revelation in the Theology of Walter Kasper**

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Abstract

The present study analyses the concept of revelation in the theology of Walter Kasper (b. 1933). The method of the study is systematic analysis, which focuses on ascertaining the commonalities, characteristics and possible inconsistencies in Kasper's thought. The sources for this study consist of works pertinent to the subject in the corpus of Kasper's writings from 1965 to 2015.

In order to offer a full account of Kasper's understanding of revelation, this study analyses the philosophical and theological background of his thought. The present study outlines and discusses Kasper's interpretation of the doctrine of revelation, his understanding of how the Bible should be interpreted and his dogmatic method. This study also discusses Kasper's understanding of the meaning of revelation in the modern era. In line with previous studies of Kasper's theology also this study concludes that the three influences that have most affected Kasper's thought are: German idealist philosophy, the Tübingen School and the Second Vatican Council.

This study argues that Kasper's conception of revelation is dynamic and dialogical. With the help of the concepts of German idealist philosophy, especially that of F.W.J Schelling, Kasper sketches a model of revelation theology based on the idea that, precisely because the human being is finite, he is able to conceive that there must lie an infinite ground that is the ground of being of all reality. In the meaning event (*Sinnerfahrung*) the human being realises that his or her ground of being must lie in infinite reality. The human being's true freedom can only be fulfilled in connection to God, who is himself perfect freedom. This study argues that this basic philosophical framework can open possibilities for dialogue with other world views as well.

Kasper argues that the Trinitarian God abides in relation (Father, Son and the Holy Spirit), and the immanent reality of the Trinitarian God is thus reflected in the Creation. As God's creation and God's image, human beings are intended to be in dialogue, both with God and with other human beings. In his self-revelation God gives his promise: he will be with his people always. In the Exodus narrative this promise culminates in the event of the burning bush, in which God gives his Name to Moses (Ex 3,14). In the New Testament literature the promise finds its fulfilment in the Incarnation.

The title of this study is *Event of the Radically New*. The most important observation concerning the modern, post-Vatican II Catholic understanding of theology of revelation is that revelation consists not only of information but rather that it is primarily an event. It is an event in which God reveals himself anew in each particular historical era. It is radical in the sense that it brings something completely new and completely transforming to our reality. As well, it is radical because it reflects the eternal spirit of the Gospel, the roots (*radices*) of Christian faith. Thus, paradoxically, revelation is at the same time radically eternal and radically new, open to the future. Kasper's theology of revelation culminates in Christology. The truth of the Christian faith, the truth that shapes and renews our reality, is the incarnate Word of God, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In Christ's full humanity the mystery of the meaning of being human is solved once and for all. Christ is God's freedom, love and mercy incarnate. He is the answer to all search for meaning. In him, reality is interpreted in a completely new, illuminating light. In Christ the majestic quality of God's being (grace, *Gnade*), appears in human history as mercy (*Barmherzigkeit*). In Jesus Christ, Christians find the fulfilment of their yearning for a new, meaningful experience: a fulfilment that modern man so determinedly, but in vain, tries to find in immanent reality.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Walter Kasper as a Representative of Catholic Theology after the Second Vatican Council

The overcoming of 19th century Neoscholastic Theology characterises the theological atmosphere of the 20th century Catholic Church. Neoscholasticism tried to solve the modern crisis of theology by returning to the high scholastic roots of doctrine and forming a timeless version of the scholastic tradition.¹ The break in metaphysics in its classical form – both in the development of philosophy in and outside the Catholic Church – resulted in a newfound quest in the Catholic Church to assimilate the reality we live in into theological discussion rather than to build a theology that is a super-theology with no interface with the surrounding reality. Walter Kasper (1933–)² represents modern Catholic theology after the Second Vatican Council with his practical and society-oriented approach to doctrinal and ecclesiological questions.

Kasper has witnessed both the catastrophic consequences of the Second World War as well as the opening up of the Church to the world in the Second Vatican Council. As Professor of Dogmatics³, bishop of Rottenburg-Stuttgart and president of the

¹ TK, 7; See also GPV, 148; Kerr 2007, vii; O'Meara 2014, 132; Clifford 2014, 155; Podhorecki 2001, 24. The time period between the First and Second Vatican Councils gave direction to the whole spirit of Catholic theology in the 20th century. Maurice Blondel combined classical Neoplatonic philosophy with modern pragmatic philosophy and searched for an “active” philosophy that proposed choosing, willing and acting to open up the possibility for the supernatural in Christianity. His thinking that aimed to combine philosophy and Christian belief systems is behind many 20th century Catholic theologians like Rahner and Balthasar. It also reflects the characteristic move of 20th century Catholic theology towards a dialogical attitude towards the questions, problems and challenges of the modern era. Instead of fighting the fight against modernity, a more open attitude towards a co-existence between the Church and society started to emerge. See also Donovan 2005, 84.

² Walter Kasper was born on the 5th of March 1933 in the city of Heidenheim-Brenz in the diocese of Rottenburg-Stuttgart, the same area to later become his diocese as bishop. The Kasper family was very religious, which affected young Walter from the very first years of his life. Kasper began his studies in philosophy and theology in the Universities of Tübingen and Münster in 1952. His teachers included Hans Küng and Leo Scheffczyk, who together represent two different interpretations of Catholic theology, one being a well-known liberal and in some circles even a controversial theologian; the other a well-known conservative theologian. Kasper also worked as an assistant for them both, and some scholars are convinced that the radical difference between the two and Kasper's ability to work with both of them indicated his later role as the dialogue-oriented ecumenical spokesperson of the Vatican. Kasper completed his pre-ordination seminar in 1956 and was ordained a priest in 1957. In 1961, when Kasper was 28 years old, he defended his dissertation on the topic of the doctrine of the Tübingen School in the 19th century. The title of the dissertation was *Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule*. (The most recent edition was published 2011: WKG S 1. Freiburg: Herder.) HGS, 44–45; 57; Joha 1992, 83. For biographical details as well as Kasper's own reminiscences of his upbringing in the National Socialistic regime of Germany and the meaning of being a Catholic in a politically and theologically difficult time; and of his studies as well as his experience of being a theologian at the time of reform (namely the 1960's) in the Catholic Church, see Walter Kasper & Daniel Deckers: *Wo das Herz des Glaubens schlägt: Die Erfahrung eines Lebens*. 2008. Freiburg: Herder.

³ Between 1964 and 1970 Kasper held the Chair of Dogmatics at the University of Münster and from 1970 at Tübingen. Between 1983 and 1984 Kasper was a visiting professor at The Catholic University of America in Washington. His professorship at Tübingen continued until 1989 when he was ordained a

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity he has become one of the most well-known contemporary Catholic theologians.⁴ He has had a major role in ecumenical dialogues and declarations of the Catholic Church with other Christian denominations in the late 20th and the beginning of 21st century. At the latest Kasper became one of the most visible theologians of the Catholic Church in the 21st century when Pope Francis gave him high praise in the first days of his pontificate. Reading Kasper's book about mercy during the conclave, Francis told the world at his first Angelus, "[the book] did me such good [...]" Kasper said that hearing the word mercy changes everything [...] It changes the world."⁵

Kasper's bibliography consists of hundreds of articles, lectures and dozens of books. He retired as the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in June 2010 but he is still actively engaged both in ecumenical dialogue as well as in theological discussion.⁶

Kasper's theological orientation has been greatly influenced by the primordial confrontation between the deeply religious atmosphere of his childhood upbringing and the false utopian prosperity claim of the thousand-year-reign of the National Socialist party from the 1930^s to 1945 Germany. This juxtaposition sheds light on Kasper's understanding of the task of theology in the modern world.⁷ For him it is not only a question

bishop of his home diocese, Rottenburg-Stuttgart. Rottenburg-Stuttgart is a diocese of over two million Catholics. HGS, 99–100.

⁴ E.g. *Wikmark* 1978, 12; DW, 190. Kasper's colleagues and contemporaries Rahner, Küng and Ratzinger all have very different emphases in their work, but at least on one question all three and Kasper agree: modern Catholic theology must distance itself from the Neoscholastic theology. This view is common in Catholic theology after the Second Vatican Council. In 1994 he was appointed a representative to The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. Five years later Kasper resigned as bishop when he was elected an archbishop of the Roman Curia. The same year he became the secretary for The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and in February 2001 he was elevated to Cardinal by John Paul II. In May of the same year Kasper was appointed the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, succeeding Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy. In this position Kasper was also the president of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. Kasper has attained a reputation as a pro-ecumenism spokesperson and as a notable figure in international ecumenical dialogue. For example Kasper given an award by the Catholic Church year 2002, in 2004 the University of Seattle awarded him an honorary doctorate for his ecumenical merits, and the same year he was awarded for promoting Catholic-Jewish dialogue. In 2010 Kasper was honoured by the American Jewish committee and called "a champion" against anti-Semitism. [<http://www.raoulwallenberg.net/?en/news/1590.htm>] (accessed 26.5.2015) [<http://www.zenit.org/article-29135?l=english>] (accessed 26.5.2015); *Allen* 2002, 48.

⁵ *Ivereigh* 2015; *Ivereigh* 2014, 369–370

⁶ Kasper is especially well-known and respected in his work on behalf of ecumenical relations, and in the year 1979 he was elected one of the twelve representatives of the Catholic Church to the WCC Faith and Order –commission. Kasper has also officially stated that the 2000 Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith *Dominus Iesus* is too complicated in its language. In his central ecumenical role Kasper has had to explain and the contents of *Dominus Iesus* in several occasions and also soften some of the document's statements for example of how the Catholic Church defines what a "Christian Church" is. Year 2005 *Das Kardinal Walter Kasper Institute* was founded in Vallendar, Germany. The intention of the institute is to promote ecumenical theology and spirituality; collect, edit and study Kasper's works and organise symposiums and seminars inspired by Kasper's theological thinking. [<http://www.kardinal-kasper-stiftung.de/institut.html>] (accessed 26.5.2015)

⁷ HGS, 14–19; see also KK, 428; FPM, 272. This is true of the whole generation of Catholic priests in Germany in the early 20th century. See, for example *Kerr* 2007, 88. The other influential philosopher behind Kasper's thinking, Martin Heidegger, was also affected by the National Socialist politics of 1930's and 40's Germany. Kasper attributes the rise of nihilism to human attempts to create earthly utopias in a manner very

of giving an account of the faith that he professes, but also a question of a profound understanding of the value and meaning of being a human in a secular age. The moral, ecclesial, political and sociological crisis of Germany in the first half of the 20th century is illuminating for the interpretation of the whole field of German theology in the 20th and 21st centuries. The two World Wars gave Germany a permanent wound. The World Wars not only profoundly damaged Germany's relations with other countries but also affected people's ability to trust their own government. The theologians of Kasper's generation were forced to practise religion in secret, they were taught by professors who were held prisoner in concentration camps. They suffered when parents, siblings or they themselves were sent to concentration camps; they saw the despair of the Church at the time of the National Socialist regime, and in some cases had to come to terms with colleagues favouring the obviously malignant politics of that same regime. Furthermore, they saw the emancipation of culture and society emblematic of the 1960s, the student movement, pluralism, and the rise of cultural relativism. At least some of these theologians, including Kasper, see cultural relativism as a threat. All of these post-war developments are symptomatic of the late 20th and early 21st century. Theologians of the 20th and 21st centuries are facing both a multicultural but also a multi-theological field of research: it is not enough to be only apologetical, one must also be dialogical and aware of the culture modern people live in. The situation is completely new in the whole of human history.

1.2. Studies of Kasper's Theology

The interest in Kasper's theology has increased especially after he was appointed cardinal in 2001.⁸ The following is, therefore, not a comprehensive representation of all Kasper studies but a sample providing a general idea of the field of Kasper research. This sample consists primarily of dissertations as they provide the best survey of the field of Kasper studies, but it also includes some shorter analysis or studies when relevant for the present study. This survey also gives a summary and an outline of the main themes in Kasper studies over a period of almost 40 years.

Örjan Wikmark's 1978 dissertation⁹ deals with Kasper's, Hans Küng's and Karl Rahner's interpretations of the doctrine of infallibility. The central theme is the inconvenience of the doctrine of infallibility for the relations of the Catholic Church with other Christian churches. The theologians taken as examples are, in Wikmark's own words, the best-known Catholic theologians of the 1970s. Wikmark compares the doctrine of infallibility with the doctrine of truth in the Gospel, concluding that the Gospel's truth (in

similar to Heidegger (who, after personally being favourable to the Nazi regime, also had personal reasons for attempting to explain the moral collapse of the post World War II Western civilisation in a philosophically sustainable way). See Hart 2011, 45.

⁸ *Pro Quest*, the international database of dissertations includes informative Abstracts of most of the Kasper studies worldwide.[<http://dissexpress.umi.com/dxweb/search.html>] (accessed 26.5.2015).

⁹ *Öfelbarhet och evangelium: En studie i Karl Rahners, Hans Küngs och Walter Kaspers uppfattning av kyrkans och läroämbetets infallibilitet*. Diss. Lund: Verbum. 1978.

other words the infallibility of the Gospel), should be the authority that is fundamental to all doctrinal formations.

In 1986, Arne Rasmusson and Roland Spjuth authored a joint study of Kasper's, Edward Schillebeeckx's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's Christologies.¹⁰ The motive of the study was to create a Swedish textbook for modern Christological development and theological hermeneutics. Their analysis of Kasper's theology takes the Enlightenment as a starting point: when reality is perceived only as an object of the human being's investigation and there is a strong separation between the inner and outer reality of the human being, God becomes only a reality of the inner life of a person or he becomes irrelevant altogether. The time period after the Enlightenment has exhibited the tendency to divorce everyday experience from religious reality. This study aims to give a response to modern society's growing secularism from the central point of theology in the thinking of three famous theologians of the 20th century.

Joseph G. Ramisch wrote his dissertation on the historical Jesus and Christological method: he discusses the work of Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng and Kasper. The central question of the dissertation is how much a theologian can utilise the research material of the Quest for the historical Jesus when trying to structure Christology. The result of the study is that this kind of Christological study requires a balance between faith and reason and between theology and history. In his study Ramisch pays special attention to the contributors of Christological doctrinal development in 20th century Catholic theology. According to Ramisch, Kasper, Schillebeeckx, Küng and their Christologies offer a good common ground for discussion within the Catholic Church. The significance of the study of the historical Jesus is still not, however, clarified in the doctrinal formulation of Christology, Ramisch argues.¹¹

In his 1987 doctoral dissertation Zdenko Joha studied the relationship between Kasper's Christology and anthropology vis-à-vis modern anthropological theology.¹² As references Joha took Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Juan Alfaro and René Latourelle. Joha places Kasper's theology in the line of those theologies affected by the modern, anthropological turn. Joha argues that in Kasper's Christological theology, besides being the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament, Jesus Christ is also the fulfilment of human destiny and all of history. Joha approaches this theme especially from the point of view of the critique that Kasper poses to the anthropological Christology of Karl Rahner.

Regina Radlbeck defended her doctoral dissertation same year as Joha on the topic of the so-called "third wave" of modern Trinitarian theology, with Walter Kasper and Jürgen Moltmann as its representatives.¹³ Radlbeck introduces the "third wave"

¹⁰ *Kristologiska perspektiv: Om möjligheter och återvändsgränder i modern teologi med speciell referens till Edward Schillebeeckx, Wolfhart Pannenberg och Walter Kasper*. Örebro: Libris. 1986.

¹¹ [<http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/8613473>] (accessed 26.5.2015)

¹² *Christologie und Anthropologie: Eine Verhältnisbestimmung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des theologischen Denkens Walter Kaspers*. 1992. Diss. Freiburg: Herder.

¹³ *Der Personbegriff in der Trinitätstheologie der Gegenwart – untersucht am Beispiel der Entwürfe Jürgen Moltmanns und Walter Kaspers*. Diss. Regensburg Universität. 1988.

interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity. According to the representatives of the third wave, the concept of person is an inseparable part of Trinitarian doctrine. Karl Barth and Karl Rahner argue that the concept “person” is today understood in a most definite manner as a “self-conscious will and activity center” and therefore, the discussion concerning the Trinitarian God is often falsely understood as discussion of three Gods, i.e. tri-theistic God. Therefore, Rahner and Barth suggest that the concept “person” should only be used as “a metaphorical corrective” when it is absolutely necessary to separate the persons in the context of Trinitarian doctrine – or that the separation should be relinquished altogether. Kasper and Moltmann, instead propose that the use of the concept of person be taken further: theologians should overcome its abstract meaning and find a way to use it as an inseparable part of the doctrine of the Trinity.¹⁴

Nicolo Madonia’s doctoral thesis is about Kasper’s hermeneutics and Christology. The dissertation was examined in the Pontificia Universita Gregoriana in 1989.¹⁵ Madonia joins most Kasper scholars in his view that Kasper’s hermeneutics originates specifically from German idealistic philosophy, especially Schelling, and the theology of the Tübingen School. Madonia concludes that in Kasper’s Christological construction the destiny of Jesus of Nazareth of history is different from the mystery of Christ.

Patricia Ann Plovovich defended her doctoral thesis on Kasper’s theological method in 1990.¹⁶ According to Plovovich, Kasper’s methodological starting point is in his approach to theology from the perspective of theology of history: Kasper aims to create a new synthesis between faith and reason utilising the approach of theology of history. Plovovich also seeks to explain the philosophical and theological categories behind Kasper’s theological thought.¹⁷ She also analyses Kasper’s revelation theology.¹⁸

Michael Eugene O’Keeffe wrote his 1994 University of Notre Dame dissertation on modern day Spirit Christologies¹⁹. His dissertation introduces the Spirit Christologies of W. H. Lampe, Piet Schoonenberg and Walter Kasper.²⁰ O’Keeffe’s starting point is the shift in Christology from the 1960’s. O’Keeffe introduces Christologies that strive both to counter doctrinal problematics and social and/or political questions

¹⁴ Radlbeck 1989, 13–18; 205–214. See also Kasper’s critical evaluation of the Trinitarian concepts of Barth and Rahner. GJ, 458–463. See also new investigation on the topic of the Trinity in Rahner’s and Kasper’s theologies, and how the latter is – albeit critical in tone – also in debt to Rahner’s vision: *O’Regan* 2014, 110–126.

¹⁵ *Hermeneutics and Christology by Walter Kasper*. Diss. Pontificia Universita Gregoriana. 1989.

¹⁶ *The Theological Method of Walter Kasper*. Diss. Fordham University. 1990.

¹⁷ [<http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9020020>] (accessed 26.5.2015)

¹⁸ *Plovovich* 1990, 148–208.

¹⁹ Spirit Christology strives to find an expression for Christ’s divinity with the help of the biblical symbol of God as Spirit instead of expressing his divinity by means of the concept of the Logos. O’Keeffe’s study interprets Spirit Christology as a model that illuminates the God-human relationship on the basis of Jesus Christ’s bringing together both scriptural, traditional and experiential claims in light of the conciliar claims of Nicaea and Chalcedon as parameters within which Christology develops. On the definition of Spirit Christology: see also *Haight* 1992, 257.

²⁰ *Contemporary Spirit Christologies: an Examination of G.W.H. Lampe, Walter Kasper, and Piet Schoonenberg*. Diss. University of Notre Dame. 1994.

concerning Christology. He analyses the Christologies he discusses especially with respect to the use of the New Testament in the arguments for these Christologies. The critics of classical theology lead in some cases to new outlines of Christology that take into account both anthropological and soteriological points of view. According to O’Keeffe, Kasper especially emphasises the role of the Spirit in the hypostatic union.²¹

In 1996 Józef Morawa defended his dissertation on Kasper’s idea of *Communio*-Church as a sacrament of redemption in and for the world.²² He focuses on Walter Kasper’s interpretation of the concept of *communio*²³ as articulated by the Second Vatican Council. In the situation of the secularised, post-modern era the Church needs new – or serious renewal of the old – means for proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. Kasper’s interpretation of the *communio* idea is a theory which strives to show the Church’s place in modern society and in the future as a place of unity, truth, freedom, peace and forgiveness of sins. The *communio* idea is not only a way to describe the unity and community, a so-called brotherhood, of Christ’s Church, but *communio* is also the answer to the mystery of the Triune God. Because God is not alone, neither are his people.²⁴

Joseph Palakeel studied in his dissertation the use of analogy in theological discourse, paying special attention to its contribution in ecumenical discourse.²⁵ His study consists of analysis of Karl Barth’s (analogy of faith), Hans Urs von Balthasar’s (analogy of love), Eberhard Jüngel’s (analogy of advent), Karl Rahner’s (analogy of man) and Walter Kasper’s (analogy of freedom) use of analogy in theological discourses. A perspective on the background of these discussions is given in his analysis of the analogical thinking of Erich Przywara. Palakeel argues that the so-called Przywara-Barth-Balthasar debate on analogy has led to several new theories of analogy. He shows that in 20th century analogical discourse the impact of both German idealistic philosophy as well as the struggle to

²¹ [<http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9424348>] (accessed 26.5.2015). O’Keeffe’s dissertation adviser was the late Catherine Mowry LaCugna, American Catholic theologian at the University of Notre Dame. She is known for her monograph *God for Us*, a study of Trinitarian theology. She argues that the abstract differentiation between the economic and immanent Trinity does not serve the proper place of Trinitarian theology in the liturgical life of the Church or in the Church’s understanding of salvation. Although criticised by the Dominican theologian Thomas Weinandy for her feminist perspective, her referring to God using feminine attributes and blurring the concepts of Son and Spirit, LaCugna’s thought comes close to many modern Trinitarian theologies which consider person and relation as key concepts for understanding the Trinity. She further developed Rahner’s view that the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity, stating that the standard paradigm of economic and immanent Trinity has various limitations. Instead she suggested that the principle of inseparability of theologia and oikonomia should be the starting point for Trinitarian theology and developed a relational ontology of person-in-communion within this structure. This paradigm is very close to Kasper’s Trinitarian theology as well. LaCugna’s work has also been praised as one of “the most stimulating theological works of the past few decades”. See *Groppe* 2002, 730; *Holzer* 2011, 325; *Bauerschmidt* 2011, 534; *Weinandy* 1995, 132–133; *LaCugna* 1991, 165–173.

²² *Die Communio-Kirche als Sakrament des Heils in und für die Welt: Zum erneuerten Verständnis der Sendung der Kirche in der Gegenwart im Werk Walter Kaspers*. Diss. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Peter Lang. 1996.

²³ By the end of the 1980s *communio* (or *koinonia*) would become a concept around which most ecumenical discussions of unity centres. See *Stauffer* 2009, 261.

²⁴ *Morawa* 1996, 223.

²⁵ *The Use of Analogy in Theological Discourse: An Investigation in Ecumenical Perspective*. Diss. Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana.

overcome the challenges of modernity can be seen. He then places the theologies of Rahner, Balthasar and Kasper in the continuum of the analogical debate begun by Barth and Przywara.

Thomas I. Petriano wrote his doctoral thesis in 1998 on Kasper's Christology.²⁶ According to Petriano, in Kasper's theology there is a shift from Spirit Christology to Son Christology. Petriano argues that Spirit Christology is not only an expression of the theological trend of recent years but also a clearly biblical approach to Christological problematics. Petriano states that Spirit Christology is precisely the right approach to Christological problematics because Spirit Christology is built into the Christology of the New Testament. According to Petriano, Kasper is a pioneer in Spirit Christology oriented Roman Catholic theology, but goes on to state that in Kasper's later works Spirit Christology gives way to Son Christology. Petriano's arguments are based mainly on *Jesus der Christus* and *Der Gott Jesu Christi*, and he claims that this shift occurs in between them: *Jesus der Christus* representing the Spirit-Christology and *Der Gott Jesu Christi* Son and Logos Christologies. Petriano argues that Kasper emphasises Son and Logos Christologies in his subsequent work. According to Petriano, this shift is unfortunate because Logos Christology needs a pneumatologically oriented Christology alongside it.²⁷

Ralph N. McMichael Jr's 1999 dissertation studies the apologetic orientation of Kasper's Trinitarian doctrine.²⁸ McMichael states that Kasper's theological point of departure is to try to answer the challenge of modern atheism. It is typical, according to McMichael, of Kasper's apologetics that he emphasises that modern atheism is more about denying a metaphysical idol, not denying the God of Christian confession. McMichael begins his study with an account of Kasper's concept of modern atheism and its roots. McMichael's main source is Kasper's *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. He argues that according to Kasper, modern atheism is a post-Christian phenomenon. For example, in Antiquity there were people who did not believe in the predominant gods but who did not deny the existence of divinity *per se*. Moreover, the early Christians could also be defined as atheists as they denied the existing gods of the Roman Empire and instead were followers of Christ. According to Kasper, modern atheism is a consequence of modern secularism.²⁹

According to McMichael, in his Trinitarian perspectives Kasper relies on classic, biblical and traditional interpretations when trying to create a renewed doctrine of the Trinitarian God. McMichael suggests the concept of "Trinitarian apologetics" as Kasper's point of departure.³⁰ By utilising this concept, McMichael ensures that Kasper's apologetic cannot be labelled as traditional, liberal-foundational or *ad hoc* apologetics, but

²⁶ *Spirit Christology or Son Christology? An Analysis of the Tension between the Two in the Theology of Walter Kasper*. Diss. Fordham University. 1998.

²⁷ [<http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9825874>] (accessed 26.5.2015)

²⁸ *Trinitarian Apologetics: Walter Kasper's Theology of God in Response to Modern Atheism*. Diss. The Catholic University of America. 1999.

²⁹ McMichael 1999, 34–35.

³⁰ McMichael 1999, xiv.

that its point of departure is precisely Trinitarian.³¹ McMichael remarks that Kasper finds the answer to the challenge of modern atheism from within: he takes seriously the challenges that atheism poses to theology, but points out at the same time that the challenge that atheism poses to Christianity can also have positive effects. In McMichael's work attention is drawn, however, to his analysis of Kasper's concept of freedom. McMichael points out that freedom is, according to Kasper, the only possible point of departure for understanding the concept of God and it is also the only common conceptual point of departure for the dialogue between believers and atheists. McMichael reviews Kasper's concept of freedom in the light of *Der Gott Jesu Christi*.

Norbert Podhorecki's doctoral thesis from 2001 offers an outline of Kasper's hermeneutics, especially concerning revelation, the Bible and tradition.³² Podhorecki uses the term "hermeneutics of dogma" (*die Dogmenhermeneutik*). For him, the term hermeneutics of dogma means interpretation of dogmas through systematic differentiation, comparison and research. Podhorecki points out that so-called double-sided relativity of dogma (*doppelten Relativität des Dogmas*) prevails between tradition and the Bible. Since it is important to have interpretation between the Bible and the tradition, the place where the truth is situated must be the *communio* of believers.

Paul Galles wrote his comparative study of the theologies of Paul Tillich and Kasper in 2012. Galles discusses the possibilities of God-speech from the point of view of analogy, dialectics and paradox. Both Tillich and Kasper strive to answer the question posed by modern, secular culture: can Christian faith give a definitive answer to the search for meaning and salvation? Whereas Tillich uses a correlation method in which he tries to combine the question of man³³ with the paradox of Christology, Kasper tries to find a more traditional answer from the doctrine of analogy but cannot, however, completely avoid a certain paradoxical aspect in the doctrine of salvation.³⁴

A notable addition to the question of secularism, pluralism and religious dialogue in the context of Kasper's theology is the 2014 conference publication entitled *Speaking Truth in Love: The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper*³⁵. The volume consists

³¹ McMichael 1999, 154: "Accounting for the Christian faith involves an accounting of reality. An account of the Trinity offers an account of reality. Furthermore, in Kasper's apologetics, this Trinitarian account of reality reveals the truth of reality." See also the abstract of McMichael's dissertation: [<http://www.lib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9926381>] (accessed 26.5.2015)

³² *Offenbarung – Schrift – Tradition: Walter Kaspers Beiträge zum Problem der Dogmenhermeneutik*. Diss. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001.

³³ Gendered pronouns in German and English are problematic when it comes to the matter of addressing the whole human race rather than women or men. In this study the use of substantives like human, human being and person are used when referring to human beings. In the present study, when the translation from German to English requires (or it is otherwise required), the pronoun "he" is used to refer to a generic human being. In some cases the substantive "man" reflects the original German intention best. Use of both genders (e.g., "he/she") is not explicitly used in Kasper's German text. Gender-neutralising reference to God (e.g., by using "Godself") does not accurately translate the original German sources.

³⁴ Paul Galles: *Situation und Botschaft: Die soteriologische Vermittlung von Anthropologie und Christologie in den offenen Denkformen von Paul Tillich und Walter Kasper*. 2012. Tillich-Forschungen. Vol 3. Berlin: Gruyter.

³⁵ *Speaking Truth in Love: The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper*. 2014. Ed. Colberg, Kristin M. & Krieger, Robert A. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press.

of essays based on presentations at a conference held at the University of Notre Dame in April 2013. Involving 19 writers in total it is a compact, yet illuminating cross-section of Kasper's theology and his contribution to ecumenical theology and religious dialogue. The articles in the book are divided to three main sections: first deals with Kasper's theological cornerstones, the second focuses on Kasper's position as an ecumenist and the third consists of Kasper's two articles and one sermon. The book locates Kasper in the field of 20th and 21st century Catholic theology emphasising his role as both an erudite dogmatic theologian as well as a practical theologian engaging the everyday life of the Church.

1.3. The Purpose, Sources, Method and Progression Structure of the Study

The present study aims at analysing the concept of revelation in the theology of Walter Kasper. The method employed is systematic analysis, which focuses on finding the commonalities, characteristics and possible inconsistencies in Kasper's thought. This study focuses on both analysis of Kasper's thought and examination of his theological method in the light of theology of revelation. It is possible to investigate the concept of revelation in light of other methodological approaches as well.³⁶ In present study, however, systematic analysis serves as a text-based method that treats the text according to its own terms.³⁷ Systematic analysis aims both to describe Kasper's theology, and to critically analyse his theology in a manner faithful to his own thought.³⁸ The systematic analysis can be described as system-immanent analysis, because the conceptual system of thought is analysed "from inside", which means that the text is analysed "inside out" in its own terms instead of by means of applying a method external to it. We can liken this method to examining an x-ray of the body: one can detect something superficially from the outside as well, but what is most important and what lies underneath can only be seen if one also looks below the surface, if the internal organs are examined thoroughly. Classic systematic analysis brings together a number of text analytic methods such as concept, argumentation and precondition analysis. On the basis of analysis, questions and critical remarks can be directed to the text. System-immanent analysis is directed towards models of thought and systems of concepts. To be able to accomplish this task the material is read analytically with special emphasis on concepts, arguments, processes of arguments and preconditions of arguments. System-immanent analysis is complemented with the knowledge that already can be derived from previous studies (e.g. monographs, articles, interviews, book reviews). With regard to the present study, other theologians will be brought into the discussion in a comparative manner if their views shed light on the problem of this study and if they provide helpful further information on Kasper's position in the field of theology. However, the primary emphasis will be on Kasper's own system of thought.

³⁶ On hermeneutical traditions and a comprehensive history of theological interpretation, see e.g. *Jeanronc* 1994, 1–11; 159–182.

³⁷ On text-based analyzing method, see e.g. *Vikström* 2005, 87–97.

³⁸ Cf. on descriptive-systematical interpretation, see e.g. *Hägglund* 1969, 37–44.

Earlier works on Kasper's theology have focused, as presented in the chapter above, on particular dogmatic themes in Kasper's thought such as Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity. The vast concept of revelation³⁹, however, has so far been neglected or covered only superficially in previous studies. Revelation is a fundamental theological concept. The concept of revelation also refers to a wider philosophical-theological hypernym for the experiences that a human being can receive from the divine reality. Revelation reminds us that what we experience through our senses is not the entire truth. The concept of revelation underlies foundationally every major theological topic. For this reason it is not possible to only deal with the concept of revelation in isolation. Rather, it must be examined in the context of other major theological questions such as Trinitarian theology, Christology, ecclesiology and salvation history. In the analysis of Kasper's revelation theology it is also important to bring into the discussion the questions and problems specific to our own time.

Our age is characterised by secularism on the one hand, and demand for scientific and verifiable truth on the other. Because of globalisation, a modern, western human being has access to more information and has more opportunities to experience the world than ever before. Despite its need for verifiable truths, our age, paradoxically, also has irrational, unpredictable and restless features. Especially in Europe, Christianity struggles for its place in a secularised, pluralistic world that seems to offer something for everyone. To be able to answer the challenge of the modern age, the concept of revelation has to be understood in a more comprehensive manner than only in terms of doctrine. To be able to answer the challenge of growing pluralism and secularism in modern age, Christianity has to be able to offer something exceptional and radical. It has to be able to show that its profound message is not a dead letter or medieval superstition, but instead that it is something that responds to the basic need a human being has to understand himself and the reality surrounding him. It has to show that what God gives us in his revelation is something exceptional, something completely new, meaningful and radical. It is this need and challenge that Kasper takes seriously in his theological *Ansatz*. Kasper is well known for his efforts to bring ecclesiological discussion into the context of modern society. Therefore, a highly practical motive prevails in his contribution to theology. The vast majority of his theological work has been written after the Second Vatican Council and has been strongly affected by it.⁴⁰

The sources for this study consist of Kasper's bibliography, with a particular focus on the monographs that can be considered his main work. The primary sources of this study are *Jesus der Christus* (hereafter JC)⁴¹, *Der Gott Jesu Christi* (GJ)⁴², *Katholische*

³⁹ For a comprehensive overview of the basics of theology of revelation, see e.g. *Seckler* 1985, 60–83; *Böttigheimer* 2012, 359–371.

⁴⁰ See also *Joha* 1992, 4.

⁴¹ *Jesus der Christus*. 2007. Freiburg: Herder. The first edition of *Jesus der Christus* was published in 1974. The present study uses the latest edition (2007). In English: *Jesus the Christ*. 2011. Trans. Dinah Livingstone. London: T&T Clark.

⁴² *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. 2008. Freiburg: Herder. The first edition of *Der Gott Jesu Christi* was published in 1982. In the present work the latest edition from the year 2008 is used. In English: *The God of Jesus Christ*. 2012. Trans. Dinah Livingstone. London: T&T Clark.

Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung (KK)⁴³ and *Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens* (B).⁴⁴ Besides these books,⁴⁵ one article important for the topic of this study, *Offenbarung Gottes in der Geschichte: Gotteswort im Menschenwort* (OG),⁴⁶ is also considered as a primary source for the purposes of this study.

The earliest of these primary sources is *OG*, which was published in 1970. It provides a compact analysis of the concept of revelation and briefly introduces the main emphasis concerning the concept of revelation in Kasper's thought. In this article the main emphasis is in Kasper's theology-of-history approach. The function of this article is not to exhibit philosophical backgrounds of revelation theology but rather to give an outline of the basic fundamental theological conception of revelation. *JC* and *GJ* represent Kasper's systematic theology and contain his treatments of the most central themes of theology such as Christology, pneumatology, revelation theology, religious language and Trinitarian theology. These books were written during Kasper's years as a professor of dogmatic theology at the universities of Münster and Tübingen. *KK* completed the trilogy in 2011, a year after Kasper's retirement from the presidency of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It is more personal in its tone and includes much reminiscing about both the theology of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council as well as Kasper's reflections on the ecumenical dialogues with other Christian churches. *B* was published in 2012 and sheds light on Kasper's use of central concepts of grace and mercy. It is written in very plain language, the tone reflecting Kasper's effort to "give an account of the hope that is in us" (Peter 3,15).

The secondary sources of this study consist of Kasper's other theological work, books, lectures and articles that are relevant in the light of the topic of this study. Kasper's theological bibliography is vast. The collection of his main work (*Gesammelte Schriften*, WKGS) consists of 17 books, some of them still waiting to be (re-) published. In addition there are dozens of articles lectures and interviews, some published and some unpublished. In the five primary sources of this research a timeline of Kasper's thought can be discerned: the first, *OG*, was published in 1970 and the last, *B*, in 2012. Therefore, they represent a period of over 40 years in Kasper's theological thought and provide a good basis for an analysis of Kasper's thought and its possible evolution.

In *OG* Kasper analyses the concept of revelation from the point of view of theology of history. *OG* already includes all Kasper's main emphasis concerning the concept of revelation: history as the place for the encounter with God; Jesus Christ as the

⁴³ *Katholische Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung*. Freiburg: Herder. In English: *The Catholic Church. Nature, Reality and Mission*. 2015. Trans. Thomas Hoebel. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark.

⁴⁴ *Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens*. 2012. Freiburg: Herder. In English: *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. Trans. William Madges.

⁴⁵ In the present study, English translations of *JC*, *GJ*, *KK* and *B* have been based on published English translations compared with the German original. However, in many cases the published English translation has been modified in order to reflect more faithfully the original German. Where this is the case, it is noted in the text.

⁴⁶ *Offenbarung Gottes in der Geschichte: Gotteswort im Menschenwort*. – *Handbuch der Verkündigung* I. Hrsg: Dreher Bruno & Greinacher, Norbert & Klostermann, Ferdinand. Freiburg: Herder. 53–96.

culmination of God's revelation; the Trinitarian God as relation; human being as a "you" for God; the meaning experience as the "place" where the encounter with God happens and the concept of pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), which can be interpreted as an equivalent to the concept of pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*), emerging in Kasper's later writings. All these themes are later elaborated, especially in Kasper's central dogmatic works *JC* and *GJ*.

In *JC* Kasper discusses – as the name of the book suggests – Christology, the Jesus question, his life and death, in the light of both history and the modern day context. In addition, Kasper discusses the question of the historical Jesus. Kasper especially calls attention to the meaning of Jesus' humanity as a mediator between God and man. Kasper emphasises that the Bible's complete testimony includes an implicit view of history and God's salvific plan as a whole. From the point of view of eschatological events, Christology has a special meaning, and not only because Jesus' main message was, according to Kasper, the coming of the Kingdom of God. In Jesus' person the destiny and mystery of being of all humankind is revealed.⁴⁷

The aim of *JC* is to combine scientific research and exegesis with the doctrine of the Church. In *JC* Kasper deals with the most significant themes of the Second Vatican Council: similar challenges, questions and problems that the Church faces today have never before been encountered in its two-thousand-year history. In Kasper's view, those challenges have to be confronted in a way not only faithful to the tradition of Christian faith but also innovative. The book focuses on the most central doctrine of the Church: Christology. Kasper states:

The basis and the meaning of the Church is not an idea, a principle, or a programme. It is not comprised in so many dogmas and moral injunctions. It does not amount to specific church or social structures. All these things are right and proper in their setting. But the basis and meaning of the Church is a person. And not a vague person, but one with a specific name: Jesus Christ.⁴⁸

GJ continues and deepens the themes of *JC*, especially concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. The first chapters of *GJ* deal with challenges that the modern, subject-centered world poses to Christianity. Kasper focuses on modern atheism as a challenge to Christianity. He discusses the thinking of the well-known modern atheists: Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. In relation to atheism, Kasper's approach is dialogical, although he acknowledges that a dialogical approach requires the same attitude from the interlocutor as well. Atheist rhetoric uses the same philosophical apparatus as theology, so the common language already is there – we only have to find the means of using it. The focus in the dialogue, according to Kasper, is the question of being (*die Seinsfrage*) *per se*, and the God-question (*die Gottesfrage*).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ E.g. *JC*, 67.

⁴⁸ *JC*, 37–38: "Sinn und Grund der Kirche ist aber nicht irgendeine Idee, kein Prinzip und kein Programm, sind auch nicht einzelne Dogmen und moralische Gebote, schon gar nicht bestimmte kirchliche oder gesellschaftliche Strukturen. Das alles hat an seinem Ort sein Recht und seine Bedeutung. Grund und Sinn der Kirche ist jedoch eine Person, die einen ganz konkreten Namen hat: Jesus Christus."

⁴⁹ *GJ*, 63–69; *GJ*, 136; *OG*, 84.

In the background of these endeavours for dialogue is Kasper's apologetic motive: how can Christianity find ways to respond to the challenges of our time in such a way that it remains loyal to its roots? For Kasper, the most central task for Christianity is to bring the message of Christ to the awareness of the people of our time in a modern and unique way. In his study Kasper discusses the knowledge of God and its limitations and possibilities. The book ends with a thorough rendition of the doctrine of the Trinity. Kasper deals with the questions both from historical and modern view and also from the point of view of Church doctrine while including a scientific and philosophical approach. The result is Kasper's own synthesis of the questions at hand. Finally Kasper argues that Christianity can – and must – give a credible response to the challenge posed by modern atheism.⁵⁰ In retrospective, in 2008 Kasper wrote in the introduction of the new edition of *GJ*, that the book was written in a “deliberately polemical way”.⁵¹

KK completes the trilogy of systematic theology. It was published in 2011, almost 20 years after *GJ*. *KK* can be seen both as an account of the theological career so far of the recently retired president of *the Council for Promoting Christian Unity* as well as an account of the situation of the Church in the 40 years since the Vatican II. The book is more personal than the first two books of Kasper's trilogy. He wants to take a look at the Church's past and its foreseeable future. He also gives an account of his personal opinions and feelings about the Church and its current situation. He remarks that new challenges for the Church have arisen after the Second Vatican Council, and many questions posed by the council still remain unanswered.

Kasper's 2012 study of mercy, *B*,⁵² offers an analysis of a central theological concept of Kasper's. It reinforces the emerging idea of *communio* in Kasper's theology that he highlighted after his work as the secretary of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985. The title itself is illuminating: it emphasises mercy as the central attribute of God's being. *B* discusses what the mercy of God means for us as human beings and how, when and where it appears in our world and what it means for us to be merciful towards other human beings.

This study proceeds in the following order: Chapter Two will discuss the theological and philosophical background of Kasper's concept of revelation. The starting point for the analysis of Kasper's theological position is the genetic background of his theology: that is, the background of his philosophical-theological *Ansatz*. This chapter introduces the philosophical and theological tools that Kasper uses as well as the main influences on Kasper's thought. Special consideration will be given to the dialectical concept of reality in the late philosophy of Schelling. The relationship between reason and

⁵⁰ *GJ*, 477–479.

⁵¹ *GJ*, 9: “bewusst polemisch”

⁵² The book became famous after Pope Francis publicly praised it stating that “This book has done me so much good” (from the jacket cover of the English version of the book); see also *Ivereigh* 2014, 369–370; *Moloney* 2015, 60; *Kasper* 2015 [<http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/03/cardinal-kasper-responds-to-first-things-review-of-mercy>] (accessed 26.5.2015). Mercy is also the theme of the jubilee year 2016. See *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy, MV), a papal bull of indiction, promulgated on 11th of April 2015. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html] (accessed: 1.6.2015)

faith in Kasper's thinking is analysed. The theology of history concept will be introduced and a summary of Kasper's analysis of religious language will be given.

The analysis part of the study discusses his concept of revelation in the light of this basic philosophical-theological approach. The central question is, what is revelation in Kasper's theology? How does revelation work and on the basis of what prerequisites? How is revelation received? In Kasper's view, how is theology capable of saying something about the divine reality, and what possibilities do people have for interacting with the divine reality? Chapter Three discusses these conditions of revelation, including an analysis of Kasper's use of religious language and the dialogical basic structure of revelation as well as an example of Kasper's use of the Bible. Chapter Four discusses the reality of revelation. This chapter makes practical application of the theory of revelation, especially giving consideration to the meaning of the revelation in modern, secular context and to the challenges that modern atheism poses to Christianity. It also discusses what possibilities there might be for a dialogue with a secular culture. Chapter Five discusses the importance of the concept of the "new" in Kasper's theology of revelation and how it is applied to his interpretation of revelation in modern as well as historical context. Special consideration is given to Kasper's thought in the interpretation of the concepts of grace and mercy. Both the theoretical and practical application of the doctrine of revelation will be discussed.

In our age, theological discussion cannot be isolated in the ivory towers of universities. Instead, the focus of theological work must be on dialogue: on ecumenical dialogues, on dialogues with other religions and on dialogue with the growingly secular, multicultural and multireligious world. The strength of Kasper's theology lies in his mastery of the cultural, philosophical and religious history of Europe. In addition, he has personally experienced the rapidly changing cultural and religious climate of Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries. He applies his vast knowledge to the questions of our time. His contributions to theology, ecumenism and religious dialogues as well as to current questions and pastoral life of the Church give inspiration and material for further theological work to the generations to come. Kasper focuses on learning from the heritage of the earlier generations and on truly understanding how, in the secular context, Christians might be able to safeguard what is most important and most central in the Christian religion. Faith is not only something written in the pages of the Bible. Nor is tradition something written in the pages of Church documents. To be able to have faith and live faith, to practice religion, one must also live it and contextualise it. In the European context we stand on the shoulders of the great theologians of the past. Without knowing where we come from and where our theological knowledge comes from we will not be able to respond to the new challenges we encounter in the modern world and engage in dialogue with others. Keeping this in mind, Kasper seeks to engage himself in dialogue both with other Christian denominations and other religions, also with atheists.

The theology of revelation, if analysed thoroughly, can illuminate the entire Christian world view. It reveals how Christians speak about God and the world, how they grasp the reality surrounding them, how they want to interact with each other and about that to which Christians attach their hope and belief. To be able to talk about the Christian God we must talk about the revelation of God. If we wish to find a common ground for dialogues with other world views, from a Christian perspective it can thus be found in the theology of revelation. This study, therefore, examines one vision of the concept of Christian revelation in the hope of providing helpful tools for further dialogue with both

the modern, global Christian worldview and with other religions, as well as with secular and atheist worldviews.

2. Kasper as a Catholic Theologian

2.1. Three Main Influences: Schelling, the Tübingen School and the Second Vatican Council

The philosophical-theological atmosphere of the beginning of Kasper's theological studies can be characterised as difficult. The old Thomist realism and Neoscholasticism of the 19th century had faced strong criticism and had given way to a more subject-centered philosophy. Kasper wrote in 1987 that the most influential event of 20th Century Catholic theology was the surmounting of Neoscholasticism.¹ This statement from *Theologie und Kirche (TK)* enlightens the whole atmosphere of Catholic theology between the First and the Second Vatican Council. The two world wars in the first half of the century assured that a certain blind optimism concerning the possibilities and abilities of the human person had faced a strong setback.²

We can discern three main influences on Kasper's thought: the late philosophy of Schelling, the Tübingen School and the Second Vatican Council. These three influences are also intertwined. Schelling's critique of the deterministic system of Hegel was, in some sense, the culmination point of German idealism: with Schelling's philosophy it became possible to move on to postidealistic thinking.³ German idealistic philosophy is behind many contemporary ideologies and cultural phenomena. In contrast to Scholastic Thomism, German idealistic philosophy follows a different line of philosophical development. It is also behind the theological and philosophical atmosphere of the Tübingen School which played a role in the art of Catholic theology in overcoming the old narrow scholastic views of theology and therefore giving one impulse towards the Second Vatican Council.

2.1.1. Schelling's Late Philosophy

Kasper's theology has been influenced by German idealistic philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries,⁴ especially the philosophical legacy of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Kasper wrote his habilitation thesis on Schelling's late philosophy.⁵ Throughout Kasper's

¹ TK, 7; see also Kerr 2007, vii; Palakeel 1995, 272; O'Regan 2014, 122; Clifford 2014, 155.

² B, 11; GGE, 17; RS, 289.

³ A, 163–164; 604.

⁴ German idealistic philosophy is a common denominator in German philosophy after Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). It was based on Kant's thought, but these ideas were further developed and also widely criticised. Sivenius 1999, 337–343.

⁵ *Das Absolute in der Geschichte: Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings*. 2010. Herder Verlag. WKG2. Kasper's habilitationsschrift was originally written in 1965. The 2010 edition includes a new introduction and a new afterword by Magnus Striet, which discusses the study in light of recent Schelling-studies. One of the main thesis of this study is, according to Kasper: "The characteristic of our late-idealistic situation after Schelling's late philosophy through Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Heidegger to the idea of 'postmodern' is the becoming aware of the un-reachable and unthinkable fact and contingency of reality." See TK, 17. Philosophy after Schelling and Hegel is usually called post-idealistic because of its pessimistic view of reality: after the shift from a theocentric world view to an anthropocentric world view the description of reality began to show signs of a more critical and even

entire career Schelling has remained a remarkable influence on his basic philosophical-theological orientation, although Kasper also criticises it. In Schelling's thought the central theme is the Spirit and its position as Absolute Predicate, and the freedom of this Absolute.⁶ Schelling's late philosophy⁷ is also the basis and starting point for the central themes in Kasper's theology: the concepts of infinite, finite and the dialectical relationship between them and the concept of freedom.⁸

Schelling, Johann Gottlieb Fichte as well as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel were the most influential German philosophers who further developed but also criticised Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy and David Hume's empirism, scepticism and determinism. German idealism can be characterised as a philosophical manifestation of modern yearning for rationality and freedom.⁹ German idealist philosophers after Kant tried to find an answer to the antinomies¹⁰ that Kant had posed. Antinomies are part of Kant's dialectics: the naturally pure concepts of reason that lead to illusory conclusions forcing the reason to be in contradiction with itself. Of Kant's four antinomies, theology is especially interested in three of them: the question of the universe with respect to *space and time*; the relationship between free will and determinism (the question of freedom) and the being of an absolute that is absolutely necessary (God). All post-idealistic philosophers have had to wrestle with these questions.

negative approach to the God-question. On the other hand, also the human person's capabilities to understand reality and its laws were also diminished. After God seemed to become a so-called "unnecessary factor" for the events inside the world, the so-called "death of God" –philosophy arose. Kasper aims to prove that this kind of philosophical view is untenable: God's death would mean that also man is dead. GJ, 57; 69; NGK, 85.

⁶ The concept of "freedom" is bound up with the positive philosophy of Schelling, especially the dialectics between the finite and the infinite. See *Annala* 1985, 50–51; *Sivenius* 1999, 367. The pneumatological emphasis of Kasper's theology concerning salvation history also reflects the concept of the Absolute of the World Spirit in German idealism. See also KOG, 26–36; GJ, 349–359.

⁷ Behind the thought of Schelling stands a long philosophical continuum of Neoplatonic thought and its Christian interpretation – all the way to the "break of the Middle Ages" and Nicholas of Cusa, German mysticism and Meister Eckhart. These influences will also be considered in this study insofar as they are relevant in relation to the main topic of this study.

⁸ Of infinite, finite and freedom in Schelling's philosophy see *Copleston* 2003, 130–135. Also: A, 95–119.

⁹ *Sivenius* 1999, 337–343; *Ruokanen* 1987, 93; *Dudley* 2007, 3–10; 183. In his philosophy of religion, Schelling criticised both historicism and the Kantian idea of moral religion. According to Schelling, we are unable to reach the Absolute, i.e. God, through our own will and conscious effort. Instead we have to make ourselves "objects of God" – be present and attainable. To Schelling, this meant finding the divine revelation in Christ. *Rasmusson & Spjuth* 1986, 27–28; *Joha* 1992, 86. From this starting point on it was possible to form a new "positive philosophy" A, 515–583. Schelling saw the Absolute as a process which is formed through the course of history. The truth is not immutable but evolving. Schelling understood the Absolute as a kind of fusion between the subject and the object: the Absolute is the perfect identity in which both the subject and the object come together as one. In this sense evolution throughout the course of history is actually the development of the perfect identity of the Absolute. Schelling's philosophy developed from the early stage of the impersonal Absolute of metaphysical idealism to the late stage of personal, available and self-revelatory God. *Nordin* 1999, 341; *Sivenius* 1999, 34; *Copleston* 2003, 126–127; 145–148.

¹⁰ Kant's four antinomies are: The limitation of the universe in respect of space and time; the theory that the whole consists of indivisible atoms, the problem of free will in relation to universal causality and the existence of a necessary being.

The concept of paradox is essentially bound up with the concept of dialectics. The original programme of Schelling's and Hegel's idealistic philosophy aimed at overcoming Kant's dualism of which also the antinomies are a part: both Schelling and Hegel tried to find a unity rather than a juxtaposition between the subject and the object.¹¹

German idealist philosophers after Kant joined him in trying to find a way to defeat scepticism but all of them found different answers to this problem. Transcendental idealism¹² was based on Fichte's ideas, and Schelling and Hegel also based their ideas on his thought. Schelling replaced Fichte's dualistic, subjective idealism with absolute idealism. Whereas Fichte tried to demonstrate that all experiences can be explained as necessary postulates of self-consciousness, Schelling argued that subject and object are two modes of one underlying substance.¹³

Studies of Schelling's philosophy categorise the different phases in Schelling's thought.¹⁴ Kasper notes that the problem in Schelling studies is that the scholar often has to place "Schelling against Schelling" and therefore, only bring out one aspect of his thought. Kasper remarks that the complex philosophical thought of Schelling requires a more comprehensive understanding of his entire philosophical system rather than a juxtaposition of elements within it. To understand Schelling, one must understand the whole dialectic movement and thinking of German idealism.¹⁵

Kasper considers freedom not just an important part of Schelling's thought but rather its central feature. Schelling's position becomes more comprehensible in the light of his critique of Hegel. Hegel saw the Absolute as a process of totality in a philosophical sense instead of as a transcendent God.¹⁶ The basic concept in Hegel's philosophy (the Absolute that evolves through the course of history) did not satisfy Schelling. Hegel saw the ground of being (*essence*) and the experience of being (*existence*) as the same thing.¹⁷

¹¹ Oittinen & Jauhiainen 2011, 15; 18.

¹² Nordin 1999, 336–340, 342. The basic idea of transcendental idealism is the ever-continuing development of the Absolute Spirit. It is a kind of evolution of Spirit: for Schelling, the apex of "the evolution of the Spirit" is the highest achievements of human reason, knowledge and art.

¹³ Dudley 2007, 184–185.

¹⁴ See e.g. Dudley 2007, 108; Kosch 2006, 87–89.

¹⁵ A, 64. In the Finnish translation of Schelling's study of human freedom the translator Pauli Pylkkö characterises Schelling's philosophy as quasi-academic: at first sight Schelling's study's style appears strictly academic. However, here lies the paradox of Schelling's thought: ironically, the seemingly academic text actually points to a dimension beyond the academic world. The philosophy of Schelling attempts to surpass the limitations of strict academic speech. See Pylkkö 2004, 152–153. See also A, 585: "Niemand macht uns deutlicher als gerade die idealistischen Denker, dass jede Aussage nur an ihrer Stelle ihre Gültigkeit hat. Es kommt auf die Perspektive an, aus der heraus etwas gesagt ist, es gilt auf den Skopus zu achten, auf den hin eine Wahrheit gesprochen wird. Damit ist mehr gemeint, als dass bei jeder Aussage der Kontext zu beachten ist."

¹⁶ Copleston 2003, 171; JC, 275.

¹⁷ Scholastic theology posits the idea of identity between essence and existence in God. In scholastic theology, God is absolute being. Included in the nature of absolute being is the belief that every potential is also a possibility for actuality. In finite being, essence and the existence are, instead, separated. Hegel aimed to overcome the separation of essence and existence in man by arguing that in a finite being as well, essence evolves inevitably to existence. Therefore, the whole of reality, whole of existence is in a state of "becoming" (*werden*). Cf. Tillich 1959, 81–82.

According to him, reality “is” not, but it is “becoming” (*werden*). Therefore, the finite is also in Hegel’s thought infinite both in its essence and in its existence. Schelling criticised Hegel’s view of the inevitable evolution of essence into existence. According to Schelling, the experience of being (*existence*) is based on the “form” of being itself (*essence*) and this being must have a universal ground of being which unites every single being (*Absolute*).¹⁸ In other words: God’s existence precedes his essence and his essence is the result of his own actions – therefore, everything God does is what God wills without any metaphysical or moral constraints. Thus God is a completely free agent.¹⁹ This view of Schelling’s positive theology is the basis for Kasper’s theological thought as well. Hegel’s inexorably evolving Absolute-God does not correspond, according to Kasper, to the biblical image of a God who acts freely and is sovereign in the course of history. Therefore, the starting point of his theological reflection is the relationship between freedom and the ground of being – and the possibilities for a human being to have a free contact with his or her own ontological ground of being.²⁰

In Hegel’s philosophy Schelling saw the threat of nihilism and wanted to offer a corrective.²¹ For Schelling, Hegel’s idea of self-realisation of the Spirit reduced the human being to only a tool in the Spirit’s self-realisation process. Schelling worried that this kind of thinking ignores the profound element of alienation (*Entfremdung*). If man only becomes a tool for the self-realisation of the Absolute throughout history, the destiny of man becomes as well only a deterministic series of events that have no meaning. Consequently, this raises the question of the problem of evil. In his late philosophy Schelling was concerned with developing an existential dialectic as opposed to Hegel’s rational dialectic. Schelling’s existential dialectic attempted to find a satisfactory explanation for the emergence of evil and of destructive and irrational forms of life.²² Schelling’s corrective of Hegel is based on his profoundly different understanding of freedom. Hegel’s system restored the element of hope to the understanding of reality, at least phenomenologically speaking. If there is no freedom there can be no hope. However, it was Schelling who gave life to the concepts of hope and freedom. Schelling felt that the Hegelian Absolute only used human being for its own fulfilment. It consumed human being, so to speak. Instead, Schelling suggested that true freedom for man would appear in

¹⁸ See also *Tillich* 1967, 142; 144–149; *Tillich* 1959, 81–83; 85. The basis of Schelling’s existentialism lies, however, in Hegel’s essentialism, because without the ground of being it is not possible to have experience, either. If the private identity of every being were not based on one common ground of being, no experience of single beings vis-à-vis the ground of being could not exist, either. We are able to recognise other beings and ourselves only because we have something in common. For Schelling, the key to understanding this kind of thinking was freedom as the condition of identity. Freedom must exist in order that the evolving of reality would not only be a deterministic series of events that happen inexorably one after another. Likewise, for a human being to truly have participation in God’s reality, this participation has to be grounded in freedom. See *Schelling* 2006 [1809], 18.

¹⁹ *Kosch* 2006, 113.

²⁰ *Schelling* 2006 [1809], 18.

²¹ A, 49. The philosophers of the post-idealist era also saw the danger of nihilism in Western thinking: Heidegger saw nihilism as “destiny woven into the very fabric of the West by a long history of intellectual error”. See also GJ, 79–80; *Hart* 2011, 45.

²² See for example: *Schelling* 2006 [1809], 62–69. *Annala* 1985, 48–49.

history only if the Absolute was the eternal God, God that is freedom himself.²³ Kasper concludes that Schelling's dialectic actually emerges in his late period as *dialogic* – the idea of historical dialogue between the Absolute (God) and man. When history remains open for dialogue, the future also can have a true hope that we can grasp.²⁴ Kasper's interpretation of Schelling focuses on a comprehensive understanding of what history with the living God entails instead of simply a pessimistic picture of a completely deterministic history without freedom, hope and meaning. In this regard especially the late philosophy of Schelling speaks to Kasper. In Schelling's late philosophy Kasper detects clues towards more personal-dialogical and Christocentric orientation to history.²⁵

In Schelling's arguments Kasper finds tools for his own discussion. For him Schelling is simultaneously the fulfilment of and break in German idealism. His thinking led to the emergence of the post-idealist thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche. Kasper argues that understanding Schelling makes it easier to understand the contemporary discussion of relativism and pluralism. Kasper argues that understanding German idealist philosophy helps us to see the streamlines of many contemporary philosophical questions as well as the plurality of forms of thought in our own day. Even though the Post-modern era is often stigmatised with the accusation of subjectivism, Kasper refuses to see the entire picture through such a single lens. He argues that it is characteristic of the post-Enlightenment era that it cannot be described by means of only one phenomenon or ideology: besides the Enlightenment, there was the period of Romanticism. Besides idealism, materialism and positivism; besides liberalism, conservative and restorative movements.²⁶

Kasper criticises Schelling for not being consistent in his opposition of ontotheology. Schelling turned upside down the argument of ontotheology in postulating a necessary God *a priori* from the experience of God to an *a posteriori* argument: the reality is conceived in the light of what necessarily exists and thus it is proved that what necessarily exists is the Lord of Being, that is, God. What Schelling fails to do in his philosophy, however, forms the basis of Kasper's own emphasis: from the reality which necessarily exists, we can postulate the historical self-manifestation of God: that is, revelation. Whereas Schelling starts his positive philosophy from speculation on God's intra-divine potencies, Kasper sees history and God's self-manifestation in the course of history as the reflection of these powers.²⁷ Therefore, whereas Schelling directed his interest toward speculation in the powers within the immanence of God, Kasper is more interested in the manifestation of those powers within creation. This emphasis is also consistent with that of the early Church Fathers who opposed the idea that human reason could deduce something of the inner life of the Triune God. What we can know of God is how God works in and through history.

²³ A, 69–70.

²⁴ A, 70.

²⁵ A, 70.

²⁶ A, 12.

²⁷ GJ, 201–202.

Therefore, the difference in Kasper's thought with Schelling's late philosophy²⁸ of freedom is that Kasper wants to bind the freedom of the creator to a "higher principle" than Schelling's interpretation, in which God's causal power must be independent of his actions. Kasper claims that Schelling's attempt to overcome idealism did not quite succeed.²⁹ Schelling seeks to emphasise absolute freedom in a philosophical sense, whereas Kasper takes Schelling's basic premises and uses them for his positive theology and analogy of freedom³⁰ interpretation. Because God is freedom, his actions are the ground for all free actions, both God's own and God's creatures. Kasper takes the biblical motive of God for creating the world as his starting point and develops a theology of freedom that is grounded in the free creating will of God. God's free will is shown to us in the course of history and it embraces the idea of God creating man for his partner in dialogue. This personal-historical dimension, therefore, gives a deeper meaning to the free Absolute than only a philosophical argument regarding the basis of freedom.

The God of the bible is not simply the depth dimension of the world; he is the freely acting lord of history.³¹

The importance of Schelling's philosophy for Kasper lies in the concept of dialectic. For Schelling, "dialectic is about [...] paradox, i.e. that the infinite is hiddenly present in the finite, being its creative and groundless ground of being (*Abgrund*)"³² The events of history are the only possible means for the finite to reach to the infinite. From this point of view, adopted from Schelling, Kasper approaches theological questions. In this sense, his approach is "from below" (*von unten*).³³

For Hegel as well the freedom of the Absolute is central.³⁴ The essential difference in Hegel's system compared to that of Schelling's lies in that Hegel insists that

²⁸ There was a change of focus from the early to the late philosophy of Schelling. Over the course of his career, Schelling's philosophy changed its focus. In his earlier work, Schelling maintained that one's nature determines one's actions. In his later work Schelling sought to divorce causal power from content of action. See *Kosch* 2006, 114.

²⁹ HT, 252.

³⁰ The analogy of freedom is the model of analogy Kasper develops for the use of analogy in theological discourse. It is based on his conception of freedom as the basis of all reality and he develops it with the help of the new metaphysics, theological language and rationality in theological discourse. The concept will be more thoroughly discussed in the following chapters. For a comprehensive analysis of the concept, see *Palakeel* 1995, 280–290.

³¹ GJ, 236: "Der biblische Gott ist ja nicht einfach die Tiefendimension der Wirklichkeit, sondern der freie Herr der Geschichte" See also JC, 79; NGK, 83; OG, 61–62.

³² *Annala* 1985, 51. Kasper remarks that this tradition originates from the interpretation of Platonism and Neoplatonism and that it can also be seen in the apophatic theology of Meister Eckhart and Nicholas of Cusa. A, 315–316; KK, 114.

³³ *Joha* 1992, 85.

³⁴ *Copleston* 2003, 170. Hegel's idea is that the subject's (i.e. the Absolute's) object can only be the Absolute itself, because as an infinite substance it is the ground of being of everything. For Hegel the important thing, as well as for Schelling, is the development of the Absolute in history but in contrast to Schelling's thought, for Hegel this fulfilment of the Absolute happens through man and man's intellectual development. The Absolute is in a process, in which it becomes aware of reality and this becoming aware happens through the human soul. The Absolute can relate itself to an object and manifest itself in this object or "opponent". The being of the Absolute is finding itself in its object (in other words: in the human being)

the Absolute is – literally – everything there is, the whole of reality. It is not the ground of everything that is, or its sustaining force, but rather everything that is, the totality in process, the Absolute that is everything. Moreover, it is everything becoming, being in the process of self-awareness. Here we can see the crucial difference with Schelling's conception: Schelling argued that the Absolute is itself being, an identity, whereas for Hegel the Absolute is a self-manifestation. Hegel argued that in the process of becoming aware, the Absolute must have human beings as his counterpart. According to Hegel, the (Absolute) essence of love is that in the other (the counterpart) and in its encounter with the other it finds itself.³⁵ Nevertheless, as noted above, in this process humanity is only a bystander, a tool for the process of becoming (*werden*). This is why the concept of freedom became central for Schelling. If identity is only recognised in freedom, for human beings to have identity they must accordingly be free. This freedom, however, cannot exist without a ground. It was a conviction of Schelling – and a conviction that Kasper adopted from him – that freedom is not possible without a universal ground.

In contrast, the philosophy of Schelling can be described as voluntarist. Some voluntarist motifs existed already in the old German mysticism (for example in the mystical thought of Meister Eckhart). The voluntarist characteristics of German idealistic philosophy are also the bases for describing the volitional ground of being as something that cannot be fully captured, or even as an irrational being, *Abgrund*.³⁶ The paradoxical nature of the ultimate being, the Divinity itself, is characteristic of German idealist thought. The philosophical thought of German idealism revolves around thesis and antithesis, being and non-being: the fundamental questions of being in general. When opposites are so strongly present in the philosophical worldview one is bound to require for a synthesis between them. Post-idealist philosophy tries to build on the legacy of German idealism but also to be its critique. Kasper insists that it is not possible to understand the ideological streamlines of the Western context of our time without understanding the basics of German idealism.³⁷ In his habilitation thesis Kasper came to the conclusion that Schelling did not quite grasp the concept of God's freedom in its fullness. Schelling tried to interpret revelation within his categories of negative philosophy – it was an attempt to grasp revelation from below, utilising the philosophical categorisations. This kind of approach discards the ultimate, unsurpassable, sovereign freedom of God. Only this kind of absolute freedom can be the basis for a true human freedom as well.³⁸ Kasper concludes, however, that even though some of Schelling's ideas are outdated, his critique of materialism and his basic understanding of divine freedom remain valid.³⁹

and finally becomes identical in and with this object (the counterpart of the Absolute). This is the Hegelian explanation of the Bible's expression "God is love".

³⁵ Copleston 2003, 170–171; GJ, 309–310; JC, 275–276.

³⁶ McGinn 2001, 37–44.

³⁷ A, 43–50; HGS, 46. See also Dudley 2007, 195.

³⁸ HT, 252.

³⁹ O'Regan 2014, 123.

2.1.2. The Tübingen School, Critique of Metaphysics and New Understanding of Reason

The so-called Tübingen School has exerted a considerable intellectual influence on Kasper, and especially on his theological method.⁴⁰ In the history of theology the Tübingen School holds a major place. In only few decades it changed the whole course of biblical interpretation. It is not an exaggeration to state that modern biblical exegesis has its roots in the work of the Tübingen School.⁴¹ The Tübingen School critically embraced philosophical categories like 19th century Romanticism and its conception of history and German idealism. In the School's earlier phase the tendency was more towards imaginative mysticism, but later it gave way to more practical and scientifically oriented notion of what theology as science should be.⁴² The Tübingen School attempted to reconcile the Church's teaching with modern philosophy. Characteristic of the Tübingen School was a critique of secularist and psychologising views of the meaning of faith and God as well as critique of narrow views of Neoscholasticism. Neoscholasticism, that was a revival and further development of medieval Scholasticism, was an attempt to solve the crisis of modernity with the help of the high scholastic tradition and to create a timeless, uniform theology on those grounds.⁴³ The rise of the Tübingen School was not a reaction against Neoscholasticism *per se*: both Neoscholasticism and the Tübingen School emerged roughly at the same time. Nevertheless, the Tübingen School and its intellectual, modern approach had a major impact in overcoming the Neoscholastic, antimodernist views. The difference between the two schools lay especially in the historical understanding of the theology of the Tübingen School versus the timeless, uniform approach of Neoscholasticism. The Tübingen School also had a major impact on overcoming the one-sided metaphysics⁴⁴ and the problems of idealist philosophy. The Catholic faculty of Tübingen did not want to adopt Hegel's deterministic understanding of the relation between God (*the Absolute*) and world history.

In addition to Kasper, several other famous and influential Roman Catholic theologians have a background in the Tübingen School: for example, the founder of the School Johann Sebastian von Drey, and Johann Adam Möhler, who, long before of the *aggiornamento* of the the Second Vatican Council, created a basis for the theory of the doctrinal development and theory of Church as a community of believers.⁴⁵ Kasper admits

⁴⁰ Loewe 2014, 80–81; Clifford 2014, 154; For a more comprehensive view on the Catholic theology of the Tübingen School of the 19th century see Hünemann 2005, 173–187; from Kasper's point of view see HGS, 31–51.

⁴¹ Harris 1975, v.

⁴² Reardon 1985, 135.

⁴³ TK, 7-8; Kerr 2007, vii; Seckler 2001, 287–290.

⁴⁴ Kerr 2007, vii.

⁴⁵ HT, 250; RS, 279; Yarnold 1993, 563. These were the ideas, for example, that the originally Anglican, later Catholic theologian John Henry Newman developed further in the 19th Century. His emphasis was on the Catholic view of the development of doctrine, the sovereignty of conscience, *sensus fidei* (see CCC, 92) belonging to the Church members as a whole (i.e. to the entirety of *communio* of believers) and of the confession according to which a religious conviction is not bound to logical facts and certainties, but to probabilities, that, when combined, can convince their moral justification. This means a so called

that Möhler has greatly influenced his own ecclesiology, especially in his emphasis on the Church as the body of Christ that is living and constantly being renewed.⁴⁶ From J. S. von Drey Kasper has adopted principles of the Tübingen School: ecclesialist theology (*Kirchlichkeit*), scientific orientation (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) and a practically oriented openness to the problems and questions of modern times (*Gegenwartsbezogenheit* or in *KK: Zeitgenossenschaft*).⁴⁷ Kasper agrees with the common understanding that the Tübingen School was a pioneer in the discussion of how modern era with its modern worldview affect theology and the Church.⁴⁸

A characteristic of the Tübingen School was disappointment in secular and overly-psychological views of religion and God. The Tübingen School wanted to distance itself from 19th century attempts to create a normative theology for the entire church around the world.⁴⁹ As a result a new, a more constructive view of theology was created: a theology *within* – instead of *against* – the modern world and its challenges.⁵⁰ Kasper himself was introduced to the philosophical and theological world of Tübingen by his professor J. R. Geiselmann⁵¹. It was the Tübingen School that also had an impact on Kasper's idea to develop theology from Christology and building in it an inner logic.⁵² This thought is based on the idea that man can grasp the divine reality through God incarnate, the Word made

accumulation of proofs – one cannot be convinced of religious matters solely through science or reason, but with a so-called “illative sense”, i.e. an inner certainty which is bound to the sense of morality.” [...] religious conviction is based not on logically irrefragable proof but on the convergence of probabilities on the basis of which the ‘illative sense’ arrives at moral certainty.” See also *Schoof* 1970, 201–202; *Kerr* 2007, 42–44 summarises Yves Congar's theological achievements and remarks that before the Second Vatican Council also he developed a theology of the laity, the deposit of faith and the idea that in the Church everything happens because the Holy Spirit wills it: collegiality means fellowship and community that reflects the Trinitarian God himself. This teaching of the Church as a community of believers later appeared in the document of the Second Vatican Council of the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, promulgated 21st November 1964. The English translation of the constitution: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html] (accessed 26.5.2015)

⁴⁶ *KK*, 26; *ZZD*, 261. See also *Clifford* 2014, 154; 159.

⁴⁷ *HGS*, 31. These characteristics of the Tübingen School originate from J. S. von Drey. *TK*, 7; 11–20; *Seckler* 2001, 289; *KK*, 30; 479.

⁴⁸ *Schoof* 1970, 165–166; *Seckler* 2001, 288; *Joha* 1992, 2–4; *TK*, 54–57. In particular theology of experience and dialectical theology and philosophy were a central focus in the Tübingen School. Revelation, faith and the Church were to be given a new, more dynamic content. Tradition was seen as a living power maintained by the Spirit of God within the community of believers. In the faith of the individual the Word of Christ becomes a reality, and the living tradition in turn provides the content of faith in history. Essential was the renewal and reformation of Christian identity in the light of the new, reformed understanding of history. Prior to the Enlightenment the scientific orientation of beliefs or of dogmatic structures was not problematic: theology was considered a science as much as any other.

⁴⁹ *Burtschaell* 1985, 119–120.

⁵⁰ *Seckler* 2001, 287–290; *TK*, 7–8.

⁵¹ Geiselmann was Kasper's professor of dogmatic theology in Tübingen. He introduced Kasper to the theology of Johann Adam Möhler. Geiselmann, together with his colleague Yves Congar, brought the ecclesiological themes of Möhler's work into modern Catholic theology. Geiselmann also introduced the actual theme of the historical foundations of Christian faith to the young Kasper. Joseph Geiselmann was one of the theologians who “brought the communitarian theology of the Catholic Tübingen School back from its undeserved obscurity and focused attention once more on its great ecclesiologist, Johann Adam Möhler.” *Joha* 1992, 83; *HGS*, 31; 35.

⁵² *Joha* 1992, 83.

flesh. This is also a point of reference for theology: through the humanity of God, God becoming a human being, through the so-called historicity of God, we can understand something of God.

The question of the relationship between faith and reason takes us as far as to the Arian conflict and the response to it of the Cappadocian Fathers. The Arian theologians claimed that it is possible to understand the inner divine reality with human reason. For the Cappadocians this was a preposterous claim because of the underlying idea that a creature would be able to “capture” the Creator with the help of its own reason. From the creation *per se*, however, – of which human reason is naturally also a part of – the created cannot deduce anything of the inner life of the Creator. This is why the Cappadocians insisted that what we can know about God is what God is willing to reveal us of himself, that is, what God gives us of himself in his revelation.

If the infinite is to be accessible to us, it must disclose and make itself known to us; it must reveal itself.⁵³

This is also the intention of the First Vatican Council, in the concept known as the twofold order of knowledge. We can know things by natural reason and by divine faith. The things that can be understood through divine faith only are things that remain hidden unless revealed by the divine source himself.⁵⁴ The starting point for understanding the relationship between faith and reason is for Kasper the differentiation between natural theology and revelation. The question of the relationship between grace and nature is closely bound to that of natural and / or supernatural knowledge and natural and / or supernatural revelation.

Kasper follows Przywara’s basic orientation concerning the debate concerning *analogia entis*. *Fides non destruit sed supponit et perficit rationem*: faith does not destroy reason but presupposes and perfects it.⁵⁵ Revelation itself presupposes something, an object, to which it can attach. If there was no one to accept the revelation, there would be no point to reveal anything. What revelation gives, faith receives. One does not exist without the other. For this reason, revelation is given to human beings who by their reason can accept it (and this does not mean a cultivated supermind or intellectual “super reason” but the reason of any person – as opposed to, for example, a tree or a stone or an animal).⁵⁶

One characteristic of the Tübingen School was the history-oriented approach to the question of metaphysics of theology. The Tübingen School wanted to overcome the old concept of metaphysics and base the new concept on a metahistorical understanding. Kasper developed his own concept of metaphysics in the spirit of the Tübingen School and

⁵³ GJ, 151: “Soll uns das Unendliche zugänglich werden, dann muss es sich uns selbst erschliessen und eröffnen, es mus sich selbst offenbaren.”

⁵⁴ Turner 2004, 3.

⁵⁵ JC, 286–287; see also JC, 287: “*Gratia non destruit naturam, sed supponit et perficit naturam*”; Schenk 2011, 176; CCC, 153.

⁵⁶ GJ, 141–142; OG, 75–76; see also DV, 7; CCC, 142–143.

Schelling's philosophy, although remaining critical towards the latter. Typical of his approach is an emphasis on the community as the receiver and provider of the truth in history.⁵⁷ Although Kasper is critical towards a rigid metaphysics, he argues emphatically that metaphysics cannot be abandoned altogether.⁵⁸ Science always relies on some kind of metaphysical system.⁵⁹ What he tries to provide is a new approach to the concept of metaphysics and to give it a more living, vital interpretation.

Metaphysics is not the basis of theology, but rather an impetus for theology. The mission of theology is to talk about God as the basis of all reality – and without metaphysical presumptions this is not possible. One can also assert the reverse: “metaphysics without theology is, in the end, without a ground and dissolves itself.”⁶⁰ For Kasper, metaphysics is concerned with the question of reality as a whole. Metaphysics is “wisdom and science of the first and therefore, universal principles”⁶¹. Kasper's perception of metaphysics is similar to that of Joseph Maréchal. Maréchal's *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique* further develops Maurice Blondel's idea of the unity of reality and gives it a theological emphasis. In Maréchal's view, the location of the unity of reality is the Spirit of human being. The Spirit of human being is also the place for the mystical union between God and human being. Metaphysics examines, according to Maréchal, the being of being (or being of existence), *ens inquantum ens*. The object of knowledge is therefore metaphysical, if it is (even implicitly) related to the ultimate, common and unconditional order of existence. Metaphysics, the science that studies being itself (*ens qua ens*), is a science of truth *per se* (*vérité comme telle*). All the knowledge and value systems of man are already *a priori* included in ontology, and they participate in the objective, absolute truth. Maréchal's transcendental philosophy also forms the background of Rahner's transcendental system and his concept of the *supernatural existential*.⁶² Kasper combines the Maréchalian conception of ontology with the view of Christian theology of God as the ground of being of everything.⁶³ Therefore, it can be said that Kasper agrees with Maréchal's conception of metaphysics as an essential method for perceiving reality. Maréchal states that knowledge of the object is possible when it is a true part of the subject. In God, both the subject and the object belong to the same reality.⁶⁴ This kind of perception of the possibilities of metaphysics in knowing the object is a positive starting point as well for the human knowledge of transcendental reality. This metaphysical starting point is also behind Karl Rahner's philosophical anthropology. Kasper develops the idea of man's

⁵⁷ *Joha* 1992, 83; see also DV, 19; CCC, 91–92.

⁵⁸ ZZD, 257; JC, 47–48; KK, 28.

⁵⁹ GJ, 99.

⁶⁰ ZZD, 269: “Metaphysik ohne Theologie aber wird letztlich grundlos und löst sich auf.” See also KK, 28. *O'Meara* 2014, 130.

⁶¹ ZZD, 257: “sie ist Weisheit und Wissenschaft von den ersten und damit von den allgemeinsten Prinzipien.” See also *Palakeel* 1995, 275.

⁶² *Joha* 1992, 12; *Mannermaa* 1971, 11–16.

⁶³ JC, 47 GJ; 248, 370: “Die philosophische Frage nach dem letzten Grund (arkhe) aller Wirklichkeit und die biblische Botschaft von Gott dem Vater, d.h. dem personalen Ursprung und der Quelle der Schöpfung- wie Erlösungswirklichkeit, stehen bei aller Verschiedenheit in einer inneren Korrespondenz.” See also GJ, 248–255.

⁶⁴ *Mannermaa* 1971, 17–18.

possibilities of grasping transcendental reality also from the point of view of man's finitude. Therefore, Kasper also takes into account the "reverse side" of humanity: man's possibility of grasping transcendental reality from this reality is restricted by temporal and historical limitations. Another Catholic theologian who developed "theological metaphysics" further, is Erich Przywara. He wrote several books that dealt with the use of analogy in theological statements. What is relevant in Przywara's work is the idea of the "potential" of the creation towards transcendence, a sort of an "option" of grasping God due to the creatureliness. Kasper does not directly follow either Maréchal or Przywara, but develops his own "third line" in his perception of metaphysics and therefore creates a kind of synthesis of the two.⁶⁵

In Aristotelian metaphysics the concept of substance was the basis for everything. For Aristotle metaphysics was also about the being of being or being of the ground of being; in other words, the ground of everything: on what everything that is is based. The central question of metaphysics is, therefore, the central question of theology. However, some ground rules can be made for the use of metaphysics in Christian theology. According to Kasper, the Christian concept of reality means an understanding of the basic nature of reality as relations, as a relational ontology (*eine relationale Ontologie*).⁶⁶ He says, therefore, that the old metaphysics can only be replaced by a new, better metaphysics.⁶⁷ Christian symbolism is also partly dependent on Hellenistic culture and metaphysics. Kasper states that the mission of theology is the pursuit of grasping reality from the point of view of Christianity, a so-called "metaphysics of the meaningfulness of Christianity".⁶⁸ Kasper believes that the old metaphysics has already been overcome: the so-called ontology of being is not a part of valid theological ontology anymore. The problem is that whereas the ontological statements reduce the "cause" of theology to rigid formulations, the metaphysics based on freedom cannot create expressions about what is to be believed.

The starting point, therefore, for formulation of Christian doctrine is not so much the view of Western metaphysics of God as the "highest being". Instead Kasper suggests that the message of God as the living God of history, the liberating God, the God of hope and love, should be rephrased.⁶⁹ Relevant is the effect of a God who appears in history: God is the effecting and actual God, God with us, not a static and irreversibly otherworldly "highest being".

Kasper does not bind theological truths in philosophical formulations, but uses the language of philosophy as a tool which helps the theologian to perceive reality. Besides the language used in the Bible and philosophical formulations, no other way exists

⁶⁵ *Joha* 1992, 76; 12–13; GJ, 131. See also *Casarella* 2011, 195–199.

⁶⁶ ZZD, 270; GVF, 515.

⁶⁷ OG, 96; GVF, 512.

⁶⁸ Kasper's mission is to free theological conclusions from their philosophical overtones and inquire into them from the point of view of metaphysics. Kasper sees metaphysics as a sort of research method, as a way of examining reality as a whole. This is, after all, the only possibility when reality is seen as a perfection of God's salvation history in the history of the world. Philosophy, instead, is always bound to time and time-bound values. TK, 9; 16; *Rasmusson & Spjuth* 1986, 28.

⁶⁹ GJ, 38.

of expressing theological truths. Therefore, theological statements as well are philosophical in their *form*. This is why the detachment of philosophy from theology is not possible. What is essential is delve into the core of the philosophical formulations that are the basis for theological formulations. It is a question of finding the inner *truths* of Christianity within the *significations* of the sentences. Based on methodology, interest in the questions of the modern day, criticism of metaphysics and the hermeneutical point of view, Kasper's theology represents a typical "new wave theology" of the end of the 20th Century.⁷⁰

Kasper remarks that the discussion of metaphysics is often stigmatised by Blaise Pascal's claim:

Christian faith is not directed towards a God of philosophers but a God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he is a God of history and [...] cannot be thought through timeless categories of being and essence.⁷¹

While Kasper affirms that God is "always new and open towards the future"⁷² he simultaneously adheres to the conviction that already the God of the Old Testament is not only a God of history but also a God of wisdom and tradition. In the Bible, however, there is already present a critical function towards a one-sided use of "wisdom of the people" (*der Weisheit der Völker*). The Gospel of Jesus Christ declares that he is someone whose true identity remains hidden even from all the wisdom of the world.⁷³ In Kasper's analysis, the Bible already holds a critical, even if not rejecting, stance towards the use of philosophy in use of articulating the truths of faith. Jesus Christ as the apex of Christian revelation gives a whole new meaning to the concept of metaphysics. This is what the "always new" points to.

However, purely conceptual metaphysics pushes the God of Christianity behind concepts. This is why the language of the Christian faith also has to take the historical context into account. Without it, language is abridged and transformed into conceptual speculation, detached from its context. Kasper remarks that we must remember that the profession of theology lies on other foundations than on the methodological tools that are for its use.⁷⁴ The diversity of philosophy and theology is necessary: the reality behind theological statements cannot be forced into any philosophical prerequisite. This reality is the revelation that is unveiled in Jesus Christ in a unique and particular way. Its

⁷⁰ For a short description of the "new wave theology" see *Geffré* 1973, 49–74. It is typical for the theologies of the 20th century to acknowledge modern day phenomena and problems as well as to shun both the metaphysical and the authoritarian approach as well as to pay special attention to the relationship, possibilities and problems between hermeneutics, dogmatics and exegetics. See also *Joha* 1992, 2–4; *Kerr* 2007, 75. The paradox of Henri DeLubac (who was characterised as the leader of the nouvelle théologie movement) was that he held that philosophy requires theology and theology equally requires the foundation of philosophy.

⁷¹ ZZD, 258: "Der christliche Glaube richtet sich nicht auf den Gott der Philosophen, sondern auf den Gott Abrahams, Isaaks und Jakobs; er ist ein Gott der Geschichte [...] und nicht mit den Kategorien eines zeitlosen Seins und Wesens zu denken."

⁷² ZZD, 258: "[Gott aber ist] Immer-Neue und der Zu-künftige."

⁷³ ZZD, 259.

⁷⁴ TK, 16–17.

truth cannot be forced into any given philosophical formulation.⁷⁵ The criticism of metaphysics has a twofold function: on the one hand it shuns rigid philosophical formulations and on the second hand emphasises the uniqueness of the Christian message. No predetermined philosophical pattern can fully function as a yardstick for the Christian truth. In historical Christianity there is no possibility of one-sidedness: historical Christianity comprises a history and relations, of me-you-us. People exist only as a *plurale tantum*.⁷⁶

If we agree that metaphysics is needed for God-talk, we see that the question of metaphysics is closely bound to the question of the nature of religious language. Metaphysics is not for Kasper a dead letter of philosophy but a search for the ground of being that is “written in the hearts of human beings”.⁷⁷ Metaphysics is the tool for this search.⁷⁸ It is a tool for finding words to describe genuine, living reality. This does not mean that it would rise above this reality, because it is only a tool, only an ancillary method. This kind of use of metaphysics was also intended by the first ecumenical councils that sought to find the expression of beliefs of the religious community in an intellectually satisfying formulation. Kasper says that his central theme is God’s vivid history in the world with his people: a Triune, communicative God, who wants to place himself in relation with his creature, to place the human being as his partner in dialogue. The God of causalities of the old metaphysical systems shrinks God to a mere God of the gaps. Therefore, Kasper insists that the old metaphysical system must be reconstructed.

If God is comprehended as unchanging and eternal, “resting entirely in himself”, he becomes the end of everything. Instead, Kasper uses the interpretation of theology of history and gives Christian metaphysics a meaning which, according to him, is more in line with the actual God of the Bible: God is love. Kasper argues that “it is easy to see how these ideas could completely transform the image of God and also how they give new relevance to the idea of creation.”⁷⁹

Kasper’s critical attitude toward rigid metaphysics should not, however, be considered only in philosophical context but also in the context of contemporary theology. Whereas Neoscholasticism tried to come to terms with the crisis of modernity with the high Scholastic tradition and attempted to give the Church doctrine a timeless formulation, the “new metaphysics” wanted to do the opposite: it is Kasper’s conviction (and many other 20th century Catholic theologians) that doctrine is time-bound rather than above it.⁸⁰ Doctrine, as well as the entirety of the Church preaching, takes place in time, in history rather than hovering above it unanchored. This does not mean that doctrinal formulations are empty, but rather that they represent the living gospel rather than “cast iron” principles.

⁷⁵ JC, 47.

⁷⁶ JC, 91; OG, 66–67.

⁷⁷ GVF, 512: “Sie ist [...] dem Menschen ins Herz geschrieben.”

⁷⁸ GVF, 512.

⁷⁹ JC, 133: “Es ist verständlich, wie von hier aus das Gottesbild völlig revolutioniert werden konnte und wie der Gedanke von der Schöpfung neu an Aktualität gewinnen musste.”

⁸⁰ TK, 7; Kerr 2007, vii; O’Meara 2014, 132.

The classic definition of revelation distinguishes between two forms of revelation: natural and supernatural. Kasper defines these two as “experience of God” (*Gottese Erfahrung*) and “knowledge of God” (*Gottserkenntnis*).⁸¹ The First Vatican Council maintained that man can know God from created reality because of the light of reason⁸². Kasper remarks, however, that the verb “know” is used in the broadest possible sense: it is not argumentative and defined knowing but rather a determination that there exists the *possibility* to know God (*certo cognosci posse*). Thus the statement of the Council does not specify whether a single God-experience is “valid” or “true”, or by what conditions it is such – it simply maintains that this kind of knowledge is possible. This is called the transcendental-theological approach.⁸³ It affirms the possibility for faith which the faith itself presupposes.⁸⁴

A theology that aims to define God inevitably fails and will end up representing a god that is actually stripped of everything divine which remains a false god.

A theology that sells out to a rationalism which aims to grasp everything, even God, in its concepts, has no power to dislodge the superstition it claims to be attacking; it is itself the most ignorant kind of superstition.⁸⁵

The task of theology cannot be a complete description of its object, because God in his own being refuses every attempt at definition. The knowledge of God becomes for Kasper a synonym for faith. Knowledge is only possible in freedom. If we tried to categorise God in any way, we would inevitably fail. Therefore, God can only be known in freedom and Kasper sees faith as the equivalent of this freedom.⁸⁶ Faith acknowledges that it can never wholly grasp the reality of God which remains a mystery:

It cannot be the goal of theology to move beyond faith in God by means of thought, but rather only to grasp the mystery of God as mystery.⁸⁷

Because the knowledge of God, like all knowledge, is based on experience, experience becomes fundamental. The concepts of both faith and experience are ambiguous and difficult to define. Thus Kasper first argues that the relationship between faith and

⁸¹ GJ, 154–165; 183–185.

⁸² Vatican I follows both Augustinian thought (it is possible to know God with intuitive reason) and Thomistic axiom (God can be known from his actions; cf. Classic proofs as utilised in Thomistic tradition for the existence of God).

⁸³ Kasper’s definition of the “transcendental-theological statement” (*transzendental-theologischen Aussage*) of Vatican I brings to mind the transcendental philosophy of Kant, especially when Kasper describes the intention of the First Vatican Council to “bring out the accountability of man for his belief or unbelief, and thus the reasonableness (*Vernünftigkeit*) and intellectual probity (*die intellektuelle Redlichkeit*) of faith”. GJ, 143: “Mit dieser transzendental-theologischen Aussage soll die verantwortlichkeit des Menschen für den Glauben wie für den Unglauben und damit die Vernünftigkeit und die intellektuelle Redlichkeit des Glaubens herausgestellt werden.” See also OG, 76.

⁸⁴ GJ, 142–143.

⁸⁵ GJ, 60: “Eine Theologie, die sich einem alles, auch Gott begreifenwollenden Rationalismus verschriebe, könnte den Aberglauben, gegen den auszuziehen sie vielleicht vorgibt, nicht austreiben, sie wäre selbst finsterster Aberglaube.”

⁸⁶ GJ, 185.

⁸⁷ GJ, 61: “Das Ziel der Theologie kann es nicht sein, den Gottesglauben im Denken aufzuheben, vielmehr nur, Gottes Geheimnis als Geheimnis zu begreifen.” English translation has been modified.

experience contains two basic levels. One is hearing⁸⁸ (hearing that evokes faith⁸⁹ and is transmitted in the tradition of the community of believers) and the other is faith which is an expression of a religious experience. Instead of being a static reality, the experience of faith varies in each historical situation. It is difficult to determine which experience can be considered as acceptable in the light of revelation in Scripture, and which is only the product of human imagination. Therefore, Kasper uses the biblical understanding of knowledge: it is never acquired by the mind alone but it is mediated through one's entire existence. This means that knowledge is never an isolated area of our existence but rather it is an interaction of the whole of our existence – and also that of our neighbours, of other people.

Faith is the act of confidently letting oneself submit to God's fidelity and mercy. [...] We can also say: having faith means saying "Amen" to God and, thereby, trusting in his favour, fidelity, and his boundless mercy.⁹⁰

When faith attaches to its object it is not an act of the reason or affection only, it is an act of the entirety of the human person. Kasper concludes that the relation between faith and experience must be described in terms of a critical correlation. There is a hermeneutical circle between the mediation of faith and the experience of faith. We never experience reality as such, without any presuppositions. Instead we always experience it with a specific meaning for us. Therefore, the experience must include both the subjective and objective experience. This means that experience happens in history and is mediated through every historical situation. It is therefore, dialogical in structure: it is an interaction between a person and the world. No experience is isolated from the historical context.⁹¹ Experience always remains open towards the future, but is, moreover, open beyond itself.⁹² Experience can never be fully articulated and thus it remains a mystery even to itself.

C. Stephen Evans states a question concerning the limits of human reason:

If we encounter a limit to human reason, would reason have the capacity to recognise this limit, or would such a capacity to recognise the limit itself be beyond the limit? And even if we can recognise our limits, does faith really make it possible to transcend those limits in some way?⁹³

Kasper's answer would be: definitely. The possibility for faith to reach beyond the limits that otherwise would restrict us (*Gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam*) is one of the basic assumptions in Kasper's theological system. He argues that the entire

⁸⁸ In this characterisation on the nature of faith and experience we can detect a strong Rahnerian echo. See for example *Kerr* 2007, 90–91.

⁸⁹ In Catholic tradition the ability to hear God's word and understand it is called *potentia oboedientialis*. See OG, 86; GJ, 131.

⁹⁰ B, 62: "Glauben ist vertrauendes Sich-Einlassen auf Gottes Treue und Barmherzigkeit. [...] Man kann auch sagen: Glauben bedeutet Amen-sagen zu Gott und dabei auf seine Huld und Treue und auf seine grenzenlose Barmherzigkeit vertrauen." See also JC, 319–320.

⁹¹ GJ, 156–159; OG, 86; *O'Regan* 2014, 121.

⁹² See *Godzieba* 2014, 46.

⁹³ *Evans* 2005, 336. See also DV, 6: "Through divine revelation, God [...] chose to share with them those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind."

theological tradition is based on the axiom *fides quaerens intellectum* (Anselm of Canterbury), faith seeking for understanding⁹⁴. The question of the possibility of reason to know God “with certainty from the consideration of created things, by the natural power of human reason”⁹⁵ was the formulation of the Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican I. Although it might seem odd at first glance to claim that it is possible for reason to grasp something that is so obviously beyond our logical and rational grasp, the Constitution can also be understood from the point of view of faith working together with reason, that is: faith looking for reasonable understanding.⁹⁶ Such understanding becomes even more urgent in changing historical situations and challenges that the Church faces. If the Church does not answer the problems posed by modernity, it loses its credibility. This view lies in a direct continuum with the intellectual atmosphere of the Tübingen School, where there was an insistence that faith should be subjected to scholarly investigation while still maintaining a conservative basic approach to the tradition of the Church.⁹⁷ When accompanied by the problems and challenges posed by the secularised situation of the modern Western world and by modern atheism, the understanding of one’s own faith and “giving an account of the hope that is in us” (1 Peter 3:15) remains a relevant task for a theologian of today.

The Second Vatican Council added concrete-historical and salvation-historical approaches to earlier approaches to the question of the possibility of knowing God and problematics of faith and reason. Faith is given to man as a gift and it is fully and thoroughly mediated by human experience in actual historical situations: human hearing, understanding, affirmation and appropriation. Natural theology is the orientation towards God, but faith is possible only through revelation: it is only substantiated through its proper object, that is, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.⁹⁸ For reason alone can never bring faith on its own. Faith is always a comprehensive act of the whole human being.⁹⁹

In modern philosophy the abstract understanding of nature and reason of the Enlightenment was changed: instead, the possibilities of reason were understood as historical and time-bound. The documents of Vatican I and II then affirm in this sense what is generally understood in modern philosophy: human reason’s capabilities to understand something as natural and reasonable varies from time to time; reason is historically conditioned.¹⁰⁰ Because the concept of history and its relevance for understanding the central concepts of reason and revelation are central in Kasper’s thought we will have a more thorough look on the relationship between history and reason in the following chapters.

⁹⁴ GJ, 16; EJC, 16; B, 97; HT, 251; RS, 289. See also e.g. *O’Collins* 1982, 53.

⁹⁵ See DF, 4.

⁹⁶ *Turner* 2004, 5; see also *Kirjavainen* 1987, 295. Dostoyevski claimed that faith in God and pure reason are religious opposites: if the freedom of the human person is based solely on pure reason it leads to a distorted kind of religion and the loss of freedom. Therefore, if one follows Dostoyevsky’s argument, only a freedom that is based on a principle of faith can be true freedom.

⁹⁷ *Burtschaell* 1985, 117; LT, 240.

⁹⁸ GJ, 144–145; NGC, 34; see also DV, 4–7.

⁹⁹ GJ, 145; KK, 78.

¹⁰⁰ GJ, 142–143.

According to Kasper, the division of the unity of faith effected by the Reformation was a significant cause for the change in the concept of reason. Kasper claims that after the Reformation the concept of reason was detached from religion and became the private matter of every individual. The idea was that reason is “immutable, even if there was no God” (*etsi Deus non daretur*)¹⁰¹. Here Kasper attaches the rise of the modern bourgeoisie to the Reformation period and wars of religion of the 16th and 17th centuries and claims that the result of the Reformation was the loss of the integrative function of religion. Another influence that Kasper mentions is the rise of the modern sciences. He argues that the rise of the middle class at the time of the Reformation affected the understanding of a human person’s autonomy. Men of the new age began to see themselves as an autonomous subjects, free from predominant societal structures like politics or religion.¹⁰² This changed understanding of the concept of reason after the Reformation has greatly influenced the emergence of modern man’s distorted concept of freedom. The emphasis on autonomy has led to an emphasis on subjectivity. Although there is historical truth at the core of Kasper’s claim, it is an oversimplification. The Reformation, the rise of the middle class, and the development of the modern sciences are not the only historical factors which affected the new understanding of society, self and reason – which Kasper admits by stating that the modern process of secularisation has a variety of roots.¹⁰³ He notes that one of these roots is the Neoscholastic doctrine of nature and grace: the dualistic conception of nature and grace led to a distinction between the “natural order” and the inviolability of grace. Correspondingly, the consequence of this distinction was a deeper distinction between the state and the Church. Unintentionally the possibility for a separation between the “natural” and “religious” planes of life became possible.¹⁰⁴ Behind the rhetoric of the Enlightenment there also lies a long history of medieval mysticism, *devotio moderna* and Renaissance humanism that also have considerably influenced the emergence of the modern concepts of the human being and of human reason. The emphasis on the individual person and his capacities belongs in the post-Reformation period to the rhetoric of the Enlightenment rather than unambiguously to that of Protestantism.

2.1.3. The Second Vatican Council and the Self-Communicating God

Kasper studied theology in a time of reform in the Catholic Church: theological thought evolved in the direction of questioning the old ways of doctrinal formation. Some principles of the Tübingen School were bound to the ideas of the Enlightenment and only came to fruition in the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰⁵ The medieval Scholastics, Thomism, and 19th century Neoscholastics were joined by alternative views of theology. In the past hundred years the Catholic Church was forced to face the effects of the growing emphasis on subject and subjectivity, the threat of relativism, modern interpretations of the philosophy of

¹⁰¹ GJ, 13; 49; 55–56; 67; KK, 114.

¹⁰² GJ, 50–58.

¹⁰³ GJ, 56; NGK, 85; 88–89; KK, 62–65.

¹⁰⁴ NGK, 88–89.

¹⁰⁵ HGS, 31.

freedom, and modern atheism. Subjectivity and emphasising the autonomy of the individual were genuine challenges compared to the traditional Christian world view. A theocentric worldview had been slowly replaced by an anthropocentric one.¹⁰⁶ This turn to a radical emphasis on individualism and individual rights has had a major impact on Kasper's theological evolution.

The time period from Vatican I to Vatican II is determinative for the formulation of modern Catholic theology.¹⁰⁷ In the Catholic Church the biggest reaction for confronting the challenges of modern day was the Second Vatican Council, which John XXIII convened in 1962.¹⁰⁸ The summoning of the Council came as a surprise to most – including the young Kasper: “it was like a lightning from the blue sky”.¹⁰⁹ The Second Vatican Council is often referred to as abrupt because John XXIII was at first considered to be a short-term pope who would not make any radical decisions within the Church. Short his papacy indeed was, but also a groundbreaking and radical one in the history of the Catholic Church. However, the winds of change were already blowing in the Church prior to the Council and many of its decisions were only affirmations of the very much anticipated modifications in the doctrine of the Church. The Church position as antimodernist and antiliberal and its affirmations of the Thomist tradition and Neoscholasticism, was something that the Catholic theologians who were more open to the questions of modern culture wanted to overcome. I will attempt to be very careful here not to press the dichotomy between conservative and liberal theologies too far: for example the Tübingen theologians did not generally see themselves as liberals, but more accurately as *ad fontes* theologians. This is a route that Kasper wants to follow as well.

I like to pass not as a liberal but as a radical and even more as an open-minded theologian. For “radical” does not mean “fanatical”. The word radical means to go back to the radices, to the roots.¹¹⁰

However, during the Council and after it the minority, who wished to retain Neoscholasticism and the post-Tridentine tradition could not reconcile themselves to the

¹⁰⁶ NGK, 85; see also *Pröpper* 2011, 280. In his book of Mercy, however, Kasper enthusiastically waits for “a necessary theocentric turn” (*der notwendigen theozentrischen Wende*), see B, 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Kerr* 2007, 1–2; 223–225. All theologians born between the years 1890 and 1940 were educated in the Thomist tradition. The members of the clergy had to take the antimodernist oath formulated by Pius X. The oath was a declaration of the Catholic Church's commitment to the intellect. The most important content of the oath concerning the possible knowledge of God and revelation was the fruit of the First Vatican Council: “[...] God, beginning and end of all things, can be certainly known, and therefore also proved, as the cause through its effects, by the natural light of reason through the things that have been made, that is, through the visible works of creation.” The aim of antimodernist movement within the Church was to keep modern philosophy apart from theology. The fear was that modern philosophies discarded the basic assumptions of one universal truth, reason, identity, objectivity and explanations based on an ultimate foundation. The antimodernist reaction was to restore a timeless, universal and objective theology. Paradoxically, this program proved to be a failure in a very same manner – as Kerr notes – as that of the Enlightenment and for the same reasons. It opposed being to history and failed to recognise the concrete situations of human life.

¹⁰⁸ E.g. *Schoof* 1970, 228–235; STV, 13; HGS, 53–56; B, 15–16; RS, 278–279.

¹⁰⁹ RS, 278.

¹¹⁰ HT, 249; see also NGK, 91; *Hahnenberg* 2007, 27.

conciliar documents.¹¹¹ Therefore many of the documents remain as compromises. Kasper himself refers to this conflict by stating – rather diplomatically – that both the First Vatican Council and the Second need *re-reception* with regard to some questions.¹¹²

Kasper has written most of his theological works in a period when the rising trend in Catholic theology was the emphasis on Christology and an attempt to make traditional Christian doctrine come closer to the modern era. Due to the rise of anthropological theology, the focus of the discussion shifted to the problematics between modern culture and traditional Christian views of revelation.¹¹³ The meaning of anthropology¹¹⁴ for Kasper's theology is twofold: on the one hand Kasper emphasises the fact that Christology must be humanly understandable,¹¹⁵ on the other hand, the meaning of soteriology comes from within its anthropological interpretation. In his Incarnation, Jesus Christ becomes a human being for others; as a redeemer and saviour he is unselfish being for others and a role model of true humanity, a model of how we should act towards each other.¹¹⁶ Kasper's theology is strongly affected by the influence of the new, reforming theological atmosphere which began to emerge in Catholic theology already before Vatican II and which finally found its expression in the Second Vatican Council. The legacy of *Vaticanum Secundum* affects Catholic theology up to the present day.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ RS, 281; *Witherup* 2006, 15–27.

¹¹² KK, 370–371; RS, 281–282; see also *Kerr* 2007, 50. The term “re-reception” originates from Yves Congar: for him it means that a doctrine that has prevailed over a long period of time can begin to look different in a context of a new doctrine.

¹¹³ *Joha* 1992, 2–4; *Allen* 2002, 151–157. In the inner hierarchy of the Vatican, in Curia, Kasper is reported to represent the so-called reformation party (Allen). The main aim of this party is, according to its name, to reform the Catholic Church from within, following the decisions of the Second Vatican Council. The focus is on pursuing collegiality, distancing itself from centralised administration as well as a broader toleration for different kinds of thinking, difference of opinion and pursuit of wider discussion. Kasper is located, according to Allen, on the more moderate wing of the party.

¹¹⁴ In his book review of *Jesus der Christus* Jörg Baur states: “Kasper distanziert sich vorsichtig von Rahner und versucht die Sinnhaftigkeit des Redens vom Heil in einer geschichtlich gewordenen Welt zu begründen.” *Baur* 1977, 60. Emphasising the meaning of history distances Kasper's approach from the more anthropologically oriented approach of Rahner. Karl Rahner and Kasper do have some similarities: both emphasise the meaning of anthropology in Christology, albeit from a slightly different point of view. In addition, their interpretations of revelation and of the Bible approach each other. On Kasper's perception of Jesus' role as mediator and its meaning for the testimony of the Bible and to philosophy: see JC, 338–401. Cf. *Rahner* 1976, 222–225. On the one hand, both Kasper and Rahner emphasise that the culmination point of God's revelation is Jesus Christ and the Easter events. Only after Jesus' role as mediator (*der Mittler*) it has been possible for mankind to have a true connection to the reality of God. On the other hand, Kasper seeks to build his theological system more on theological than on philosophical grounds, whereas Rahner's system aims to combine the both. Rahner's theology can be described as an anthropological theology which combines both philosophy and theology. *Rahner* 1976, 35–36; *Mannermaa* 1971, 9–10. Kasper, instead, emphasises the meaning of “theological theology”. GJ, 479: “Die Formel ‘theologische Theologie’ ist nur als polemische Formel sinnvoll, die dazu dient, die Theologie an ihr eigenes und eigentliches Thema zu erinnern.” Kasper also wants to distance himself from Rahner's interpretation of German idealism. KK, 29. According to Kasper, Rahner's anthropologically oriented theology and Christology pose a risk of “unilaterally ‘metaphysising’ historical Christianity”. By this Kasper means that in anthropologically oriented theology there lies a danger of one-sided metaphysics.

¹¹⁵ See JC, 92–94; cf. On Rahner: *Toiviainen* 1976, 541.

¹¹⁶ See JC, 93; 326–337.

¹¹⁷ For a concise summary of the major topics and emphasis of the Second Vatican Council see *Sullivan* 2007, 37–59. See also *O'Collins* 2006, 171–172.

Compared to the discussion preceding it, from the time of the Second Vatican Council onward the theological discussion concerning revelation has been different.¹¹⁸ The shift in paradigm was notable mostly in the emphasis on the self-communicating God and in detachment from the instruction-theoretical understanding of revelation of the Middle Ages.¹¹⁹ *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum)*¹²⁰, focuses on the self-communicating God. The Council emphasises that God communicates himself through revelation and that revelation can be attained and understood by human reason; faith is an answer to God's call that indicates God's companionship with humans. In his revelation God calls man into dialogue with him.¹²¹ The essential difference between the First and the Second Vatican Councils regarding the concept of revelation lies in that, whereas in the First Vatican Council the emphasis was in the cognitive-doctrinal plain, in the Second Vatican Council the concept of revelation became a more comprehensive reflection conception that aimed at explaining the reality of salvation as a whole. Revelation was considered not only as a divine concept, but also from the situation of man as a whole.¹²²

Kasper's thinking has been considerably influenced by the theological atmosphere that began to emerge within the Catholic Church before the Second Vatican Council. Kasper himself states that the thinking of Karl Rahner in particular is a paradigm of the separation of Catholic theology from the Neoscholastic theology and of the formation of a new, more modern, more pastoral and more practically oriented theology.¹²³ Kasper could be described as a "moderately progressive" theologian. He wants to find his way *ad fontes*: from philosophical and speculative theories to the core of the Church, Jesus Christ. In this mission Kasper is both loyal to the teachings of the Church and close to modern man, because only by accomplishing these two, he claims, can the message of the Church be brought into the 21st century.

2.2. The Concept of Time: Theology of History and Openness towards the Future

Revelation happens within human history and God's plan is realised in the course of this history.¹²⁴ Kasper says that he follows the idea of Walter Schulz in his concept of history: "history is a process of exchange between subject and object, a mediatory event between man and the world, where the world defines man and man defines the world." It is not a series of linear events, but instead a movement from past to present and onwards to the

¹¹⁸ Seckler 1985, 66–67; Schoof 1970, 201–209; Ott 1959, 15–28.

¹¹⁹ On an introduction to the instruction theoretical views of revelation, see Seckler 1985, 64–66.

¹²⁰ *De divina revelatione: Dei Verbum*. The year 1965 by Vatican Second Council acknowledged dogmatic constitution. (DV) The English translation of the constitution: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html] (accessed 26.5.2015)

¹²¹ See also Witherup 2006, 32–58.

¹²² Böttigheimer 2012, 483.

¹²³ DW, 193.

¹²⁴ See also DV, 2.

future.¹²⁵ Kasper's understanding of history is dynamic and interactive. History is the "place" where human reason is located and the area the reason can (at least in a relative sense) grasp.

The idea of God in the perspective of universal history was originally formulated by Johan Sebastian von Drey of the Tübingen School.¹²⁶ It is his critical approach to German idealist philosophy¹²⁷ and orientation that Kasper has adopted. Kasper refers to the reality of God with his people as a "concrete historical" (*konkret-Geschichtliche*) reality. In the "historical being of man" his ontological as well as ontic conditions are actualised.¹²⁸ This means that God's presence with his people does not happen in some collateral, transcendent reality but in this reality of our own and in the concrete history of humanity. For Kasper, the beginning and motivation for a theology of history begins from Christology. Christology reflects the concreteness of God's history with us at its fullest.

God assumed not only a human nature but a human history, and in that way introduced the fulfilment of history as a whole.¹²⁹

Incarnation is not, therefore, only a salvation historical event, it is also an anthropological explanation for the whole constitution of human being. History is not "just happening", but neither is it a deterministic series of events. It has also an existential aspect, and the events of history are reflected *in, with and under* the experiences of history.¹³⁰ This means that history always has a certain aspect that cannot be fully grasped. Therefore, salvation history reflects the mystery of the Trinitarian God himself. Kasper binds human nature and

¹²⁵ JC, 95: "Die Geschichte ist ein Wechselprozess zwischen Subjekt und Objekt, ein Vermittlungsgeschehen von Welt und Mensch, in dem die Welt den Menschen bestimmt und der Mensch die Welt." See also GPV, 148–149. E.g. also *Joha* 1992, 92–93: "Im Anschluss an H.J. [sic!] Schulz' dialektischen Wirklichkeitsbegriff sieht Kasper Geschichte als einen Vermittlungsprozess zwischen Mensch und Welt, Subjekt und Objekt, an der Mensch und Welt sich gegenseitig bestimmen. Dabei ist es von Wichtigkeit, dass die letzte Bestimmung des Menschen auf seiner personalen Entscheidung und Freiheit begründet." See also OG, 83.

¹²⁶ GJ, 193.

¹²⁷ See also *Burtschaell* 1985, 114.

¹²⁸ Kasper's ontology is especially influenced by Heidegger. On the fundamental difference between ontology and onticism: see *Rée* 2000, 9–14. Ontological questions are concerned with being as such; ontic to the being of individuals. See GJ, 173–174; *Kaufmann* 1996, 182: "Heidegger's 'fundamental question' arises for human beings or, as Heidegger puts it, for *Dasein*. [...] Heidegger used it for the human mode of being." The being of man differs from the being of animals because people "are" not only being in reality but they also strive to find a meaning of being from reality. Human beings do not only exist, they also search for a meaning for their existence and have tools for expressing both the search and the meaning. For Heidegger the way to deal with being is language. With the help of language in each historical situation of being (*Dasein*) the being can be "enclosed", that is: verbalised. E.g. JC, 360; OG, 83. For Kasper the central issue is to define the ontology from the concept of person: "Deshalb muss es möglich sein, von einer Phänomenologie der personalen Erfahrung zum ontologischen Wesen der Person vorzustoßen. [...] Wir müssen [...] die Ontologie von der Wirklichkeit der Person her entwerfen, d.h. wir müssen die Ontologie personal und die Person ontologisch begreifen." In this view Kasper emphasises the conception of the meaning of experience in perceiving the true nature of reality. Kasper sees both the historical being of man as well as the personal character of his being as a prerequisite to being able to grasp within his own being an experience of his own ground of being.

¹²⁹ JC, 72–73: "[dass] Gott nicht nur eine menschliche Natur, sondern eine menschliche Geschichte angenommen hat und daß er dadurch die Vollendung der Geschichte überhaupt eingeleitet hat."

¹³⁰ GJ, 161 "in, mit und unter"; see also OG, 65–66; 71.

(natural) history together in the Incarnation. History cannot be defined only with concepts such as time or place or a certain happening, it is also the key for understanding the existential meaning of revelation. Revelation is always received in a certain time and place but even so, it remains ultimately mysterious. Its interpretation happens *in, with and under* the experiences of the receiver.¹³¹ Existentialist *and* historical interpretation, both of which are included in Kasper's theology-of-history approach¹³², walk constantly hand-in-hand in his theology.¹³³

The interpretation of time and history sheds light on Kasper's interpretation of experience. Kasper states: "experience never begins at point zero but is historically mediated."¹³⁴ It is important for him to avoid the problems included in both existential and historical-critical interpretation method when used alone, to the exhaustion of the other.¹³⁵ The historical and existentialist interpretations are bound together in Kasper's thought by the concept of freedom. In an encounter between man and God, the experience is, according to Kasper, always historical. He emphasises that encountering God does not imply alienation from this world: God encounters people in human history. The culmination point of the joint history of God and man is the Incarnation: God comes into the world in the person of Jesus Christ.¹³⁶ Kasper emphasises the social and communal character of the encounter:

[...] in the general history of revelation the image of God remains ambiguous [...] God does not will to approach man solely as an individual, independently of his reciprocal ties

¹³¹ GJ, 163; 165; KK, 115.

¹³² Kasper sheds light on his own theology-of-history approach by comparing his own interpretation to that of two Protestant theologians, Oscar Cullmann and Rudolf Bultmann. He analyses their concepts of history, time, and their choice of faith points of view (Kasper himself has a point of view centered on the possibility of choosing faith based on the historicity of human beings). According to Kasper, the concept of linear progression of time of Cullmann's is appropriate in that sense that it prevents the reduction of history to only a personal, existential historicity limited to a specific point in time of a single individual. However, a linear progression does not, according to Kasper, do justice to the understanding of history in the New Testament. Linear progression of time, namely, prevents the possibility of returning to the past and therefore, in Kasper's thinking, also the possibility of conversion. G, 74–82.

¹³³ In his interpretation of the meaning of history a connection to the salvation-historical approach of Wolfhart Pannenberg can be seen. Both Kasper and Pannenberg emphasise the unity of history and truth. Like Pannenberg Kasper also emphasises that salvation history, history of religion and profane history cannot be separate entities: salvation history happens in and within profane history instead of on some meta-historical plane. On Pannenberg's conception of history *Galloway* 1973, 31–34 and on his theological principles: *Kärkkäinen* 2002, 117–118. See also G, 93–94; GW, 181–182; c.f. *Grillmeier* 1975, 504–509; *Pannenberg* 1988a, 69–70. The resurrection of Jesus is for Pannenberg both a fact and a fulfilment of earlier generations' anticipation. See *Rasmussen & Spjuth* 1986, 39–40. Pannenberg emphasises the unity of the truth: the truth about the world has to be one, because it is impossible to have multiple explanations. Only one truth can explain the whole of reality. Therefore, the Christian truth about the world, God and human must exist within this one truth. Therefore the Resurrection cannot have only a symbolic meaning, because it would mean that our salvation is only symbolic. For example, in *JC*, Kasper agrees that Pannenberg's basic idea is correct although he surpasses the limits of historical-critical research with his reasoning about the "fact-meaning".

¹³⁴ GJ, 156: "(Die) Erfahrung niemals am Nullpunkt anfängt, sondern geschichtlich vermittelt ist."

¹³⁵ OG, 80–87.

¹³⁶ G, 138–143; OG, 53; 77.

with others, but also wills to reveal himself to man as a social and historical being. [...] God's common history with man demands a special history of God's revelation.¹³⁷

Here Kasper reveals that in his thought the creation and special revelation belong together: history is a place for both creation and for God's special plan for human beings. Revelation and man's experience of God give history and time a completely new meaning.

Kasper states that human beings exist in an existential time where the new *aeon* opened up in the Christ-event makes the choice for belief or non-belief possible.¹³⁸ Kasper wants to emphasise the new possibility opened up in Christ: the new *aeon* makes conversion possible through grace. Grace makes it possible to have a new beginning and therefore, it also makes it possible to overcome the limits of being in time. This means that we are able to have a new chance with respect to our past as well. Through grace not only the new beginning but also the possibility to overcome the limitedness of time becomes possible. The possibility for a new beginning gets a new name in the witness of the New Testament: grace. At the same time it becomes a living reality for human beings.¹³⁹

Revelation gives a whole new meaning to history. Kasper thus interprets dynamically the concepts of history and time in the New Testament: the encounter between God and man in history makes the new *aeon* possible. It is an *aeon* of the Holy Spirit and the Church of Christ, whose future lies in the eschatological events, when we will be able to see face-to-face.¹⁴⁰

The concept of time is, therefore, central for understanding Kasper's theology of history. Time as a concept should be understood here as broadly as possible: not just as a measure or a yardstick for the events of history, nor only as technical term of an organising concept such as "temporal and spatial", but rather as an existential concept. From the point of view of theology of history, time has something more than just its most apparent interpretation. The theology of history approaches the meaning of time from the point of view of Christology, salvation history, eschatology and the eternity of God.¹⁴¹ God gives himself in a certain moment of time, he appears in human history. The biblical view of history is to be understood as a dialogue between man and God that happens in a particular moment of time. God has posited his creature, man, in this particular moment of time. In

¹³⁷ GJ, 209: "[...] das Bild Gottes bleibt in der allgemeinen Offenbarungsgeschichte vieldeutig. [...] Gott sich dem Menschen nicht nur einzeln, unabhängig von aller wechselseitigen Verbindung, sondern dem Menschen als einem sozialen und geschichtlichen Wesen offenbaren will. [...] So gibt es um der allgemeinen Geschichte Gottes mit den Menschen willen eine besondere Geschichte der Offenbarung Gottes." English translation has been modified.

¹³⁸ Rudolf Bultmann's interpretation comes close to that of Kasper. In Bultmann's thought Kasper, however, sees a danger of Christology being reduced to soteriology and because of that, of a reduction of faith into a personal choice to believe. The consequence of this reduction would be a dualistic division of history: into the inner (the choice of belief of the Christian) and the outer (the other events) history. *Bultmann* 1964, 36; cf. G, 76–77. G, 75; cf. B, 112–113; cf. *Bultmann* 1964, 36: "[...] kann kein Zweifel daran sein, dass Jesus die Zeit seines Auftretens als die Entscheidungszeit angesehen hat und die Stellung zu seiner Person und seiner Verkündigung als das, woran sich die Zukunft des einzelnen entscheidet."

¹³⁹ G, 74; B, 77.

¹⁴⁰ See also DV, 7.

¹⁴¹ G, 67–100.

this moment of time man can not only *be* in it but also *shape* it.¹⁴² This is, therefore, also a concept for making a choice: time enables us to be converted to God.

Historical time proceeds in the tension between the past, present and future. In a life of a human being this means that the eschatological choice of belief must always be made at this moment. On a universal scale it means that history is to be understood as a multilateral field of happening and being which does not simply find its explanation in a single temporal definition. Kasper remarks that God's action in history is at the same time timelessness (*Zeitlosigkeit*) and mastering of time (*Zeitmächtigkeit*). He emphasises that according to the biblical concept of God, eternity does not negatively mean "timeless" or "outside of time" but in a positive sense the Kingdom of God is *within time* and *above time*.¹⁴³ Therefore, also the eternity of God must be understood dialectically: at the same time that God is in time, God is also free of time.¹⁴⁴

Time is defined not only from the perspective of the eternity of God but also from Christology. The fact that history continues despite evilness and sin is based on the redemptive work of Christ. God allows human history to continue because he wants to save the whole human reality through Christ.¹⁴⁵ In the Christian message, in the life and death of Christ salvation and profane history are also united. Kasper follows the documents of Vatican II in his conviction that, based on the fact of their having been created by the Word of God, all human beings have a share in Christ and in his work of redemption. This is because, as the author of the Letter to the Colossians says, "in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). Therefore, the acts of creation and redemption belong together."¹⁴⁶

Theology can never wholly be detached from tradition, but it must be at the same time historical-positive (*historisch-positiv*) and philosophical-speculative (*philosophisch-spekulativ*).¹⁴⁷ According to Kasper, the essence and existence of theology can never be each other's competitor or opposites. Rather, they must complement each other.¹⁴⁸ In history the church lives by Tradition. The Tradition of the Church is at the same time essence and existence; it grows in a historical-positive sense and is evaluated in a philosophical-speculative sense. Kasper also remarks that if theology were to authentically fulfil its task in this manner, it would also have a positive effect on the society. In other words, theology is "transmitting of faith continuously into this moment (J. S. Drey)".¹⁴⁹

¹⁴² G, 80.

¹⁴³ G, 83.

¹⁴⁴ G, 84–85.

¹⁴⁵ GJ, 202–205; G, 87.

¹⁴⁶ G, 92–93. Also: GS, 12.

¹⁴⁷ This view is very traditional in the Western European context and cannot necessarily be applied to theology in general. Outside the Western context modern theology operates in a very different field of thought and praxis. The historical-positive and philosophical-speculative aspect of theology is actually minimised. Instead, modern contextual theology can operate, for example, in the spiritual-communal, mystical-pneumatological or ethical-societal field.

¹⁴⁸ M, 85.

¹⁴⁹ M, 86.

Tradition is the lived and breathed reality the community of believers live in, mediate and pass on:

It is not possible for us to have a proper conception of a faith not mediated to us by tradition [...] If the Easter faith and thus faith in Christ rests upon the testimony of the apostles, then the only means of access to it that we have is through the apostolic witness which is handed down in the Church as the community of believers.¹⁵⁰

Kasper states that in the spirit of Tübingenian theology the transmission of the Christian tradition in a way relevant to modern times is one of his main guidelines. Moreover, the idea of transmitting Christian Tradition in any current historical situation also exists as a personal motivation in Kasper's own life. As a child of the period of the Second World War, living through the Cold War; witnessing the Second Vatican Council and the collapse of Communism, Kasper has himself borne witness to the importance of having dialogue with modern culture. This dialogue involves the attempt to understand the philosophical backgrounds as well as the sociological structures that affect the prevailing cultural, social as well as theological atmosphere.¹⁵¹

While affirming the need to understand the prevailing culture and trying to find the means to communicate the Christian message in the current historical situation, the historical approach still remains critical towards itself as well. If history as a dialogical reality between God and man is taken as the starting point¹⁵² of theological reflection, it actually safeguards theological interpretation from time-bound problems. While trying to find the proper, authentic expression for the Christian message in our time, the historical-relational approach of theology of history acknowledges, at the same time, that the future always remains open, and that doctrinal development can never be finalised in the sense of strict dogmatic rules. New times always bring new questions and new problems. In addition, such new questions and problems must not be interpreted as problematic for the development of the Church and the doctrine of the Church, but instead they can be interpreted as a welcome and necessary dialogue and discussion that actually builds that which the Church is. The Church is open to the future. In addition, the theology of history is in this sense loyal to the Church's certitude that the Holy Spirit leads it in the course of history. This openness towards the future and dialogue is that which constitutes the Church

¹⁵⁰ JC, 218: "Uns eine adäquate Erfassung eines durch Tradition nicht vermittelten Glaubens nicht möglich ist [...] Wenn der Osterglaube und damit der Christusglaube auf dem Zeugnis der Apostel beruht, dann ist er uns gar nicht anders als über das apostolische Zeugnis, das in der Kirche als der Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden weitergeben wird, zugänglich." See also DV, 5: "It is common knowledge that among all the Scriptures, even those of the New Testament, the Gospels have a special preeminence, and rightly so, for they are the principal witness for the life and teaching of the incarnate Word, our savior." See also OG, 92.

¹⁵¹ A, 11–14; see also GGE, 22–27; KK, 428.

¹⁵² Instead of, for example, using transcendental reality *per se* as a starting point (as in Karl Rahner's work) or starting with the relationship between scripture and authority (as in the work of Joseph Ratzinger). See *Schüssler Fiorenza* 2014, 23; 26–29.

as a relational *communio* of believers.¹⁵³ As such, it reflects the inner life of the Trinitarian God himself.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ The *communio*-ecclesiology originates from *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council. (Promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964). In 1985 in the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops Kasper proposed to the assembly of bishops that the intention of the unifying theology of Vatican II is *communio* ecclesiology. *Colberg & Krieg* 2014, xvii.

¹⁵⁴ See also LG, 8.

3. Conditions of Revelation

In the great religions of the Book the sempiternal questions of being, the ultimate ground of reality and meaning of life are not only dealt with from the perspective of mere human speculation but are based on the conviction that their world view, their fundamental vision is derived from the testimony of God himself in the course of history, both in his word and in his deed. This testimony is called divine revelation.¹ Revelation is something on with which a religion stands or falls. If there is no way of knowing God, religion becomes unnecessary.² A typology of revelation theologies could be constructed from several points of view. Avery Dulles introduces five models of revelation that in his opinion reflect the types of revelation theology in the 20th century. He makes this classification based on the main emphasis of each of their vision: revelation as doctrine, revelation as history, revelation as inner experience, revelation as dialectical presence and revelation as new awareness.³ Cardinals Dulles and Kasper are contemporaries who share the post-Second Vatican Council conception of revelation being essentially God's free self-revelation that happens in the course of history. In a general categorisation of types of revelation theologies their approach could also be characterised as "communication theoretic", the other types being "information theoretic" (in which revelation serves as the "place" where divine instructions regarding salvation are given) and "epiphanic" (instead of theoretical instructions, revelation is the salvation historical happening, during which God's *Dasein* is revealed as someone who does great deeds).⁴ What differentiates the communication theoretic model from the information theoretic and epiphanic models is that it introduces a theocentric radicalisation: in revelation God does not reveal *something* but rather himself.⁵ An essential aspect of the communication theoretic model is the possibility for a human being to participate in revelation reality and the *communio*-dimension of revelation. In this view God is personal in his own relations as the Triune God, and he wants to have human beings in a personal relationship with him as well. In Kasper's thought, revelation is "an invitation and challenge to covenant and communion with God".⁶ Kasper places himself against the purely propositional forms (and therefore, against the information theoretic model) of revelation. In the Bible there are undeniably also propositional statements, but their intention is not only to be information which God gives to people in order to make them believe. Instead, they are historically situated and personally involving, which means that they do not give orders or instructions without a cause, and the cause is always related to the person.⁷

¹ Dulles 1983, 3; OG, 53; 61; Böttigheimer 2012, 359.

² OG, 53; Dulles 1983, 5–6.

³ Dulles 1983, 26–28.

⁴ On the three basic models of revelation theory, see e.g. Seckler 1985, 62–67. See also GJ, 210.

⁵ Seckler 1985, 66–67; GJ, 211.

⁶ GJ, 211: "Einladung und Aufforderung zum Bund und zur Gemeinschaft mit Gott."

⁷ GJ, 209–215. See also Ward 1994, 225–226.

3.1. Autonomy of Religious Language

To be able to further understand Kasper's interpretation of revelation we must also consider how he uses religious language. Religious expressions traditionally aim to describe a reality which does not easily comport with descriptions of human words: they run out when one tries to say something about the unspeakable. However, language is also the only thing available for us for the task. Language plays, therefore, an important role in the giving and receiving of revelation. It has both revealing and hiding implications. The mystical tradition adheres to the conviction that the reality of God remains a mystery that human words can never fully grasp. Modern philosophy of language asks if talk about God is meaningful at all. From these two starting points Kasper tries to answer the question of how language is capable of saying anything of God.

In Kasper's opinion, actual reality and language about it go hand in hand. This is also in line with the biblical understanding of reality: the whole creation is established on the word of God and Jesus Christ as the Word of God is the ultimate realisation of the word of God in our reality and in our history.⁸ To take language as the starting point for theological discussion is, therefore, a consistent step for Kasper. Even if limited by our finite reality, words still reflect the reality of God and his word. Language, therefore, reflects a dialectical understanding of reality. Words are simultaneously words of God (the testimony of the Bible) given in revelation, and human words. Human words are not devoid of meaning: they reflect the creation of God. Even if they cannot say anything definite of the reality about the Trinitarian God, they still reflect God's reality. Kasper says that language is a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*)⁹ of reality and as such it gives also meaning to reality through metaphors and similes. It cannot get a complete grasp of all reality and it cannot grasp the reality of God, but it can, nevertheless point to the reality that is bigger than any sum of words of it.

The language of biblical revelation is manifold: it involves historical narration, proverbs, prayer, songs and poetry; it includes praise, prayer, commendations, instruction, cursing and lament. Historical texts are often narrative in their form, whereas in the gospels the historical narrative is intertwined with instructions, metaphors and

⁸ GJ, 298–304. Kasper argues that Jesus Christ is “the final and definitive Word of God”, and thus the biblical understandings of “word” and the Greek understanding of “Logos” bear at the same time a correspondence and a radical difference. Kasper does not want to use the Greek concept of “Logos” in an unqualified manner when talking about Jesus Christ as the Word of God, because he argues that the element of kenosis is neglected in the classical Logos-Christology. The theology of the Word of God can only be correctly understood when all aspects of the interpretation of Jesus Christ as the Word of God are taken into account: biblical faith in creation; faith in God of history with human beings and the aspect of the Word becoming flesh and hence the Word emptying himself, becoming a man and giving himself subject to death. The creation, thus, already implies the reality of the Cross in Kasper's Christology. See also OG, 61–63; DV, 4; CCC, 102.

⁹ *Der Vorgriff* is a central concept in Kasper's theology. In this study it is translated as “pre-apprehension” to underline the meaning of *Vorgriff* as a pre-view, anticipation, a pre-conception of something that we cannot quite grasp in our reality. It is closely related to the concept of *Capax Dei*, an ability to grasp something of the incomprehensible, infinite reality that is the ground of our being. The concept of *Vorgriff* simultaneously expresses both a reaching-out to the divine and the fact that this action can never be done completely. Hence it is merely a *pre*-apprehension, a whisper of the divine.

prayers. The religious language of the Bible as well as that of the Tradition and liturgy of the Church make up a whole that can be examined under the collective rubric of a “religious language”. Kasper surveys religious language from the point of view of modern philosophy of language and the tradition of mysticism and apophatic theology of Christianity. According to Kasper, the question of the autonomy of religious language is central from the point of view of apologetics.

In addition, theological reasoning is bound to our physical reality. That is why in a philosophical-theological sense the divine reality can only be examined “von unten”: using our human means and human language. Kasper states, however, that the approach “von unten” is actually barred to us, because “every question already presupposes a preunderstanding of the reality with which the question is concerned”¹⁰. If God had never come into discussion in human history we would never be able to ask about him. This claim is strongly revelation-theological. It suggests that there must be some kind of prior knowledge of God before we are able to say anything about, question, doubt, believe in, trust in, God. Otherwise God would only be a fragment of our imagination. The question of how, why, when and under what conditions revelation takes place, remains.

The challenge of atheism is also connected to the question of religious language. Kasper wants to answer the challenge of modern atheism from within the unique language of Christianity. The existence of God can neither be verified nor falsified by means of the natural sciences. This is why a mathematical-logical approach to the question of God is fruitless. What natural sciences *can* do for theology, argues Kasper, is to help us see that the reality of revelation is neither superstition nor a convenient explanation for things not yet explained by the natural sciences. For Kasper, the natural sciences belong to another dimension of knowledge than the reality of revelation, which belongs to the dimension of the reality of salvation. However, Kasper claims that the modern mentality, oriented as it is toward the natural sciences and technology, requires us to speak coherently and controllably of God and his revelation. They can also help to clarify that theology is not about superstition or about a primitive world view. Therefore, the example of the organised natural sciences can bring, so to speak, an order to the profession of theology. The task for revealed truths is not to explain the yet unknown fields of science or fill the gaps of current human knowledge. Responsible revelation theology remembers that it belongs to another dimension of knowledge than the mathematical-scientific field of knowledge. But this acknowledgement works both ways: the scientific world view can help theology to remember that it does not profess superstition or the supernatural. Revelation does not operate in the field of the supernatural, some mysterious world beyond ours, but instead within our own reality and our own history. Revelation must be investigated in the light of both infinite and finite reality: if understanding of the revelation is detached from the world, it is in fact detached from the very reality it is supposed to affect. The reality of the world and of the divine are simultaneously present in revelation.¹¹

¹⁰ GJ, 59: “Denn jede Frage setzt bereits ein Vorverständnis der erfragten Wirklichkeit voraus.”

¹¹ OG, 54–55; this thought can also be found in Pope John Paul II. See *Wegder-McNelly* 2006, 159.

However, valid scientific reasoning can never fully grasp transcendent reality. Divine reality is, and always will be, a mystery in its deepest sense, and the means of human language are limited when trying to grasp it. It is actually more than limited, because especially, as Kasper puts it, after “philosophy has become atheistic”.¹² The concept of substance as well as the concept of relation have become prone to misunderstanding, as Kasper notes, “We lack the language and the adequately developed categories that would enable us to speak unambiguously of God.”¹³

First, therefore, modern philosophy of language poses the question: is the word “God” a meaningful word at all, and can one speak of religious life as an independent area of life? Second, is the mystical dimension of life always such that one should preferably say nothing about it than try to express it?¹⁴ Kasper criticises the view of modern philosophy of language for their idea of religious language, stating that their view is too narrow. Here we have to limit ourselves to a few examples of modern philosophy of language relevant to Kasper’s understanding of religious language. He first targets his criticism to Wittgenstein’s and Russell’s logical positivism. This is a logical starting point for Kasper in his apology for Christianity as logical positivism can be said to be a linguistic equivalent to the atheistic philosophy of Nietzsche’s. Kasper claims that whereas Nietzsche promulgated the death of God from the point of view of nihilism, Wittgenstein’s logical positivism does the same to language: “what we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.”¹⁵ Kasper calls the consequences of the logical positivism “semantic atheism”.¹⁶ Wittgenstein’s sentence is, however, often misunderstood, and Kasper notes, that Wittgenstein later on developed his theory of language games as a critique of logical positivism.¹⁷

The successors to Wittgenstein’s work on philosophy of language are commonly categorised in two main categories: *cognitive* and *non-cognitive theories* of language. *The Cognitive theory of language* (i.e., J. Wisdom, I.T. Ramsey) emphasises the meaning of deep understanding and the empirical experience of inner commitment. What is central to this theory is that language can also reach beyond scientific argument and still remain meaningful: personal certitude does not necessary mean logical conviction alone. Empirical experience can also be real from the point of view of a person’s inner experience

¹² GJ, 135–136: “Nachdem die Philosophie [...] atheistisch geworden ist” By this Kasper means the possibility for atheistic orientation to the question of being and non-being especially after the atheistic answer to Hegel’s philosophical position by Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche.

¹³ GJ, 135: “Es fehlt uns an der Sprache und an ausgebildeten Kategorien, um eindeutig von Gott reden zu können.”

¹⁴ GJ, 58–59; 165–166; GPV, 144; similarly: *Gollwitzer* 1964, 5–7.

¹⁵ This is one of Wittgenstein’s most famous quotes: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.” See also OG, 55. For a wider analysis of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and the possibilities to say something of the unutterable see *Knepper* 2009, 66–69.

¹⁶ Logical positivism became untenable from the point of view of natural science itself. After the breakthrough of modern quantum physics and its interpretation it became obvious that not even the empirical sciences can be strictly verified but instead the ground of the physical world seems to be random. This randomness can be detected through statistical analysis. Cf. GJ, 167–168; OG, 54.

¹⁷ GJ, 168–169; HT, 250.

and personal certitude. Language works as a symbolic system that helps us to grasp reality.¹⁸ In Kasper's view, cognitive theory does not, however, attain the depth of religious language and experience. He points out, however, that compared to *non-cognitive theory* the advantage of the cognitive theory is that in its view, religious language cannot be reduced to only ethics or empiricism. For example, the representatives of *non-cognitive theory* (i.e. R. Braithwaith, R. M. Hare, P. M. Bure) see the function of religious language only as a moral code system. This makes Kasper ask, is it not a narrow view of religious language especially compared to how religious people themselves experience it? A religious person sees the object of his faith, God, as a receptive, open, speaking and loving person, not as a highest moral authority or ultimate being of love in philosophical sense. Impersonal moral codes do not speak to the believer in a same way as a personal God, who can be encountered personally. According to Kasper, non-cognitive theory reduces religious language to ethics.¹⁹ The cognitive theory which emphasises the empirical experience of deeper understanding and inner commitment does not reach the depths of religious language and religious experience either.

The *theory of the speech-act*²⁰ (J. L. Austin) works within religious language because it takes into account the special nature of religious language: religious language is testimonial speech. In the speech-act God becomes accessible in understandable words, in the form of language. The closest theory of philosophy of language to Kasper's own thought is the theory of the *historicity of language* (*Geschichtlichkeit der Sprache*). Language is affected by both the historical evolution of language but also by the historical situation and historical community in which the language is used, as well as the pre-comprehension which directs the understanding of language in a certain way. Language reveals a certain historical situation in a way typical for our time and our cultural context.²¹ According to Kasper, in modern discussion the philosophy of language focuses, however, on the *communicative praxis of language* (*Sprache als kommunikativer Praxis*). When understood in a comprehensive way, this theory (represented by Jürgen Habermas and K.O. Apel), combines earlier theories by taking into account the local and historical position of language and the subjective validity of language. According to Habermas, every communication act in a communicative society is a pre-apprehension of a perfect communication society and a sign of an ideal human society, a society in which no alienation prevails. Kasper remarks, however, that in Habermas' theory the ontological status of the pre-comprehension of perfect understanding remains unexplained.²²

Praxis should be understood in its original Greek-philosophical sense as "*communicative freedom praxis*" (*kommunikative Freiheitspraxis*). Kasper argues that this way also a connection to modern philosophy of freedom is created.²³ Here we can also see

¹⁸ Stiver 1996, 72–79.

¹⁹ GJ, 169.

²⁰ For a more comprehensive account of the speech-act theory see Lycan 2008, 144–155.

²¹ GJ, 170.

²² GJ, 171–172; KK, 98–99.

²³ ZZD, 260.

that Kasper combines the modern theory of language as *communicative praxis* (*Sprache als kommunikativer Praxis*)²⁴ with his own interpretation of the philosophy of freedom. Based on his interpretation of Schelling's philosophy of freedom Kasper's thesis responds also to the antinomy of free will and determinism posed by Kant. In Christianity action follows being (*agere sequitur esse*); indicative presupposes imperative. Only to demand an ethical life would be contradictory to the proclamation of the Gospel: in the language of doxology we try to describe "what God *has done* for us and what *the basis of his actions is*"²⁵.

One could claim that, even if we cannot or do not want to identify reality as a whole as God's creation, many of the concepts we treat as immanent (such as, for example, freedom, reason, love and power) are still, in some way, reflections of infinite reality. Even in a secular usage of language these concepts are used in a rather indefinite – and therefore, infinite – manner. Abstract, immeasurable concepts could actually be means of portraying infinite, immeasurable reality, whether we call that reality the reality of God or accept that there are concepts in human language that have a meaning deeper than only empirically verified and measurable reality.

Kasper seeks to find an explanation for the religious use of language in a universal sense, because if religious language is left alone on its own island of significance, it will lose any wider application. In addition, it will never become understandable in any other community than within the religious community. Language is not only used as a plain, hard instrument of communication: it always includes symbols and references. It is living and evolving as it is used. There is no language vacuum where language would remain intact. Language is always a product of respective language communities, cultural traditions and practices.²⁶ Kasper does not simply adopt Wittgenstein's theory of language game, but rather turns it upside down: even though the language is indebted to our respective language communities, nevertheless religious language has to be universally meaningful.²⁷ Moreover, the universality of language is important not only from the point of view of the human context. If we are trying to grasp "the something", i.e. the ground of our being, that determines everything, only universal categories are suitable for this task. Only universal categories can answer the question of God.²⁸ If words are used only for the play and speculation within the religious community and their understanding and proper interpretation can only be done within the religious community, no one outside the religious community can ever take them seriously. In such a case, words are only as meaningful as a fairy tale.

It is, however, a special characteristic of religious language that it has special value as testimonial truth (*Zeugnismwahrheit*). Kasper emphasises that religious language is not descriptive but *evocative* in character.²⁹ In Kasper's analysis of the significance of

²⁴ GJ, 171–172.

²⁵ ZZZ, 260: "[...] was Gott getan hat und was Aufgrund seines Tuns wirklich ist."

²⁶ HT, 250.

²⁷ GJ, 171.

²⁸ GJ, 171–172; B, 28.

²⁹ GJ, 170.

language and of the autonomy of religious language, seems to prevail a certain tension. On the one hand, the language should be universal and understandable by all; on the other hand, language is always strongly affected by the practical, affirmative, liturgical and diaconal inner understanding of a specific religious community which uses the language. In this case, this is the community of Christian believers.³⁰ The concept of “testimonial truth” is not, however, without problems. What is the meaning of the word “testimony” for Kasper: who testifies, and how does it become truth? It seems that by joining the idea of evocative language to the concept of testimonial truth Kasper seeks to argue for the mutable, living content of religious language. In this way he tries to avoid diminishing religious language to static, dogmatic expressions. It seems that Kasper’s description of the nature of religious language functions as a tool for his understanding of safeguarding religious truths (*depositum fidei*) and their transmission to future generations of believers. “Witnessing” is, therefore, foremost a concept bound to history and events in history.

For Kasper, the evocative nature of language also means that religious language is truly effective: it forms and changes reality. If one does not share Kasper’s view of the evocative, “forth-calling” nature of language, it could lead to criticism of his view of the universality of language: namely, that the theory can only be applied to the community of believers, who share the experience of language’s evocative nature (the language of liturgy and worship). Here we can see a connection to Kasper’s idea of the community of believers as *communio*. The *communio* of believers is a gathering of personal relations: me – you – us. The personal connection between believers enforces the understanding of language as personal and evocative – a language within the *communio* of believers.

According to Kasper, the nature of religious language is such that every word and every speech-act is oriented to yearning and hope; therefore, every communication situation reflects a yearning or a wish towards a higher reality.³¹ Kasper emphasises that in the end all concepts of language refer to a divine reality, because language is a way of transcending the limits of being. The word “God” is, therefore, always meaningful when the meaning of the whole of reality and meaning of the being of man is under discussion.³² Therefore, forthcalling functions as an expression for the general yearning of human beings. Religious language refers to a reality that we cannot grasp but which we can long for. It is – so to speak – an articulation of the *sensus fidei* in each historical period. The testimony of the religious community moves from the current time into the past and anticipates the future.

Kasper denies that religious language can *only* be effective within the religious community. He uses philosopher, cultural critic Walter Benjamin’s concept of universal hope³³ and turns the idea of the elitism of religious language on its head: religious

³⁰ GJ, 172.

³¹ F, 350; OG, 84.

³² G, 130; GPV, 145; GM, 19–20.

³³ According to Walter Benjamin this kind of hope must also include the loved ones who have passed away: only the fact that language reflects solidarity with the whole of reality (that is, both the reality of the living

language is not some insignificant equivocation within an inside group's members, but on the contrary religious language is expressive power, which gives a prerequisite and meaning to all other contents of language.³⁴ Thus it is clear that Kasper considers the idea of *communio* as a way of explaining the whole of reality. The *communio* is, for him, so to speak, a reflection of the being of the Ground of being, the Trinitarian God himself. If *communio* only included those with the "right faith", it would mean that language loses all its meaning outside this group. If this view is applied even to the atheistic world view, one can say that even every atheist is yearning for God; every wish that asks for truth or unconditional, is a wish for God, based solely on the ontological structure of the whole reality. The act of yearning is universal for all humanity. What Kasper's claim actually means is that a human being's wish for God is universal, even if one cannot or will not himself or herself grasp what he or she yearns for.

According to Kasper, language is communication that encloses a certain pre-comprehension of universal being. Because language is a means for a human being of stretching himself beyond the limits of his own being, the function of language ultimately is to refer to the divine reality.³⁵ It is a question of understanding the whole of reality and the meaning of man's own being.³⁶ At the same time we are on the one hand aware of our limits and on the other hand we understand that our being is based on infinite, unlimited being.

Therefore, Kasper makes a profound metaphysical claim when he states that language is always ultimately religious language and that falling silent about God leads to a confusion of languages as in Babel.³⁷ If language as a natural communication method of human beings is perceived as religious as such and religious above all, such a claim has consequences for the interpretation of all reality. To see religious language as the intrinsic value of language in general requires for its support a belief that this reality, which we experience through our senses, is not the whole truth. This claim is both religious and metaphysical in nature: it holds that naturalism can never grasp the whole of reality. Of course, the special position of religious language is special only if we believe that language contains the kind of meanings that cannot be seen or verified by means of empiricism, that there lies a "larger" reality behind mere words. The question of whether these meaning contents refer to a real, existing reality, is a matter of belief. In other words, Kasper's understanding is based on a presumption that our reality is based on an infinite one – a controverted presupposition for example by atheists. However, atheists also base their own convictions on metaphysical belief systems and on language that is based on the same philosophical apparatus as theology and therefore, they also make metaphysical claims when giving their account of reality. There are no worldviews that are free from

and of the dead equally), guarantees that language is directed toward to a righteous God. Since every speech-act implies a hope of successful communication, every speech-act anticipates the Kingdom of God. See GJ, 172; FPM, 274–275.

³⁴ GJ, 172; JC, 333–335.

³⁵ GJ, 165–183; G, 130; OG, 76–77.

³⁶ G, 130; GJ, 165–183.

³⁷ GJ, 175; B, 53.

metaphysical assumptions. All belief systems, whether theistic or atheistic, are based on metaphysical assumptions. What is evident for Kasper, though, is that exactly because we do have *de facto* religious experiences, in the process of shutting them completely out of our perception of reality we would simultaneously dishonestly narrow our *de facto* experience of existing reality. In addition, for Kasper all statements, not only those of a religious-metaphysical nature, are based on some kind of belief system.

Language does, however, include elements that are not merely a purely descriptive recitation of facts. Language always exists in the territory between descriptive, imaginative, pragmatic, semantic and functional meanings. It is also semantically possible to use language for empirically false sentences like “an elephant is always the same as a purple cow”, although our empirical experience can immediately tell us that such a sentence has absolutely no truth value. The possibility and power of religious language lies within the imaginative usage of language, but at the same time, there in lies its weakness: religious language should function at all levels of language, not just the imaginative. Otherwise it can never be completely convincing. Therefore, the question is: does religious language also meet the requirements of descriptive, pragmatic, semantic and functional meanings?

Kasper bases his thought on the idea that every question about our existence and its ground is ultimately a pre-conception (*Vorgriff*) of the divine reality and that every speech-act is a cry for God. This is the core of the autonomy of religious language.³⁸ One must remember, however, that what religious language tries to describe differs from the meanings that descriptive language tries to open up. The content of religious language is at the same time both identifiable and completely removed from our common day experience. Religious language simultaneously contains a familiar and an unfamiliar element. Even though religious language aims to be universally understandable and it aims to follow the principles of linguistic intelligibility, it still contains implications of meaning that cannot be completely understood within the limited concepts of our finite reality. Even if we interpreted the atheist’s sigh for meaning and purpose of being as a sigh for divine reality, religious language limits itself when answering this kind of yearning. In the evocative sense, religious language functions as a tool for opening up transcendental reality for man. At the same time, however, the question of “the existence of God”, for example, is paradoxically completely irrational, even heretical, because God’s being exceeds all possible definitions of God’s being, including “ground of being” or “power of being”. God is the ground of everything but still, paradoxically, we cannot *really* say that “God is the ground of everything”, because this kind of sentence would give a limited definition to something you cannot define. Therefore, even the best description fails to meet its target.³⁹

³⁸ GJ, 172; GPV, 145.

³⁹ GJ, 172–173. See also *Tillich* 1987, 297: “The word ‘God’ is filled with the concrete symbols in which mankind has expressed its ultimate concern, its being grasped by something unconditional. And this something is just not a thing but the power of being in which every being participates. [...] The atheistic terminology of mysticism is striking. It leads beyond God to the Unconditioned, transcending any fixation of the divine as an object.” See also *Knepper* 2009, 68: “Ineffability discourses are governed by socially established rules – rules that, ironically, make it possible to speak about what cannot be spoken about. On the second hand, however, such rules do not straightjacket authors of ineffability discourses such that they

Kasper considers, therefore: how does the word “God” actually define the reality? The paradox lies in the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar.

But what is the reality that is meant by the word ‘God’? If this ontological question is no longer raised, then the proposition that God is becomes a statement of what the word ‘God’ means to us. This kind of transformation of ontological statements into statements of meaning and function empty the word ‘God’ of its cognitive content.⁴⁰

The question of being is bound to the question of God. The intrinsic understanding of Christianity entails the idea that life itself encloses the question of God. Being is the perpetual question of metaphysics but it was not until Thomas Aquinas that the question of being as being itself, being *ipso facto* was posed as opposed to the question of being as substance, essence or as a part of conceptual reason.⁴¹ Kasper applies Heidegger’s view of language as the “home of being” (*das Haus des Seins*). Being is used here as being itself, being *ipso facto*, not as theoretical or ordinary but as something that speaks to us once we manage to detach ourselves from instrumental reason. Ontology of being means that we must go beyond straightforward conceptualisation. Therefore, the Christian revelation speaks the depth language of being. Being is openness, it cannot be chained to rigid concepts. The openness of being is also a concept of Heidegger’s. The question of God and especially God as the being-itself is central to the doctrine of being for both Aquinas and Heidegger.⁴²

With the help of language, it is possible to open up the kind of dimensions of being that otherwise would be inexplicable or hidden. Kasper takes metaphors and parables as examples: metaphors bring out such dimensions of reality that could not otherwise be opened up only by means of descriptive language. In this function, metaphors are heuristic instruments (*heuristische Instrumente*), which help to broaden and refresh the perspectives on reality, perspectives which otherwise would be narrow. If the word “God” is understood as a parable, this means for Kasper that the world is a place open to God. Through the word “God” we can understand that the world is actually a parable of God. The word “God” opens, therefore, a new meaning for the world: it is free and open to the future. Therefore, God-speech is always effective, and as a word it encompasses both the semantic and

are unable to ‘go against them’. In fact, the expression of inexpressibility seems to require at least some measure of rule-resistance [...]

⁴⁰ GJ, 173: “Welches aber ist die mit dem Wort Gott bezeichnete Wirklichkeit? Wird diese ontologische Frage nicht mehr gestellt, dann wird aus der Aussage, daß Gott ist, eine Aussage darüber, was das Wort Gott kognitiv entleert.”

⁴¹ Caputo 1982, 2–4. Caputo states that the Event of Appropriation, (*Ereignis*), is what assigns being to the plane of thought and therefore enables the entire history of metaphysics. GJ, 12. In Heidegger’s opinion the problem of Western philosophy was the inability to truly understand the difference between being and beings or ultimately with the overemphasised role of rationality. In this sense, in Heidegger’s thought the deconstruction of Western metaphysics reached its culmination point. See B, 37. In Heidegger’s view the problem was apparent in Western philosophy at least as early as in the thought of Plato. When Plato spoke of the world of ideas as the highest category of being, he already lost the ability to appreciate the wondrous, peculiar anomalies of particularities that – in Heidegger’s opinion – should be the individual objects of marvellous amazement, before the fact that something at all *is*. See Hart 2011, 47–48.

⁴² GJ, 173–174; Caputo 1982, 3; see also Marion 1991 [1946], 68.

pragmatic meanings.⁴³ The word “God” gives us a definition of the indefinite. It takes hold of a reality that cannot be held. It bridges the gap between our reality and the divine. It is a meaningful word. It is actually the most meaningful word there is because it points directly to the answer of the whole meaning of our being.

In this way Kasper promotes his idea of the redefinition and therefore evocation of the nature of religious language in order to solve the problem of how to speak of God. This question also encloses the question of how to speak *with* God – the God-question for Kasper is simultaneously a question of who and how. This means that the question of God is closely bound to the question of man, his destiny and history.⁴⁴ The question of God only as an intellectual challenge has no value for Kasper.⁴⁵ The word “God” has to be significant and truthful, not only some ethical term that defines common communication or a meaningful perspective on reality. The word “God” represents a holistic approach to reality. It should not, therefore, be used as a slogan or a watchword. The word should always be used critically and truthfully: in a way that, though appealing to and speaking to people in any historical situation, it cannot be reduced as a hobby horse for any contemporary agenda.⁴⁶

The paradox of familiar and unfamiliar brings us to the doctrine of analogy. For Kasper, central among the possibilities of religious language is the possibility to grasp the concept of the infinite through the concept of the finite. Kasper identifies analogy as the grammar of faith (*Sprachlehre des Glaubens*).⁴⁷ Analogy is at the same time identity and difference. Thus, only through analogy can we grasp the similarities between things, but also their differences. This is why analogy is also used in the so-called hard sciences.⁴⁸ Kasper remarks that analogical and metaphorical speech are alike: both are based on indirect and extroverted speech.⁴⁹ Therefore, analogy as the “grammar” of religious language can reveal what is meant by the nature of language as *Vorgriff*. If analogy lies in the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar, then the intersection between of what is known and what is only a pre-comprehension of the “whole truth”, is the “something” that religious language attempts to grasp.

Indirect and extroverted speech can grasp something that exact, descriptive speech is unable to grasp. Through metaphors and analogy the possibilities of speech are in principle unlimited. In religious language the element of *Vorgriff*, the possibility of saying something of the beyond, is always present:

⁴³ GJ, 139; 174; HT, 255; Cf. *LaCocque* 1998, 317: “Tension between the past and the future, between the known and the unknown, the experienced and the hoped for, agrees with the dual character of the Name of God.”

⁴⁴ OG, 84; B, 107.

⁴⁵ GJ, 9.

⁴⁶ GPV, 146–147.

⁴⁷ GJ, 175; on analogy and its biblical and traditional arguments, see *McInerny* 1996, 152–163; *Shanley* 2002, 46–56; 61–66; *Palakeel* 1995, 328–329.

⁴⁸ GJ, 176–177.

⁴⁹ GJ, 176.

Language draws its life from a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the total meaning of reality and gives expression to this meaning in metaphors and similes. Thus language is at the same time a remembering of an unfulfilled hope of the human race and an anticipation of this hope. Even before language becomes explicitly religious language, it always already implies a religious dimension. Only in religious language does language reach its full stature.⁵⁰

In his analysis of the concept of *Vorgriff*, therefore, Kasper locates the ontological status for Habermas' theory of pre-comprehension of perfect understanding. If *Vorgriff* is something that is given to us in our creation, if it is based on the fact that our ground of being lies within the Trinitarian God himself, it is ontologically something that binds us to the reality of God. It is "something": a feeling, a whisper of the reality beyond ours. There is something poetic in Kasper's interpretation of the concept of *Vorgriff*; it is not a mathematical or literal apprehension that is logically processed through our senses. It is an element of mystery, something that remains to be seen. Language enables us to grasp elements of reality that only anticipate its full nature, and it is analogy that gives us the grammar for this speech.

Kasper states that analogy can grasp the infinite only in the self-fulfilment of the Spirit. In other words: analogy is similarity and comparability including difference and similarity at the same time. Analogy can grasp the infinite only through the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit: in other words, in faith.⁵¹ Kasper's dialectical view is based on the critique Schelling directed towards Hegel's philosophy. Kasper states: "Analogous predications occupy a position between univocal and equivocal predictions".⁵² Equally, Kasper insists that despite the analogy there always must remain a difference between finite and infinite reality.⁵³ In analogy a tension always exists between univocal and equivocal expressions. Thus language has both revealing and hiding implications. All the *dicta* of God (and also of our own reality) are located in the field of metaphors, religious language, the tension between opposites and similarities.

It is not, however, a consequence of a dialectical concept of reality that language has a role as an instrument referring directly to divine reality or which holds a place as the key to understanding divine reality. In a paradoxical manner, language has at the same time a revealing and a concealing task: language is a paradox between familiar

⁵⁰ GJ, 175: "Die Sprache lebt vom Vorgriff auf einen Gesamtsinn der Wirklichkeit und bringt diesen in Metaphern und Gleichnissen zum Ausdruck. So ist die Sprache zugleich Erinnerung an eine unabgeleitete Hoffnung der Menschheit und Antizipation dieser Hoffnung. Noch bevor die Sprache zur expliziten religiösen Sprache wird, impliziert sie je schon eine religiöse Dimension. Erst die religiöse Sprache bringt die Sprache zu sich selbst." See also OG, 67–68; KK, 98.

⁵¹ AG, 427; GJ, 178; 149–150; B, 96–98.

⁵² GJ, 176: "Die Analogie steht ja in der *Mitte zwischen den univoken und aequivoken Aussagen*." The understanding of the dialectic between finite and infinite requires a clear difference between univocal and equivocal expressions. An expression is univocal when it describes an object that is always the same and immutable. Equivocal expression, instead, describes the difference and contrast between things: when a word is used in an equivocal sense, the same word can mean even many different things. Analogical speech about transcendental reality includes both univocal and equivocal expressions. See also *Palomäki 2002*, 352–353.

⁵³ JC, 92.

und unfamiliar. The means of a language are limited, but its limitedness also contains its possibilities. Traditional apophatic theology begins only after the words and means have been exhausted. Only after understanding something about our subject we can accordingly deny something about its understood qualities.⁵⁴ Kasper articulates this idea as follows:

We come to know more what God is not than what he is; we come to know that we cannot know him.⁵⁵

There “is” no God who “is”.⁵⁶

According to Kasper, in the theological doctrine of analogy there are three different phases: *via affirmativa*, *via negativa* and *via eminentiae*. Through the *via affirmativa* we discover that the Creator and the creation, the infinite and the finite, are connected through the act of creation. God’s handprint and God’s effect can be seen in his creation.

Through the *via negativa* we understand that we can never fully grasp the infinite, because we ourselves are finite beings. The *via eminentiae* reminds us that finite attributes belong to God in a higher, all-exceeding manner. The knowledge that in the end we cannot really know anything about God, is, however, “enlightened ignorance” (*docta ignorantia*⁵⁷), that is, conscious knowledge of not-knowing.⁵⁸ A genuine understanding lies amid understanding and ignorance. It is something that we are not necessarily even able to put in to words – and even when we find the words, the understanding is still imperfect.⁵⁹ This kind of partial understanding is, however, better than a static perception of the object of understanding: a static perception can in reality mean that we do not actually understand anything about the object. The *Via eminentiae* is a negation of negation: it brings out the positive meaning of negation. The reasonableness of a religious language lies in the intersection between the *via affirmativa*, *via negativa* and *via eminentiae*. However, Kasper emphasises – as opposed to Hegel – that *docta ignorantia* does not mean that all our concepts fail to say anything and are only bound to fall into indeterminacy.⁶⁰ It means rather, that the *via eminentia* negates the negation of the *via negativa* and that through this negation it works as a means of mediation that actually is entirely open.⁶¹ Therefore, in Kasper’s thought, the possibility to know something about God happens in the intersection of the *via negativa* and *via affirmativa*. The *via eminentiae* opens a mediating level of understanding through which we grasp reality as entirely open to us. In this analysis of the

⁵⁴ Turner 2002, 16; Durand 2011, 373. Apophatic *via negativa* opens up only when person has some kind of perception of the cataphatic theology.

⁵⁵ GJ, 179: “Wir erkennen darin von Gott mehr, was er nicht ist, als was er ist; wir erkennen, daß wir ihn nicht erkennen können.” Also: GPV, 145.

⁵⁶ GPV, 145: “Einen Gott, den ‘es gibt’, gibt es nicht.” (A quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer). Also in: OG, 54.

⁵⁷ *Docta ignorantia* is a term adopted from the pre-modern thought of Nicholas of Cusa based on the book of same name. See also Hopkins 1981, 49–51; Wikström 2005, 44.

⁵⁸ GJ, 220. Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus and Nicholas of Cusa all thought that the supreme knowledge of God is to know that he is unknowable.

⁵⁹ Turner 2002, 15–18.

⁶⁰ GJ, 178.

⁶¹ GJ, 179.

via negativa and *via affirmativa* Kasper follows the basic approach of German idealist philosophy: thesis-antithesis-synthesis. The negating of negation is a paradoxical gateway to understanding something of incomprehensible reality.

The intra-Catholic problems with regard to the doctrine of analogy have been mainly due, Kasper thinks, to the discontinuity between the ideas of *analogia entis* and *analogia fidei* as well as with the concepts of *analogia entis* and *analogia relationis* and *operationis*. This means that there has been difficulty in recognising any kind of continuity at all between the being of God and his creation. Whereas Kasper acknowledges the old axiom already accepted by Church fathers that we know more about what God is not than what he actually is, he still maintains that the classical formulation of analogy must be transformed so that it corresponds to the salvation-historical understanding of reality. God is not indifferent to his creation even if he is not in a physical (or spiritual, for that matter) continuum with it. From this point on Kasper develops his own analogy of freedom. For theology of revelation this means that God freely opens himself to the human being, who in his freedom will in turn be able to answer God's call.

Kasper claims that true freedom is based on a lasting and eternal ground instead of on finite objectives. The freedom of God is something that is "beyond necessary" (*mehr als notwendig*). Kant's idea of the necessity of God posited by thought is, therefore, rejected by Kasper.⁶² God's ultimate freedom surpasses any necessity; instead of and to the contrary of any necessity, freedom becomes the "place" to encounter God. The analogy of freedom means, therefore, the possibility of detecting traces of God's revelation in our reality and of conceiving reality in a completely new way as the space of freedom and history.

3.2. Anthropological Conditions: Revelation as Opening of Being

From the point of view of theological anthropology the motivation for the question of the identity of our ground of being comes from the act of creation itself. Had God not created anything, as Kasper asks, (*the primordial existential question: "Why is there something at all? Why not rather nothing?"*⁶³), there would not be anything or anyone contemplating about the creation, the deepest meaning of life, life after death: any of the ultimate

⁶² GJ, 182–183.

⁶³ JC, 96; GJ, 187. Hans Urs von Balthasar claimed that in the modern world it takes a Christian to ask this primordial question: today, philosophy is practised only in the context of faith. See Kerr 2007, 133. David Bentley Hart describes this amazement, "intimate otherness in things" almost poetically in *The Experience of God*: Hart 2013, 88: "[...]there are only fleeting instances scattered throughout our lives when all at once, our defences momentarily relaxed, we find ourselves brought to a pause by a sudden unanticipated sense of the utter uncanniness of the reality we inhabit, the startling fortuity and strangeness of everything familiar: how odd it is, and how unfathomable, that anything at all exists[...]" Christian faith brings to this sense of wonder an entirely new perspective: it is not only about amazement at the creation around us, it is not only a question of why is there something rather than nothing, it is a fundamental question of "the universal truth about salvation for all human beings." (*die universale Wahrheit des Heils für alle Menschen*). GJ, 145. See also OG, 56.

questions. Therefore, the motivation for God to reveal himself comes first and foremost from within the creation and from the actual act of creation; and secondly, from the fact that man is the image of God. Revelation can only be understood from a human perspective, that is, when somebody hears it and understands it.⁶⁴ Compared to the world view of physics, philosophy (not to mention theology) go one step beyond. Whereas physics goes to the ultimate limits of physical reality, it leaves the ultimate question of “why” unanswered. Physics is a science of what and how, but generally it is not interested in the question of why, at least not in a philosophical sense. It is left out of the exercise as pointless. It cannot be measured, verified or falsified, therefore it is not worth examining.

For theology, the starting point of God is self-evident. The limitations and possibilities of theological and religious language have been discussed above. Revelation is characterised as God’s self-revelation (*Selbstoffenbarung, Selbstmitteilung Gottes*),⁶⁵ his giving of himself. It is the final measure and yardstick for what it means to be Christian:

Revelation is the final prerequisite, ground, center and norm for everything that counts as Christian.⁶⁶

To be able to explain the nature of revelation Kasper needs to explain his understanding of theological anthropology as well. For him, the understanding of anthropology rises from the completely new that Christology brings to the interpretation of anthropology.⁶⁷ Jesus Christ as a human being becomes the “grammar” of God’s revelation: only through his humanity are we as human beings capable of receiving and understanding revelation. For Kasper this means that Christology actually amounts to statements about man. Understanding Christology means understanding something deeply profound about ourselves.⁶⁸ Therefore, the anthropological question is closely bound to the question of Christology. It is also a question of the relationship between the familiar and unfamiliar. Kasper argues:

Christology is a substantial determination of anthropology which as such must remain open. In the sense of the classical notion of analogy, we have to say that however great the similarity between anthropology and Christology, the dissimilarity is still greater.⁶⁹

Even with the mediating power of Jesus Christ between humanity and God, the mystery of God still remains unopened. It is both given to us in the ultimate revelation of Jesus Christ and at the same time it remains a mystery. Mystery characterises the hiddenness and secretness of God, an affirmation that his being is something that can never be exhaustively explained. The paradoxical nature of God’s revelation means that the

⁶⁴ JC, 84.

⁶⁵ OG, 68.

⁶⁶ OG, 53: “Die Offenbarung ist die letzte Voraussetzung, Grund, Mitte und Norm für alles, was als christlich gelten will.”

⁶⁷ JC, 93–94.

⁶⁸ JC, 84.

⁶⁹ JC, 93: “Die Christologie ist eine inhaltliche Determination der als solche offen bleibenden Anthropologie. Im Sinn der klassischen Lehre von der Analogie muß man deshalb sagen: Bei aller noch so großen Ähnlichkeit von Anthropologie und Christologie besteht eine je größere Unähnlichkeit.” Also: CUF, 28; NGK, 92–93; GPV, 145.

mystery of his being is never fully made manifest in our reality. However, the way how God wants us to encounter him is an encounter in and within history. Therefore, revelation is always here and now even though it is never fully, exhaustively revealed. The element of something new and unfamiliar is at the same time current and future-oriented. We have a grasp of the mystery that is fully revealed only in the eschatological events.

The interpretation of the Bible is meaningful only if we assume that there exists an analogy between finite and infinite reality, and an analogy of truth between a particular historical situation and the reality of God. This means that the message of the Bible always points beyond itself to God's infinite reality, in every historical period.⁷⁰ However, one must make a distinction between analogy and univocity: we are not univocal with God. Kasper states that in the world itself there is nothing divine. The Bible draws a clear distinction between God's reality and the world.⁷¹ Kasper argues that Christianity desacralises and strips the world of divinity.⁷² For example, the Church's doctrine of the two natures in Christ indicates an infinite difference between man and God. Christ is both God and human: in him God becomes closer to man than ever before in all salvation history, but at the same time the infinite difference between man and God remains. Therefore, Kasper reminds us that the truly unique events of God's plan of salvation cannot be measured analogically against the events of factual reality.⁷³ However, the power of analogy lies in the fact that analogy, like metaphor, is indirect discourse: its significance lies beyond itself.⁷⁴ These two points of analogy that at first seem contradictory are actually, for Kasper, complimentary: precisely *because* analogy cannot fully grasp divine reality but merely *point beyond* our own reality, it is a useful tool in our speech about God. In the theological doctrine of analogy it cannot, therefore, be said that with analogy we have a continuity from our reality to that of God's. Analogy rather serves as a principle that helps us see that only from our reality we can grasp the mystery of God.

Kasper states that analogy is a principle for ever greater openness. That is, it is not rational in its content but rather a grammar of faith.⁷⁵ In Kasper's thought, analogy as the linguistic doctrine of faith gives language the voice of something totally new. It helps us to grasp the relation between familiar and unfamiliar statements.⁷⁶ Kasper claims that there is a dialectic between familiarity and strangeness in metaphorical speech. Analogy is located in the tension between univocal and equivocal statements. Kasper argues that analogy is, in fact, primary to all univocal predications. This means that we cannot grasp a concept as unambiguous and clear without the use of analogy: we cannot understand something as univocal if there is no possibility for comparability and differentiation. Therefore, Kasper uses analogy from the point of view of relations: we can understand

⁷⁰ Cf. IBC, IIIA: 3; PO, 4.

⁷¹ CUF, 28.

⁷² GJ, 52; CUF, 27.

⁷³ JC, 201.

⁷⁴ GJ, 177.

⁷⁵ GJ, 175, 178. Cf. KK, 92.

⁷⁶ GJ, 175–176.

something as clearly univocal only in relation to something else, through comparison on the one hand and differentiation on the other. Therefore, Kasper assimilates his conception of reality as relations to his usage of analogy as well. In relations, we simultaneously recognise something familiar to us (something that we can already relate to) and unfamiliar (alien or unknown compared to our apprehension of ourselves and our familiar surroundings).⁷⁷

To be able to receive and understand revelation, people must have some kind of quality or intellectual or existential instrument for this receiving and understanding. Augustine named this existential instrument the *Capax Dei*⁷⁸, the capacity for human beings to have a connection to, a capacity, for God. However, Catholic theology holds that this capacity needs supernatural grace for it to be effective.⁷⁹ Kasper, too, sees the world pronounced in the light of the dialectical world view: *finitum est capax infiniti*. In Kasper's use the concept of *Vorgriff*⁸⁰, pre-conception, corresponds to the classical idea of *capax Dei*.⁸¹ The *Vorgriff* designates an innate openness to divine reality but in Kasper's thought an openness as well to reality as a whole. Finite questions always lead to the question of their counterpart: "every finite concept presupposes a pre-conception of the infinite"⁸². The

⁷⁷ Cf. OG, 91: "Doch ist die verheißene Zukunft nicht in jeder Hinsicht und absolut neu; in diesem Fall wäre sie für den Menschen absolut unverständlich. Im Typus besitzen wir bereits ein Modell, nach dem wir das ausstehende Neue schon jetzt umrißhaft zu erkennen mögen. [...] Durch solche modellhaft-analogen Typologien, in denen nun sukünftige Geschichte wenigstens umrißhaft bekannt ist, wird die Geschichte erst für den Menschen zum bergenden Raum."

⁷⁸ Kerr 2002, 231; see also CCC, 153: "Faith is a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him."

⁷⁹ Kerr 2002, 134.

⁸⁰ The concept of *Vorgriff* brings to mind Rahner's idea of the supernatural existential, but *Vorgriff* holds a slightly different meaning for Kasper: it is not only a conceptual tool or description of our inner capability for transcendence; it also has an inexplicable, mysterious element in it, it is something that remains beyond our grasp. GJ, 117; KK, 88. On Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential: *Rahner* 1976, 132–139; *Mannermaa* 1970, 87–95.

⁸¹ This idea stems originally from Maurice Blondel. NGK, 89. In contrast to (for example) Barth's idea of God being the wholly other, utterly distinct from men, Kasper asks whether it is necessary to understand the human person as a free partner for God, brought onto the scene of history by God, and that by faith this creature can have a correspondence with God based on his creatureliness. This correspondence, faith, is not something given in advance (*pregegeben*) but rather a presupposition (*Voraussetzung*) for revelation, a quality in man for having the potentiality for God. GJ, 131. But although the concept is similar, Kasper gives it a different meaning: *Vorgriff* is not some supernatural entity given to humans from the outside; rather, we are able to have *Vorgriff* because we are created and because our ground of being lies in the infinite reality. Kasper seeks to distance himself from the anthropologically-oriented concept of the *supernatural existential* of Karl Rahner, and instead gives the *capability for the God (Capax Dei)* a more holistic interpretation. Whereas Rahner presupposes a capability for man to reach to God from his own existence, Kasper emphasises the necessary transmission of grace. This presupposition is in Kasper's thought, different from Rahner's idea of the supernatural existential, because it is not based on the nature of man but rather on the nature of God. In this way Kasper wants to avoid the too anthropologically oriented interpretation of the orientation of man to God. On Rahner's position see *Sheehan* 2005, 33–36; *Kerr* 2007, 99–101.

⁸² GJ, 181: "Jeder endliche Begriff setzt einen Vorgriff auf das Unendliche voraus." See also NGK, 89; 92; cf. A, 592. Kasper states that Maurice Blondel, who was later followed in this kind of modern thought by Henri DeLubac and Karl Rahner, first took man as the starting point and stated that every human striving in our finite and conditional reality is ultimately a striving towards infinite and unconditional reality. Therefore, in the constitution and dynamic of being human belongs striving for something that surpasses everything that we can ever completely grasp.

use of the concept of *Vorgriff* reveals Kasper's dependence on Rahnerian transcendental philosophy, although he explains its content a bit differently, both as tribute to and critique of Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential.

Kasper argues that precisely *because* we are finite beings and through really, truly *experiencing this finitude*, we are paradoxically able to grasp infinite reality. This can only happen in the analogical understanding that, if we are finite, there must be something infinite beyond our finitude. This basic structure for the conditions of revelation derives from Schelling's dialectical philosophy. However, Kasper takes this interpretation a step further and claims that in the limit situation⁸³ of one's own finitude one is able to open up to the reality of God. Kasper interprets Aquinas' notion of the possibility of the finite spirit to be open to reality (*quodammodo omnia*⁸⁴) as meaning a person's two-way nature: a person is at the same time a unique individual as a finite being and also open to all reality, that is, to the infinite. To the paradox of being human belongs the feeling of "something" that we can never fully grasp. It is like a flickering feeling – an understanding that reality is always larger than us. It is a vague sense of "something beyond": something that we point to as the "meaning of life". This paradox of being can only be solved, says Kasper, by the free initiative of God where God encounters man and gives himself to man.⁸⁵

Positing the presence of grace as a precondition for being able to receive the revelation of God explains why not every people at every historical situation hear the voice of God.⁸⁶ Grace is like a key that opens up the possibility of having a *Vorgriff*. Grace is necessary because of the Fall. Ultimately, therefore, we are able to understand something of God's grace only through revelation, and vice versa: the event of revelation is possible because it is an act of God's grace.⁸⁷

God's revelation is not supra-historical but intra-historical. This means that not only does revelation always have a definite meaning in every historical situation, but also that the meaning, at the same time, paradoxically surpasses every definite historical situation. Therefore, people of all times possess the capacity to understand something of God's revelation. This, however, means that a human being must be existentially oriented. If a person does not have an existential stance to being, he or she cannot grasp anything of the supra-historical (to make use of Nietzsche's term).

⁸³ Boundary or limit situation (or boundary or limit experience) is originally a concept of Karl Jaspers. See *Jaspers* 1989 [1953], 18; see also e.g. *Bornemark* 2006, 53–57; *Peach* 2008, 42: "According to Jaspers, human beings are always in situations. General situations are temporary and are always changing. Boundary situations, however, are unclear and oppressive, situations that one cannot modify. A boundary situation can be described as an inescapable limit of our empirical existence with an uncertain future. A situation becomes a boundary situation 'when it succeeds in awakening the individual self to its existential content.'"

⁸⁴ JC, 364.

⁸⁵ NGK, 89.

⁸⁶ See also DV, 5: "To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving "joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it." Also: CCC, 153.

⁸⁷ B, 51.

Kasper argues that the concept of *Vorgriff* is actually bound to the anticipatory nature of Christian faith: “In this way, analogous to reason, faith has an anticipatory structure (*Vorgriffstruktur*)”.⁸⁸ The concept of *Vorgriff* becomes understandable only in the light of eschatological events. In addition, the capacity for God is bound to the historicity of man. *Vorgriff* is an ontological pre-requisite for hearing the word of God, a given quality for the creature of God, but it is not a quality included in revelation itself. That opens up the word of God to a human being and enables him or her to grasp something of revelation. It is God’s grace. But the term *Vorgriff* is not to be understood as some kind of direct connection to the ground of being. It is merely a *Vorgriff*, an anticipation of that reality. But if this *Vorgriff* never anticipates any kind of fulfilment, is it not then only a utopia, a dream that never comes true? Kasper applies the concept of *Vorgriff* to God’s history with us: the historical events of God’s being with us in course of history are anticipatory in nature. But that anticipation already implies a promise of the future. *Vorgriff* is not, therefore, only a utopia, a dream never come true, but the reasonable hope of a promise to be grasped, an anticipation attached to our reason for (at least to some extent) understanding the reality beyond and behind ours.

Kasper seeks to maintain a tension between being and consciousness: they are not to be straightforwardly identified as identity, but instead in the tension between the two there always remains a mystery, a profound impossibility to entirely grasp the reality of one’s being.⁸⁹ Man always remains a mystery to himself. When man reaches out to infinite reality he still remains finite himself, and surely infinite reality cannot be deduced from the finite mind’s openness to being. Kasper wonders if we really can have more than a negative perception of the infinite. He even argues that we can call infinite reality the “ultimate absurdity of existence”. Whatever we call it, it still appears as a mystery before us.⁹⁰ On the one hand we can extend the limits of our own being by longing, thinking, analysing the reality before us, but on the other hand it still remains unreachable, because no matter how much we long for, think and analyse, we still can never comprehend reality.⁹¹ If the *Vorgriff* is only an anticipatory concept by nature, if it is only a promise to be fulfilled, what kind of confirmation do we have right here and right now? The question, therefore, remains: how is the finite ever capable of the infinite?⁹²

Kasper approaches the question of the experience of our finitude from the point of view of Nietzsche, who argues that ultimately man experiences transcendence as the ultimate non-inclusion of himself in history. The realisation of one’s finiteness in

⁸⁸ KK, 100-101: “So ist dem Glauben analog der Vernunft ebenfalls eine antizipatorische Vorgriffstruktur eigen.”

⁸⁹ Rahner argues that from the undoubted openness of the human spirit a human being is capable of understanding infinite reality – that is, because the human spirit is open to the idea of the infinite, it can grasp infinite reality. Kasper’s critique of Rahner becomes clear here: he criticises Rahner’s transcendental theology for being too closely bound to idealist philosophy: identity is identified with being and consciousness. Ratzinger makes the same observation and criticism of Rahner’s conception: see *Toiviainen* 1993, 125-126.

⁹⁰ JC, 92.

⁹¹ JC, 96.

⁹² JC, 271.

front of infinite reality results in a definitive realisation of the absurdity and pointlessness of our being, a constitutive non-availability of one's being (*Nichteinholbarkeit seines Daseins*).⁹³ In the situation of "ultimate, or constitutive non-inclusion", however, there must be a Christian difference in perceiving our reality. For a Christian world view this problem is solved with Christology: in Jesus Christ humanity reaches the apex of human existence. But even this ultimate existence is a mystery: humanity finds its fulfilment in a real, yet underivable, mysterious way.⁹⁴

How do we bear the sufferings and limitedness of our existence? If our being in history consists only of the possibility of an "as if" remaining, then surely our existence is only pure agony and suffering. In a general sense, what then is considered to be freedom from suffering and agony? The answer lies, at least in a Western cultural context that emphasises the concepts of person, autonomy and personal independence, in the question itself: the ultimate, desirable thing in our lives is freedom itself. Generally, therefore, freedom can be considered as a "desirable state". At least relatively speaking it is something that everyone, no matter what religion or no religion at all, crave and desire. The understanding of the meaning of freedom may vary from culture and religion to another, but in general it could be characterised as some kind of desirable state of being. Following the philosophy of Schelling, Kasper maintains that only if freedom is the ground of all reality can the human spirit also be truly free⁹⁵:

Only if God exists as absolute creative Freedom is the world a possible realm of freedom for men.⁹⁶

Thus Kasper argues that only through perfect freedom can the human spirit truly transcend the limits of its own being. The mode of this freedom has to be perfect, absolute freedom: that is, God's freedom. The important emphasis for Kasper is that (as unlike in the interpretation of freedom of atheist humanism)⁹⁷ God's freedom does not limit man's freedom but on the contrary gives it its fulfilment. Kasper states that whereas Kant saw the ultimate freedom as the (moral) Kingdom of God⁹⁸, the real Kingdom can only be something that man beckons, asks for. For if freedom is something that cannot be deduced and something mysterious in nature (as Kant thought as well) then it must, argues Kasper,

⁹³ JC, 97–98. As we can see, Kasper has the same understanding of the paradoxical nature of God's openness to human beings as Henri DeLubac, see *Kerr* 2002, 134. Henri DeLubac calls this a Christian paradox: "the soul is naturally open to a face-to-face communion with God which can only be granted supernaturally." De Lubac's argument is bound to the 20th century controversy with Thomism and DeLubac's publication of *Surnaturel* (1946). Basing his argument on Thomas Aquinas, DeLubac argues that a human being has a capacity for God, which is granted by a supernatural gift of grace. See also OG, 58.

⁹⁴ JC, 92; CUF, 33.

⁹⁵ This thought once again originates from Kasper's interpretation of the German idealist philosophy and thought of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel.

⁹⁶ JC, 98: "Nur wenn Gott als die absolute schöpferische Freiheit ist, ist die Welt ein möglicher Raum der Freiheit für den Menschen."

⁹⁷ See, for example, *DeLubac* 1995, 424–426. De Lubac argues that when man becomes an object of his own interest, he actually loses knowledge of himself. For when he tries to understand himself as a pure object, he forgets that he actually is the subject as well and therefore "under the influence of methodological abstraction, consciousness and freedom evaporate." See also NGK, 92.

⁹⁸ JC, 123.

be something that is a gift, not derivable from history: that is, an entity outside the realm of our own being.

“Thy Kingdom come” would then be the ultimate cry for freedom. Here we can see that instead of narrowing God (and religion) to a mere moral categories, Kasper emphasises that God is a living reality who encounters us in human history. Crying out for the Kingdom of God is then a crying out for the ground of our being, an attempt at something “qualitatively new”, an expectation of a new age (*olam ha-ba*).⁹⁹ Kasper argues that in the course of history Israel learns that the coming Kingdom of God is not a historical entity but transcendent. Kasper states that from the time of the exilic and post-exilic prophets the belief in the almighty rule of God began to take a shape of the eschatological hope instead of the idea of a concrete area ruled by God.¹⁰⁰ In biblical salvation history, therefore, the rule of God evolves from a concrete, earthly promise to one of eschatological hope. This eschatological hope is established in the person of Jesus Christ.

The analysis of the word “being”, when related to God as the *ground of all being* or *being-itself*, must begin with a wider examination of the corresponding terms in Latin, German, French and Hebrew. This is because the English word “being” used in this context does not have as much semantic weight as the corresponding terms in these other languages.¹⁰¹ The Latin *esse*, German *Sein*, French *l'être*, not to mention (as will be demonstrated later more thoroughly) the Hebrew *hāyâ*, bear a much deeper meaning to the word “being”. What is meant thereby with the term being is a much wider philosophical and metaphysical term. Thomas Aquinas referred to this wider meaning of being with the concept of a self-subsistent being (*ipsum esse subsistens*): a being that exists on its own, without any cause for its existence.¹⁰² Kasper follows Thomas in this interpretation: “God does not possess being; he *is* Being in absolute perfection that has no slightest trace of neediness.”¹⁰³ Kasper calls this definition “the properly metaphysical definition of God’s essence.”¹⁰⁴ But Thomas already puts himself in a difficult position with this definition as he also claims the notion of *Divine simplicity*.¹⁰⁵ How can something be simple and at the same time the ground of everything that is? The French Thomist philosopher, Jacques Maritain, tries to combine the notion of simplicity and the ground of all being with the use of the term “*sacred abyss*”, something that is indescribable, a being which has no

⁹⁹ JC, 100; 120.

¹⁰⁰ JC, 120–121.

¹⁰¹ On the metaphysical meaning of the word “being”: Kerr 2002, 74.

¹⁰² Gericke 2012, 131; *Te Velde* 2005, 131. In Thomas’ thought, God’s self subsistent being means that God exists necessarily in the singular. This means that every other being can exist only as a negation of God’s being. Everything else that exists, exists therefore, as not-God, a negation of this singular being. In order to avoid the idea of the total negation of any other mode of being but that of God’s, Thomas speaks of participation in God - a creature participates in the being of God. He does not have being as identity, as God, but he participates in the being of God. This turns the seemingly negative concept of not-being into a positive one: being that is distinguished from God is being in relation to God. In Thomas’ view God is not, therefore, beyond being but subsistent being itself, in whose being all other existing things participate. See also GJ, 250–253.

¹⁰³ GJ, 467: 467: “Gott hat nicht Sein, er ist das Sein in absoluter Vollkommenheit und Bedürfnislosigkeit.”

¹⁰⁴ GJ, 252: “die eigentliche metaphysische Wesensbestimmung Gottes zu gelten”

¹⁰⁵ Kerr 2002, 73; 76–77.

distinction between essence and existence and yet is something that is “a subsistent being itself”.¹⁰⁶ Kasper uses what he calls “new Christian metaphysics” in order to explain how he understands the being of God as the ground of all being.

Finite questions always lead to the question of their infinite counterpart: as Kasper notes, “every finite concept presupposes a pre-apprehension of the infinite”.¹⁰⁷ Kasper argues that because we are finite beings thus and through genuinely experiencing this finitude, we can paradoxically grasp the infinite reality. This can only happen in the analogical understanding that if we are finite, there must be something infinite beyond our finitude.¹⁰⁸ In Kasper’s thought this understanding happens with the help of the analogy of freedom: because God is infinite freedom and our freedom is based on God’s freedom, we can grasp something of divine reality.¹⁰⁹ It is not only that freedom manifests itself in the course of history, but also that it appears in history so that we recognise in it something that we can relate to. This is a *Vorgriff* of divine reality. The analogy of freedom explains in Kasper’s thought what the “something” that escapes our understanding might be. In Kasper’s opinion, the immanent reality can be seen as a gateway to transcendent reality because God is truly present in both. Paradoxically, therefore, we are open to infinite reality precisely because we are finite beings.

“Nothing/nothingness” (*der Abgrund*, cf. “sacred abyss”) is a central concept of Schelling’s dialectical philosophy. As Schelling poses the famous question: “*Why is there something at all? Why not rather nothing?*” Kasper answers this question in his study of Schelling by analysing the concept of *Abgrund*:

When this question remains unanswered, Schelling perceives it as a groundless nothingness, an *Abgrund*.¹¹⁰

Kasper’s study proceeds to analyse further the concept of nothingness, the un-thinkable being. Nothingness attains a paradoxical content in the dialectical concept of reality in Schelling’s philosophy. The relationship between the *Sein* (*sein*) and nothingness, between reason and irrationality come together in the synthesis of thesis and antithesis: something rational is twisted around itself and it shows itself as something irrational (and vice versa). Thus both the concepts of Being (*Sein*) and non-being (*nicht-Sein*) come together in the analysis of the concept of reason and its relationship to the ultimate reality, the first of all firsts. Finally Kasper concludes:

¹⁰⁶ Kerr 2002, 73.

¹⁰⁷ GJ, 181: “Jeder endliche Begriff setzt einen Vorgriff auf das Unendliche voraus.” See also F, 350; NGK, 89.

¹⁰⁸ See also Palakeel 1995, 280–298; cf. Galles 2012, 385. Whereas Joseph Palakeel fails to recognise the paradoxical element in Kasper’s understanding of analogy altogether, Paul Galles argues that the only analogy that Kasper recognises is a paradoxical analogy and suggests that instead of being disturbed by the fact that *analogia fidei* presupposes correlative-dialectically *analogia entis* or rather *analogia libertatis* or even *analogia historiae*, Kasper seems to find this kind of analogy fulfilling.

¹⁰⁹ Similarly: Pröpper 2011, 441.

¹¹⁰ A, 87: “Wenn diese Frage keine Antwort findet, sieht Schelling den Abgrund eines “bodenlosen Nichts” sich auf tun.” See also on semantics and sources of “*Abgrund/Grunt*”: McGinn 2001, 37–44.

Before this Prius (“the First”)¹¹¹, which does not require any foundation but rather encloses every foundation, must all thinking become silent and bow. The reason can only have here a negative stance. It is placed outside itself, absolutely ecstatic. [...] Schelling reminisces Kant’s description of the sublime which he designates as the true Abyss (*Abgrund*) for the human reason. In the ecstasy the reason negates itself but the negation becomes canceled in the negation of the negation. The reason negates itself to win over its own content.¹¹²

Kasper interprets Schelling’s concept and provides a meaningful explanation of the experience of “nothingness” in the light of Christian tradition. When a person faces the limits of his own being, he is so to speak slammed against the limits of his finite being. This collision is violent, forceful and desperate. It is the deepest possible realisation of our own finitude, the realisation of the inevitable end of our own life, the realisation of deep, cold, astounding nothingness. One of the literal translations of the word *Abgrund*: a wall, can help us understand what the collision with the limits of one’s own being means: it is like slamming into a metaphorical wall. If the outcome is that a person becomes convinced that this is it, there is no greater reality beyond the limits of our own being and that this concrete reality is everything there is, the logical conclusion would be to become an atheist. The realisation of one’s limits can lead to an experience of despair, darkness and unbelief.¹¹³ If, however, a person passes beyond these limitations and so to speak pushes the limits of his own being, he is confronted by something that lies beyond. It is as well frightening, tremendous, deep and astonishing, but in a different sense than in the first case. It is a realisation of a deeper meaning, ground of being, infinite reality which is the cause and ground of everything. This encounter is a paradox in its deepest sense. But because Kasper identifies revelation as paradoxical by nature, he uses the concept of paradox in a most positive fashion. Revelation is a positive paradox, so to speak. Kasper follows Rudolf Otto’s idea in his description of the experience of the limits of one’s being:

Insofar as this experienced mystery is an inaccessible horizon of all our experience it encounters us as the Wholly Other, a frightening abyss, a wilderness of nothingness. Insofar as it is close to us in everything, it appears to us as a protecting Ground, as grace

¹¹¹ The term “*Prius*” as well as the term “*Abgrund*” originate from Christian Neoplatonic philosophy.

¹¹² A, 216-217: “Vor diesem Prius, das keiner Begründung bedarf, das vielmehr alle Begründung ausschließt, muss alles Denken verstummen und sich beugen. die Vernunft kann hier nur ein negatives Verhältnis haben. Sie ist hier außer sich gesetzt, absolut ekstatisch. [...] Schelling erinnert an Kants Beschreibung des Erhabenen, das er einen wahren Abgrund für die menschliche Vernunft nennt. [...] In der Ekstase negiert sich die Vernunft, aber die Negation wird in der Negation der Negation wieder aufgehoben. Die Vernunft negiert sich, um ihren Inhalt wieder zu gewinnen.” Cf. *McGinn* 2001, 39: “According to scholars of Middle High German, the word *grunt* (in contemporary German *Grund*) is used in four general ways, two concrete and two abstract. *Grunt* can, first of all, be understood as physical ground, that is, the earth. *Grunt* can also mean the bottom or lowest side of a body, surface, or structure (Latin: *basis/profundum, fundamentum, fundus*). This sense of *grunt* is etymologically related to *abgrund* (*abyssus*), originally used to indicate hell conceived of as the bottom of the universe. Abstractly, *grunt* is employed to indicate the origin (*origo*), cause (*causa*), beginning (*principium*), reason (*ratio*), or proof (*argumentum*) of something. Finally, *grunt* is employed as what is inmost, hidden, most proper to a being (*intimum, abditum, proprium*) - that is, its essence (*essentia*). The semantic richness of this simple German word, especially its spectrum of both concrete and abstract significations, made it a seed ripe for flowering in the age of linguistic creativity that has been spoken of as the *kairos* of German vernacular in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.”

¹¹³ GJ, 164; B, 13; OG, 67.

and fulfilment. The encounter with this mystery can be terrifying or blissful; it can repel and attract, fill us with anxiety and fear or with gratitude, joy and consolation.¹¹⁴

The Wholly Other is so utterly beyond of our capacities for understanding it that it escapes all our definitions. This is the paradox of God's being-there-for-us and his hiddenness. He is *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* simultaneously.¹¹⁵

In the course of history the human being surpasses the infinite (Pascal); he or she moves towards a mystery that a human being cannot solve by himself. Is that the nothing, or is the absolute fulfilment of being revealing itself? The human being remains here as an open question, to which the human being cannot give an ultimate answer by himself.¹¹⁶

According to Kasper the Ultimate (*Das Letzte*) can never be found inside the immanent world, because the ground of being is transcendent. Thus a person who seeks meaningfulness in his life can never find fulfilment in the immanent world. Kasper's thought can be interpreted as follows: in the search for meaning, the "something" that always escapes us, the hidden and unexplained "it" in our lives, we encounter the *Abgrund*: nothingness. Our reception of this experience depends on our perception of the reality. Which ever the experience is: either an experience of complete nothingness or an experience of the divine ground of our own being, it is a realisation of the ultimate experience, getting carried up into an ultimate illumination of our own being. When a person truly realises the finitude of his own being, he simultaneously opens up to the possibility of the infinite. The mystery of being, therefore, opens up in the midst of the ultimate experience of non-being. The primordial question of being rather than not being is answered in the paradoxical conversion of a mind: when facing the *Abgrund* of our being there is nothing more for us to hold onto. Therefore, we put all our trust and all our hope in the groundless Ground (*grundlosen Grund*).¹¹⁷ The mystery of our existence is never fully grasped because it can only happen in this paradoxical conversion situation. Therefore, for Kasper the knowledge of God is always paradoxical in nature: it encloses the thesis (question of being) and antithesis (realisation of limitedness of being and possibility of non-being) and produces a synthesis only in an incomplete and mysterious way. The realisation that the groundless Ground is actually our own ground of being is the paradoxical experience *par excellence*.¹¹⁸ In this sense the word "gap" (which is one of the many

¹¹⁴ GJ, 164: "Insofern die Erfahrung des Geheimnisses ein unerreichbarer Horizont aller unserer Erfahrung ist, begegnet es uns als das ganz Andere, als schauervoller Abgrund, als Wüste des Nichts. Insofern es uns in allen Dingen nahe ist, erscheint es uns als bergender Grund, als Gnade und Erfüllung. Die Begegnung mit diesem Geheimnis kann ebenso erschreckend wie beglückend sein; sie kann abstoßen und anziehen, mit Angst und Schrecken wie mit Dankbarkeit, Freude und Trost erfüllen." Cf. OG, 67; 71.

¹¹⁵ B, 59.

¹¹⁶ OG, 67: "In der Geschichte übersteigt sich der Mensch um ein Unedliches (Pascal); er rührt an ein Geheimnis, das er selbst nicht lichten kann. Ist es das Nichts, oder meldet sich hier die absolute Fülle des Seins? Hier bleibt sich der Mensch eine offene Frage, auf die er sich selbst keine endgültige Antwort geben kann."

¹¹⁷ GJ, 188–189.

¹¹⁸ GJ, 83–84. This is also the point in Kasper's critique of Feuerbach: while affirming Ludwig Feuerbach's idea of the human mind's infiniteness in its intention, Kasper simultaneously remarks that precisely because our mind is infinite in its intention the finiteness of our physical being becomes clear. Because the "infinite mind" cannot exceed the limitations of our bodily finitude we can never materially fulfil this intentional

English equivalents for the word *Abgrund*) is illustrative. In the meaning experience (*Sinnerfahrung*)¹¹⁹ man is wrenched from his own secure, immanent, finite being and thrown into a gap of realisation which is at the same time utterly terrifying and absolutely illuminating. It is terrifying, because of the tangible realisation of one's own finitude; illuminating, because of the tangible realisation of our finite being as resting safely on its infinite source. There is no freedom more genuine than the freedom found in this realisation.

The concept of paradox is important here: the experience of one's finitude can be similar for both an atheist and a theist: the outcome is different, yet at the same time the experience itself is the same. Where a theist finds meaning and fulfilment, an atheist finds only the excruciating realisation of nothingness and meaninglessness.¹²⁰ In these experiences we can see similarities to those experiences of some of the Christian mystics, who often underline the fact that precisely when we realise that we are as far away from God as possible¹²¹, we actually encounter him in this "dark night of the soul" (St John of the Cross¹²²). Kasper states that also the understanding of God in the mystical tradition is simultaneously of both knowing God and knowing the distance between themselves and God. The light of God is so great that it blinds and throws man into blindness. The mystical experiences of God are often characterised as similar to Jesus' abandonment by God on the Cross. In the experience of distance, however, one can also encounter God's holiness. His holiness appears in the dark night of the soul. St John the Cross, the Spanish mystic, well exemplifies in his *The Dark Night of the Soul* the sense of God's closeness and companionship whilst being plunged into darkness. This view is also reflected for example in Meister Eckhart's thought, though not being a mystic in the same sense as St John the

infinite. Therefore, man can never be man's God – as Feuerbach suggests in his theory of projection – but our ground of being must be in the reality of God. Our yearning for the infinite must be yearning for God, instead of yearning for our own deceptive, virtual infiniteness. See also OG, 84.

¹¹⁹ *Sinnerfahrung* (or: *Sinn-Erfahrung*) is translated in this study as "meaning experience". The original German word *Sinn* also includes meanings of a sensus; a sense; an idea. *Sinnerfahrung* is something that gives our existence a deeper sense and deeper perception of the surrounding reality. It designates a meaningful grasp of being and of our orientation to being.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Sartre* 1984 [1943], 555–556. A striking example of the experience of limitedness and its outcome in an atheistic worldview can be found in Jean-Paul Sartre's analysis of freedom and responsibility. Sartre makes the self, I, the ground on which everyone in the end must rely on. Being is becoming aware of myself, of my being, realising of my own presence. The place where, in Kasper's understanding, the meaning experience (*Sinn-Erfahrung*) happens, is in Sartre's thinking only a deep realisation of self, similarly to the projection theory of Feuerbach. *Sartre* (1984 [1983], 556) concludes: "I encounter only myself and my projects so that finally my abandonment – i.e., my facticity – consists simply in the fact that I am condemned to be wholly responsible for myself." Whereas a believer encounters the eternal ground of being, a ground for morals and something to rely on; Sartre's unbeliever encounters the abysmal depth of their own being. Sartre also states that because there is no "other" from whom to receive our responsibilities, in the end there are no actions that are not human: everything done by a human being is human. This also includes, for example, unspeakable acts of violence. See also B, 127; OG, 67.

¹²¹ This was also the idea of Nicholas of Cusa; see *Moore* 2013, 12: "Nicholas often described his own thought in mystical terms – describing the deepest level of theology to which he aspired as a meaningful darkness in which the mind, 'knowing without knowing', voyaged beyond the edge of rational understanding (intellectus) in search for God – thereby entering a cloud (caligo)." On "the darkness of God and the light of Christ." See also *Turner* 2004, 48–74.

¹²² B, 152–153.

Cross.¹²³ History is filled with these kind of mystical experiences: through ultimate darkness and abandonment they reach the ultimate realisation of the presence of the Divine reality. This is something that Kasper denotes in his Schelling-study as *ver-rückt*. The reason that dislocated, it is *ver-rückt (insane)*. In the process that Schelling calls ecstasy, the reason must leave its place, become *ver-rückt*. In this process it loses its subjectivity. But at the same time, when it loses its subjectivity, the being-around-itself can have connection to the reality which is something beyond its limited self-being, its narrow subjectiveness. It can realise that the ultimate reality opens itself to it as the ground of all being.¹²⁴

3.3. Functional and Dogmatic Interpretation

Kasper interprets the new meaning of dogmatics in the time period after the Second Vatican Council and makes a rather ideological statement:

Dogmas are not God's word as such; they stand below the word of God. In Dogma the Church defines the relationship with the original, in the Bible canonically witnessed revelation, in each, individual situation.¹²⁵

Kasper's choice of words "the revelation canonically witnessed to in the Bible" (*in der Schrift kanonisch bezeugte Offenbarung*) shows that his interpretation of the origin of the canon corresponds to the traditional Catholic view: the canon of Scripture originates in a direct continuum from the word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit all the way to the witness of the apostles, the Christ-tradition (the materials that eventually became the New Testament) and eventually to generation after generation within the Church.¹²⁶ New generations of the Church receive the permanent content of the canon, interpret it and pass it on to the next generation. Ideally the Church, theology and Tradition work together to bring the original message of the Scriptures to every particular situation of history.¹²⁷ Therefore, Kasper argues, dogmatics as a profession must remain as a hearer of the Word

¹²³ KK, 199; B, 101–102; 152–153.

¹²⁴ GJ, 370.

¹²⁵ DW, 195: "Dogmen sind also nicht selbst Wort Gottes, sondern stehen unter dem Wort Gottes. Im Dogma definiert die Kirche den Bezug der ursprünglichen, in der Schrift kanonisch bezeugten Offenbarung zur jeweiligen Situation." See also EDV, 10–11; see also DV, 6.

¹²⁶ See DV, 17–19.

¹²⁷ G, 188; EDV, 4; HT, 250; STV, 13; OG, 61. On the Catholic conception of the canon: *Beinert* 1995, 53–54; *Witherup* 2006, 3–4; also: IBC, IIIB: 1: "Guided by the Holy Spirit and in the light of the living tradition which it has received, the church has discerned the writings which should be regarded as sacred Scripture [...]"; see also DV, 11: "Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-20, 3:15-16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself." Cf. *Veijola* 2004, 53–55, 69; *Veijola* 2002, 460. In modern research on the canon there is the conviction that the inner sense of faith (a canonical sense) guided the process that lead to definition of the canon. The aim was to both safeguard the unity of faith and allow its diversity. Also: *Toiviainen* 1992, 286–287 and *Dunn* 1987, 43: "[...] earliest Christians were concerned to remember Jesus and to pass on these memories to new converts and churches. [...] it is equally clear that they were more concerned with the substance and meaning of what Jesus had said and done than with a meticulous level of verbal precision or with a pedantic level of historical detail."

(*Hörer des Wortes*).¹²⁸ The tension between the letter and the Spirit must remain: it should not be reduced either to the authority of the Church nor only to a utopian, spiritual sense of faith.¹²⁹ The task of dogma is to safeguard and interpret the revelation of the Bible authentically, here and now.

Kasper remarks that critical theological hermeneutics requires the acknowledging the changed historical situation when considering revelation and the theological formulations of revelation. After the hermeneutical turn¹³⁰ of Hans Georg Gadamer the examination of the Bible as a witness to revelation is interpretatively different than what it was at the time of positivistic interpretation. Dogmatic formulations are supposed to be explanations of revelation made in a hermeneutically critical manner, with loyalty to history and responsibility to the future. This kind of dogmatic theology can only be understood as an open system which is hermeneutically critical and open to corrections.¹³¹

A further examination of Kasper's theology of history will shed light on his interpretation of the Bible. Two basic concepts, which are here denoted as *functional* and *dogmatic* interpretations¹³², will help to clarify his position in the field of biblical theology. The functional interpretation seems to be primary for Kasper. The Bible is a narrative of the history between God and man. According to Kasper, the idea itself of a divine reality that surpasses our own implies that "God as all-surpassing and all-exceeding reality is not a fact to be proclaimed positivistically"¹³³. Accordingly, the same applies to revelation of God:

Revelation is not a pre-given and a handed-down fact, it is never a reality "as such", it can never be "fastened" or "taken over" [...].¹³⁴

The word *of* God is not only a word among others; accordingly, all the words *about* God can never fully grasp the reality which he is.¹³⁵ Essential, therefore, for Kasper is a God who *acts* in history and the effects of his actions. God is rather a verb than a

¹²⁸ Term originates from Karl Rahner. See OG, 67.

¹²⁹ DW, 199; NGK, 91.

¹³⁰ *Thiselton* 2009, 206; *Ruokanen* 1987, 113–116. In Gadamer's view every interpretation happens through language. The concepts of human language, in turn, are not unequivocal and language can therefore never be an exhaustive description of reality. The history of human influence and experience can, instead, be transmitted; this is why Gadamer's hermeneutical method is foremost an interpretation of communication: interpretation of the meaningful transfer of information from the object before one to the mind of the one who interprets. Therefore, for example, the sentences of the Bible are informative and relevant in a communicative sense, even if they are not a literal and accurate description of reality.

¹³¹ DW, 195–196; See also G, 15.

¹³² These could also be denoted as existential and dogmatic interpretations or orthopraxis and orthodoxy – or in the spirit of revelation theology as interpretations of act-revelation and word-revelation – but for clarity the above mentioned terms have been chosen as the most descriptive. E.g. JC, 51–52; GJ, 212.

¹³³ ZZD, 259: "Gott als die alles bestimmende und alles übersteigende Wirklichkeit ist kein positivistisch feststellbares Faktum [...]" See also OG, 70; *Plovanič* 1990, 215.

¹³⁴ OG, 70: "Offenbarung ist kein vorhandenes und zuhandenes Faktum, nie eine Wirklichkeit 'an sich', sie kann nicht 'festgestellt' und 'dingfest' gemacht werden [...]"

¹³⁵ ZZD, 259; KUG, 304.

substantive, an event (*Geschehen, nomen actionis*).¹³⁶ With this statement Kasper opposes himself against metaphysical realism, which gave no room for the aspect of occurrence and happening within beings. The *nouvelle théologie* movement wanted to honour the original intention of Thomas Aquinas and interpreted his theology from the Augustinian-Neoplatonic hermeneutical horizon. They wanted to liberate Thomas from the old rigid metaphysical framework. It meant honouring his conception of God as essentially active instead of static being.¹³⁷ This conviction must be, however, differentiated from the idea of God being reduced to *only a function*, as Kasper's intention is quite the opposite: to indicate that God is neither a function for means of human self-fulfilment nor is he an active "explanation" for unfathomable reality. However, he is an active in his relation to the creation (*economic Trinity*) as well as in his relations as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (*immanent Trinity*). We as humans, however, can only really say something about the effects of God's being, not so much about his essence. If we attempt to categorise God's attributes, we find that they are "valid only for our limited, human comprehension of God"¹³⁸. We only perceive certain aspects of God's essence when we examine the created world: they are the result of God's interaction with the world. Thus Kasper continues: "[revelation] is an eventful happening that only takes reality as its own in a communication act between human beings."¹³⁹

Kasper's functional and dogmatic interpretations could also be described as interpretations of faith and order:

Today the Church cannot secure its identity by sheer presumption of orthodoxy, or by reversion to the exercise of faith and orthopraxis. Present-day problems must be tackled at their foundations.¹⁴⁰

In the case of Christology, for example, we must discover how both *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* are revealed in Jesus Christ.¹⁴¹ On the one hand, the purpose of a functional interpretation is to safeguard the historicity of the biblical word and the actuality of the historical revelation; on the other hand, the purpose of a dogmatic interpretation is to ensure that the historical revelation is interpreted according to Church tradition and the fullness of dogma. Kasper argues that dogma can be expressed only as a relative and historical variable that only has a functional meaning. It is relative in two aspects: provided that it serves and points to the original word of God and provided that it is bound to the problems of a specific time and serves for the right interpretation of the

¹³⁶ GJ, 208; KK, 115; see also *Balthasar* 2006, 189: "The word of revelation is the Word in the mode of action: God is apprehended in the act of self-communication."

¹³⁷ See e.g. *Kerr* 2002, 73–74; *Kerr* 2007, 31; *Ward* 1994, 5.

¹³⁸ B, 95: "[die Unterscheidung einzelner Eigenschaften] gilt nur für unser begrenztes menschliches Begreifen Gottes."

¹³⁹ OG, 70: "[sie] ist ein ereignishaftes Geschehen, das nur in der zwischenmenschlichen Kommunikation seine Wirklichkeit besitzt."

¹⁴⁰ JC, 52: "[Das bedeutet, dass sich] die Kirche heute ihrer Identität weder durch reines Pochen auf Orthodoxie noch durch den Rückzug auf den Glaubenvollzug und die Orthopraxis versichern kann." English translation has been modified.

¹⁴¹ JC, 52.

gospel in concrete situations.¹⁴² This means that dogma is interpreted between two poles¹⁴³: revelation, as it is testified to in the Scripture (the Gospel), and the current situation of where and to whom it is preached. Revelation – as testified to in the Scripture – represents the anchor to which dogma is attached. The current time and space in which the gospel is preached allows the gospel to breathe – its continuity and renewal in history gives it a shape which is simultaneously the same (revelation) and ever-renewed (understanding and acceptance of it). Interpretation is not arbitrary, however, because throughout time the Church constitutes the rules for the deepening of and complementing the interpretation of the dogmas. Dogmas have growth and progress in them, but at the same time they express a content of faith that is binding and valid at all times. The faith, its biblical roots and its dogmatic application are common treasures of the entire *communio* of the Church, not simply one or two persons' arbitrary interpretations of it.¹⁴⁴

Hence, dogmas must be historically interpreted in the sense that the historical situation, the context and the historical way of speaking must be considered in the interpretation and thereby what was said at the time must be interpreted in today's context and language with a mind attentive to the contemporary Spirit. [...] For this historical hermeneutic of dogmatic statements, there are rules recognised by the Church.¹⁴⁵

For Kasper, the starting point for biblical hermeneutics is the idea that both scientific hermeneutics and the doctrine of Scripture (as the Church safeguards it) must go together. In this sense, in Kasper's hermeneutics the scientific, ecclesiastical and practical applications of interpretation are intertwined. In order to avoid the counterargument of the possibility that not only an individual but also a community of believers (*communio*) could go wrong, Kasper makes use of the modern theory of institutionalisation.¹⁴⁶

The modern theory of institutionalisation [...] indicates that the subjectivity of the individual is always restricted; that it cannot master the existing multitude of phenomena and viewpoints. There are cognitive advantages in a 'system' in which experiences of other and earlier generations are 'stored' and objectified in the form of morals, customs, traditions, and so forth. [...] This embodiment in a social setting, its traditions and institutions, is already, viewed in purely human terms, the strongest protection for, and

¹⁴² M, 38.

¹⁴³ F, 356; D, 140. Norbert Podhorecki calls this understanding of hermeneutics in Kasper's thinking the "double relativity of dogma" (Die doppelte Relativität der Dogmen). *Podhorecki* 2001, 305–306.

¹⁴⁴ KK, 376; HT, 249.

¹⁴⁵ KK, 376: "Dogmen müssen deshalb in dem Sinn geschichtlich ausgelegt werden, dass die geschichtliche Situation und Kontext und die geschichtlicher Sprechweise bei der Auslegung bedacht wird und damit das damals Gesagte im heutigen Kontext und in heutiger Sprache geistesgegenwärtig ausgelegt werden muss. [...] Für diese geschichtliche Hermeneutik dogmatischer Aussagen gibt es von der Kirche anerkannte Regeln." English translation has been modified. See DV, 12.

¹⁴⁶ Also known as institutional or system theory. Niklas Luhmann was one of the most prominent modern day thinkers in the sociological systems theory. It is based on the idea that a sociological system or institution has cognitive advantages compared to the possibilities of a single individual. See *Luhmann* 1973, 183–184; *Luhmann* 1972, 20–24. The experiences of individuals are objectified within a system and the values of (for example a religious) community can be freed both from subjective quirks and also from the capriciousness of the dominant powers. Kasper's adaptation of system theory and its possibilities for verifying a religious truth see JC, 55–56. See also KK, 74–76.

the best guarantee of continuity. As history shows, Christian belief can most readily regenerate itself from the basis of such a heritage.¹⁴⁷

He argues that whereas it is strongly indicated, even likely, that one person will have a false perception of reality, a “system” (as Kasper calls it), or in this case the Church as institution, has the advantage of correction. The experiences and conceptions of earlier generations are “stored” and “objectified” within the *communio* of believers. Hence the Church holds a *Tradition* of certain practices and stands, therefore, as a certain guarantee of continuity. For Kasper, “testimony” means that there prevails a manifold verification of doctrine which at the same time preserves and, when necessary, specifies doctrine. In addition, the *communio*¹⁴⁸ of believers needs affirmations of faith in the form of the creeds.

Kasper admits that there is a danger of one-sidedness in this kind of thinking: belief in Jesus Christ may change into belief in the Church. This is why Kasper finds it important to constantly go back to the sources (*ad fontes*) and roots (*radices*)¹⁴⁹ of the Church’s faith: to the person of Jesus Christ. He believes that all reformation begins with Jesus Christ, naming Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan movement as well as Ignatius of Loyola and meaning of the meditations of Jesus’ life (the Ignatian Exercises) as examples of such renewal of the faith system.¹⁵⁰ Practical involvement is always present. There is no “authentic” or “tested” testimony of a community of believers unless it is lived and experienced in the practical, authentic real life of the community.

What is illuminating in Kasper’s interpretation of the Church authority and the problem of how authentic doctrine is safeguarded and who it is who safeguards it, is his interpretation of the infallibility of the Pope. He emphasises that infallibility does not mean that the Pope is infallible as a person, but that he is infallible as a representative of the entire witness of the Church. His infallibility is bound to his office, not to his person.¹⁵¹

In other words, the pope does not have an infallibility detached from the Church, but he exercises the infallibility given to the Church. He is then an authentic witness of the faith of the Church.¹⁵²

The infallibility of the pope is, therefore, bound in Kasper’s interpretation to the whole community of the Church. Kasper argues that the doctrine of infallibility must also be

¹⁴⁷ JC, 55–56: “Die modern Institutionalisierungstheorie [...] weist darauf hin, dass die Subjektivität des einzelnen immer begrenzt ist, da sie die Vielfalt der Phänomene und Gesichtspunkte nicht bewältigen kann. Hier liegen die kognitiven Vorteile eines ‘Systems’, in dem die Erfahrungen anderer und früherer Generationen ‘gespeichert’ und durch Sitte, Gewohnheit, Tradition, u.a. objektiviert sind. [...] Diese Verleiblichung in einem gesellschaftlichen Gefüge, seinen Traditionen und Institutionen ist schon rein menschlich gesehen der stärkste Schutz und der beste Garant der Kontinuität. Aus solchem Erbe heraus kann sich der christliche Glaube nach dem Ausweis der Geschichte auch am ehesten immer wieder regenerieren.”

¹⁴⁸ KK, 44–48; D, 41–42; RS, 287.

¹⁴⁹ EF, 11; HT, 249; PF, 35; NGK, 91; RS, 281; OG, 80–81.

¹⁵⁰ JC, 56.

¹⁵¹ KK, 365; see also *O’Meara* 2014, 132–133.

¹⁵² KK, 365–366: “Er besitzt also keine von der Kirche losgelöste Unfehlbarkeit, sondern übt die der Kirche gegebene Unfehlbarkeit aus; er ist dann authentischer Zeuge des Glaubens der Kirche.”

interpreted in and from the point of view of history: a doctrine is true in its meaning if it is tested in the course of history. Therefore, history and the community interpreting the doctrine in the course of history together constitute a safeguard of the authenticity of doctrine. Kasper states that it is a matter on the one hand of overcoming, and on the other hand of binding doctrine to the witnesses in history. The doctrine is tested over the course of time. Theology and church office stand in cross-reference to one another: church office cannot disregard theological interpretation and Catholic theology exists only because it is based on the norm of the binding witness of the Church.¹⁵³

If we apply Kasper's concept of analogy between finite and infinite reality to his interpretation of the Bible, we can assume that if a human being has a possibility to understand something of the infinite reality when realising his or her own finitude, we can likewise claim that the Bible can reveal something of infinite reality in finite human words. Here we have an obvious link to the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*:

In Sacred Scripture, therefore, while the truth and holiness of God always remains intact, the marvellous "condescension" of eternal wisdom is clearly shown, "that we may learn the gentle kindness of God, which words cannot express, and how far He has gone in adapting His language with thoughtful concern for our weak human nature."¹⁵⁴

In the Bible the revelation of God is brought to human beings in their own language, in words that they can understand.

Hermeneutics means for Kasper transmission of the eternal, immutable Christian message to people in a constantly changing, secular world. When talking about the intention of revelation one must always take into account the fact that it is always only a partial interpretation of something that in the end still remains a mystery, something that can never be fully articulated. Kasper writes

The Bible alone is the inspired word of God in and through human words, which is furthermore emphasised by the witnesses of Tradition [...] Scripture is, therefore, the prime message and document (root witness) of Faith by which all proclamation must be nourished and from which it must take its orientation. It was from the testimony of Scripture that, throughout history, renewal movements have proceeded again and again. This cannot be otherwise today.¹⁵⁵

The importance of tradition for a Catholic theologian can be seen here clearly. The Bible bears the root witness of the revelation of God, but tradition is the measure by against which it is interpreted. Therefore, the function of the Scripture becomes clear in a process of interpretation through the living tradition of the Church. In Kasper's interpretation, revelation is always something actual, something that invites us to take part in the infinite

¹⁵³ F, 337–342; 356; KK, 365–366; D, 27.

¹⁵⁴ DV, 3. See also CCC, 101; KK, 88.

¹⁵⁵ KK, 88: "Die Bibel allein ist in und durch Menschenwort inspiriertes Gotteswort, was sie wiederum gegenüber den Zeugnissen der Tradition hervorhebt. [...] Die Schrift ist deshalb die Ur-Kunde des Glaubens, an der sich alle Verkündigung nähren und orientieren muss. Vom Zeugnis der Schrift her sind in der Geschichte immer wieder Erneuerungsbewegungen ausgegangen. Das kann heute nicht anders sein." English translation has been modified. See also EDV, 7; D, 134–135; RS, 278; OG, 61; see also DV, 11.

life of the Trinitarian God. Revelations never exists “as such” (*an sich*), but is always tied to the truth and reality of salvation.¹⁵⁶ For Kasper, the functional interpretation is unquestionably the most important one. Dogmatic interpretation must be subordinate to functional interpretation, because for us to be even able to make a dogmatic interpretation we have to find the premises on which we make the dogmatic interpretation, i.e. its function. If there was no meaning, that is, function, for the dogma, there would be no sense in having the dogma in the first place. What must be clarified here is the position of the Bible in the hermeneutical process: as *Ur-kunde* (Constitutive document) it is not only testimony to the function, but also a testimony and interpretation of the function of the early community of faith. Therefore, the Bible itself already holds both dogmatic and functional interpretations. Finally, the function can be defined as the most authentic embodiment of a certain revelatory message: for example, a particular chapter or paragraph in the Bible. This should not, however, be interpreted as a static rule. Function is always an act of God. Because revelation is a living reality it must also be interpreted in the light of a living tradition. Revelation is an invitation to an eternal dialogue with the infinite God. The emphasis on the relational interpretation of *communio* and living tradition within the *communio* of believers becomes obvious. In relation to God and to each other the *communio* of believers safeguards, interprets and transmits the living tradition.

The function of the Biblical revelation is, therefore, to invite the creatures of God into a dialogue with him. This basic function is that, which the Magisterium tries to preserve as orthodox teaching and to safeguard dogmatically. Dogma contains two poles: divine revelation and the Church’s template. Dogma is always measured against the word of God (as it is written and handed down). In the course of history the dogma is evaluated in the light of revelation. The Church is not in a monologue with itself but instead, has a dialogue with the “historically transmitted revelation” (*geschichtlich vorgegebenen Offenbarung*).¹⁵⁷ Therefore, the functional and dogmatic interpretations do not contradict, but rather complement each other. Kasper aims to create a new synthesis between faith and reason by combining the historical nature of the Christian faith and the historicity of revelation with the functional and dogmatic interpretations.

Tradition and interpretation belong together in Kasper’s hermeneutics of the Bible. The tradition represents a unity of act and being (*Akt-Seins-Einheit*, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*), i.e., a functional interpretation of the revelation of God, the dogma is its grammatical expression. The historical-critical interpretation, as it is understood in modern research, already has its roots in the Renaissance humanism. Kasper remarks that the *Sola Scriptura* –principle of the Protestant Reformation was actually the principle of *Solus Christus* or of finding the *viva vox evangelii*.¹⁵⁸ In this sense the differentiation between “Sola Scriptura” and “Scripture and Tradition together” is not as drastic as it at first glance might seem. Historical-critical interpretation and biblical theology in its own right only came later when the self-evident status of the Christian faith had begun to shatter. Kasper

¹⁵⁶ OG, 85.

¹⁵⁷ D, 25–27; KK, 88–89.

¹⁵⁸ JC, 57; see also GPV, 147.

claims that the possibility for historical-critical research into the Bible only opened up after the possibility for a break in and distance from Tradition. Only after the historical events are no longer present reality, can one turn back to them and examine them in a critical way. In Kasper's view, this process was greatly advanced by the Pietist movement and its focus on personal, practical, simple and biblical theology. Autonomous biblical theology was thereafter established at the time of the Enlightenment as a critical yardstick of ecclesiology.¹⁵⁹

Revelation cannot be understood without the help of reason. This is why faith and reason must go together. Here we can see how the functional interpretation meets the principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* and the necessity for a systematic discipline for preserving the eternal word of God. The functional essence of revelation becomes understandable for people when it is reasonably, systematically organised. When talking about the intention of revelation one must always take into account the fact that it is always only a partial interpretation of something that in the end still remains a mystery, something that can never be fully articulated.

The whole narrative of the Bible takes place in the tension between the articulated and the not-yet-revealed, in the tension between human history and God's salvific plan. To clarify this thought we can approach this problematic with the example of Jesus Christ as fully human and fully God: the Church doctrine claims that Jesus is undividedly, unchangeably and inseparably both human and God. This doctrine is called the doctrine of the hypostatic union of natures in Christ. We cannot, however, find in the Bible a direct, ontological argument for this doctrine.¹⁶⁰ Kasper argues, however, that in the Bible the function of Jesus' person as the redeemer is clear. The meaning of his person cannot be separated from his role as a redeemer. Therefore, in the historical work of Jesus, his promise of being God's instrument manifests itself. His obedience and the meaning of his work is later expressed in the doctrine of two natures.

What is known as functional Christology is essentially a Christology in its realisation. It not only gives expression to an external function of Jesus, but sees his function [...] as the expression and realisation of his being, or of God's being in him and with him. This functional Christology is itself a form of ontic Christology. 'Being' however is understood here not as mere existence but as reality, not as substance but as personal relation. [...] thus it is precisely functional Christology which gives expression to God's nature as self-giving love.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ OG, 80–83; JC, 57–58. See also *Witherup* 2006, 3–11.

¹⁶⁰ EJC, 59.

¹⁶¹ JC, 250–251: "Die sogenannte funktionale Christologie ist im Grunde eine Christologie im Vollzug. Sie bringt nicht nur eine äußere Funktion Jesu zum Ausdruck, sondern sieht seine Funktion [...] als Ausdruck und Verwirklichung seines Seins bzw. des Seins Gottes in ihm und durch ihn. Die sogenannte funktionale Christologie ist also selbst eine Gestalt einer bestimmten Seinschristologie. Sein wird hier aber nicht als Vorhandensein, sondern als Vollzug, nicht als Substanz, sondern als personale Relation verstanden. [...] So bringt gerade die funktionale Christologie Gottes Wesen als sich verschenkende Liebe zum Ausdruck." See also OG, 72–73; 96.

The active being of God is even more emphasised in Kasper's Christological analysis of the Prologue to the Gospel of John. Kasper argues that the sentence "and the Logos was God" does not refer to a subject but to a predicate: "'God', without an article, is here a predicate instead of a subject."¹⁶² God is presented in the Gospel as acting, living God instead of an ontological higher ground, a god of (bad) metaphysics. However, Kasper also combines here both ontological and functional statements:

Nevertheless it has to be said that the Logos has the character of Divinity. Despite the distinction between God and Logos, both are united by the one divine nature. At this point it becomes clear that *theos* is not merely the designation of a function, but an ontological statement, even though this ontological statement is orientated to a salvific statement.¹⁶³

The ontological statement points to the "salvific statement". The ontological explanation is only meaningful in the context of its salvation historical function. The salvific plan manifests itself in real, historical events. In Kasper's interpretation, the ontological and functional statements do not contradict but compliment each other. In the process of interpretation, first comes being – then the function of being and finally the meaning of being:

The functional statement, therefore, is the object of the ontological statement. The function however is grounded also in the nature; the ontological statement, therefore, is not merely an encoding of the functional statement. The ontological statement without the salvation statement would be an abstract speculation: the salvation statement without the ontological statement would be without force and groundless.¹⁶⁴

Therefore, Kasper's interpretation of the economic and ontological Trinity come together in his theology-of-history approach. Functional and ontological statements are complimentary: salvation history is the manifestation of the immanent Trinity in history, that is – the function: the economic aspect is explained in the course of history, but it has its basis in the immanent reality of the Trinitarian God. Therefore, it can be said that Kasper's conception of reality is threefold: it can only be explained if all the three aspects: ontological (the ground of being, being-itself), functional (the actions of being-itself) and historical (the meaning of the actions of being-itself) are taken into account. However, Kasper is opposed to a view in which the Trinity is seen as deducible from the history of salvation "by a kind of extrapolation". Because the ultimate "essence" of God remains a mystery, it would be an error to state that the economic and the immanent Trinity are equivalent (A=A) (as opposed to Rahner here). Rahner's thesis has been criticised for ontologising the sameness of the economic and immanent Trinity, when actually they are only epistemically identical. We can know the Trinity only as economic (*ad extra*);

¹⁶² JC, 256: "Das artikellose 'Gott' ist hier Prädikat und nicht Subjekt."

¹⁶³ JC, 256: "Dennoch soll gesagt werden, der Logos sei göttlicher Art. Bei aller Unterschiedenheit von Gott und Logos sind beide durch das eine göttliche Wesen geeint. Hier wird deutlich, dass *theos*; nicht nur Funktionsbezeichnung, sondern Wesensaussage ist, wenngleich diese Wesensaussage auf eine Heilsaussage hingeordnet ist." English translation has been modified.

¹⁶⁴ JC, 256–257: "Die Funktionsaussage ist also das Ziel der Wesensaussage. Die Funktion gründet jedoch auch im Wesen; die Wesensaussage ist deshalb nicht nur eine Verschlüsselung der Funktionsaussage. Die Wesensaussage ohne die Heilsaussage wäre eine abstrakte Spekulation; die Heilsaussage ohne die Wesensaussage kraftlos und unbegründet." English translation has been modified.

ontologically the Trinity *ad intra* remains a great mystery that may be something totally different than we can even begin to imagine. The only thing we can really know about the Trinity are God's actions, that is, the economic Trinity.

Therefore, the functional interpretation is what counts. It does not, however, give a definitive interpretation of the immanent Trinity simply because it is not possible to make one.¹⁶⁵ What is essential to see here is the relation of the doctrine of the Trinity to the word of God in Kasper's thought. Following the path that the early Church fathers took in fashioning dogma, Kasper as well sees that the only possibility for understanding the nature of the Trinitarian mystery is to turn to revelation, to the word.

In the process of interpretation of revelation the function becomes understandable as an infinite function of God: God's being can be interpreted as God's being in history with his people. God promises to be with his people in the course of history, always. The apex of God's presence in history is the Incarnation. Furthermore, after the Resurrection God sends his Holy Spirit into the world and continues his being among his people in the Spirit. The events of salvation history reflect the "structure" of the immanent Trinity. Accordingly the dogmatic interpretation of this "structure" is the doctrine of the Trinity with all its explanatory power of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit:

The one God encounters us once and for all concretely in the history and fate of Jesus and is permanently present in the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁶

The historical being of Jesus is the emergence of God's love into historical time. Therefore, his *function* expresses what is in the *doctrine* put in ontological terms. The function of the revelation event (Jesus' life, proclamation, death and resurrection) receives dogmatic interpretation in the doctrine of the Church: Jesus is both fully God and fully human.

The element of reflection is always included to dogma: dogma is essential anamnesis of the once-and-for-all given revelation.¹⁶⁷

The final measure, criterion and prerequisite for interpretation and for every dogma must be God's Word. Kasper's interpretation actually comes close to the classical Lutheran *Sola Scriptura*. One could argue that this is a paradigm of a circular argument: one needs functional interpretation in order to understand revelation, which in turn is the ultimate criterion for the authenticity of such interpretation. However, this circular argumentation can also be characterised as something that suits biblical and revelational narrative rather than contradicts or problematises it.¹⁶⁸ Nicholas of Cusa already insisted

¹⁶⁵ This was also the conviction of Gregorius of Nyssa. The salvation history does not offer us a complete picture of the inner Trinitarian life. The picture always remains incomplete, that is the mystery nature of God's being. See GJ, 424–425.

¹⁶⁶ JC, 259: "[dass] der eine Gott uns konkret in Geschichte und Geschick Jesu ein für alle Mal begegnet und im Heiligen Geist bleibend präsent ist."

¹⁶⁷ D, 25: "Zum Dogma gehört also immer ein auf die Offenbarung rückbezügliches Moment; das Dogma ist wesentlich Anamnese der ein für allemal überlieferten Offenbarung."

¹⁶⁸ Cf. O'Regan 2014: "As Kasper points out throughout *The God of Jesus Christ*, an irreducible circularity exists between the facts or history and the confession of faith." Vincent Holzer offers the critique that in order to find a more functional and strategic approach to other religions, modern Christian theology is in

that all theological reasoning is ultimately circular¹⁶⁹: there are no outside criteria for the facts, facticity comes from within the system itself. This does not remain unnoticed by Kasper: he states that the entire proof comes ultimately from the certitude of faith, not from reason or analysis: “the ultimate cannot be justified by the penultimate, the all-embracing and infinite by the finite”¹⁷⁰. Therefore, he locates the proof for verification of a particular dogma inside the community of faith. Kasper appears to think that the circular argument can be avoided if interpretation is located in the course of history, within the *communio* of believers, within the tradition, within the living function among agreed dogmas. Once again Kasper uses the theory of institutionalisation:

Holy Scripture and the testimonies of Tradition are not a measure applied from the outside to the Church and its doctrine, but rather are an essential part of the testimony of the Church about itself. In other words, they are not instances coming from outside that can be used subsequently as proofs or counter-instances. They are authoritative testimonies of the faith of the Church itself and thus an integrating and constitutive part of the Church’s reflection about itself.¹⁷¹

The community of believers lives and breathes revelation – thus bringing to life both functional and dogmatic interpretations of revelation. Kasper states that the task of theology is constantly to try to find how a particular doctrine originates from the original testimony (*Anfangzeugnis*).¹⁷² The original testimony is significant in the light of revelation theology: Kasper argues that there is no revelation without community:

Thus revelation does not occur in the form of something objectively ascertainable which is then subsequently known by faith. It occurs in human faith and in the mode of life that develops out of this faith. The truth of revelation is thus the truth of witness (*martyria*). This means, further, that God’s revelation never exists in itself but only in a human, historical mediation. We encounter the self-revealing God only as the God who is hidden in his human and historical revelatory forms.¹⁷³

danger of overdetermining the function of pneumatology and functionalising the Trinitarian faith. This might lead to an acceptance of a ‘double economy’. See *Holzer* 2011, 326. Even though Kasper does not “functionalise” the faith in order to be in dialogue with other religions, the critique applies to his approach as well. Overemphasis on functional interpretation may result in compromising the content of faith.

¹⁶⁹ See e.g. *Hopkins* 1981, 76–77; 95.

¹⁷⁰ GJ, 214: “Das Letzte kann nicht vom Vorletzten, das Allumfassende und Unendliche nicht durch das Endliche begründet werden.” See also ZZD, 268: “Der Gottesglaube hat also seine eigene Rationalität. Er kann nicht abstrakt von außen bewiesen werden; man kann den Glauben niemandem andemonstrieren. [...] Der Glaube erweist sich aber als wahr, indem er sich als ein Licht erweist, in dem der Mensch und Welt erst voll verständlich werden.”

¹⁷¹ KK, 87: “Die Heilige Schrift und die Zeugnisse der Überlieferung sind kein von außen an die Kirche und ihre Lehre herangetragenener Maßstab, sie sind vielmehr selbst ein wesentlicher Teil des Zeugnisses der Kirche über sich selbst. Sie sind damit keine von außen kommenden Instanzen, die man nachträglich als Beweismittel oder auch als Gegeninstanzen einsetzen kann. Sie sind maßgebende Zeugnisse des Glaubens der Kirche selbst und damit ein integrierender und konstitutiver Teil der Reflexion der Kirche über sich selbst.”

¹⁷² KUG, 305.

¹⁷³ GJ, 215–216: “So geschieht Offenbarung nicht als etwas objektiv Feststellbares, das erst nachträglich im Glauben zur Kenntnis genommen wird. Sie geschieht im Glauben des Menschen und in der Lebensgestalt, die aus dem Glauben folgt. Offenbarungswahrheit ist darum Zeugniswahrheit (*martyria*). Das heißt auch: Gottes Offenbarung gibt es nie an sich, sondern nur in menschlicher geschichtlicher Vermittlung. Wir

Revelation in history is a pre-glimpse of eschatological events. Kasper states that the signs that appear to believers in the course of history are ambiguous and only become clear in “faith’s perception (*Vorgriff*) of this end of history”¹⁷⁴ and also that vice versa is true: the perception of faith must find its validity in the course of history.¹⁷⁵ Thus, for Kasper, both the community of believers and the actual history they live and lived in, act as a yardstick for the authenticity of revelation. The lived, breathed, worshipped, commonly agreed revelation in the form of the personal encounter between believers and God is the revelation that in the course of history (and with a careful consideration of both the functional and dogmatic interpretations) can be deemed as real. For Kasper this is called *the historical character of truth (geschichtlichen Charakter der Wahrheit)*.¹⁷⁶ The historical character of truth is Kasper’s application of the theory of institutionalisation. He states:

It is characteristic for the biblical concept of truth that the truth is not just known and said, but it also can and must be done. Truth and loyalty are bound together tightly. [...] The truth has capacity and durability, it prevails. [...] Thus the truth is a historical phenomenon and finally it has the dimension of an eschatological promise.¹⁷⁷

It is clear that in this sense Kasper treats the religious community as a closed group that holds the instruments for correct interpretation within the community.¹⁷⁸ Interpretation has to have rules, it must happen in an orderly fashion. Thus Kasper argues that: first, the interpretation of the Bible should take place in the Holy Spirit; second, that the interpretation of the Bible should be honest to the time with in which it is interpreted; and third, that exegetics and dogmatics should be in constant dialogue with each other. One must be careful with the interpretation of the word “God” and “God’s word”. Kasper takes Wolfhart Pannenberg as an example of a theologian who has talked about the crisis of the “scripture principle” (*Krise des Schriftprinzips*) and criticised the pure scriptural positivism (*der Schriftpositivismus*). Although Scripture tells us about God and God’s word, this fact does not mean that it should be read positivistically. Instead, the Scripture should always be read in their own context and keeping in mind that though the word of God is historical and given in a particular historical situation, it also exceeds its historical meaning and is valid for in any historical situation it is read in.

Therefore, the word of God is according to the Bible historical, but as a word of God it exceeds each historical situation; it includes the fact that because God is all-embracing and all-exceeding reality, it has a universal and, therefore, also contemporary, current

begegnen dem sich offenbarenden Gott nur als dem in seinen menschlichen und geschichtlichen Offenbarungsformen verborgenen Gott.” See also OG, 56; DV, 7.

¹⁷⁴ JC, 212: “im glaubenden Vorgriff auf dieses Ende der Geschichte.” See also OG, 79.

¹⁷⁵ JC, 212; ST, 183.

¹⁷⁶ M, 70.

¹⁷⁷ M, 70-71: “Für den biblischen Wahrheitsbegriff ist es charakteristisch, dass die Wahrheit nicht nur gewusst und gesagt, sondern auch getan werden kann und muss. Wahrheit und Treue sind engstens miteinander verbunden. [...] Wahr ist, was Dauer und Bestand hat, was sich bewährt. [...] Wahrheit ist also ein geschichtliches Phänomen und letztlich eine eschatologische Verheißungsgröße.“

¹⁷⁸ KK, 83–87. This is already the traditional understanding of the early Church: TE, 198: “Als wahr sollte gelten, was in der Kirche von den Aposteln her überliefert wird.”

meaning. It is, therefore, in accordance with the biblical sources themselves to say more that is possible to grasp through historical-critical interpretation.¹⁷⁹

The last sentence of this quote deserves more thorough examination. If the biblical texts themselves are such that they point to “something more” and that their intention cannot be reduced to their simple literal or historical-critical meaning, this means that Kasper argues that the biblical texts themselves include an element of “something new” and something that we can never fully grasp. The mystery nature of revelation is present in the literary form of the biblical revelation as something that points to something, a not fully-articulable “more”. Hence, although here translated with the lowercase, the “word of God” (*Wort Gottes*) can also be translated as “the Word of God”. The Bible contains the words of God, but also it is revelation of the Word of God. The Word and the event are bound together in revelation.

Therefore God reveals himself through his promised Word, which is proved to be so in the course of humanity’s journey in history.¹⁸⁰

The word always gives meaning to the event but also vice versa is true, there cannot exist an event of salvation *per se*, without the meaning that the word gives to it. The previous sentence could also be written with the Word with a capital “W”, because ultimately the Word of God gives the meaning to revelation.¹⁸¹ Thus the Word does not only interpret events of history but also constitutes them.

Kasper attempts to combine both the point of view of modern hermeneutics as well as that of more traditional doctrines of Scripture¹⁸²:

The Bible in its unity should be interpreted inside the Tradition as well as in the context of its history of interpretation and history of reception and to understand the single testimonies in the light of the others, i.e. to interpret them according to the analogy of faith.¹⁸³

The task of dogmatics is to think through the message that is written in the Scriptures.¹⁸⁴ For Kasper, the theological interpretation is essentially a pneumatological one.¹⁸⁵ In a pneumatological reading the Scripture is read in a way that gives room to that “more” that cannot quite be articulated with the help of a historical-critical reading alone. The concept of analogy represents here the possibility for “something more”, because it

¹⁷⁹ PES, 513: “So ergeht das Wort Gottes nach der Bibel zwar geschichtlich, aber als Gottes Wort übersteigt es die jeweilige geschichtliche Situation; es hat, da Gott die alles umgreifende und alles übergreifende Wirklichkeit ist, eine universale und damit auch eine gegenwärtige Bedeutung. Es ist also der Literalsinn der biblischen Quellen selbst, der mehr besagen will als das, was historisch-kritisch fassbar ist.” See also GJ, 133. In a similar way: *Balthasar* 2006, 200.

¹⁸⁰ OG, 62: “Gott offenbart sich also durch sein verheissendes Wort, das sich in der Wanderschaft des Menschen in der Geschichte erweist.”

¹⁸¹ See CCC, 102.

¹⁸² This is a modern approach, which is a trend in modern theology. *Watson* 2010, 118–119.

¹⁸³ ST, 183: “[Dies ist der innere Grund für die Forderung,] die Schrift in ihrer Einheit wie im Zusammenhang ihrer Auslegungs- und Wirkungsgeschichte in der Tradition zu lesen und die einzelnen Aussagen im Licht der anderen zu verstehen, d.h. sie nach der Analogie des Glaubens zu interpretieren.“

¹⁸⁴ PES, 519–526.

¹⁸⁵ ST, 178; PES, 524–525.

always points to a greater difference than similitude between our reality and God's. Analogy holds, therefore, the potential for grasping something beyond our straightforward, empirical, this-worldly understanding of reality. Kasper's attempt at a holistic approach becomes clear: he creates his own, modern model of typological interpretation of the Bible in which Jesus Christ is the apex of God's self-revelation¹⁸⁶ and the *Typos* for the understanding of reality. For Kasper, interpretation of the Bible actually means a holistic interpretation of the meaning of all reality.¹⁸⁷ Kasper argues that theological interpretation can never bypass historical interpretation, but that historical interpretation is needed for understanding the theological interpretation: God's word appears in history in a form that is understandable in human words.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, according to Kasper, the pneumatological interpretation is more suitable for the interpretation of the Bible than the historical-critical interpretation. By pneumatological interpretation Kasper means a double-sided interpretation of the Scripture, a process of analysis moving back and –forth between Christological and pneumatological interpretation. This means that the Christ-event is always present in the reading of the Scripture when it is read in the Holy Spirit. Pneumatological interpretation attaches itself to the Tradition, which believes that the Holy Spirit guides the Church and invigorates the message of the Church in every historical situation. The Scripture is a witness to and a manifestation of the universal truth of God. Typologically it contains not only words, but also meanings that the words point to and which receive new meanings. For example, Adam is the *Typos* of the new Adam and the people of God in the Old Testament is a *Typos* of the Church.¹⁸⁹ Kasper argues that in contrast to allegorical interpretation of the Bible, typology does not try to find meta-historical meaning but a historical fulfilment. Pneumatological interpretation is essentially bound to the witness of the community of believers and is always evaluated in the light of the tradition that the witnesses of different times bear. Scripture is the book of the Church and it should be read in the context of the believers in the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹⁰

Kasper makes three points that must be taken into account in the process of interpretation of Tradition and revelation. First, Kasper makes use of the traditional practice of *Lectio Divina* in analysing the relationship between Revelation, the Bible and Tradition. Kasper attaches the concept of *analogia fidei* to salvation historical understanding of revelation. In traditional interpretation of *Lectio Divina* this means:

Already in its traditional understanding the salvation historical interpretation covers the thus far discussed dimension of the hermeneutical problem: the literal meaning describes the historical dimensions of revelation; the allegorical meaning the Christological-theological intention of the statement; the moral (tropological) meaning

¹⁸⁶ OG, 53; 77.

¹⁸⁷ ST, 185–190; OG, 91–92.

¹⁸⁸ PES, 516; M, 52–53; OG, 59.

¹⁸⁹ OG, 72–73; 91; JC, 374.

¹⁹⁰ PES, 519–526; OG, 71.

aims at existential exegesis, while the analogical meaning aims at the eschatological dimension.¹⁹¹

However, the traditional allegorical interpretation of the Bible cannot be reprinted directly into our age. The modern interpretation of the Bible must renew allegorical interpretation in a critical and creative way – in the Spirit of the original typological meaning of the Bible. Kasper claims that the biblical revelation opens itself to a tradition process, in which re-reading always renews the revelation in the *Typos* of a new revelation.¹⁹² The use of analogy is, therefore, present in this process: the analogy enables the process of the past to become the measure of interpretation for the events in new historical experiences.¹⁹³ Second, Jesus Christ himself interpreted his message as the fulfilment of the Old Testament and therefore opened the possibility for a once-and-for-all interpretation of the entire Biblical revelation. In Kasper's interpretation this means that Jesus Christ is God's final revelation in person and therefore, also the fulfilment of Tradition in person, in which the Tradition means God's giving of himself in the historical process through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ the self-revelation of God becomes ever-new and actual, only to be fulfilled in the eschatological events of end times.¹⁹⁴ Third, the ultimate and complete event of Jesus Christ is present in the present time in the Holy Spirit. In the Holy Spirit the entire history of God's self-revelation is safeguarded and transmitted to the present day.¹⁹⁵ For Kasper this threefold process is, therefore, first and foremost, a process of the self-revelation of the Trinitarian God¹⁹⁶ and secondly, a measurement for the use of analogy as the grammar of faith. Analogy is the interpretation of Tradition and the Bible, reflected in the historical reality of the present and in the past. Pneumatological interpretation encloses the historical interpretation, but does not give it an imperative position. In interpretation, the only imperative thing can be the word of God. In Kasper's understanding, truth and the gospel are two poles of the same reality.¹⁹⁷

This model of functional and dogmatic interpretation relies strongly on the institutionalisation theory. It leaves open, though, a precise definition of who exactly is a "witness" to the faith. It also relies on the concept of *sensus plenior*, and takes the role of *communio* here somewhat for granted: the *communio* of believers holds the key to right interpretation, which through the course of history is proven as truth.

¹⁹¹ OG, 90: "Schon in ihrem traditionellen Verständnis umfaßt die heilsgeschichtliche Interpretation alle bisher besprochenen Dimensionen des hermeneutischen Problems: Der Literalsinn bezeichnet die geschichtliche Dimension der Offenbarung, der allegorische Sinn die Christologisch-theologische Aussageintention, der moralische (tropologische) Sinn zielt auf eine existenziale Auslegung, während der analogische Sinn die eschatologische Dimension anvisiert."

¹⁹² OG, 92; 94–95. See also CCC, 128–130.

¹⁹³ ST, 185; OG, 71.

¹⁹⁴ OG, 72–73; 79; ST, 185–186; PES 520. See also DV, 15–16; 20.

¹⁹⁵ ST, 186.

¹⁹⁶ OG, 74.

¹⁹⁷ ST, 183; KUG, 306; HT, 256.

3.4. The Basic Dialogical Structure of Revelation

3.4.1. Freedom

As opposed to an oppressive understanding of the authority of God Kasper seeks to base his understanding of God on the concept of freedom. Freedom is a term that in many way characterises the atmosphere of the Modern world. As a concept, however, freedom is anything but easy to comprehend. Therefore, how it is used in the context of Kasper's thought must be carefully defined.¹⁹⁸ Kasper distinguishes between formal and existential experiences of freedom:

One must distinguish between the formal freedom essential to man, which he never loses even as sinner, and the material or concrete, existential experience of freedom. The formal freedom essential to us and presupposed by the New Testament confronts us concretely as a captive freedom. Only in the following of Jesus Christ and in his Spirit is it released to become the freedom of the sons and daughters of God. It is achieved in following Jesus, not in self-seeking, but in love.¹⁹⁹

What is misunderstood, often profoundly, in our modern context is exactly the latter, the existential experience of freedom. For if freedom does not have its ground in the source of freedom itself, it loses its meaning. If the concept of freedom is understood only as formal freedom, it loses its meaning. It can, therefore, only acquire its meaning through its existential interpretation. Arbitrary freedom, defined by each individual personally and selfishly, is no freedom at all.

Following the basic orientation of German idealist philosophy, Kasper states that freedom lies in the tension between the infinite and the finite. Only through understanding the concept of the finite and truly experiencing it we can analogically grasp the infinite.²⁰⁰ Only in a total opposition, in a dialectical relationship between the finite and the infinite, can man grasp the infinite as the basis of his own being. In this sense Hegel's idea of opposition can also be detected in Kasper's thought. The difference here is that Kasper does not content himself with only the inexorable evolution of existence and the idea of the human being based on this understanding. For Kasper, the encounter between the infinite and finite happens specifically in concrete, human history. Both the acts of God and man are always free, never predestined. Therefore, Hegel's idea of the totality in process is for Kasper untenable. True freedom also contradicts any moral demands based on "pure reason", as necessary as they may seem. This is why Kasper also opposes the moral demands of Kant: "because you can, you must". According to Kasper, this demand is not realistic. It truly seems to demand more than is realistic to expect from man.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ See also *Kerr* 2007, 45–46. The attempts in National Socialist Germany and the Soviet Union to exterminate the Church, accompanied with the anti-Catholic laws of France and Mexico, brought the freedom of the Church from the state to the interest of post-war Catholic theology. In the post-war situation, freedom had to be restored as political and ideological freedom from any state system. But it also awoke consideration of what exactly authentic freedom is in philosophical and theological senses.

¹⁹⁹ CUF, 10.

²⁰⁰ JC, 89; GJ, 181–182.

²⁰¹ CUF, 9.

Kasper's point of view of philosophy of freedom does justice to the biblical description of the divine reality in the sense that it leaves the majesty of God untouched and undefined. What is problematic with this approach, however, is that a certain prerequisite is still required for making statements: in this case, freedom as a divine attribute. By positing freedom as a prerequisite for the situation of encounter between God and man, and by positing history as the place for this encounter, Kasper himself creates a philosophical precondition for the encounter between God and human beings. Joseph Palakeel articulates this problem as a problem of freedom as principle: whereas characterising the God-man relationship by means of the concept of freedom is a good theological insight that helps to explain the relation between God and man, nature and grace, creation and redemption, faith and reason, it is not legitimate to raise the concept of freedom to the level of a principle. Palakeel argues that making a principle of the concept of freedom is not possible because being cannot be substituted with freedom because freedom is something that belongs to being.²⁰² For Kasper, that freedom is the basis for a God-man relationship is given. The association of freedom with being is not a problem, because for him, freedom is a definitive principle of the manner of God's being. For him, God's being is not freedom; for him, God is freedom. Thus all real freedom necessarily originates from the original source of freedom: God himself.

The previous chapter discussed the concept of analogy in Kasper's theological thought. Because God is absolute freedom, he can only be known in freedom. In his interpretation of the doctrine of analogy Kasper combines his conception of language and metaphysics and arrives at an analysis of freedom as the basis for analogy.²⁰³ Kasper uses philosophy – and metaphysics – as a tool for seeking to discover the nature of the reality to which dogma refers.

The point of departure of Kasper's theory is that freedom must be based on a universally determinable agent. The possibilities that he presents have as their starting point the assumption that the ultimate essence of freedom must be *a priori* originate from God. According to Kasper, openness to the infinite mystery belongs to the essence of freedom.²⁰⁴ In Kasper's view, the alternate possibilities for realisation of freedom are: autonomy as opposed to theonomy; autonomy as realisation of theonomy and autonomy as a metaphor for theonomy. Kasper denotes the first possibility as the restorative model, the second the progressive model, and the third the model of correlation and analogy.²⁰⁵ The first model can be interpreted as a reaction to the theories of Nietzsche, Feuerbach and Marx: after the French Revolution it was understandable that the Church assumed that human freedom,

²⁰² See Palakeel 1995, 298. See also Wright 1986, 109. John H. Wright remarks in his book review of *Der Gott Jesu Christi* that Kasper seems to assume the existence of human freedom and divine freedom as a ground for this freedom without giving actual arguments to how and under what conditions this is possible.

²⁰³ Palakeel 1995, 280.

²⁰⁴ TK, 172. Cf. Schelling 2006 [1809], 9: "[...] individual freedom is surely connected in some way with the world as a whole [...], some kind of system must be present, at least in the divine understanding, with which freedom coexists."

²⁰⁵ TK, 165–175.

understood in purely secular terms, can only lead to anarchy and nihilism.²⁰⁶ The second model takes into account the anthropological turn of theology after the Second Vatican Council, but disregards the dialectic of the Enlightenment (*Dialektik der Aufklärung*) of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno of the Frankfurt School.²⁰⁷ It also fails to safeguard the divinity of God: if human freedom is the ultimate manifestation of divine freedom, are we not left with an empty ideology without its original divine ground? As an example of this kind of model Kasper takes the liberation theology of Latin America.²⁰⁸ Kasper identifies himself as representative of the third model but remarks that it also has its weaknesses.

Kasper's argument is based on the idea that the greater the connection of the human being to God, the greater his freedom.²⁰⁹ If we assume that the human freedom is based on divine freedom it can never find its fulfilment anywhere else but in connection with its ground. Freedom which is based only on the immanent world can never be perfect freedom. However, even as an analogy of divine freedom, human freedom is still imperfect and still awaits its fulfilment. Because in Jesus Christ God becomes man and humanity is therefore made partakers of the divine nature, the freedom of man finds its true fulfilment only in the person of Jesus Christ. Kasper emphasises that analogy lies "in between radical difference (*Äquivozität*) and complete similarity (*Univozität*)"²¹⁰. The immanent and divine realities remain separate even though they cannot ever be completely distinguished. Analogy works as a reminder that the ground of this immanent reality lies in the divine reality. This divine reality, however, can never be forced to be a part of our reality by human means or commands. In the life of a Christian the world ethos (*Weltethos*) and ethos of redemption (*Heilethos*) remain as separate but concurrent.²¹¹

We can only truly understand our own finiteness in front of an absolute that is infinite. And vice versa: because we are finite, we can understand that our ground of being has to be something infinite. We as human beings can exercise freedom that exists in the tension between the finite and the infinite. In freedom we are also capable of grasping something of the infinite reality beyond ours. Kasper thus separates the interpretation of analogy from its metaphysical basis as interpretation of the cosmos and instead uses history as the location of the exercise of freedom. Freedom, therefore, manifests itself in the history of the world. In this model of analogy God is not only necessary, he is the "new" and "more" in history, a being who shows himself to us in revelation as freedom. Moreover,

²⁰⁶ This was also the assumption of Kant: he believed that if there is no common moral ground, it leads to nihilism, which in turn leads to violence. KK, 62; B, 14; NGK, 93.

²⁰⁷ Horkheimer and Adorno questioned the uncritical positivity and adamant belief in pure reason of the Enlightenment. They argued instead that the Enlightenment was only a sequel of the time of myth with its over-optimistic view of progress and the capabilities of the human mind. Instead of a time of reason, the modern era can be characterised as barbaric and violent. Horkheimer and Adorno wondered if there is, in fact, something in the ideal of the Enlightenment itself that leads to violence and distortion. See OG, 60; JC, 84–85.

²⁰⁸ GJ, 94–97; NGK, 87; *Palakeel* 1995, 273–274.

²⁰⁹ TK, 172.

²¹⁰ TK, 175: "Diese Mitte zwischen radikaler Verschiedenheit (*Äquivozität*) und völliger Gleichheit (*Univozität*) nennt man Analogie." See also GJ, 175–176; 178, 206, 298, 469; B, 99–100; CUF, 8–9.

²¹¹ TK, 174–175.

Kasper argues that traces of God's revelation can be found within history and that these traces help us see that reality is a space for freedom.

The Christian concept of freedom is bound to history and vice versa:

The flow of time is to be experienced only in the human spirit, in the intellect of man who by reason of his freedom can stand back from the individual moment and extend himself through memory into the past and by anticipation to the future.²¹²

Because the human spirit is capable of distancing itself from the current moment and moving back to the past and towards to the future (*distentio animae*), he is also capable of freedom. What is given to human beings in their creatureliness is, therefore, the capacity for freedom. The historical continuum is based on this free movement of the human spirit: in the tension between the past and the future we are able to grasp the concept of the continuum of history. We understand the past as that which no longer exists and the future as that which does not yet exist. History is then actually grounded in the inner sense of history and understanding of time typical for the human spirit.²¹³ This is, however, where Kasper departs from a purely philosophical explanation of freedom and revelation. He claims, namely, that analogy actually helps us to turn to the testimony of the Bible and the Bible allows the reality to appear to us in a completely new way. In Christian understanding of faith God does not restrain the freedom of man but is, instead, the ground of it. Freedom is Grace: God's willingness to reveal himself to man is based on his freedom and this kind of freedom emerges as grace.²¹⁴ In freedom, the human being longs for the absolute, perfect and absolutely necessary, for the fulfilment of being. This fulfilment is given to man through Grace.²¹⁵ The nature Grace is love: Christian freedom makes availability for love possible. Kasper concludes that according to the message of the Gospel the heart of being a human is availability for love (*Verfügbarkeit für die Liebe*).²¹⁶

Therefore, he states that "*analogia fidei* presupposes *analogia entis* or *analogia libertatis* and brings the latter to its fulfilment"²¹⁷. For Kasper, history and reality are not understood correctly if they are not understood from the point of view of God's history with us and, therefore, from the point of view of the religious community. This model of the analogy of freedom is Kasper's answer to the problems with the traditional understanding of the doctrine of analogy. In the analogy of freedom Kasper finds an alternative to the traditional concepts of *analogia fidei* and *analogia entis*. He takes Barth as an example of a theologian who in his dialectical theology sought an answer to the question of whether the transcendence of God and his word can be preserved by some other way than by making man and his positive or negative answer a phase in the word and action

²¹² JC, 94–95: "das Nacheinander der Zeit nur erfahrbar ist im Geist des Menschen, der aufgrund seiner Freiheit Distanz hat zum jeweiligen Augenblick und sich deshalb durch die Erinnerung in die Vergangenheit und durch die Vorausschau in die Zukunft ausstrecken kann." See also OG, 83.

²¹³ JC, 95.

²¹⁴ B, 53–57. On freedom and grace: *Greshake* 1977, 106–122.

²¹⁵ JC, 317.

²¹⁶ JC, 319; B, 44–47.

²¹⁷ GJ, 183: "[In diesem Sinn] setzt die *analogia fidei* die *analogia entis* bzw. *libertatis* voraus und bringt sie zur Erfüllung." See also OG, 69; 71; 90.

of God. Therefore, the human being must be understood as a partner who is created by God and God, in the act of revealing himself, presupposes that this partner understands and hears his word.²¹⁸ However, in making the *analogia fidei* as presupposition for *analogia entis*²¹⁹ and giving the former the role of fulfilling the *analogia libertatis*, he actually suggests that faith precedes being. But if faith precedes being, from where is the faith received? In Kasper's view, faith is established in revelation. This faith is a gift given by God who gives being to his creatures and in this giving also grants the possibility for them to answer his call. Thus given faith is a presupposition for revelation and moreover, a presupposition for being. The analogy of faith is, therefore, for Kasper an explanation for the human being's capacity for God, (*capax Dei*) based on creation itself but also preceding it.

Kasper argues that the modern concept of human freedom is Christian in origin. He admits that it would be anachronistic to state that the biblical understanding of freedom and the modern concept of freedom are equal, but still, undoubtedly, only after Christianity did the world become familiar with the idea of true human value. Hegel argued that only thorough Christianity was the deepest nature of the human person first known.²²⁰ Although the concept and essence of freedom and the inner freedom of man have been philosophical questions since the time of Socrates and Plato, Hegel claimed that the correct understanding of the possibilities of human freedom only entered the world after Christianity. By bringing this Hegelian view into his discussion of the nature of human freedom, Kasper uses Hegel's evolutionary view of the development of the Absolute in human history in favour of a Christian understanding of freedom. The origin of the Christian concept of freedom is the concept of man in the Hebrew Scriptures as the image of God, a concept delineated in the first two chapters of Genesis.²²¹ In the Fall narrative the freedom of man is actually bound to his relationship to God. His being is not "free" in the sense that he is free to do whatever he wants, but on the contrary he is actually very dependent on his one important relationship, the relationship to God. His "happy state" demands his complete and total giving of himself to God, a complete, no questions asked kind of obedience. To argue that in this original state man is actually free is to argue that true freedom only happens in deep, dependent relationship to God. Dependence on God is the true form of freedom and freedom understood falsely leads to sin.

Kasper reminds us, however, that freedom is not a philosophical question in the Bible, but nevertheless, what we call free will is implicit in the biblical narrative. The Christian concept of freedom manifests itself in love, and the ultimate realisation of this love in freedom is the person of Jesus Christ.²²² In the person of Jesus Christ the original state of freedom can be re-established when sin is redeemed by his death on the Cross and

²¹⁸ GJ, 131. See also *Schüssler Fiorenza* 2014, 33.

²¹⁹ Kasper takes this interpretation of analogy formulated by Hans Urs von Balthasar and Gottlieb Söhngen and develops his own analogy of freedom from their conviction that *analogia fidei* presupposes *analogia entis*. GJ, 131; 180; *Palakeel* 1995, 284.

²²⁰ CUF, 5; similarly *Copleston* 2003, 203: "This idea (that man is actually free) entered the world through Christianity, according to which the individual *as such* possesses an infinite value, that is, that man *in himself* is destined to the highest freedom."

²²¹ CUF, 5–7.

²²² CUF, 8–10.

the false illusion of freedom is therefore conquered. The understanding of freedom as total dependence and obedience to God has also consequences for the proclamation of the Church. Kasper's conviction is that today more than ever the Church must see the Gospel of freedom as means of handing on, responsibly and expressively, God's revelation in the world. Kasper calls the Church "the institution of Christian freedom". His apologetical motive can be seen here: making freedom as the cornerstone of the Church's message Kasper appeals to the constant yearn for freedom of modern man. But at the same time he emphasises that the message of the Church is not a quick remedy for the problems of modern age but instead a sempiternal answer to man's search for truth. This means that the Church must appear in history in a particular way. He remarks:

Only a Church which is not of the world and which draws its norms only from the Gospel can be effective in the world as a sign and instrument of salvation – which also means as a sign and instrument of Christian freedom.²²³

Genuine Christian freedom is freedom is based on a new beginning and is perfect by its nature, it does not depend on contingent factors. In a person's life the perfection of freedom means finding the connection with God: only by having a connection to one's own ground of being man can truly be free. What Kasper tries to accomplish here, however, is to perceive the nature of God in the light of modern philosophy of freedom and to base the concept of faith on it. For Kasper, God is absolute freedom that determines everything. Therefore, instead of a monopolised truth-claim he can simply refer to freedom as the ground of everything that is. Moreover, he asserts that the believer is oriented towards absolute freedom when believing. Faith gives a meaningful explanation of reality.²²⁴ Therefore, faith is not arbitrary or irrational but has a meaningful ground in the freedom of God. The usage of a universal concept like freedom is clever in face of other religions and atheism as well: freedom is something that is an appealing, desirable concept to every human being, regardless of what they believe in. Freedom is something to be desired *per se*. It is a common, universally understood philosophical concept, but yet at the same time complex enough to safeguard the element of mystery in it. Kasper gives this philosophical concept a Christian meaning:

He (God) is the power of the future, and, therefore, is not bound by the laws of time; he is the Lord of time and of the future. This, however, is the definition of freedom.²²⁵

Furthermore, in his interpretation of freedom Kasper associates freedom with the possibility of making a change, to affect, to be active and have the possibility to be open to something totally new and unfamiliar. The emphasis that freedom can only be freedom if it forms the basis of all reality, is essential. This claim also has consequences for Kasper's interpretation of deterministic view of reality:

²²³ CUF, 45.

²²⁴ GJ, 154.

²²⁵ JC, 132–133: "Als Macht der Zukunft steht er nicht unter dem Gesetz der Zeit, er ist vielmehr Herr der Zeit und der Zukunft. Dies ist aber die Definition der Freiheit."

[...] when the world and its laws are made absolutes, the result is a deterministic system in which not only God but man as well is dead, because there is no room left for human freedom.²²⁶

Therefore, in the end, freedom is something that can only belong to God and the freedom experienced by creatures can only be the freedom derived from the freedom of God. Thus Kasper interprets freedom holistically:

Freedom denies the primacy of the universal over the particular. Freedom in any real sense is possible only on the premise that reality as a whole is determined by freedom, for that is the only condition which allows freedom room for action within reality. To conceive reality under the rule of freedom means that reality is to be seen not as an enclosed but as a basically open system with room for the unique, new and original.²²⁷

Kasper connects the possibility for openness to the new and unique to the concept of freedom. The modern understanding of freedom (the modern illusion of freedom, that is) is for Kasper “an enclosed system” that disregards the possibility of anything new or unique. In its illusory attempt to achieve complete, ideological freedom as a universal principle, paradoxically, it prevents true freedom from flourishing. For arbitrary freedom can never be authentic freedom. Only freedom based on the assumption that it is the basis and determinant of all reality (that is, if the ground of freedom is particular and special) can result in true freedom of the human being as well. Kasper emphasises, however, that God’s freedom is not arbitrary and inscrutable. This is actually what differentiates the Christian concept of freedom from all arbitrary, sometimes even destructive, understandings of freedom. God’s freedom is characterised as freedom in love. This means that his freedom is unity, loyalty and companionship; God would not do anything that contradicts his being as love.²²⁸ His freedom is freedom based on his being as love.

Kasper’s interpretation is, however, open to criticism. His point of view could be challenged by the claim that freedom is actually accidental rather than axiomatic (the basis for all reality). Kasper’s position is that freedom has to have a necessary ground, that

²²⁶ GJ, 77: “Wenn die Welt und ihre Gesetze absolut gesetzt werden, dann ist in einem solchen deterministischen System nicht nur Gott, sondern auch der Mensch tot, weil kein Raum mehr für die menschliche Freiheit ist.” It is notable, however, that, as opposed to classical Newtonian physics, Quantum physics acknowledges the possibility of interpreting chance as a sign of ontological indeterminism. See *Russell* 2006, 580. Modern science does not, therefore, interpret the world as a deterministic whole. In his text book on Quantum mechanics Alastair Rae describes the ontological problem of quanta: as in philosophy and theology, also physics tries to find answers to the ultimate, primordial questions such as the question of the being of man. Even the theorems of physics are not as clearly perceptible and verifiable as people sometimes are accustomed to think. The “dark areas” are constantly under investigation. *Rae*, 2002[1980], 287–288: “It should be clear by now that one of the fundamental problems thrown up by quantum mechanics in general, and the measurement problem, in particular, is the nature of reality – what is it that ‘really exists’ in the universe? What is our ontology?”

²²⁷ JC, 86: “Freiheit negiert nämlich den Primat des Allgemeinen vor dem Besonderen. Sie ist sinnvollerweise nur möglich unter der Voraussetzung, daß die Wirklichkeit insgesamt von Freiheit bestimmt ist, denn nur dann kann in ihr ein Raum für Freiheit sein. Wirklichkeit unter dem Primat der Freiheit zu denken, heißt darum, die Wirklichkeit nicht als ein in sich geschlossenes System, sondern als grundsätzlich offenes System betrachten, in dem Raum ist für das Einmalige, Neue und unableitbar.“ See also OG, 62–63; NGK, 91.

²²⁸ JC, 133.

is God. But to an outside observer, who does not have a Christian world view, what he claims to be “necessary” can appear as “true randomness”. If necessary God-based freedom and illusion of freedom caused by true randomness appears to the observer as the same and there is no means to tell the difference between them, then they actually are, in all meaningful sense, the same thing.²²⁹ Then what exactly is the difference, objectively speaking? Either a God who is the necessary ground or a true randomness without any personal, divine element in it, merely pure chance? Kasper’s proposition implicitly claims that freedom without a universal ground is either impossible or incomplete. His claim is not something that can be said without reservation. The definition of freedom and the experience of freedom depends much on how the concept is defined, and on cultural as well as sociological context. It can also be argued that freedom as such does not exist but is always bound to being.²³⁰ In Kasper’s usage the concept of freedom becomes a sort of self-explanatory “super-concept”. What is notable here is the usage of the terms “unique, new and original” which is characteristic of Kasper’s view of reality as he describes the ground of being. Freedom is not for him merely a random quality, but rather, the essence of the whole of history. Only something totally, qualitatively *new* can really and truly bring any kind of hope and success to human history.²³¹ Kasper argues that freedom, in fact, is the all-determining reality we call God. He discusses the “ultimate meaning of reality”:

Is it pure chance, blind fate, a universal regularity which allows no room for freedom or an all-determining freedom which we call God?²³²

Placing the definitions “*no room for freedom*” and “*all-determining freedom which we call God*” in opposition to each other shows us clearly that Kasper’s theological system is based on the firm belief that the form of God’s being is freedom, and that true freedom as an independent entity actually does not exist in any other form. This is so self-evident to him that he does not even contradict the idea. It is either-or: no freedom at all or the ultimate freedom which we call God.²³³ Here the question of randomness versus true freedom finds

²²⁹ According to several standard interpretations of quantum mechanics quantum phenomena are objectively random. On true randomness see for example: *Aspelmeyer* 2007, 871–875.

²³⁰ *Palakeel* 1995, 298. Palakeel argues: “Raising freedom to the level of a principle is not legitimate, because we cannot substitute being with freedom since freedom is something which belongs to being.”

²³¹ JC, 100.

²³² JC, 148: “[Welches der letzte Sinn aller Wirklichkeit ist]: reiner Zufall, blindes Geschick, allgemeine Gesetzmäßigkeit, die dann auch keine Freiheit mehr zulässt, oder eine alles bestimmende Freiheit, die wir Gott nennen.” See also GPV, 146.

²³³ The critique of Joseph Palakeel of Kasper’s definition of freedom is grounded in this assumption: he argues that freedom as a universal principle does not exist, and is, instead, always bound to being. *Palakeel* 1995, 298. But is not the ultimate being by definition something that we can conceive as the ultimate freedom (or love, or reality, or ground of being, for that matter)? Is not the idea of ultimate being already implicitly loaded with all the other ultimate concepts? And, more importantly, do these concepts find their ultimate meaning in the ultimate being? That is, is not the ultimate reality the place where the explanation for universal concepts is actually found? If the answer is yes, then the problem between freedom-bound-to-being and freedom-per-se ceases to be a problem. In his critique of Kasper Palakeel denies the possibility of freedom as a universal principle but he does not justify this argument. Therefore, he stumbles actually into the same problem he accuses Kasper of: that of only assuming something and not justifying it. One could also argue that Palakeel actually speaks of the exact same thing as Kasper, but that he only defines it differently. Whereas Kasper claims that freedom is a universal concept, bound to the being of God, Palakeel

an explanation in Kasper's model of a Christian philosophy of freedom: randomness, "a pure chance, blind fate" may *appear* as freedom, but in reality we are free only in our relationship to God. This freedom lives in the relationship between man and God.

In modern Catholic theology the idea of *capax Dei* is closely bound to the question of freedom.²³⁴ Revelation can only be understood correctly in the light of Christian freedom. The reverse is true as well: the revelation of the self-revealing God in freedom is the prerequisite for authentic, Christian freedom. Following Schelling's philosophy of freedom, Kasper argues that authentic freedom can never fully manifest itself in pure reason. It necessarily needs the concept of God, however, because God is absolute freedom.²³⁵ As God is free, therefore, man can also be free, and therefore, man is capable of grasping the full understanding of freedom only in his relationship with God. The reverse is also true: if freedom is not understood correctly, one can never have a relationship with God. A false understanding of freedom leads to a false understanding of reality. Authentic freedom necessarily requires the concept of God because God is absolute freedom.²³⁶

The Bible knows that what is properly human consists in man's free stance before God and in his being God's partner and the "other" for God²³⁷

Kasper tries to resolve the problem between the distorted modern concept of freedom and its original Christian meaning. Christian freedom is always God-given freedom. Because Jesus' freedom is the perfect form of human freedom, his freedom is what also defines our freedom.²³⁸

With his distinctive approach to theology (and philosophy) of freedom Kasper attempts to avoid abstract theism. Instead, he demands a "theological theology", which, for him, means a mutual collaboration of faith and reason in exploring the reality of the Trinitarian God.²³⁹ When Kasper states that "the meaning of being is therefore to be found not in substance that exists in itself, but in self communicating love"²⁴⁰, he simultaneously attempts to avoid both theist metaphysics and Christian theism, which he claims to be untenable position.²⁴¹ The reality of God cannot be reduced to any philosophical system. Kasper's analogy of freedom is based on the idea that because God is absolute freedom, his being cannot be deduced from any necessity posited by thought.²⁴² Anthony J. Godzieba argues that Kasper – in line with Jean-Luc Marion – "attempts to

argues that freedom is a concept bound to being in general. The problem is one of how we distinguish the ideas of "being in general" and "being of God". It can also be argued that they are the exact same thing (if we assume that the ground of all being is God). For if God is the ground of all being, then also all the entities we relate to being in general are ultimately related to God.

²³⁴ See e.g. *Kerr* 2002, 134–135; 231 n. 2.

²³⁵ *Palakeel* 1995, 267–268.

²³⁶ Cf. *Palakeel* 1995, 267–268. See also GS, 9.

²³⁷ CUF, 7. Cf. DV, 2. See also *Struys* 2003, 228.

²³⁸ JC, 175.

²³⁹ GJ, 479; *Godzieba* 2014, 43.

²⁴⁰ GJ, 260: "Der Sinn von Sein ist also nicht in sich stehende Substanz, sondern sich selbst mitteilende Liebe."

²⁴¹ *Godzieba* 1995, 6; GJ, 437.

²⁴² GJ, 183.

retrieve and redeem the Christian experience of God by liberating God from Being and attempting what Heidegger has ruled out: a resituating of God as transcendental horizon, or as *arche*.²⁴³ Kasper argues that rather than some abstract form of being, God's free self-communication is the basis of our reality. This is how Kasper tries to avoid falling into an ontotheological system. Instead he grounds his theology of freedom to the idea of personal relationship between God and human being.²⁴⁴ Everything that is, is based of God's free turning to us. Godzieba concludes: "This is an experience of the all-encompassing that fits into no ontotheological system, but can only be experienced through personal relationships affording finite glimpses of this infinite."²⁴⁵

Paul Galles calls Kasper's metaphysics a "metaphysics of meaning" (*die Sinnmetaphysik*).²⁴⁶ This term is very illustrative, because Kasper wants to ground his metaphysics to the idea that human being is in constant search for the ultimate, final meaning of everything. Human being is the being who through the experiences of his life, his speaking and his knowing "pre-apprehends the mystery of the unconditioned, perfect freedom."²⁴⁷ Because human being's being is based on the free being of God, he lives in the presence of the infinite mystery that is God and waits and hopes for the free self-revelation of this mystery. The potentiality of man for God is, therefore, established entirely in the reality of revelation, without any active power of man himself.²⁴⁸ If *analogia fidei* presupposes *analogia entis* or *analogia libertatis* and gives it its meaning, then the being, as well as freedom, of man is constituted in the reality of revelation.

3.4.2. Relationality

The doctrine of the Trinity in Kasper's thinking can be interpreted in terms of two basic categories: the question of the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity²⁴⁹ and the question (closely bound to the first question) of intra-Trinitarian relations. Kasper states that modern personalism can be a useful tool in understanding the constitution of persons of the Trinity. Kasper utilises the basic relations of me-you-us in order to grasp the concept of the Trinity. The central theme is the being of the Trinitarian God in relation: In God's triune nature God is a personal, communicative, active and effective God, rather than static and qualitative "threeness". This kind of interpretation is in direct continuity with the Trinitarian theology of the Cappadocian Fathers in particular. In the Second Vatican Council it was further emphasised in the concept of *communio*, relationality being the central mode of God's being. God's being is *communio*, and therefore, also how he affects our reality can be seen as in terms of relationality. This basic understanding of God as relations has an impact on Kasper's entire theological system, most notably on his

²⁴³ Godzieba 1995, 8.

²⁴⁴ GJ 243; Godzieba 1995, 14.

²⁴⁵ Godzieba 1995, 14.

²⁴⁶ Galles 2012, 384.

²⁴⁷ GJ, 205: "vorgreift auf das absolute Geheimnis einer unbedingten, vollkommenen Freiheit"

²⁴⁸ GJ, 131.

²⁴⁹ GJ, 424; 427–430; B, 96–100. See also CCC, 689–690. According to the doctrine of the Catholic Church the persons are distinct but inseparable.

understanding of revelation as interaction between God and human beings, God is self-communicating love, who is in interaction with human beings. Worship is interaction between believers towards God and with God.²⁵⁰

Kasper also emphasises that Persons of the the Trinity are not *in* dialogue, they *are* dialogue.²⁵¹ Because the inner Trinitarian life is sharing in love, God's self-revelation can only in accordance with this reality be the same kind of loving sharing of himself to his people.²⁵²

If one understands God's freedom as a self-giving love as an all-comprehending meaning horizon, the consequence is that [...] a relation is the fundamental reality. It is a matter of relational view of reality. It appears perfect when [...] the reality is explained in the light of Trinitarian doctrine and it shows the paradigm of Christian account of the world and shows that the meaning of life is love.²⁵³

However, even though we refer both to God's persons and human persons with the same word "person", the concept of person when referring to God cannot be used in an analogical sense to the human person. It would, however, also be a mistake to understand the concept of person within the context of the Trinity as supra-personal. For Kasper, the concept "over- or supra-personal" (*überpersonal*) is a category that must be distinguished from the Christian idea of God as a person in a way that is incomparably higher than we are. Kasper argues that the whole concept of the supra-personal is actually nonsense, because the category of person already is the highest category we analogically have at our disposal when speaking of God.²⁵⁴ Here Kasper combines both his theory of the Trinity as relational and our linguistic capabilities for comprehending something of the Trinitarian reality analogically, using the tools of human language. But the concept of "person" signifies here more than the plain language implies: it signifies at the same time ontological reality and the functional, living reality of God.

The category of person has a threefold meaning: first, it maintains that God is not an object, a thing to be observed, but instead a subject who exists; second, it emphasises that God is a sovereign subject who is a predicate neither of the world nor of man; third, it says that God is the reality which determines everything.²⁵⁵ Kasper tries to

²⁵⁰ Cf. the same idea in John Zizioulas's interpretation of the Greek Patristic Synthesis: *Zizioulas* 1997, 110–114. Yves Congar's theology was also affected by Zizioulas profound reading of the Creek Fathers; Kasper states that it was actually Yves Congar's interpretation of the work of Thomas Aquinas that urged theologians to develop an ontology of love. If love is to be considered as the ultimate meaning of the world, then the explanation of the mystery of "why something, rather than nothing" cannot be found in the concepts of substance but neither can it be found in the subject (as is the case in modern Western culture). Rather, it is to be found in relational understanding of reality. See B, 96.

²⁵¹ GJ, 260; 425.

²⁵² KK, 122.

²⁵³ GVF, 515: "Versteht man Gottes Freiheit in sich selbstmitteilender Liebe als umfassenden Deutungshorizont, dann ergibt sich daraus, dass [...] die Relation die grundlegende Wirklichkeit ist. Es ergibt also ein relationales Wirklichkeitverständnis. Das zeigt sich vollends, wenn man [...] die Wirklichkeit im Licht der Trinitätslehre deutet und sie zum Paradigma einer christlichen Weltauslegung macht und zeigt, dass Liebe der Sinn von Sein ist." See also B, 82–87.

²⁵⁴ GJ, 259.

²⁵⁵ GJ, 259–261.

give the category of person a definition that would safeguard the sovereignty of God. He wants to combine both the biblical and metaphysical understanding of God. The category of person implies that God as person is available to another person, to the human being. The nature of this encounter is love. To embrace the revelation of God means to embrace the omnipotence of love and the hope that it gives for the eschatological triumph of love over hatred.²⁵⁶ The God understood as Father thus gives the basis for understanding God from a Christological point of view. Love as the nature of God's being provides the motivation for salvation history: if God is perfect freedom in love, his love cannot be a forced kind of love. It is love by the very nature of his being. First and foremost it is love for his eternal, consubstantial Son.

Kasper wants to be faithful to the biblical notion of God when describing God as personal God. He examines the essence of the Trinity with the methodological help of the concept of Father. Therefore, his starting point for analysing the essence of Trinity is the essence of the Father. Kasper argues that the concept "Abba", however, is almost overused in Western contexts: it has become a cliché. The use of word "Abba" is, according to Kasper, in traditional theology often accompanied with the Greek philosophical view of God as ground of everything, the metaphysical God of the philosophers. The Greek philosophy began a deductive process in which the "Godhead" was deduced as the ultimate source of reality. Kasper claims – in accordance with late philosophy of Schelling – that this kind of view actually reduces God only to an "end". If God, however, is only an end, he is also an end in the sense of immutability – he cannot move, he does nothing, he is not active. He is, as Nietzsche put it, dead. Although Nietzsche's famous citation "God is dead" has also been interpreted as the death of the God of metaphysics, not as the death of the Christian God *per se*, Kasper declines this kind of interpretation. Kasper argues that Nietzsche actually found in the God of Christianity "one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth"²⁵⁷. However, one easily focuses here on the word "conception" – which underlines the critique of metaphysics and its implications to theology more than the question of the actual being or non-being of God. "God is dead"²⁵⁸ is, therefore, only the final logical implication of this kind of Western metaphysics, an implication which rips life from God.²⁵⁹

In his analysis of the person of the Father Kasper moves, therefore, from the biblical problematics of the definition of God as the almighty Father to the onto-theological definition of God, and finally to the definition of God's essence in the light of a modern philosophy of freedom. Kasper's emphasis lies on the assumption that all metaphysical definitions of God strip him of all divinity. Even though Kasper criticises the concept of "Abba", he still begins his own interpretation of the Trinity from the concept of the Father. This shows that he acknowledges a fundamental error in the interpretation of the concept of Father. If "Abba" or "Father" as the source of all reality is understood as a static end, an

²⁵⁶ On the necessity of hope and meaning, see B, 13.

²⁵⁷ GJ, 99: "einer der korruptesten Gottesbegriffe die auf Erden erreicht worden sind."

²⁵⁸ Nietzsche's slogan has been used as a diagnosis of modern culture. GJ, 51; see also *Welte* 1985, 37–43; *DeLubac* 1995, 42–58.

²⁵⁹ JC, 132.

immutable ground, he is not the God of the Bible, the Father that Kasper calls the Father-God of Christianity. In his relations of Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit God is not a static Godhead, but instead a living, relational God. This God-in-relations defies the static, immutable picture of God as “the end” as described above.

The Person of the Father is a basis for the Trinity, the Father of all reality (*Vater aller Wirklichkeit*).²⁶⁰ From the Bible Kasper finds arguments that Father is the “determinative word” (*das Grundwort*) of biblical revelation. According to Kasper, the interpretation of the “fatherhood” of God exceeds all our linguistic connotations around the word “father” and our human interpretations of fatherhood, not to mention the question of equality. Father, for Kasper, is clearly a title which refers to the Lord and foundation of all reality. This does not mean that the Father is a static entity as in Greek metaphysics, nor a vengeful punitive God of “pure justice”, but instead that he is the living ground of all being, a living ground who is loving, liberating and justifying.²⁶¹ But if he is not an avenging, frightening judge, neither is he the teddybear-like “daddy” –figure of fairy tales (despite of the origin of the word “abba” as infantile speech, a hypocorism). According to Kasper, overly-familiar “dear God” language turns God into a mere buddy and strips him of his divinity.²⁶² The word “Father” exceeds the limitations of our human reality and refers to the divine reality that the Bible describes.²⁶³ Therefore, one cannot use a straightforward analogy to human fathers, “daddies”, when speaking God who is Father. The critique of this kind of language about God is similar to Kasper’s critique of the anthropomorphic concept of person in God-talk. “Person” and “Father” are God-related concepts in a higher sense than in a pure anthropomorphic analogy.

“Father” can be understood as an eschatological sign. In the New Testament it is not only used in the sense of being created as God’s children but also in the sense of us being the children of God in the sense of the eschatological gift of salvation.²⁶⁴ It is notable that this also implies the idea of the “something new” in Kasper’s thought: as Father, God begins a new reign, a new Kingdom in love, for his creation.²⁶⁵ It could be argued that by concentrating on the concept of Father Kasper wants to safeguard the traditional speech of God as Father on the one hand and on the other hand ensure that the concept of Father is not used in too anthropomorphic way. But the concept of Father implies also a third point: as Father, God is someone who creates, who is a God-head, a Father to all creation. The God of Christianity is a God who has the power to bring forth something new. The Kingdom of God is the apex of this new, it is the upcoming perfection of

²⁶⁰ GJ, 251.

²⁶¹ See *Wildman* 2006, 612–613. Wesley J. Wildman defines a typical Ground-of-being theology as a theology that denies “that ultimate reality is a determinate entity, and they deny that the universe is ontologically self-explanatory.” This description of Ground-of-being theology sheds light on the differentiation that Kasper draws between the ideas of God as “ground of all reality” and God as “Father of the whole reality” – instead of being a static, immutable mover or end of all things, God is a personal, relational, loving God, a Father of all the creation. See also GJ, 370.

²⁶² GJ, 241; B, 22; 59.

²⁶³ GJ, 236–237; See also *McMichael* 1999, 78–80.

²⁶⁴ JC, 129–130.

²⁶⁵ JC, 130–131.

everything that God is preparing for his creation.²⁶⁶ It is the fulfilment of anticipation, the fulfilment of the *Vorgriff*.

The belief that the world is a creation means that an adequate source of its existence and nature does not lie within itself. It means that the world is nothing in itself but depends totally on God, that it owes its being completely and utterly to God's generous love. In other words, love is not only the ultimate meaning, but also the origin of all reality. But that source is not just there. Love does not exist. It is constantly appearing in new forms, constantly arriving. [...] Jesus' message of the coming of God's Kingdom in love means that the ultimate source and meaning of all reality is now becoming reality in a new and final form. [...] With the entry of the Kingdom of God the world enters into salvation.²⁶⁷

Further, Kasper notes: "Love is the final meaning of being."²⁶⁸ In Kasper's understanding, "a perfect freedom in love" is the core of the essence of the Trinity.²⁶⁹ The concept of love here receives a flexible interpretation as does the concept of freedom elsewhere in Kasper's thought. Love "is" not, it does not "exist" as something nor is it "located" somewhere, but rather it is God's attribute that renews itself in itself and appears at a certain time and moment in always new ways.

Being itself is personal. The ground of being is not only a substance but the ground of being is "located" in the personal relationship of the Trinitarian God to the world.²⁷⁰ It is notable that Kasper seeks to use a "Trinitarian grammar" that is not chained to metaphysics. He uses analogy instead of metaphysical formulations. For Kasper, the word "Father" functions as a reference, a call-word. We human beings are his children, and as human beings we are capable of grasping the concept of Father through analogy. This does not mean that analogy defines the fatherhood of the Father. Since God is above all definitions, we can try to explain him only through by what we really know about his actions. Therefore, everything comes back to the revelation of God in history. For Kasper, "revelation is thus the determination of the indeterminately open mystery of humanity, its world and history."²⁷¹

Kasper is opposed to an "omnipotent" theology, which aims to define everything to point of exhaustion. There will always remain something hidden in God; man has no means for understanding God's being unless God himself is willing to reveal something. Every attempt to define God remains useless: he will always be untouchable and different than any attribute attached to him. This notion shows a sort of tension in

²⁶⁶ JC, 130.

²⁶⁷ JC, 133–134: "Der Glaube, dass die Welt Schöpfung ist, besagt ja, dass sie den zureichenden Grund ihres Daseins und Soseins nicht in sich selber hat, dass sie aus sich nichts, aber alles aus Gott ist, dass sie sich also ganz und gar der schenkenden Liebe Gottes verdankt. Die Liebe ist also nicht nur Sinnziel, sondern auch Grund aller Wirklichkeit. Doch dieser Grund ist nicht einfach vorhanden; Liebe gibt es nicht; sie erweist sich vielmehr immer wieder neu; sie ist immer wieder im Kommen; [...] Jesu Botschaft von der kommenden Gottesherrschaft in der Liebe bedeutet, dass der tiefste Grund und Sinn aller Wirklichkeit jetzt in neuer und endgültiger Weise Wirklichkeit wird. [...] Mit dem Kommen der Herrschaft Gottes kommt die Welt im Heil." English translation has been modified.

²⁶⁸ NGK, 95: "Liebe ist der letzte Sinn des Seins."

²⁶⁹ JC, 133; GJ, 261; 457.

²⁷⁰ GJ, 477–479; *McMichael* 1999, 121.

²⁷¹ GJ, 210: "Die Offenbarung ist also die Bestimmung des unbestimmt-offenen Geheimnisses des Menschen, seiner Welt und Geschichte."

Kasper's own theology (albeit one could ascribe this problem to theology in general): on the one hand he states that God escapes all definitions and on the other hand he tries to find proper terms and attributes to attach to God.

The traditional Catholic world view sees reason as a necessary element for a human person to be able to be in a personal relationship with God, who is the ground of all being. Kasper thinks that the Christian world view is fundamentally about being in relation and being personal. The Trinitarian God is three Persons in one: so to speak, the ultimate personal being-in-relation. The human person is able to grasp something of God's reality *because* God is personal and because the being of God is about being *in* personal relations. Already in the Old Testament we get a glimpse of God who, as opposed to modern conceptions of *this* immanent reality and *that* transcendent reality presents Himself clearly in both: the vertical dimension is open to a transcendent reality and refers to meanings beyond this reality and this time and space. For example, in the Sacrifice of Abraham the horizontal event has a vertical meaning; similarly, in the Cross of Jesus a vertical, a transcendental meaning manifests itself in our horizontal reality. Kasper states:

The unity of the man Jesus with the Logos is expressed in the New Testament only indirectly as the inner ground of the unity between the Father and Jesus. We shall, therefore, have to understand the personal communion between Jesus and the Father as a communion in essence, but the community of essence as personal activity. It is the peculiarity of this community of essence that it is personal and relational.²⁷²

The Christian God is a God who does not merely nobly condescend himself towards human beings; he actually becomes one in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the miracle of the Incarnation. God not only becomes more empathetic to the sufferings and joys of being a human. Instead he becomes the one who empathises with *and* suffers as one of us and for us: this is *personal* in the word's deepest sense. It does not explain away the suffering, it does not justify, much less glorify it – but it shows that God is willing to be with us, freely, only out of his loving and merciful being.²⁷³

In *KK* Kasper directly links the idea of God who communicates himself with the idea of the *communio* of believers. Kasper follows modern dialogical philosophy and states that man is in his origin a dialogical creature, not only in a verbal but also in entirely human, global sense, in his relation to both matter and spirit. In Kasper's thinking a human being is thoroughly in dialogue with himself, the world, and other human beings.²⁷⁴ From this philosophical foundation Kasper proceeds on to an ecclesiological theology of *communio*.²⁷⁵ The perfect *communio* can never occur through human endeavour but only

²⁷² JC, 342: "Die Einheit des Menschen Jesus mit dem Logos kommt im Neuen Testament nur indirekt als innerer Grund der Einheit zwischen dem Vater und Jesus zur Sprache. Wir werden also die Personengemeinschaft zwischen Jesus und dem Vater als Wesensgemeinschaft, die Wesensgemeinschaft aber als personalen Vollzug zu verstehen haben. Es ist die Eigentümlichkeit dieser Wesensgemeinschaft, dass sie personal und relational ist."

²⁷³ The interpretation of mercy as the meaning of the Easter mystery is an emphasis especially endorsed by John Paul II. Benedict XVI also took this approach as his own guideline. B, 17–18; see also *Hilkert* 2014, 74–75.

²⁷⁴ *KK*, 94–98.

²⁷⁵ *KK*, 102–111.

through God's salvific plan. Therefore, the biblical concept of perfect *communio*, a *communio* of freedom and peace, must be further examined. Kasper combines both the aspect of hope in anticipation of the perfect Kingdom of God and nature of the revelation of God as mystery. In the Church, its anticipatory nature and the hope for the coming Kingdom is seen, albeit still in an incomplete way. This has a dual meaning: Jesus' power proclaims the final events and the coming of the Kingdom of God, as well as the meaning of Jesus' own person:

Jesus' message about the coming Kingdom of God contains an excess of promise; it creates a hope which is still unfulfilled after the message has been proclaimed. The hope will not be fulfilled until God is finally 'all in all' (cf. 1 Cor 15,28). This eschatological tension must leave its mark on every Christology. Its implications must be worked out in terms of human hope.²⁷⁶

In *KK* Kasper describes the Church in the words of the Song of Solomon: "dark yet beautiful" (*Schwarz aber schön*).²⁷⁷ Kasper takes this to mean that the dialectical tension of "already there" and "still on the way" are simultaneously present in the reality of the Church. In many regards it is still dark: incomplete, imperfect and flawed. However, it still is the *communio* of Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit – it is a *communio* waiting for the fulfilment of God's history with us, the coming Kingdom of God.²⁷⁸ As Christ's Church it is always beautiful but it still appears in a very incomplete way in our reality. In our reality, the Church's mission is to be the light for the people (*lumen gentium*), to show them the way, make the anticipation of and hope for the coming Kingdom stronger.²⁷⁹ Kasper argues that instead of being only an institution, a gathering place for believers, the Church actually reflects the inner nature of the being of man:

The Church thus belongs within the comprehensive context of the existential fundamental question of humanity, the question about God, about the origin and goal of history, and about the salvation of humanity.²⁸⁰

Kasper argues, therefore, that Christian faith is not only one possible answer or religious exercise among others but the one, definitive truth that holistically explains the entirety of the existence and the question of the being of man.²⁸¹ The understanding of the church as institution has evolved in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council.

²⁷⁶ JC, 126: "Es gibt in der Botschaft Jesu von der kommenden Herrschaft Gottes einen Verheißungsüberschuss; sie eröffnet eine Hoffnung, die nach wie vor unerfüllt ist. Sie wird erst erfüllt sein, wenn Gott einmal wirklich 'alles in allem' (1 Kor 15,28) sein wird. Diese eschatologische Spannung muss jede Christologie prägen. Sie muss entfaltet werden in Entsprechung zur Hoffnung des Menschen."

Similarly in: OG, 74.

²⁷⁷ KK, 19–22.

²⁷⁸ See also DV, 8: "For as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her."

²⁷⁹ KK, 109–111.

²⁸⁰ KK, 110: "So gehört die Kirche in den umfassenden Zusammenhang der existentiellen Grundfragen des Menschen und der Menschheit, der Frage nach Gott, der Frage nach Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte und der Frage nach dem Heil des Menschen."

²⁸¹ OG, 53; see also B, 28.

In describing the people of God as the light of the nations, the Council emphasises that the Church exists because God wills it to exist: it exists for the salvation of people.²⁸²

Again, in line with the documents of Vatican II, Kasper argues that intra-Trinitarian relations are reflected in the reality of the church.²⁸³ Therefore, the *communio* of believers, that is the Church, does not exist of its own power but because it is the reflection of the paradigm of the Trinity itself.²⁸⁴ This interpretation shows that relationality is not to be understood only as a sociological interpretation of the being of man, but rather that the Trinitarian perspective has consequences for the entire interpretation of reality:

If God is thus love and *communio*, then love and *communio* are the essence of all reality. If carried through to the end, the theological understanding of the Trinitarian persons as subsisting in relations has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of reality as the whole. In that case, neither the passive substance of ancient philosophy nor modern subjectivity are any longer the point of departure or of reference of thinking. Relation, rather, becomes the all-determining ultimate reality (*Letztwirklichkeit*).²⁸⁵

The fundamental being of the Triune God as relationality is, therefore, also the basic content of revelation:

All of revelation is thus concerned with the revelation of the single mystery of God the Father's love that communicates itself through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.²⁸⁶

In *B* Kasper deepens his understanding of the Trinitarian God as being-in-relation. The argument of God's being in relation also rejects the Hegelian concept of an Absolute that is becoming (*werden*) in history:

Were God not intrinsically self-communication, then his external self-communication would constitute his self-becoming and his self-development. In this case God would first become who he is through his self-revelation. [...] Were that so, then the revelation of his mercy would no longer be a free and gracious event, but rather the necessary process of God's self-becoming.²⁸⁷

Kasper defines love as the essence of God (*immanent Trinity*) and mercy as the expression of this essence (*economic Trinity*). God is in eternity simultaneously both loving and beloved: his being as love manifests itself in our reality as his love and mercy. This interpretation deepens Kasper's understanding of the concept of love and its

²⁸² KK, 110–111; see also DV, 19; LG, 41.

²⁸³ KK, 122–125.

²⁸⁴ KK, 124.

²⁸⁵ KK, 47: "Wenn Gott so Liebe und *communio* ist, dann sind Liebe und *communio* der Sinn aller Wirklichkeit. Dann hat das theologische Verständnis der trinitarischen Personen als subsistente Relationen, wenn man zu Ende denkt, weitreichende Konsequenzen für das Wirklichkeitsverständnis allgemein. Denn dann ist nicht mehr die in sich stehende Substanz der antiken Philosophie oder die neuzeitliche Subjektivität Ausgangspunkt und Bezugspunkt des Denkens; vielmehr ist dann die Relation die alles bestimmende Letztwirklichkeit." See also OG, 68; KÄ, 386.

²⁸⁶ GJ, 222: "So geht es in der gesamten Offenbarung um die Offenbarung des einen Geheimnisses der sich durch Jesus Christus im Heiligen Geist selbst mitteilenden Liebe Gottes des Vaters.

²⁸⁷ B, 98: "Wäre Gott nicht Selbstmitteilung in sich selbst, dann wäre seine Selbstmitteilung nach außen sein Selbstwerden und seine Selbstentwicklung: Gott würde dann durch seine Selbstoffenbarung erst zu dem werden, der er ist. [...] Wäre es so, dann wäre die Offenbarung seiner Barmherzigkeit nicht mehr freies gnädiges Geschehen, sondern der notwendige Prozess des Selbstwerdens Gottes." See also OG, 68.

expression in our world. It seems that love is a synonym for mercy; Kasper “explains the inexplicable” with this one defining attribute. Because we can never fully comprehend the immanent being of God, we can understand something of him through this quality that we can detect from his actions. But in Kasper’s understanding love is more than simply an attribute of God. Rather, it is the central and essential attribute around which all other attributes revolve. It is more than just an attribute, it is the defining reality, an incomprehensible reality, a paradox that is a unity embracing otherness and difference.²⁸⁸ Kasper is careful not to claim that mercy is something that inevitably flows from God. When we experience mercy, we do not “capture” the essence of God through it, but rather it is a mirror reflecting the Trinitarian essence of God as love. In Kasper’s thought, the process of God’s self-communication begins with kenosis: the infinite God makes room for creation by withdrawing into his own infinity.²⁸⁹ He makes the creation possible in this self-emptying. In the act of creation he becomes available to his creatures precisely because of this self-withdrawal.

Trinitarian doctrine implies that reality is profoundly personal and interpersonal in its structure.²⁹⁰ If God is to be understood as being-in-relations and the Church is the *communio* that reflects this being in our reality, then the ontological explanation of the essence of all reality is being-in-relation. As the constitutive structure of reality, relationality presupposes interpersonal interpretation: we are first and foremost in relation to each other, not the other way around (i.e. first as persons and only then subsequently in relations).²⁹¹ Taking the relationality of the Trinitarian God seriously requires a relational understanding of all reality. For Kasper, the self-revealing God in relation is central. He grounds this view in the testimony of the Bible. Therefore, discussion of an example of his interpretation of Exodus 3,14, a central biblical passage for Kasper, in the next chapter is in order.

3.5. The Revelation of God’s Name

Kasper’s conviction is that revelation in the Bible is a prophetic interpretation of reality given in the salvation history. The Bible itself does not contain an explicit understanding of natural theology; that is, the Bible does not provide explicit presuppositions for the understanding of faith. However, Kasper remarks that the Bible inherently assumes a world that is religious to the core: the religious orientation of a person is a given fact in the Bible. This is especially seen in the course of salvation history: “the conviction that the order of creation and order of salvation are bound together”²⁹². An example of Kasper’s translation

²⁸⁸ B, 97–99; NGK, 93.

²⁸⁹ B, 99. Cf. *Schelling* 2006 [1809], 12: “if God were to withhold his omnipotence for a moment, man would cease to be. Is there any other way out of this argument than to save personal freedom within the divine being itself, since it is unthinkable in opposition to omnipotence; to say that man is not outside of, but rather in, God and that his activity itself belongs to the life of God? It is exactly from this standpoint that the mystics and religious natures of all times have attained to the belief in the unity of man with God [...]”

²⁹⁰ JC, 278; GJ, 38.

²⁹¹ *O’Collins* 2014, 177.

²⁹² GJ, 140: “Überzeugung von der Zusammenhörigkeit von Schöpfungsordnung und Heilsordnung”.

of Exodus 3,14; the giving of God's name (in Hebrew: *'ehyê 'ăšer 'ehyê*, in Greek: *egō eimi ho ōn*) or the burning bush²⁹³, also called "the revelation of revelations" (LaCocque)²⁹⁴, will further illustrate his understanding of the basic ontological structure of biblical revelation and the use of metaphysics in his functional interpretation of the Bible. The passage is a good example of the interpretation of revelation as well because it combines both of the fundamental dimensions of revelation: *theophany*, in which God appears and *divination*, where he makes his will known.²⁹⁵ Kasper argues that exactly this passage is the starting point of the doctrine of God and the biblical understanding of God's revelation.²⁹⁶

In contrast to the Septuagint translation and its metaphysical assumption of the passage as having to do with "the absolute being", "he who is",²⁹⁷ Kasper attempts to return to the original Hebrew meaning. According to Kasper this passage refers to absolute being, a being which means that "he (God) is with his people in an effective way".²⁹⁸ In Jer 7,23 this is formulated: "I will be your God, and you shall be my people" In *OG* Kasper characterises this passage as "the summary and entire content of revelation".²⁹⁹ In other words, God's being is effective being *in* and *within* history. In *JC* Kasper translates the passage simply "he who is" ("*der, der ist*"), emphasising that God's being is not revealed as a philosophical concept of being, but as an effective assurance of his promise of being with his people in history.³⁰⁰ The God of the Bible differs radically from the god of the philosophers because he has a name, he can be called for and spoken to.³⁰¹ In addition to Kasper's notion of the difference between the god of the philosophers and God of the Bible it could be added that the personal interpretation of God's name as giving of himself is a

²⁹³ GJ, 10, 217.

²⁹⁴ *LaCocque* 1998, 308.

²⁹⁵ GJ, 207; *Ricoeur* 1998, 335–336.

²⁹⁶ *OG*, 62; B, 90.

²⁹⁷ *Gericke* 2012, 127. Moreover, if the passage's Greek translation is understood in the light of the philosophy of Plato (who influenced the Greek translators), the translation would give an interpretation of a transcendent, highest being, the most perfect being.

²⁹⁸ GJ, 249: "[...] er in wirksamer Weise mit seinem Volk ist."; similarly in *GPV*, 155; see also *McMichael* 1999, 71; *Soskice* 2002, 70. This interpretation is also given by Georg Fohrer: according to him, the Hebrew *hāyā* means "dynamic and effectual presence". See *Gericke* 2012, 133.

²⁹⁹ *OG*, 70: "[Ich euer Gott – ihr mein Volk' (Jer 7,23) ist im Grunde eine prägnante] Zusammenfassung des ganzen Inhalts der Offenbarung." See also *JC*, 84.

³⁰⁰ *JC*, 264.

³⁰¹ GJ, 18; B, 54; see also *LaCocque* 1998, 311–312. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, who combines both the accompanying and hiding implication of the giving of the Name in his interpretation of Ex 3,14. According to him, the passage "'ehyeh' 'ăšer 'ehyeh" has doubly-enigmatic resonance. On the one hand, it is a positive revelation, "I am with you", on the other hand, it prevents the possibility of a magical and utilitarian usage of the Name, as was ordinarily associated with the using of a name in Jewish tradition. See *Ricoeur* 1998, 340–341. God does not reveal his whole name, it remains unutterable. In rabbinic tradition the using of names was understood in a complex way: giving a name to something gave the one who said it aloud a power over the thing said. See also *van Bekkum* 2006, 4: "Creation and name (either by the power of the name of God or by combining letters to names) were considered as parts of a formative processes by which God succeeded to bring the world and its creatures into being." The power of the Name belongs, therefore, to God and only to God in two senses: he is the creator of all that is, and the power of his own name cannot be given to anyone else. The Name of God itself was held to be unpronounceable, too holy to utter. His being as holy and incomprehensible was attached to his name – it could not be said out loud.

strictly Christian interpretation, because, for example, in Jewish tradition the revelation was not considered “giving himself” but rather “giving out text”. The same applies to Islam as well.³⁰²

Kasper takes Thomas Aquinas’ interpretation of the passage as an example of how interpretation has affected both the biblical and philosophical understanding of the being of God. For Thomas, being was applicable to the name of God because being was considered as the most universal of all concepts. The more comprehensive the concept was, the better it would be applicable to God. Kasper notes that in his thinking Thomas indirectly borrows from Gregory of Nazianzus as well as John of Damascus and Neoplatonic tradition. In line with Neoplatonic thought, Thomas adopts the idea of Being (*ipsum esse*) but interprets it differently from the Neoplatonic idea: all other beings take part in the being of God but God himself does not “have” being, but instead he “is” being.³⁰³

In the article *Name und Wesen Gottes (NG)*³⁰⁴ Kasper translates the passage from Exodus (Ex 3,14), the giving of God’s name: “I am Being(-there)” (“*Ich bin der Da-Seiende*”)³⁰⁵, meaning: “I am the one who is with you on your path”³⁰⁶. For Kasper this means that God is present in history as “him” and “you”, not “it”. Throughout his whole history with humankind he is not available in his revelation at all times, but only when and where he wishes to be.³⁰⁷ God’s Name simultaneously expresses his immanence and his transcendence.³⁰⁸ In *GJ* Kasper translates the same passage somewhat curiously: “I am there who am there” (“*Ich bin da, der ich da bin*”)³⁰⁹ In this translation Kasper uses the Hebrew verb *hāyâ* in a way which expresses the meaning in this verb of “effective, creative being”.³¹⁰

At the same time, however, Kasper emphasises that this being (of God) is not some kind of countable or static being, but God’s being is at the same time revealed and

³⁰² Charry 2011, 568.

³⁰³ GJ, 250–251; B, 91. See also Kerr 2002, 73–74.

³⁰⁴ 1975. *Name und Wesen Gottes. Problem und Möglichkeit des theologischen Sprechens von Gott. – Der Name Gottes*. Hrsg. Von Stietenron, Heinrich. 176–190.

³⁰⁵ Ex 3,14 has attracted a myriad of philosophical interpretations. Each translation brings forth a new philosophical explanation, and none of the metaphysical assumptions associated with the passage have yet been able to provide a widely accepted consensus to the interpretation of this passage. E.g. Gericke 2012, 125.

³⁰⁶ NG, 178: “[Ich bin] derjenige, der mit euch und für euch ist auf eurem Weg.“

³⁰⁷ NG, 178; JC, 264.

³⁰⁸ B, 91.

³⁰⁹ LaCocque 1998, 312. Hartmut Gese translates the passage even more straightforwardly: “Ich erweise mich, als der ich mich erweisen werde” “Ich bin, als der ich erweisen werde” (I show myself as the one who I shall show myself, I am as I shall show myself) insisting on future dimension of this revelation of the Name.

³¹⁰ Veijola 1990, 98–102; LaCocque 1998, 313–314. G.S. Ogden distinguishes three different kinds of use of the verb root *hyh*: 1. as copula, 2. as indicating existence and 3. as indicating transition from one sphere of existence to another. In the (indicative) imperfect form he distinguishes again three translations: 1. As copulative, 2. as existential, 3. transitional. The point of these discussions is to show that a temporal element is central to the verb *hyh*. LaCocque also emphasises that the tetragrammaton YHWH cannot be reduced to a dogmatic philosophical formula. Kasper’s interpretation is not unique among scholars; in fact, his interpretation is considered as one of the most popular ones. Gericke 2012, 125; 133.

still hidden. He reveals himself in history in a mysterious way, as he has promised to reveal himself. In his promise he is faithful, but always new; in other words, revelation does not and cannot ever exhaustively explain the being of God.³¹¹ Another central theme in the giving of God's name is, therefore, the safeguarding of God's mystery. Moses is told that "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." (Ex 33,20).³¹² The content of the revelation is, therefore, rather a declaration of God's mystery than information about his essence³¹³:

His Being-there is absolutely certain, yet it is not at our disposal; God is always unconditionally true to his promise, yet always new in the way he carries it out.³¹⁴

It is something *that is* certain, but that cannot be further explained or captured. Kasper emphasises that God's being is made manifest to human beings only in the eschatological events of the end of time:

In the Scripture, 'mystery' means, not primarily a conceptual mystery, but – corresponding to apocalyptic linguistic usage – God's eternal decree of salvation, unfathomable for man, which will be made manifest at the end of the world.³¹⁵

Even when God reveals himself, he reveals his hiddenness, his mystery, not the final truth about his being.³¹⁶ The structure of the revelation of God's Name is in the form of *idem per idem*, which is used in Hebrew to hide the explicit meaning. The passage is meant to hide more than it reveals. The Greek translation *egō eimi ho ōn* (*I am the one that/who is*) has provoked philosophical discussions about how the meaning of God's Name, *YHWH*, means that he is the ground of all being. The interpretation of the LXX translation is, however, affected by Western speculative philosophical thought and though it comes close to the original Hebrew intention it is not quite the same.³¹⁷ The biggest difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts is in their understanding of *being*. According to Greek philosophy and metaphysics, *being* is the highest that can be thought of and therefore, God of faith corresponds to this "highest possible being". In contrast, the Hebrew verb "to be" means more efficacious being, not being as a static, albeit great "highest being" but rather being as creative, life-supporting, active, present being.³¹⁸ Martin Buber adds the idea of action

³¹¹ GJ, 249; ZZD, 258. See also *McMichael* 1999, 71; 73; *LaCocque* 1998, 315; 324.

³¹² GJ, 217.

³¹³ In this sense Kasper's interpretation comes close to that of Meister Eckhart, who claimed that existence does not "belong" to God because God transcends being. Jaco Gericke argues that it was precisely Meister Eckhart who first attempted to read Exodus 3:14 without the assumptions of onto-theology. That is, if we say that God exists, it means that God contains pure existence. In Meister Eckhart's interpretation, Ex 3,14 is the revelation of pure existence. Later on, this approach became widespread in Christian mystical theology. See *Gericke* 2012, 131–132.

³¹⁴ GJ, 249: "Sein Da-sein ist absolut gewiss unbleibt doch unverfügbar; Gott ist in seiner Verheißung unbedingte treu und doch je neu." See also GZ, 24; GPV, 145; ZZD, 258: "Gott aber ist Immer-Neue und der Zu-künftige."

³¹⁵ JC, 283: *Mysterium meint in der Schrift nicht primär ein Denkgeheimnis, sondern entsprechend dem apokalyptischen Sprachgebrauch den für Menschen unerforschlichen ewigen Heilratschluss Gottes, der am Ende der Zeit offenbar wird.*

³¹⁶ JC, 213–214; HT, 254.

³¹⁷ B, 55; 90–91; *LaCocque* 1998, 312–314; 321; *Veijola* 1990, 99; *Gericke* 2012, 127–128.

³¹⁸ B, 55–56; 90–91. See also *Kerr* 2002, 80–84.

to being: I am and remain present (*Ich bin und bleibe gegenwärtig*). In their translation of the Pentateuch Buber and Franz Rosenzweig translate Ex 3,14 as: “I will be present as the one who will be there” (“Ich werde da sein, als der ich da sein werde”).³¹⁹ Both these translations also illuminate the intention behind Kasper’s interpretation of this passage. Kasper combines both the implication of God as the ground of all being and the idea of God within history in his interpretation of Ex 3,14. The fact that God, who is mystery, wants to reveal himself to us shows us that he does not want to be beyond reach but rather that he makes himself available (albeit in somewhat mysterious way) in our reality.

According to Kasper, this passage refers to an absolute being, a being which means that “he (God) is with his people in an effective way”. In other words, God’s being is an effective being *in* and *within* history. His true being remains a mystery. It is essential to understand the *effectiveness* and *actuality* of his being: God is in history and he affects history, he is with us (*mit uns*).³²⁰

The scriptural eschatological-historical understanding of reality does not involve any supra-historical concept of essence; being is here understood, not as an essence, but as actuality, that is, as being active.³²¹

However, Kasper wants to avoid the Hegelian concept of an Absolute that is becoming (*werden*) in the course of history. He emphasises that

The statement “being is coming to be”, is of course not the same as asserting that being consists in becoming.³²²

Because the God-question is definitive for Kasper, his interpretation of the Bible can also be understood through the God-question. Kasper claims that the philosophical quest for the ground of everything and the biblical concept of God that is the source and origin of all creation and the salvation actually come close to each other in the synthesis of faith and reason.

He turns to humans, speaks to them, promises himself to them. God does not only communicate something; he communicates himself to us and is thus, through his word, present in the midst of his people (Ex 3,14). Hence, the Word of God is not only information but, above all, personal communication in which God addresses us in overflowing love as friends.³²³

In the third chapter of Exodus the main point, according to Kasper, is that God promises to be with man in the course of history, always. The giving of his Name is,

³¹⁹ Veijola 1990, 99; JC, 66; B, 54–55. Martin Buber argues that history does not simply follow a plan but is rather a stage for a dialogue between God and man. See *Gericke* 2012, 132–133.

³²⁰ GIG, 139–140; NG, 178; B, 90–91.

³²¹ JC, 248: “Das eschatologisch-geschichtlichen Wesensbegriff; es versteht Sein nicht als Wesen, sondern als Wirklichkeit, d.i. als Wirkendsein.”

³²² JC, 248: “Freilich ist die Aussage ‘Sein ist im werden’ etwas anderes als die Behauptung eines werdenden Seins.”

³²³ KK, 166: “Er wendet sich den Menschen zu, spricht zu ihnen, spricht sich ihnen zu, teilt ihnen nicht nur etwas mit, sondern teilt sich ihnen selbst mit und ist so durch sein Wort mitten im Leben seines Volkes gegenwärtig (*Ex 3, 14*). Das Wort Gottes ist daher nicht nur Information, sondern vor allem personale Kommunikation, in der uns Gott aus überströmender Liebe wie Freunde anredet.” See also OG, 67–68; D, 59; CCC, 109.

therefore, at the same time a promise and a commitment.³²⁴ The culmination of God's presence in history is the Incarnation. This continuous being within his people can, therefore, be interpreted in the light of the New Testament as the fulfilment of promises in Jesus Christ. This kind of interpretation is theology in the sense of *genetivus objectivus*, that is, an interpretation of the Old Testament as an object instead of *genetivus subjectivus*, interpretation of the Old Testament's theology as it stands.³²⁵

In *KK* this interpretation is even more explicit. Kasper translates the passage of Ex 3:14 distinctively: "I am the God who is and who is with you on your path." ("Ich bin der Gott, der da ist und der mit euch ist auf euren Wegen."). The more cautious translation of *being-there* has evolved in this recent book of Kasper's into an even more emphatic *being-there-for-us*.³²⁶ Janet Soskice analyses both Kasper's and Brevard Child's reading and based on their views summarises God's own announcement of his own being as follows: "I am there wherever it may be, I am really there." Similarly to Kasper, Childs also emphasises that the announcing of God's name means before all the actuality of God.³²⁷ In the "you" God, therefore, gives us something utterly exceptional among the revelations of any gods in any religions: he gives himself to (be with) us. Something of the divine mystery is given to us. In Kasper's interpretation the "you" of God is given an eternal meaning as the "you" by the Trinitarian God himself. Because it is not possible that God necessarily needs a "you" from the creation for himself, the eternal you (*das ewige Du des Vaters*) is his own Son, Jesus Christ.³²⁸

The giving of God's Name is the most definitive moment of God's revelation. It is the culmination point, a summary of revelation inside God's revelation.

In the event of God's fundamental self-revelation to Moses at the burning bush, God refers to the promise made to the fathers Abraham, Isaac und Jacob (Ex 3,15). When Moses asks about his name, God answers 'I am he who is here' (Ex 3,14) – that means: I am the God who is here and who is with you in all of your ways. This name is a promise and a covenant: 'I shall take you as my people and I shall be your God' (Ex 6,7; cf. Lev 26,12; Jer 32,38; Ezek 11,20; Ps. 95,7). Corresponding to this covenant, Israel regards itself as

³²⁴ B, 90.

³²⁵ *Veijola* 1990, 93.

³²⁶ *KK*, 182; see also *OG*, 65. Also André LaCocque argues that the word *āšer* implicates "a you" in the divine being. LaCocque states that precisely this what/who of the divine being "constitutes the place of fall and rebound for divine 'being' / '(be)falling' / 'occurring'". The giving of God's Name maybe hides more than it actually reveals, but regardless, it gives us something to grasp onto: we are not just objects of God's revelation but we are included in the whole of salvation history with him. *LaCocque* 1998, 315–316. It is notable that in LaCocque's interpretation, a certain vulnerability is attributed to the divine revelation: God makes him available to man and, therefore, exposes himself to vulnerability, to the possible "it might all go wrong" through becoming available to a relationship. A relationship is, so to speak, a potential crack in the immutability and transcendence of an omnipotent God. Therefore, the me-you relationship is something that must define the whole essence of God's being. He would not give himself to another were there not a great divine motivation, a greater plan at stake. This interpretation also emphasises that the giving of God's Name is not a definition of God's essence but rather a *promise* of his being with us. Through the anticipatory nature of his being God does not only give himself in a relationship to man, he also opens himself (and man) to the possibility of change and surprise, a dialectics of love but also condemnation, victory but also loss. *LaCocque* 1998, 322–323.

³²⁷ *Soskice* 2002, 70.

³²⁸ *GJ*, 378.

God's people (*Laos tou Theou*), as God's own people chosen by God and set apart from all other nations (Ex 19,4–7; Deut 4,7.6–12; 32,8–15; Ps 135).³²⁹

Kasper states that God's message is a message of his continuing presence of which the ultimate manifestation is the person, life and death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.³³⁰ God's being is being in love and freedom and he has a will to share this love with his creatures. His self-manifestation in the person of Jesus Christ is the culminating point in the history of humankind. Therefore, although Kasper does not explicitly state this, the two culmination points: the revelation of God's Name and the person of Jesus Christ, actually represent the same content of divine revelation. A typological interpretation of Ex 3,14 from the point of view of the testimony of the New Testament would be, therefore, that Jesus Christ is actually present in the event of the burning bush. Nevertheless, although not directly making this assertion, Kasper does emphasise that in the person of Jesus Christ the fact that God *is* becomes a living reality inside human history as well: he exists and is present with us (mit-uns-Seiende) in history.³³¹ Jesus is the fulfilment of the promise given in Ex 3,14.

In *B*, the theme of being-there-for-us is even more emphasised:

God reveals himself as the God who guides and leads in a history that cannot be stipulated beforehand, a history in which he will always be present in a non-derivable, sovereign, and – yet again – unexpected way and who is again and again the ever-new future of his people. He is not a local god, but rather displays his power in every place his people encounter along their way.³³²

In addition, Kasper's translation has evolved into a straightforward: "I am the one who is there for you, the one (who is) with you and by your side" ("Ich bin, der für euch da ist, der mit euch und bei euch ist.")³³³ The theology-of-history approach is becoming more and more obvious in Kasper's interpretation. But it is not only history that is central: it is also the being-*with*-us, that is, God's relations towards us and to us. History and being-with correlate with each other: the "with" being both the people (with) God and history (with) God. The one does not exist without the other. History requires a relation and the relation requires a history. God is not an isolated, distant God, but the God of his people,

³²⁹ KK, 182: "Bei der grundlegenden Selbstoffenbarung vor Mose am brennenden Dornbusch nimmt Gott auf die Väterverheißung an Abraham, Isaak und Jakob Bezug. (*Ex 3, 15*). Als Mose ihn nach seinem Namen fragt, antwortet Gott mit 'Ich-bin-der-ich-bin-da' (*Ex 3, 14*), das heißt: Ich bin der Gott, der da ist und der mit euch ist auf euren Wegen. Dieser Name ist eine Verheißung und eine Zusage: 'Ihr sollt mein Volk sein und ich will euer Gott sein' (*Ex 6, 7*; vgl. *Lev 26, 12*; *Jer 32, 38*; *Ez 11, 20*; *Ps 95, 7*). Entsprechend dieser Zusage versteht Israel sich als Volk Gottes (*Laos tou Theou*), das heißt als das von Gott erwählte und von allen anderen Völkern ausgesonderte Eigentumsvolk Gottes (*Ex 19, 4–7*; *Dtn 4, 7, 6–12*; *32, 8–15*; *Ps 135*)." English translation has been modified. See also OG, 72.

³³⁰ KK, 473.

³³¹ OG, 53; JC, 264; GJ, 128; KK, 473; 478; B, 130; GPV, 143–144; KÄ, 386.

³³² B, 55: "Gott offenbart sich als Gott des Weges und der Führung in einer Geschichte, die zuvor nicht festlegbar ist, in der er unabweisbar, souverän und immer wieder unerwartet neu da sein wird und immer wieder neu die Zukunft seines Volkes ist. Er ist kein Ortsgott, sondern erweist seine Macht überall, wohin das Volk auf seinem Weg kommt." English translation has been modified. See also GPV, 143–144; PES, 520.

³³³ B, 90.

with his people. Notably, Kasper titles his chapter concerning this passage “*The Revelation of God’s Name as Revelation of Divine Mercy*” (“*Die Offenbarung des Namens Gottes als Offenbarung seiner Barmherzigkeit*”). God reveals himself in mercy in the course of history. Kasper analyses the concept of mercy as the attribute of God that human beings can relate to in the course of history. Mercy is at the same time a manifestation of both his justice and his grace. The Biblical God appears in history in a merciful, effective way.³³⁴ History is considered as the place for the fulfilment of God’s absolute freedom. Therefore, this means that he can appear in his self-revelation in every historical moment, he is not tied to a place or time. God’s mysteriousness also safeguards the element of surprise in his revelation – his actions cannot be controlled or predicted, he is a sovereign master of history, he is ever-new.³³⁵

The question of being is essentially bound up with Kasper’s understanding of reason, the possibilities of reason, and metaphysics. Kasper’s affection for the passage Ex 3,14 and its existential interpretation is understandable in the light of his fear of one-sided and rigid metaphysical formulations. The passage itself escapes all strict analyses and formulations. The living God cannot be reduced to stiff, complete formulations. Kasper’s interpretation of Ex 3,14 combines both the interpretation of *being within the history with us* as well as that of *God as the ground of being*. These effectively give Kasper’s metaphysics a more existential interpretation. He states:

The question now is how the question of God and the question of being are specifically related to each other; that is, whether we must ask the question of God within the horizon of the question of being, or the question of being within the horizon of the question of God.³³⁶

For Kasper, the question of being is a question of the relationship between reason and faith, theology and philosophy, natural and revealed theology. According to Kasper, the sensibleness and meaning of being can be found in love. The whole of reality is based on the being of the Triune God, whose effect on this reality can be seen as inner manifestation of his own Trinitarian relations. Love is the manifestation of both God’s inner relations as well as the relations of God *ad extra*.³³⁷ *Mit uns* is the modus of God’s being – his being is personal and effective.³³⁸ The culmination of this being is the Incarnation, in which God assumes our entire humanity and in Jesus Christ becomes a human being himself. With his interpretation of Ex 3,14 Kasper anchors the interpretation of God as love in the New Testament to the testimony of Old Testament.³³⁹ Kasper interprets it as a promise for the

³³⁴ Even more emphasised in: MM, 18: “Mercy is the name of our God.” See also OG, 71.

³³⁵ OG, 62.

³³⁶ GJ, 136: “Die Frage ist jetzt, wie sich Gottesfrage und Seinsfrage näherhin zueinander verhalten, ob wir die Gottesfrage im Horizont der Seinsfrage oder die Seinsfrage im Horizont der Gottesfrage zu verhandeln haben.”

³³⁷ GVF, 515.

³³⁸ GJ, 257–258. See also *Kerr* 2002, 83.

³³⁹ GJ, 258.

future³⁴⁰: the anticipation is present in the burning bush and it reaches its full meaning in the Incarnation which is the ultimate indication of the fact that the nature of God's being is love. Therefore, the full meaning of the revelation of God in the burning bush is only given in the eschatological events.³⁴¹ The passage must, therefore, be interpreted functionally rather than ontologically.

Kasper distinguishes three revelations of God's Name in the book of Exodus. First is Ex 3,14 analysed above, the second is Ex 33,19 and the last is Ex 34,6. Whereas Ex 3,14 hides more than it reveals, when read in the light of Ex 33,19 and Ex 34,6, it becomes the summary of God's self-definition. The central paradox in God's revelation is that he is at the same time fully available and yet hidden. Moses is told, "You cannot see my countenance for no one can see me and still live." (Ex 33,20). God's mysteriousness is attached to his word. The reverse is also true: his word is attached to his mysteriousness. However, Moses' reply reveals something very central in God's relationship to his people. Moses replies: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful (*rahūm*) and gracious (*ḥannūn*)". In Kasper's interpretation this passage is not only a revelation of God's freedom and sovereignty, it is also an expression of his fidelity.³⁴² Therefore, freedom, sovereignty, mercifulness and fidelity are the four attributes that book of Exodus gives to God. Kasper emphasises that although his true being remains hidden from us, the experience of God's being is not a speculative statement or a result of mystical experience. God can be experienced, through faith, in historical situations. Moses' answer reflects his experience of God's mercifulness and God's graciousness. It is a true and real experience in a true and real historical situation.

In and through history, God reveals his essence, which has been hidden from human beings. We can speak of it only by way of narrative, and not in a speculative way. In this sense, this formula is the summary of God's self-definition in the Old Testament.³⁴³

Kasper's interpretation follows the emphasis on the biblical narrative popular in postliberal theologies that accentuate the community of believers instead of the believing individual. God's revelation is not first and foremost information but rather an event.³⁴⁴ In Ex 3,14 God reveals the most central thing about his own being: he can be known from his actions throughout the course of history. His actions show his freedom, his love, mercy and his fidelity. Kasper's theology-of-history approach locates its argumentation right from the beginning of the act of creation. The centrality of history (and its logic according to the

³⁴⁰ Cf. Jean-Luc Marion interpreted the passage as manifestation of God's love (it does not matter that God gives his name to Moses but that he gives it). According to Marion, in this passage God "says absolutely nothing and absolutely everything". *Marion* 1991 [1946], 73–76; *Gericke* 2012, 133–134; *Godzieba* 1995, 8–11.

³⁴¹ André LaCocque gives the same interpretation in his article *The Revelation of Revelations: LaCocque* 1998, 329: "Consistent with its claim to point to the eschatological fulfilment of the old promise, the New Testament saw this knowledge of the Living God spread over the whole world with one coming of Christ."

³⁴² B, 56–57.

³⁴³ B, 57: "In der Geschichte offenbart Gott sein den Menschen verborgenes Wesen. Davon kann nicht spekulativ, sondern nur narrativ die Rede sein. In diesem Sinn ist diese Formel die zusammenfassende alttestamentliche Selbstdefinition Gottes."

³⁴⁴ OG, 62–63; KÄ, 388.

theology-of-history approach) is apparent from the first moment of creation: by creating time and space, God by his very own action affirms that he wants to be available in time and in space. Because he is at the same time above and outside of time and place himself, there remains a mysterious element in his self-revelation. Paradoxically, his nearness is not intimacy or proximity but neither is his transcendence an infinite distance. He is at the same time next to us, close to us (*der uns ganz Nahe*) but still hidden from us. He is the Wholly Other (*der ganz Andere*).³⁴⁵

Whereas the giving of God's Name reveals something of himself to us, it simultaneously reminds us that the world is not an extension of God. Being and faith remain different entities. The highest category of human thought (being) is not identical to the reality of faith. The complex philosophical history of interpreting Ex 3,14 has had far-reaching consequences for the entire interpretation of the doctrine of God. The main question was: is biblical understanding of God compatible with the philosophical understanding of being? Or more accurately: does the philosophical category of (highest) being precede the biblical understanding of God, and is the latter subordinate to it, or does the biblical understanding draw upon the philosophical understanding but then give it a more precise and careful interpretation rising from the biblical understanding of God itself?³⁴⁶ Kasper argues that in the Christian tradition the philosophical definition of "being itself" is not abandoned, but is given a theological, concrete meaning: God's being appears in history as love.³⁴⁷ God as love gives a new meaning for the entire future: his being means that he is ever open to the future. Every historical situation, even the worst, remains open in the hands of God who is love: he keeps the future ever new.³⁴⁸

To summarise, Kasper's interpretation of Ex 3,14 reveals his basic understanding of the reality of God in four attributes that are equivalents of those given to God in Ex 3,14:

1. God is free. He reveals himself where and to whom he wills.
2. God is love. The content of the revelation (in general, not only in Ex 3,14) is God's being in love. He wants to orientate his love in dialogue towards his creature, the human being.
3. God is merciful. His freedom and love appear in history as his grace and mercy and his compassion. He promises to be with his people at all times.
4. God is always new. His freedom, love and mercy are the attributes that instead of restricting his being, describe the complete sovereignty of his being. God's being is always open to the future, ever-new.

Although Kasper builds a convincing case on the basis of his own interpretation of Ex 3,14, the passage itself is ambiguous in a philosophical sense, and has

³⁴⁵ KK, 239; B, 59.

³⁴⁶ B, 92.

³⁴⁷ B, 93–94.

³⁴⁸ HT, 254.

throughout centuries generated numerous interpretations³⁴⁹. Therefore, Kasper's own interpretation of the "revelation of revelations" does not represent a universally accepted, consistent theory in general. However, his interpretation is in line with the modern tendency to shift the interpretation of Exodus 3,14 from the metaphysical assumptions of onto-theology to more non-realist, post-structuralist and postmodernist readings and as such it maybe better honours the rich, versatile and ambiguous spirit of the passage itself.³⁵⁰ Kasper's interpretation of this passage is also a paradigm of interpreting the revelation simultaneously as an event and a promise. God's word is never empty: it is always equipped with the act. Revelation is God's giving of both himself and his word.³⁵¹

³⁴⁹ E.g. *Gericke* 2012, 125.

³⁵⁰ For a short analysis of these modern philosophical interpretations of Ex 3,14, see an article by Jaco Gericke: Philosophical interpretations of Exodus 3:14 – a Brief Historical Overview. – *Journal for Semitics* 21/1 (2012): 125-136.

³⁵¹ See also *Dulles* 1985, 66–67.

4. The Reality of Revelation

4.1. Subjectivity and the Loss of the Dimension of Mystery

The beginning of the interpretation of revelation for Kasper is the word “God”. It is the place where theology starts and ends. Kasper states that because God is not a reality alongside or above the rest of reality, and he is not given in a way that human beings are given, he must be the answer to all the questions that arise from the created world: of man and of his existence, and of the meaning of the whole of existence. Kasper begins his analysis of the word “God” from the theologies of Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury and Luther.¹ He finds something fitting – albeit not definitive – in all their descriptions: Thomas Aquinas described God as ultimate, ungrounded Ground of all reality, Anselm of Canterbury as “that than which nothing greater can be thought”² and Luther as “That [...] to which you attach your heart and on which you rely”³. All these definitions summarise something of Kasper’s concept of God: God is the ground and meaning of all reality (*Grund und Sinn aller Wirklichkeit*)⁴, he who is love, and as love the Trinitarian basis of all reality, who wants to encounter his creature, man, and have a dialogue with him and walk alongside him in the course of history. Because God is personal, man can believe in him and attach his or her heart to him.

Kasper argues that beginning from the Second Vatican Council the Church has seen that humanity stands at a beginning of a new age. This means in general a more open and dynamic approach to reality but also the problem of how to proclaim God in the modern, constantly changing world.⁵ Kasper states that the principle of subjectivity is a result of modern thought and a reason for modern secularism:

The modern secularisation process is to be understood only against the background of the basic principle of modern thought: the principle of subjectivity. Subjectivity means that man posits himself as the starting-point and measure for understanding reality as a whole.⁶

He distinguishes between subjectivity and subjectivism⁷, the latter of which Kasper describes as “obdurate insistence of the individual subject on his limited perspective and

¹ GJ, 47.

² GJ, 47: “Das, worüber hinaus nichts Größeres gedacht werden kann.” See also ZZD, 263–264.

³ GJ, 47: “Worauf du [...] Dein Herz hängest und verlassest”

⁴ GJ, 370: “Grund und Sinn aller Wirklichkeit”

⁵ JC, 94; RS, 278–282; 289–293. See also GS, 4–10.

⁶ JC, 75–76: “Die neuzeitliche Säkularisierung ist nur zu verstehen auf dem Hintergrund des Grundprinzips des neuzeitlichen Denkens, des Prinzips der Subjektivität. Subjektivität bezeichnet die Tatsache, dass der Mensch Sich selbst als Ausgangspunkt und Mass für das Verständnis der gesamten Wirklichkeit setzt.” See also NGK, 93.

⁷ GJ, 65–66.

on his special interests”⁸. Subjectivism is short-sightedness, arrogance and ignorance: as an attitude, subjectivism ignores the fact that reality is always larger than a single individual can grasp. It is arrogant and unrealistic trust in one’s own unlimited capacities and it fails to understand that the meaning of the whole can never derive from a subjective point of view.⁹ As opposed to subjectivism, subjectivity is a universal phenomenon, often referred to in theology the anthropological turn. The anthropological turn can be traced back to the Cartesian idea of *Cogito ergo sum*. Even though the notion of subjectivity had already been developed in early Christian mysticism (as early as Augustine, later by Boethius, Anselm of Canterbury and by Nicholas of Cusa), the decisive point for the turn to subjectivity is the turn in which man makes himself the reference point of reality and the universe becomes the object of interest of technology and science.¹⁰ If our existence is depersonalised and we set ourselves as the measure of reality, the result is that we also become blind to the needs of others. Kasper claims that this kind of existence is not existence at all. If the transcendent truth of the whole is disregarded, the result is egoism.

The denial of transcendent reality and extreme turn to subjectivism lead to a reality where there is only little, if any, room for faith, salvation and hope.¹¹ Kasper worries that this kind of reality is a reality dominated by science and technology, a society of mechanistic materialism which leaves no room for mystery. Man claims to stand on his own, as a subject who masters reality as an object. This kind of stance towards reality denies room for mystery: anything that I do not know now, I can learn and master. It categorically denies that there is – nor is needed any room for mystery. Kasper adheres to the mystery-dimension of reality: mystery is not only an unveiled secret, it is a profound dimension of reality. For Kasper, subjectivism is not only an arrogant and ignorant denial of the mystery dimension, it is a pure denial of something that clearly is there. It denies a dimension of our reality that we cannot quite grasp, an underlying “something” that remains hidden from us but is, at the same time, a wavering inkling of something that we simultaneously feel and do not feel, see and do not see. To put it succinctly in terms of Christian theology: if the mystery that is the Trinitarian God is the ground of everything that is, if he is the explanation for the inexplicable, then mystery is an implicit part of reality.¹² The Christian faith accepts the fact that we human beings alone can never master all of reality.

Kasper argues that instead of looking at the “problem of God” from above or below we must turn to tradition. He associates the idea of tradition with the innate urge for man to find meaning in life, a meaning of and for himself. Because this urge has not ceased

⁸ JC, 76: “(Sie darf also nicht mit Subjectivismus), dem eigensinnigen Beharren des einzelnen Subjekts auf seiner begrenzten Perspektive und auf seinen besonderen Interessen, (verwechselt werden).“ See also HGS, 46.

⁹ Similarly: *DeLubac* 1995, 424–425.

¹⁰ JC, 76; OG, 54; NGK, 85. See also *Hart* 2011, 45: “Western humanity has succeeded in creating a world in which all values have become subordinate to the demands of the human will, and in which knowledge and human creativity have become almost entirely confused, conceptually and practically, with the exercise of instrumental reason’s mastery over all of reality.”

¹¹ B, 13.

¹² See *Morrison* 2007, 278.

even in the most secular of cultures or cultures which attempted to ban religion, Kasper concludes that man's willingness to understand himself and the reality around him goes hand-in-hand with religious tradition. Religious tradition has always sought to answer the question of our identity and thus it remains an abiding force.¹³ Here Kasper actually articulates the thought of Henri DeLubac, only in different words. Whereas DeLubac bluntly says that "a conscious spirit could never be anything else but an absolute desire for God", Kasper puts it more diplomatically – for him the quest for meaning in life actually is a quest for God. One could put this even more bluntly: if there is a capacity to think at all, then such thinking must lead to an absolute desire for God, to a certitude that he really, truly exists.¹⁴ Kasper emphasises two facts: first, that the science of theology goes hand-in-hand with faith; it is not alien to it but instead gives faith methodologically organised reflection. Second, theology as science can never turn faith into pure knowledge (*gnosis*); in the end, faith always has a mysterious element to it.¹⁵ This kind of understanding of faith as *fides quaerens intellectum* and God as something that cannot be conceived of in a scientific sense, that he cannot be grasped, is also in line with the biblical understanding of God and his revelation and of faith that points towards this ultimately mysterious God.

Kasper emphasises that though the word of God in the Old and the New Testaments also includes a doctrinal element, it is, however, foremost meant to elicit faith:

Although the Gospel does not exclude didactic elements, it binds act and content together in a way so that it does not represent meta-historical, abstract doctrine but promises and prophesies concretely given in a particular situation.¹⁶

When God reveals himself, he does not primarily want to give informative knowledge of himself but instead he wants to reveal something that a human being can grasp on to and have faith in. The reality of revelation is attached to a particular historical situation: it is not meta-historical but intra-historical; instead of information it is something that happens, something that occurs. The revelation situation is concretely historical, it happens in concrete history (*konkrete Geschichte*).¹⁷ For Kasper the whole orientation of faith is in its actuality.¹⁸ The encounter with God does not appear in a knowledge-impregnated mind as the outcome of an intellectual process. The encounter with God affects, nourishes and speaks to man, it calls him to a dialogue. God speaks to man. Not against man, but so that the *me-you* relationship generates an organic, deep relationship which affects the whole essence of human being. This speech-act is something that brings forth something *new*, it is creative and future-oriented. In this way the relationship between

¹³ GJ, 59; NGK, 85.

¹⁴ See *Kerr* 2007, 73.

¹⁵ GJ, 60–61.

¹⁶ EJC, 12: "Sosehr das Evangelium lehrhafte Elemente keineswegs ausschließt, verbindet es doch Akt und Inhalt so miteinander, dass es nicht eine übergeschichtliche abstrakte Lehre zum Ausdruck bringt, sondern eine konkret in der Situation zugesprochene Zusage und Verheißung."

¹⁷ JC, 342; see also D, 59; OG, 61–79; B, 158.

¹⁸ JC, 294.

God and a person is not comparable to that between a man and a man or a man and any object or a relationship between any two objects: it is something much more.

Kasper's view of the nature of revelation as activity and encounter in history gives him also an explanation for the problem of why revelation seems to be to some extent mutable and developing in time. God makes himself knowable through his revelation in a particular way in every particular event of history. This does not mean that the basic content of the revelation of God would not remain the same. The content and object of faith stays the same even if our way of understanding it (our language, culture and religious practices) change and evolve.¹⁹ Revelation takes a stance to the human situation in this particular historical moment. Kasper remarks that Thomas Aquinas already struggled with the question "does God exist?" by pondering the two arguments against the existence of God, arguments still valid today: the possibility of evil permitted by an infinitely good God, and the possibility of purely immanent explanations for the existence of the world. Kasper notes, therefore, that the modern explanation of the world "even if there is no God" was already anticipated by Thomas. The question of God, the inner essence of faith, searching for answers and trying to understand (Anselm of Canterbury) abides, therefore, from time to time.²⁰ Therefore central for Kasper is understanding what the situation is for the revelation of God is in our age: what prevents the acceptance of God's revelation in our time? Does the two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition still have something to say in this secularised modern age and can it be formulated in a way such that it truly speaks to a modern man, bound to this historical time and space? Can the Christian faith answer the objections made against a reasonable faith in God? How does the eternal revelation of God relate to modern, secular society? And last but not least: is God a necessary explanation for all that there is?

4.2. The Challenge of Modern Man: "A Frighteningly Profane Culture"

Even though it seems that the theory of the complete secularisation of society has become somewhat fallacious,²¹ secularism and especially atheism as one form of it is still effective in society. Over the course of his career, Kasper has been interested in the effects of secularism and atheism and in the crisis of God-talk in the modern context.²² Among many other modern theologians Kasper also discusses the dilemma of modern post-Enlightenment theology. On the one hand, the Church must adapt to modern society; on the other, it must stay true to its two-thousand-year-old tradition without losing its core beliefs. In addition, exegetical research must be taken into consideration and at the same

¹⁹ See also DV, 8–9.

²⁰ GJ, 49–50; B, 156. See also *Cavadini* 2014, 241–247.

²¹ NGK, 85–86; B, 14.

²² TAA, 73; JJ, 1973, 9–11; GJ, 18; 23; 39; 53; 477–479; KK, 60; 62–65; 456; B, 11–15; NGK, 82; 85–88; KWS, 9; GPV, 144; AGV, 32.

time our time requires a certain apologetic orientation in theology.²³ The main question for Kasper is: how to talk relevantly and plausibly of God in the increasingly secular context? Kasper defines the modern culture of the 20th and 21st centuries as something that has become “frighteningly profane”²⁴. Kasper argues that even though secularism has not led to the death of religion, it nevertheless has led to “alienation between the “everyday life” that has become profane and the ‘Sunday world’ that religion represents”²⁵. The modern ethos reflects the reason-oriented emphasis of the Enlightenment, in which “nature” became the definitive yardstick for religion and Christianity as well. Kant’s “pure reason” also became the measure for evaluating of God’s revelation: “revelation is in this sense meaningful only if it is proved to be useful for the promotion of humanity”²⁶. According to Kasper, religion has become an isolated area of life experiences instead of being the central, the actual area of life. In Kasper’s view, the events of the 20th and 21st centuries (the two World Wars, terrorism, growing inequality, uncertainty in the face of global, growing cultural and religious pluralism, the unpredictable consequences of religious extremism and the rise of modern atheism, to mention a few) are signs of an increasingly-profane culture. The new understanding of the horizontal level of being as the determining level also has consequences to God-talk. Modern theology seeks to find a way of coping with the challenges that the modern world poses.²⁷

Some reactions, such as theology of culture or liberation theology, are attempts to find a new, meaningful way to proclaim the message of Christianity in the modern world. Kasper emphasises that “Jesus’ glorification of the poor is not related to any social stratum and implies no social programme.”²⁸ This argument is to be interpreted in this context as Kasper’s cautious critique of liberation theology.²⁹ However, if one interprets Kasper’s position from his attempt to give a holistic interpretation of all reality, theology of culture is, naturally, one important part of it. Theology of culture is not for Kasper a social-political mission, but rather an analysis of the historical-actual situation

²³ M, 9; TK, 25–42. TK2, 195–264. See also *Moltmann* 1972, 12–33. This is the point at which Kasper’s thought comes close to that of Tillich. Russel Re Manning writes of Tillich: “At a time when theonomous critical thinking is being pressed upon by a militantly atheist science and culture on the one side and the equally strident forms of religious fundamentalism on the other, Tillich’s call for a theology of correlation is once again urgently relevant.” *Re Manning* 2009, xvi. On Tillich’s theology of correlation see *Tillich* 1956, 73–80.

²⁴ NGK, 81: “Erschreckend profan [...] Kultur”. See also *Hütter* 2004, 116–118. It is not only a question of religion or the lack of religion; it is a totally new cultural paradigm: postmodernity has lost its subject, it is stigmatised by “intractable fragmentation, plurality, porosity, and indeterminacy.” See also GS, 9.

²⁵ NGK, 86: “Entfremdung zwischen der profan gewordenen Lebenswelt und einer durch die Religion repräsentierten ‘Sonntagswelt’.” See the similar idea of Edward Schillebeeckx: the idea of “simple” participation in oneness, a ground of being, has no market value in modern-day context. An idea of “visio beatifica” is empty and meaningless to modern man. Modern man needs more. Therefore, from the point of view of modern, secular culture the only way to give religion meaningful content is to give meaning to the whole of reality in every historical context. See also *Kerr* 2007, 59.

²⁶ NGK, 85: “Die Offenbarung ist in dieser Sicht nur insofern sinnvoll, als sie sich als Dienst zur Beförderung der Humanität erweist.”

²⁷ AGV, 32–34.

²⁸ JC, 136: “Wenn Jesus die Armen selig preist, dann ist damit kein soziales Programm gemeint.” See also B, 64.

²⁹ JC, 396; see also NGK, 87; RS, 283.

where the encounter between man and God takes place. Theology of culture is a typical example of the attempt to bring the “openness towards the questions and problems of any particular historical situation” (*Gegenwartbezogenheit*) into the focus of theological discourse.³⁰ If theology of culture is defined as William Schweiker does in his article “Theology of culture and its future”³¹, Kasper’s view of theology comes close to that of Paul Tillich’s: Schweiker writes: “Tillich believed that theological reflection on culture was both possible and necessary in order to disclose the religious meaning of an increasingly secular world and also in order to clarify the relevance of Christian faith to contemporary life.”³²

Only in one sense can Kasper’s theology be considered as political: he emphasises that salvation and life are not private matters but that they always have a public dimension. Therefore, the idea of God’s Kingdom does, in fact, also have a political dimension: the *communio* of believers is not a private group, but rather one with a dimension that reflects the relational and personal dimension of the Trinitarian God himself.³³ This kind of “rule” is not, however, earthly, it does not imply a ruling political power as it is understood in earthly political organisations. It is, instead, a rule of the freedom of God, a rule of our serving to God, Christ as the perfect representative of this rule embodying obedience in God’s service. Therefore, “political”, for Kasper, is understood differently than is the case with Tillich, for example. Kasper’s fear of the establishment of earthly kingdoms in the fashion of the “thousand year messianic kingdom” of the Book of Revelation (20,1-10) becomes understandable in the light of his own childhood experiences in National Socialist Germany.³⁴ For the same reasons (i.e. his firm belief that nothing good can come from human attempts to build a kingdom of freedom) he also rejects Marxist sociological and political ideologies.³⁵ He states:

Modern philosophies of history and historical utopias have taken up this idea of progress³⁶ in various secular ways; this is particularly true of the Marxist expectation of a qualitative change from the realm of necessity to that of freedom. German National Socialism perverted to evil the dream of a third thousand-year empire. The eschatological character of the person and work of Christ is always misrepresented in principle, whenever Christianity is incorporated into a secular pattern of progress.³⁷

³⁰ NGK, 94–97.

³¹ *Theology of Culture and Its Future*. – The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich. Ed. Re Manning, Russell. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³² Schweiker 2009, 138–139. See also Tillich 1966, 282–285; Schüßler 1997, 44–55

³³ JC, 392.

³⁴ HGS, 14–15; OG, 87–89.

³⁵ GJ, 91–92; NGK, 96; B, 184–185. For this reason *Jesus der Christus* was edited before published in Eastern Germany in 1974: there it was released without the apparent criticism of Marxism. The East German version of *Jesus der Christus* are available for comparison in the Cardinal Kasper Institute in Vallendar, Germany.

³⁶ For example, the idea of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1201) who foretold a coming age of the Holy Spirit and a spiritual interpretation of the Gospel, which would supersede the age of the Son and of the visible hierarchical Church. JC, 394; A, 581.

³⁷ JC, 394: “Die neuzeitlichen Geschichtsphilosophien und –utopien haben dieses Fortschrittsdenken vielfach in säkularisierter Weise aufgegriffen; das gilt insbesondere von der marxistischen Erwartung eines

Kasper emphasises that the Church is not the already-established Kingdom of God either: in its present state the Church is both a visible and a hidden sign of God's reality.³⁸ Kasper's hesitation towards the theologies of liberation becomes understandable from this point of view: he fears that it has secular political elements that distance it from the original proclamation of the Gospel.³⁹

For Kasper, the motivation for God-talk is first and foremost something that must be concerned with the contemporary reality we live in, and ours is a growingly secular reality. This was also one of the topics of discussion at Vatican II.⁴⁰ Kasper argues:

Industrialisation and technicalisation are releasing a mechanism of conformity and infantilism on something approaching a planetary scale: that the management and technology which man invented in order to rule the world are becoming a scarcely penetrable network in which man is increasingly entangled. Man's own creations have got beyond his control and are now developing their own momentum. A secondary system of nature and fate has emerged.⁴¹

Kasper's theory of secularism is the antithesis of his concept of the Kingdom of God. Whereas Christianity represents the community of God and the Kingdom of God is the gradual appearance of God's new reign in history, modern, secular culture represents a mechanistic-materialistic society that struggles against any religious or "otherworldly" authorities. Kasper argues that mechanistic materialism and scientific atheism are regarded today as outmoded. He bases this bold assertion on the development of natural science itself. The mechanistic picture of the world was turned upside down after the development of quantum physics and the theory of Relativity. Kasper distinguishes in scientific research between "doctrinal atheism" and "methodical atheism", the latter of which describes the modern attitude of atheism: instead of orientating itself doctrinally to the denial of God, God's existence is simply disregarded as irrelevant. A scientist can only make statements

Umschlags von dem Reich der Notwendigkeit in das Reich der Freiheit. Der deutsche Nationalsozialismus hat den Traum des dritten tausendjährigen Reiches in böser Weise pervertiert. Grundsätzlich betrachtet wird der eschatologische Charakter von Person und Werk Christi immer dann verkannt, wenn das Christentum in ein innerweltliches Fortschrittschema eingeordnet wird." Similarly: GJ, 264–265; GGE, 23; NGK, 86. See also B, 197.

³⁸ JC, 396–397.

³⁹ GJ, 193–194; JC, 84–85; B, 64; KWS, 9; NGK, 86; *Palakeel* 1995, 273–274. The problem is not this-worldly discussion *per se*, but its Marxist or Neo-Marxist application. In the postidealist, post-Hegelian philosophies of Schelling, Feuerbach, Marx and Kierkegaard Kasper sees the danger of reducing Christianity into this-worldly, sociological ideology or even to a utopia. Kasper's interpretation of history as an interplay between God and humanity plays an important part in his critique: for him, history can never be purely a socio-economical playground, in which humanity shapes the world. It is salvation history marked by God's history with his people. The "community of freedom" can never arrive through human labor but is instead the work of the living God. For post-Vatican II critique of the Marxist assumptions of liberation theology: *Rowland* 2007, 639–644.

⁴⁰ GS, 3–5; 10–14; TK, 10–11; *Hauke* 1987, 330. See also *Ruokanen* 1992, 85–103.

⁴¹ JC, 316–317: "Industrialisierung und Technisierung einen geradezu ins Planetarische erhobenen Mechanismus der Anpassung und der Unmündigkeit auslösen, dass Verwaltung und Technik, die der Mensch erfand, um die Welt zu beherrschen, zu einem kaum mehr durchschaubaren Geflecht werden, in dem der Mensch sich immer mehr verfängt. Seine eigenen Schöpfungen sind ihm über den Kopf gewachsen und entfalten nun ihre eigene Gesetzmäßigkeit; eine Natur und ein Schicksal zweiter Ordnung ist entstanden." See also OG, 54–56.

pertaining to the sciences. The question of God becomes irrelevant, because one can neither verify nor falsify it.⁴² However, even if groundless optimism regarding the accomplishments of man and developmental optimism often associated to mechanistical materialism have ceased, the basic secular orientation remains. Kasper is especially concerned about the modern distorted concept of freedom. He claims that if freedom is understood as man's nature as a self-contained reality, it dialectically becomes the exact opposite of freedom: total captivity.⁴³

Along with the greatness of this modern concept of freedom, however, we also perceive its misery and deep interior ambivalence. That is, to the extent that human freedom understood itself as not only unconditioned, but also as absolute, it faced the necessity of playing the role of God and even of Providence itself.⁴⁴

If freedom is not anchored in any value system, then it becomes mere slavery, an illusion of freedom. As we can see, this is for Kasper not only a philosophical but also a practical precondition for understanding the concept of freedom. Freedom must be responsible freedom. Moreover, Kasper does not anchor the demand for responsibility and authority in any illusory or figurative form of authority but in an authority that is based on two aspects. First, it is based on a natural consequence of the natural human condition as such, and second, on a philosophical-theological foundation based on the conviction that the ground of all being (in philosophical language the Absolute, or who in the language of religion is called God) is freedom.⁴⁵ The first aspect of the natural human condition is based on the notion that God is also seen as the Father in other religions than Christianity. Kasper argues that in the mythical and philosophical language of fatherhood, two ideas can be discerned: first, the idea of a begetter that provides the oneness of whole of reality: God, world and human beings. Second, the idea of the position of father as the "head of the household", that is, an authority that sustains life.⁴⁶ Kasper interprets the word "father" as a primordial concept that describes the natural order of being of human beings – and no other word can replace it. Kasper is explicit in his view that stripping the patriarchal concepts from Christianity can only come with a price of "hybrid utopianism".⁴⁷ Kasper parallels the idea of freedom without a ground with the idea of a society without the primordial concept of father:

The abolition of the father is possible only at the price of a hybrid utopianism that combines absolute freedom and an inhuman kind of master race.⁴⁸

For him it is a question of being true to the original Christian usage of language. It is not by accident that he uses the word "master race, masterhumanity" (*Herrenmenschentum*), usually associated with the propagandist use of language of German Socialism in the 1930's

⁴² GJ, 76. See also von Weizsäcker 1977,162–180.

⁴³ JC, 318. See also B, 197.

⁴⁴ CUF, 14.

⁴⁵ GJ, 370.

⁴⁶ GJ, 235–236.

⁴⁷ GJ, 236; NGK, 91.

⁴⁸ GJ, 236: "Die Abschaffung des Vaters wäre nur um den Preis der hybriden Utopie einer absoluten Freiheit und eines unmenschlichen Herrenmenschentums möglich." English translation has been modified.

and 1940's. Thus, the motivation for the "correct use" of Christian terminology (and especially that of freedom) does not for Kasper primarily come from intellectual interest in the exercise of Christian philosophy. The motivation comes rather from wanting to show where nihilism can lead to. The consequences have already been seen in human history whenever and wherever the concept of freedom and independence from any authoritative figure is interpreted from a purely secular point of view. The immanent human-built utopias do not seem to work.⁴⁹ Henri DeLubac tackles this very same question in his book *The Drama of Atheist Humanism (Le Drame de l'humanisme athée)* and he does so with regard to Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* and *The Possessed*.⁵⁰ DeLubac analyses Dostoyevsky's critique of socialism as a question of atheism. In *The Possessed* man has become completely secular, his relationship with God has ceased. DeLubac analyses: "Not only is heaven emptied but man is secularised; henceforth nothing about him must recall a transcendent origin and a sacred destiny. Dreams must be banned. Then it will be possible to begin building the new edifice, on the basis of science." But what will follow from the complete absence of God and the given opportunity of man-build utopias? Will freedom from God and anything heaven-bound give man absolute freedom, autonomy from every authority? Dostoyevsky shows us that this is not the case. In search for freedom from God and in the building of a human utopia based of science freedom turns against itself: "Having set out from unlimited freedom, I have ended up with unlimited despotism."⁵¹ This is one of Kasper's basic paradigms as well: freedom understood incorrectly leads to its antithesis, in this case despotism.⁵²

Human beings are meant to live in connection with each other and in connection with God. If these connections are taken away, all is left is a mindless flock with no direction and no freedom. DeLubac points out that whereas Nietzsche's nihilism anticipated the death of God, Dostoyevsky's apocalypse anticipates the death of God *in man*. Both saw the danger in *Eudaimonia* and while both also anticipated the future of "divine sun setting in the horizon" of Europe, the outcome of this scenario was very different for them: Dostoyevsky believed that people of Europe would ultimately turn to Christ, whereas Nietzsche anticipated the death of God. Dostoyevsky saw no other possibility than turn to Christ, he thought that earthly paradise without Christ is impossible.⁵³ In some way Dostoyevsky's prophecy has been fulfilled. Although one cannot say that Europe has turned to Christ, the prosperity scenario of a socialist utopia has proven to be fallacious. And in the death of socialism in the end of the 20th century, Kasper points out, most of the utopian energy of ideal societies and faith in progress is also exhausted.⁵⁴ However, the question of possibility for a freedom without values, without a common ground, is still current today.

⁴⁹ GJ, 96–97; KK, 62.

⁵⁰ DeLubac 1995, 320–323. See also Schüssler Fiorenza 2014, 33.

⁵¹ DeLubac 1995, 323.

⁵² CUF, 14; B, 198.

⁵³ DeLubac 1995, 333; Ward 1986, 150.

⁵⁴ GJ, 97–98; KK, 97.

Kasper asks, how could a universal concept like freedom ever find its fulfilment in particular entities? Kasper follows Paul in his interpretation of the self-centeredness of human person:

The self-seeking, self-empowering man remains bound to himself, to his arbitrary interests, [...] a slave to self. Against such a person Paul contends that true Christian freedom does not consist in that self-centeredness [...] seeking the actuation of a selfish freedom. For we are really free when we are so free that we are also free from our own selves [...] and give ourselves to God and neighbour in an unselfish love.⁵⁵

To put it succinctly: Christian faith is based on the assumption that the ultimate goal and purpose in life is to spend eternity in the immediate presence of the love of the Trinitarian God. It is not only about eternal life but moreover about a holistic, even an all-encompassing, relationship to God. In a modern, Western context this kind of idea has become less popular as the focus in religion has slowly shifted from transcendent reality to immanent reality, from God to human, from the vertical dimension of life to the horizontal.⁵⁶ Kasper argues that in his subjectivity, modern man has lost the vertical dimension, having become interested only in the horizontal dimension of life. Faced with a pluralistic way of life people are lost and constantly trying to find inner fulfilment in instrumental values. However, these instrumental values can never deliver final fulfilment: man has become focused exclusively on his own being and, therefore, incapable of answering God's call. The transcendent reality is – so to speak – behind the curtain of modernity. The goals and ambitions of a human being are thus transferred to the horizontal level of being. As far as modern man wants to encounter the true and ultimate meaning of his existence, he must become aware of the vertical dimension of life. But the problem is one of how this should be facilitated. Modern man seems to be so blind in his multiple choices and opportunities that it is as if a curtain had been dropped between God and himself, preventing him from getting a glimpse of God.⁵⁷ Max Horkheimer, in expressing the same idea, uses the metaphor “eclipse of reason”⁵⁸ while considering (to use the words of Charles Taylor) “the dark abyss of time”⁵⁹. Martin Heidegger speaks of the “absence of God” (*Fehl Gottes*); for Kasper, this same concept is best described as the “eclipse of God” (*Gottesfinsternis*)⁶⁰. Kasper argues that in the modern era there are actually two basic forms of atheism: not only that of non-believers but that which lurks in our own hearts.⁶¹ Man has become deaf to the call of God.

⁵⁵ CUF, 9–10.

⁵⁶ The Weberian distinction between horizontal and vertical dimensions is used here for clarification. The horizontal dimension signifies immanent reality and immanent meanings; the vertical dimension is open to transcendent reality and refers to meanings beyond this reality and this time and space. See also NGK, 85–86.

⁵⁷ OG, 54.

⁵⁸ *Horkheimer* 2004[1947] *Eclipse of Reason*. Kasper quotes Horkheimer in B, 14: “Einen unbedingten Sinn ohne Gott zu retten, ist eitel.” (“To save an unconditioned sense of meaning without God is vain.”) Horkheimer argued that in our modern time the concept of reason has been turned upside down: whereas earlier it was used as a tool to help to understand eternal ideas which were themselves objectives; nowadays reason is harnessed to the search for *a priori* objectives. See also GVF, 512; GPV, 151.

⁵⁹ *Taylor* 2007, 322–323.

⁶⁰ A term originally used by Martin Buber. GJ, 51; 60; GGA, 37–38; KK, 464; B, 13–14; 119; AGV, 32.

⁶¹ GJ, 51; 60.

The secularisation process also has positive effects. According to Kasper, the theology of secularisation offers in fact the essential contribution for overcoming the breach between Christianity and modern culture. However, Kasper insists that we cannot blame the Christian roots of secularism for the emergence of the modern concept of autonomy. Christian freedom has to be separated from its secular counterpart: if freedom is understood deliberately in terms of autonomy, the Christian meaning of freedom is also lost.

Kasper takes a look at the history of secularisation theories and identifies three main theories: 1) theory of restoration (the idea that secularisation is an apostasy from God and that the program of secularisation should be met by an opposite Christian program of restoration) 2) progressive theory (that modern secularism is a consequence and even a fulfilment of Christianity, the idea that the biblical distinction between God and the world made it possible to find a worldly understanding of the world (Hegel, Troeltsch, Löwith); and 3) a theory of critical reaction to Christianity.⁶²

Kasper criticises the theories of restoration and the progressive theory. He argues that modern world is not, in fact, a Christian world but instead a world that is indifferent to Christianity. He claims that the course of modern history has actually been largely opposed to Christianity. Therefore, instead of accepting the restorative or progressive theories *per se*, Kasper follows H. Blumenberg in his analysis of the thesis of secularisation:

The modern age originated as an act of human self-assertion against an overwhelming and enslaving transcendence as well as against ecclesial structures that had become rigid, reactionary and repressive.⁶³

However, Kasper argues that even this theory is incapable of explaining the entire concept of modern secularisation. It is a complex phenomenon which cannot be derived from or explained by only one cause. Kasper takes Blumenberg's theory of conflict between autonomy and theonomy as a starting point and develops it further. Kasper names three main reasons for the modern, secularised situation: first, a modern emancipation that presupposes Christian liberation of a person; second, a misinterpreted concept of Christian freedom in medieval nominalism; and third, rigidified ecclesial structures of the confessional era. Additionally, the complex history of the modern era has had many effects on the development of modern secularisation: one important effect was also that of the Reformation and the rupture in the unity of the faith; the Wars of Religion, and the realisation that religion had lost its function as an integrative force. Also the development of modern science contributed the idea of the world without a transcendent ground.⁶⁴ Kasper claims that in the secularised world the need for such a "salvific exodus" has conquered people's minds as people are confident in finding a salvation which suits them best within, not beyond our immanent world. In the modern situation, people found

⁶² GJ, 52; NGK, 82.

⁶³ GJ, 53: "das Entstehen der Neuzeit als Akt der humanen Selbstbehauptung gegenüber einer übermächtigen, den Menschen versklavenden Transzendenz wie gegenüber verhärteten, reaktionär und repressiv gewordenen kirchlichen Strukturen."

⁶⁴ GJ, 52–56; NGK, 85.

themselves disappointed in religion and religious authorities and wanted to find some other new basis that would be common to all: this gave room to the understanding of the order of nature as rational. It would be unchanging “even if there was no God” (H. Grotius).⁶⁵

According to Kasper, Descartes, Kant and Nietzsche are the philosophers who have most influenced the emergence of the contemporary problem of autonomy.⁶⁶ Descartes was one of the first philosophers who wanted to answer the problem between seemingly-deterministic material reality and the existence of free will. He came to the conclusion that reality is divided in to two realms: the materialistic reality that is the world of mechanical necessity, and the world of mental free will, the reality of thought. Kant distinguishes between the phenomenal and noumenal realms. Human freedom belongs to the latter.⁶⁷ Kasper argues that the idea of an autonomous moral agent proposed by Kant is problematic, because it rules out the divine foundation of morals. Suddenly man is no longer morally responsible to God simply on the basis of God’s law, but he nevertheless feels obliged because of “internally binding” (*innerlich verbindlich*) morals.⁶⁸ Kasper also regards the postulate for finding the moral compass within ourselves too demanding, and knowing the human mind, unrealistic.

Kasper’s concern is not only theological but also sociological: he perceives the distorted concept of freedom contributing to a mechanistic society. He states:

The deplorable thing about mechanistic materialism and the atheism to which it gives rise is that it surrenders the great insight of the modern era, namely, that humanity is the point of reference for the world, and turns human beings into a function of the world and of matter.⁶⁹

The more the world becomes a kind of machine which mechanically follows its immanent laws, the more it becomes a closed system where there is no more room for freedom. Kasper sets himself the following rhetorical questions:

Can the concept of a radical human autonomy in the sense of a pure self-mediation ever succeed? Or must not a successful human identity rather be only a freedom that is given to man from another? Being from man’s own resources – or being that is received? Can autonomy find another than a theonomous foundation? And how can theonomy be so conceived that it does not signify heteronomy, but rather both grounds autonomy and brings it to fulfilment?⁷⁰

⁶⁵ GJ, 55; 66–67.

⁶⁶ AT, 26; KJ, 109; OG, 80.

⁶⁷ *Wegder-McNelly* 2006, 161.

⁶⁸ AT, 28; CUF, 9–10.

⁶⁹ GJ, 77–78: “Es ist das *Elend des mechanischen Materialismus und des daraus folgenden Atheismus*, dass sie die große Erkenntnis der Neuzeit, wonach der Mensch der Bezugspunkt der Welt ist, aufgeben und den Menschen zu einer Funktion der Welt und der Materie machen.“ This idea also appears in Dostoyevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov*: material reason annuls the person. If reason is only used as a mechanical tool, it makes a human being only a matter of materia and causality. See *Kirjavainen* 1987, 296.

⁷⁰ GJ, 106: “Kann das Konzept eine radikalen Autonomie des Menschen im Sinn einer reinen Selbstvermittlung jemals gelingen, oder kann gelungene menschliche Identität nicht eher nur geschenkte und verdankte Freiheit sein? Sein aus sich – oder empfangenes Sein? Kann Autonomie anders denn

The emancipatory concept of freedom separates man from his original free being into that of a new, captive and bound being.⁷¹ One could argue, however, that there is much evidence to support the fact that a human being is capable of doing good deeds that are generally considered moral and righteous even if he does not believe in any higher power. Therefore, Kasper's conviction of the need for universally grounded morals is based first and foremost on the reality of faith. Only secondly does he try to find philosophical or scientific explanations for this conviction.⁷²

Kasper, however, emphasises that due to modern secularism the world has not become anti-religious, nor is the world without a thirst for transcendence: "religion and religions have largely turned out to be 'Enlightenment-proof', and as anthropological constants"⁷³. The yearning for the sacred has not ceased but has instead found new and manifold ways of expressing itself. This is largely due to the myriad of alternatives modern man finds in the field of religion, and to the fact that he is now more than ever capable of making a choice, rather than simply following inherited cultural patterns.⁷⁴ However, Kasper argues that as long as ultimate satisfaction is sought from this reality, it will always remain incomplete.⁷⁵ The true meaning of life can only be found in communion with God. Kasper remarks that the "ultimate thing" can never be found in our own reality, because the ground of being of man lies in transcendent reality. Looking for the ultimate meaning

Theonom begründet werden, und wie kann Theonomie so gedacht werden, dass sie nicht Heteronomie besagt, sondern Autonomie nicht nur begründet, sondern auch zur Erfüllung bringt?"

⁷¹JC, 316. Modern thought is often characterised by the dominance of a natural scientific world view and a *Weltanschauung* based on it. It is considered to be a preferable choice compared to the philosophical (or theological, not to mention religious) traditions. Reinhard Hütter offers a comprehensive analysis of the development of the concept of freedom and its modern, narrow understanding which diminishes the concept of freedom to only a concept of personal autonomy. See for example: *Hütter 2004*, 112: "Like a coin handled for too long by too many hands, 'freedom' has lost its clear imprint. [...] we no longer know what 'freedom' means. [...] or is 'freedom' simply an equivocal term that covers fundamentally different and ultimately incompatible things?" On Hütter's analysis on the indispensability of the connection between freedom and commandment (law and gospel), which he calls the "twofold center of Christian ethics". See *Hütter 2004*, 145–167.

⁷² According to Kasper's interpretation of Nietzsche, behind the oppositional ideas of theism and atheism there lies a more fundamental question of *being* and *non-being*. Nietzsche is actually a contemporary thinker in his theory of shattering the idea of reason and, therefore, also faith in modernity. He is the first philosopher to recognise the tendency for modern culture to discard all prevailing organisations, that is, a tendency towards nihilism. Kasper describes the modern era as "nihilistic". GJ, 101: "Der Nihilismus ist der Glaube, dass es gar keine Wahrheit gibt; er schließt den Unglauben an die metaphysische Welt ein." Kasper argues that it is Nietzsche himself who uncovers the meaninglessness, purposelessness and tedium (*die Langeweile*) of our Western civilisation. See GJ, 104; cf. *Soskice 2002*, 64. The modern world is, in fact, nihilistic in many aspects. If we try to find the meaning of life in the present life instead of the world beyond, the perspective on life is also lost. Man will become unable to tell the difference between right and wrong and ultimately enter a total state of meaninglessness. GJ, 104: "Doch so herausfordernd Nietzsches Diagnose ist, seine Antwort vermag nicht zu überzeugen. Ist das Leben, das gesunde, vitale, robuste Leben und der Wille zum Leben wirklich das Letzte? Könnte nicht auch das Leben nur eine Perspektive sein, Ausdruck des Willens zu Macht, verzweifelter Versuch zum Überleben angesichts des drohenden Nihilismus?" See also OG, 67; NGK, 93; GVF, 508; KK, 62; B, 13–14; 127; GGE, 23.

⁷³ GJ, 20–21: "Die Religion und die Religionen haben sich als weithin aufklärungsresistent und als anthropologische Konstante erwiesen."

⁷⁴ Similarly *Taylor 2007*, 726–727.

⁷⁵ GM, 3–7.

from our reality is like looking for light in endless darkness. A man who seeks meaning for his life can never be fully satisfied by earthly matters. His ground of being demands him to search for meaning from within his own origin: the fact that he is *created*.

Christian freedom is not about being free to fulfil our own endless cravings; it is freedom to be free before God, freedom to actualise our true being and our true calling as interlocutors with God.

It is precisely when God is taken seriously as God that he liberates the world to be the world. The converse is also true: when the world and its laws are made absolutes, the result is a deterministic system in which not only God but man as well is dead, because there is no room left for human freedom.⁷⁶

Kasper begins to answer the challenge of modern atheism and secularism from the horizon of meaning. If reality has no common “meaningful ground”, then the experience of meaning and the experience of the absurd are the exact same thing. If so, an absurd, senseless, mindless life is as possible as a meaningful life.⁷⁷ This is the outcome of the collapse of idealism, which is followed by nihilism.

Kasper states that there “must be a ‘Christian difference’ which in a transformative way takes hold of the world critically and creatively”.⁷⁸ The Christian faith has a critical function. Faith is something that transforms us and gives us a different, thoroughly new perspective on reality. It means that God is neither an object to be worshipped nor is God a “God of gaps”. He is not an ideology and he is not a cultural or political programme. Sociologically as well he escapes all our traditional explanations.

He is not the explanation and ideologisation of the world, or man, or any ideas, movements and interests. Therefore he may not be appropriated ideologically on behalf of any intra-worldly interest; we may not take his name in vain and misuse it, but must rather regard it as holy. God is therefore to be distinguished from idols, which are absolutisations of worldly values (power, money, sexuality, reputation, success and so on). To put it in modern terms, faith in God as understood in the Bible has as one of its functions to exercise a critique of ideologies.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ GJ, 77: “*Gerade wenn Gott in seiner Göttlichkeit ernst genommen wird, setzt er die Weltlichkeit der Welt frei*. Umgekehrt gilt: Wenn die Welt und ihre Gesetze absolut gesetzt werden, dann ist in einem solchen deterministischen System nicht nur Gott, sondern auch der Mensch tot, weil kein Raum mehr für die menschliche Freiheit ist.“ Cf. KK, 477–478.

⁷⁷ This was Sartre’s conclusion. *Sartre* 1984 [1943], 555–556, as well as Dostoyevsky’s. See for example: *Kirjavainen* 1987, 296–298; [<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30129713>] (accessed 5.12.2015). See also *Hart* 2011, 46: “Nihilism is a way of seeing the world that acknowledges no truth other than what the human intellect can impose on things, according to an excruciatingly limited calculus of utility, or of the barest mechanical laws of cause and effect. It is a “rationality” of the narrowest kind, so obsessed with *what* things are and how they might be *used* that it is no longer seized by wonder when it stands in the light of the dazzling truth *that* things are.”

⁷⁸ CUF, 33, JC, 92.

⁷⁹ GJ, 259: “Er ist nicht die Verklärung und Ideologisierung der Welt, des Menschen, irgendwelcher Ideen, Bewegungen und Interessen. Er darf deshalb nicht ideologisch für innerweltliche Interessen in Anspruch genommen werden; man darf seinen Namen nicht eitel nennen und missbrauchen, man muss ihn vielmehr heilig halten. Gott ist also von den Götzen, den Verabsolutierungen weltlicher Größen (Macht, Geld, Sexualität, Ruhm, Erfolg u. a.) zu unterscheiden. Modern formuliert: Dem biblisch bestimmten Gottesglauben kommt eine ideologiekritische Funktion zu.” The critique of ideologies originates from the

Kasper refers to Charles Taylor, who in his study *A Secular Age*, discusses the widely-used secularisation thesis which claims that religion gradually diminishes in influence. Taylor describes the complex process of the rise of secularism and of the deistic ideal of a world without God who interferes with history as “an impersonal order”. Christianity, on the other hand, is based precisely, even literally, on a “personal order”.⁸⁰ An impersonal order could be characterised as a world where the rejection of relatedness of the human reason to God’s eternal being results in a cultural and religious pluralism or even indifferentism. Kasper worries that in a pluralistic situation it is difficult and challenging to be able to see the whole truth. That, however, is applicable to a situation only if we assume that there is *one* truth⁸¹ about all reality and that pluralism is only a diversion instead of the actual form of reality.

In a pluralistic situation the Church attempts to find its way of expressing its relevance in a world of abysmal choices and ideologies. Moreover, the pluralistic situation prevails not only on the so-called profane plane of life but it flourishes as well on the religious plane of life. Although the prediction of the death of religion has been refuted, the “return to religion” does not necessarily mean a return to the Christian faith and Christian heritage. Kasper describes the current European situation as a situation of “cosmotheism” (*Kosmotheismus*) which means that people discover the divine in nature and in the cosmos rather than in a particular (namely Christian) faith in personal, Trinitarian God.⁸²

According to Kasper, to be able to understand the contemporary situation of faith, we must understand the period of the Enlightenment and the reasons that led to it and also to the contemporary situation of our time. Kasper emphasises that the period of the Enlightenment is far from over, that actually only in our own time has it reached its true dimensions.⁸³ Paradoxically, the ideas that the Enlightenment opposed and tried to overcome have in a peculiar way become problems of our time: we encounter new

Frankfurt School with Louis Althusser, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse among others as its representatives. The target of the critique of ideologies was the idea of controlling the masses by means of ideological power. Behind the thought of the Frankfurt School stand Marxism and psychoanalytical theory.

⁸⁰ Taylor 2007, 270–280. See also GPV, 144.

⁸¹ As the Church Fathers assumed: GJ, 17. See also D, 65–84.

⁸² GJ, 21–22; NGK, 93. According to Taylor, in the modern era we have roughly three options: traditional transcendent religiosity, immanent humanism, and nihilism (which can also, according to Taylor, be called anti-humanism). Taylor argues that “the secular age is schizophrenic, [...] deeply cross-pressured”. An atmosphere of contradiction characterises our age: we can be deeply moved by religious devotion and (Christian) message of love, for example, but at the same time the religious reality remains detached from ourselves. We are present in its sphere of influence, but at the same time, we are not. And this kind of “schizophrenia” or paradoxical attitude seems perfectly normal. See Taylor 2007, 726–727. The question is also closely bond to the question of freedom, as the study of Reinhard Hütter shows: see Hütter 2004, 123–124: “After Kant, Fichte, and Nietzsche on the one hand and Marx, Darwin and Freud on the other, we find ourselves as late moderns caught on a manic-depressive roller-coaster ride between the ghost of the Promethean daydream of freedom, but now turned desperate and therefore dreaming of autcreativity – that is, of designing our bodies, of choosing our gender, our values, and our destinies freely according to our idiosyncratic likings and longings [...] So it happens that our late modern lives oscillate between the dreamghosts of freedom’s Promethean expansion and the nightmare of freedom’s total eclipse.” Both Taylor and Hütter acknowledge the same problem: if there is a complete void of “clear imprint”, if “anything goes”, if freedom has lost its essence, the result is the threat of nihilism or an anarchy of values.

⁸³ EJC, 22.

fundamentalism and antirationalism, even new forms of superstition. The firm belief in progress that was characteristic of the Enlightenment has proven to be fallacious.⁸⁴ Our time is characterised by self-centeredness and an accentuated aspiration to free oneself from prevailing authorities and prevailing traditions. According to Kasper, secularism means the detachment of man from religious and metaphysical constitutions and aspiration to find new meaningful content from our immanent reality.⁸⁵ As a result we see a world where we encounter “less and less the traces of God and more and more the traces of the human.”⁸⁶ Kasper considers the shift from community-centeredness to individual-centeredness after the Enlightenment as one cause of the crisis of the modern age, a time of highlighted subjectivism and individualism. According to him, this has, in turn, changed the concept of man. Paradoxically, an over-emphasised subject-centeredness has reduced man to an object of examination instead of an active, willing subject. When infinite reality is disregarded, the finitude of man becomes the prevailing norm. Loss of the sense of the infinite leads to undervaluation of human beings as well. The wars and terrorism of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century are, for Kasper, one indication that the optimistic concept of man as a successful, humane agent is fallacious.⁸⁷ He insists that theology must find a way to answer this challenge.

A person, who is confused and asks about his ground of being in the face of multiple choices, often calls for God only when he confronts in his life a situation, requiring him to take a stance on the question of finitude. The illusion of freedom also eclipses the need to have a connection to a higher reality, to God. Only after man comes up against the limits of his own being, he is forced to call on this infinite ground of being.⁸⁸ According to Kasper, the God-question is most definitely also a question of man: without the God-question the question also of the value of man will remain unsolved. Kasper also claims that whereas atheists aim to emphasise the value of human beings and humane ideals by forgetting God, they in fact restrict humane aspirations.⁸⁹ This view of Kasper’s reveals how seamlessly he combines the question of freedom and God-question. Without God there is no man or freedom of man. Godless freedom is only an illusion of freedom. According to Christian anthropology our questioning receives its answer in Christ, because the destiny of Christ also opens up the mystery of the destiny of man.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ RS, 289.

⁸⁵ EJC, 23.

⁸⁶ EJC, 23.

⁸⁷ GVF, 507; B, 11. See also NGK, 92; RS, 290.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Dudley* 2005, 3: “The call for freedom is thus more easily issued than answered. The prospect of throwing off authority is exhilarating, but also frightening. [...] Liberation cannot be accomplished overnight. But requires an exhaustive and ongoing labour of self-critique. It is this task – the task of examining and re-examining our existing practices and beliefs – to which Kant calls us, in the hope that our response will contribute to human enlightenment and freedom.” In Kasper’s view, the aspect of self-critique, examining and re-examining, is lost – instead the freedom treasured in our time consists of right here, right now, for me. If the concept of self-critique is lost, the concept of freedom is bound to be lost as well.

⁸⁹ JC, 39; GJ, 56–57; 69; OG, 84.

⁹⁰ AGV, 35; 39; NGK, 94; GPV, 144.

In *B* Kasper compares the relational ontology of the Trinitarian God to the current situation of human beings in the secular context. If the inner understanding of Christian belief affirms that God is being-in-relation and that man is the image of God, is then not man also created to be in relation? Moreover, the nature of these relations should also reflect the intra-Trinitarian relations: relation to another creature should not mean violence, oppression and tyranny, but instead, we should love each other and have mercy on each other. Love emerges in our reality as mercy that has its paradigm in the inner Trinitarian life of God himself. In the modern context this kind of mercifulness is often hard to detect. If the point of view is that of an individual, it always loses something of the big picture. In practice this can be seen, for example, in the alienation of individuals from the Church *communio*. For the traditional understanding of Christianity, the emphasis on the individual instead of the *communio* of believers is truly alien.

In Kasper's thought one cannot really distinguish between evangelisation and inculturation. In his opinion, the event of Jesus Christ is itself the definitive moment of human culture and therefore it cannot be isolated as a separate area of life. Evangelisation is life rather than only one part of culture. The willingness to overcome secularist ideologies is Christian apologetics in the true spirit of evangelism.⁹¹ Revelation speaks only if it is heard. If the Church does not understand modern man, modern man will not listen to the Church's proclamation either.

4.3. Challenging Atheism

In the discussion of atheism it is often forgotten that modern atheism also uses the same tools of transcendental philosophy as theology does. Therefore, the same philosophical prerequisites that are used in theological discussion are already also included in the atheist use of language. This is why it is not fruitful to fight against atheism from what atheist philosophy denies, but rather to discuss the different outlooks from this common philosophical ground. It is typical for modern Christianity to see atheism rather as an interlocutor than as a counterpart, but this applies only to such atheism that is also aware of its own philosophical prerequisites. Kasper does not primarily try to find a common ground for a dialogue with atheism but instead he wants to examine the similarities between revelation and philosophy – a bridge between them, so to speak, and to ground his apologetic thought on both scriptural-traditional and philosophical grounds.⁹² He argues that while atheism has an important task in defying various substitutes for God, modern atheism often appears as militant, reflecting defeatism, scepticism and agnosticism. It often fights the fights of the past, thoughts that no longer are relevant in a modern context:

In our age, it is the wise, or those who consider themselves such, who believe they can dismiss the idea of God from earlier ages as a God delusion. [...] But we can ask whether this kind of atheism isn't itself a lost cause. It hardly represents the summit of

⁹¹ NGK, 91–93; HAT, 251–253.

⁹² *McMichael* 2006, xiii-xiv.

contemporary thought, but rather reiterates in a heavy-handed and distorted manner nineteenth-century positions which have long been considered a thing of the past.⁹³

Kasper sees modern atheism at its most aggressive form as a counterpart to Christianity and opponent of old European ideals and human rights.

In *GJ* Kasper thoroughly reflects on the themes of atheism. Modern Christianity aims to answer the challenge of the New Atheism. This is why it is important to analyse Kasper's views on atheism and what kind of answers modern-day Christians can find in a situation which many find not only spiritually harrowing but also intellectually challenging. The strength in Kasper's analysis of the problem of atheism is his wide knowledge of historical, philosophical and theological line of thought. He is capable of seeing the question of atheism in a wide context of cultural historical development, including especially the time period from the Enlightenment to our own postmodern, pluralistic time. A well-grounded question that can be reflected to Kasper's views is: does not the vivid discussion that the New Atheists have provoked show us that they actually have valid questions for theists to answer? Although the arguments of the New Atheists are often sharp-tempered, they still, however, reveal central questions for Christians: what has made God's voice disappear in the modern age? Why does a modern person choose short-term goals in preference to engaging eternal goals? Why has interest in the meaning of life moved almost completely from the vertical plane of being to the horizontal? The critique of modern atheists such as Richard Dawkins is targeted (partly justifiably) to religion or religious institutions like the church. However, no matter how scientifically argued, their criticism does not reach the object of faith, God. Criticism aimed at religion as a man-made composition is something that both an atheist and a theist can exercise, but the object of faith itself remains unreachable.

However, Kasper remarks that by definition atheism denies every claim of Divine existence. He argues that:

Only that view should be regarded as atheistic which denies any and every divine or absolute that is not simply identical with man and with the world of our empirical experience and with its immanent principles. Atheism, therefore, rejects any and every claim that God or the divine exist.⁹⁴

What is essential here is the definition of "that is not simply identical with man and with the world of our empirical experience and with its immanent principles". The vice versa is true: if something can be explained and controlled by means of science and empirical experience, it is not God. Therefore, two observations follow: God is

⁹³ Kasper's inaugural John Henry Newman annual lecture in 2008. *The Tablet: The International Catholic News Weekly*. 10.5.2008, p.44. [<http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/10th-may-2008/44/kasper-says-atheism-a-lost-cause>] (26.5.2015) See also NE, 25; NGK, 86–87.

⁹⁴ *GJ*, 63: "Als Atheismus hat vielmehr nur die Anschauung zu gelten, die jede Art eines Göttlichen bzw. Absoluten, das nicht schlechthin identisch ist mit dem Menschen und mit der Welt unserer empirischen Erfahrung und deren immanenten Prinzipien, leugnet. Der Atheismus ist also die Gegenposition zu jedweder Behauptung von Gott und Göttlichem."

something/someone who cannot be explained; and, the rules of our empirical reality can never lead to verification (nor falsification) of the existence of God.

But should God then be sought in supernatural experience and miracles? Kasper's answer is negative. If one is to search for proof and verification in "supernatural proof", he or she is lost. If one waits for miracles to happen to start believing in God, he or she is lost. According to Kasper, it is especially the miracles of Jesus that are closely bound to his person.⁹⁵ They are not magic tricks, but signs that illuminate the meaning of his person. Jesus' miracles are signs that he is the one to whom people should listen. Furthermore, miracles in general are, according to Kasper, a form of personal communication:

The characteristic feature of a miracle is to be found on the level of a personal communication and claim by God, a communication and claim which show their power by taking symbolic physical form.⁹⁶

Here we can see the almost organic relationship between the word and miracle in Kasper's thinking: miracles are God's personal communication with his people. A miracle without a ground in reality, without a valid base in the laws of nature, in real history, is useless. It can only be effective if it happens in the realm of human history and follows the laws of physical reality. If a miracle contradicted the laws of nature it would be totally alien to this world, something out of our reach of understanding. On the other hand, if a miracle was performed completely apart from the laws of our reality and if it gave a direct proof of God's existence, it would be a competitor to faith and would force us to abandon free choice⁹⁷: "a divine intervention in the sense of a directly visible action of God is theological nonsense."⁹⁸ Kasper even argues that the more God acts within his creation the more the creation grows to be independent. The ratio of the independence of creation is (in the course of history of humanity with God) direct instead of inverse.⁹⁹ Therefore, even the most wondrous events, including the event of the burning bush discussed above, are "natural" in the sense that they do not contradict or disrupt the natural order. As revelation, the miracles also are paradoxically at the same time familiar and unfamiliar events inside history. The miracles are one mode of "*finitum est capax infiniti*": they are signs towards infinite reality but not directly-given proof of its existence.

⁹⁵ EJC, 58.

⁹⁶ JC, 149: "Das Besondere des Wunders liegt also auf der Ebene der persönlichen Anrede und des persönlichen Anspruchs Gottes, einer Anrede und eines Anspruchs, die sich dadurch als mächtig erweisen, dass sie sich zeichenhaft verleblichen."

⁹⁷ JC, 145; 150; 154.

⁹⁸ JC, 150: "Ein Eingreifen Gottes im Sinn des unmittelbar-sichtbaren Handelns Gottes ist ein theologischer Unbegriff."

⁹⁹ JC, 150. Incidentally, this argument is also Kasper's argument against the Marxist idea of a religionless society. He argues that communism is ultimately unable to provide an answer to man's quest for the meaning of life. Christianity, instead, reveals value and dignity of every person instead of persons only being pieces of a sociological puzzle. The dignity of a person lies in his transcendence. Therefore, human autonomy and theonomy increase in direct proportion to each other. GJ, 96; B, 22–25; NGK, 87; 92–93.

The answer to the question of God cannot be found in miracles nor in the not-yet-explained realm of our existence – the starting point has to be something else. Kasper approaches, therefore, the question of God and the relevance of the word “God” in our modern culture from the point of view of the crisis of the modern day, that is, the nihilistic consequence anticipated by Nietzsche. Kasper’s starting point is the distorted concept of modern autonomy and the death of God as the ultimate consequence of the Copernican turn that ultimately leads to the negation of God and in its most aggressive form to modern militant atheism. But the death of God also means the death of man. The destruction of culture in our modern age leads to the destruction of modern age itself. This is because when we force our own roots to disappear, we destroy the very core of our own existence.¹⁰⁰

Because God’s existence cannot be either verified or falsified, many seem to think that discussions about God are completely insignificant.¹⁰¹ However, Kasper approaches the question from a slightly different angle: the point of departure for theology is not the existence (or even less proving the existence of) God, but instead the confession of faith which affirms that God is the Creator of heaven and earth and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not a matter of pure natural knowledge of God but instead of faith, a faith in God who has revealed himself.¹⁰² Therefore, Kasper’s point of departure when discussing the problems posed by modern atheism is that of revelation theology. Essential is how God works, the predicates based on his actions, so to speak, instead of the question of his being or his existence.

Kasper divides modern atheism into two main categories, both dependent on the understanding of autonomy in the modern age: the first is atheism that thinks that, because of autonomy in the cultural, political and scientific spheres there is no need for the God-hypothesis any longer. The second is humanistic atheism for the sake of freedom, that is, autonomy of the subject whose freedom rails against the idea of an omnipotent (and restrictive) God.¹⁰³ Kasper argues that no reflective form of atheism discusses the existence of God *per se*.¹⁰⁴ At the same time that atheism aims to defend individual rights and the right not to believe, it disregards Christianity’s concept of freedom. Kasper remarks that the origin of modern atheism is closely related to the Enlightenment concept of autonomy. Kasper claims that without the Christian concept of the value of the human being the modern – albeit distorted – concept of freedom and autonomy would not exist either.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ NGK, 87; GJ, 57.

¹⁰¹ GGA, 40–41; B, 13–14; cf. 22–25; KWS, 9.

¹⁰² GJ, 107; 111.

¹⁰³ GJ, 68; NGK, 89.

¹⁰⁴ GJ, 107.

¹⁰⁵ AT, 30; NGK, 87; 92. See also Hütter 2004, 111–113; 118–124. Hütter claims that when in postmodernity freedom is something that is demanded in every area of life, it has become polyvalent. The demand for Freedom is both characteristic of postmodernity and also something that is very difficult to define in the postmodern era. Having the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* as his background, Hütter offers three different definitions of freedom in our time by relating it to its opponents: freedom versus interference (the so-called “negative freedom”, which has to be controlled by law in order to ensure negative freedom for others as well); freedom versus determination (the “positive freedom”, freedom controlled by one’s

Whereas in the original Christian concept of freedom, freedom is understood to be based on the will of the free, loving God, the modern concept of freedom emphasises the autonomic, independent, human-based nature of freedom. The modern kind of thinking about freedom (one inherited from the understanding of the concept of autonomy of the Enlightenment) is, however, typical in our age both in atheistic and theistic ideologies.

For Kasper, only a given freedom – from the infinite God to finite man – is true freedom.¹⁰⁶

As opposed to atheistic humanism, God's infinite freedom does not appear as a restriction and questioning of human freedom but rather as its pre-requisite.¹⁰⁷

Not all the forms of atheism are a threat to Christianity. Sometimes atheism can also reveal the situation of man. Atheistic ideologies force Christians to take a stance toward the critique of religion. Karl Rahner interprets atheism as a natural result of secularism¹⁰⁸. Kasper argues that it is one possible result of secularism but certainly not an inevitable one.¹⁰⁹ Kasper is much more concerned about the idea of atheism (resulting from subjectivism) resulting in nihilism, which he sees is inevitable if all meaning, *Sinn*, is removed from the world. If religion is moved into a purely subjective plane, reality is reduced: if religion is everybody's private matter it becomes empty in the face of the whole of reality. Atheism and nihilism are logical consequences of this development already anticipated by Hegel.¹¹⁰

Kasper makes use of the term “troubled atheism” (*bekümmertes Atheismus*) originating from Rahner, when he refers to people who are in search for God but cannot hear God's voice in the modern Western value void.¹¹¹ When everything else is seen and done, and nothing else is left but a bare and naked person, the quest for God begins. One significant obstacle in modern dialogue is the persistent fear of some atheists of a superstitious, science-rejecting, Middle Age religion or too-anthropomorphic perception of

reason and will) and freedom *as such* – that is, *without* its opponent, which, in Hütter's opinion, most perfectly characterises the concept of freedom. The Christian concept of freedom is based exactly on the idea that freedom exists as such, that it is as a concept free from this-worldly comparison, and exists only on its own. Only the third kind of freedom presented here can be true freedom, because freedom defined in terms of its counterparts (interference or determination) always loses its absolute meaning. Only something that *is itself* absolute, can be characterised with an absolute meaning. Hence Hütter writes (very much in line with Kasper's writings) 2004, 113: “The “law” of this freedom, that is, divine freedom, can only be God's triune life itself and this divine life's being love.” On “positive freedom”, see also Hoff 2013, 13–14.
¹⁰⁶ GJ, 106.

¹⁰⁷ GVF, 512: “Anders als der atheistische Humanismus erweist sich die unendliche Freiheit Gottes nicht als Grenze und Infragestellung der menschlichen Freiheit, sondern als deren Möglichkeitsbedingung.“ See also GGE, 23; NGK, 91.

¹⁰⁸ A differentiation must be made between the concepts of secularisation (*Die Säkularisation*) and secularism (*Der Säkularismus*). The secularisation process itself is a legitimate process, in which the biblical understanding of the distinction between God and the world is brought into fulfilment. Secularism as an “ism”, on the other hand, does not represent a Christian world view but is rather indifferent to it. GJ, 52–53; OG, 59–60. The term “secularism” originated with George Jacob Holyoake, who understood secularism as philosophy that advances progress, a philosophy completely freed from the otherworldly.

¹⁰⁹ AGV, 51.

¹¹⁰ GJ, 57; 67–68. See also GGE, 23.

¹¹¹ GJ, 68–69.

the Christian God. For a fruitful dialogue those are the worst possible starting points. For it is also a hope of Christians to reject the anthropomorphic, autarchic, tyrant-like gods who exist only as moralists. Instead, if God were stripped of all anthropomorphic images and medieval prejudices, a mutual understanding with atheists would be possible to build based on the search for truth and the true meaning of life. What sense is there behind all this? What happens to me when the surrounding reality does not give satisfying answers to my questions anymore? This is the beginning of the realisation of one's own finitude and the beginning of the search for meaning. It is also the possible starting point for a dialogue between a religious and atheistic world view.

Faith is not a ball-and-chain for a Christian, it is in fact just the opposite: it liberates. Faith in God is not the jumping of a marionette, jerked by the strings of a skilful puppeteer, but a free, independent opening towards one's own ground of being. Kasper tries to find arguments for the Christian concept of the ground of being and freedom with the help of philosophical terms.¹¹² Therefore, his arguments come at least a little closer as well to persons who do not have a Christian world view. Kasper wrote at the end of *Die Methoden der Dogmatik (M)*, following his colleague Hans Urs von Balthasar:

The most serious observation is that theology has become weak in faith, sceptical, miserable and lost its sense of humour.¹¹³

Kasper's question arises from the *Zeitgeist*, which prompts a concerned question: where does the alienation of Christian concepts from their original meanings lead to and where has the authentic joy and involvement gone that the hearing of God's word once evoked in people?¹¹⁴ When doctrine has fossilised into a dead letter, the faith that relies on it also dies. Kasper states that the method of theology should be based on the principle of *fides quaerens intellectum* instead of composing strict theses. Christian faith is not about living strictly according to doctrine, it is about living in freedom. Why should theology have to stick to rigid doctrinal theses, when other fields of science today have a possibility and even an obligation to question, correct and challenge? In the light of living tradition this view is also in line with the Church's teaching. The Gospel is a living reality. Because it is characteristic of a human being to search for an understanding for his faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*), he finds himself in a constant battle between two powers: on the one hand there is unbelief (*Situation des Unglaubens*) and on the other hand the darkness of God (*der Gottesfinsternis*).¹¹⁵ One could say that it is harder today than ever before to have faith, because there is not only the danger of unbelief (which has always belonged to the struggle of the believer) but also because in the modern age people cannot seem to be able to hear the voice of God because it is somehow obscured behind all the

¹¹² On Kasper's method in dogmatics, see for example: *McMichael* 2006, xiii-xiv; *Plovanich* 1990, 53–65.

¹¹³ M, 87: "Der schlimmste Einwand ist der, dass die Theologie im Grunde so kleingläubig und argwöhnisch, so griesgrämig und so humorlos geworden ist."

¹¹⁴ M, 86–87.

¹¹⁵ GJ, 51; 60; B, 13–14; AGV, 32. After the Second World War Max Horkheimer wrote *Eclipse of Reason*, which dealt with the darkened concept of reason which has turned into a mere implement and become detached from its object ground. According to Horkheimer, the autonomous subjective reason independent of any common ground is actually irrational. *Horkheimer* 2004[1947], 54. Kasper quotes Horkheimer in a similar context: "Einen unbedingten Sinn ohne Gott zu retten, ist eitel." GVF, 512; B, 14.

white noise around us. To generalise: our age favours an atheistic orientation. In an age where the search for peace of mind, self-seeking, self-help, self-fulfilment have become trends, this observation might seem somewhat bizarre. Our own time can be characterised both as a time of dire need for meaning, search for fulfilment of life, and complete opposition to anything that seemingly prevents or restricts our self-seeking purposes. Kasper's analysis is clear: it is the self-this and self-that that is wrong with our culture. A human being is not meant to live a self-centered, self-sufficient, self-absorbed life. A human being is in his or her natural state when he or she is in relationship to others. And the most central of these relationships is the relationship to God. This basic orientation is already established in the event of creation.

If one tries to answer the question of God's being or non-being by mathematical or empirical means, and find proof from our finite reality, the discussion will spin around an endless circle. Instead, modern Christianity has to find, according to Kasper, a common language, a common ground for establishing a credible and affirmative answer to the question of God's existence. For Kasper, it is not only a question of affirming or denying God's existence but a much wider question. The questions and identities of human beings are also closely bound to the question of God.

The concept of freedom posited by Christianity includes the possibility of denying the existence of God:

It is not until the Christian conception of freedom that the whole depth of human freedom as a question concerning the relationship vis-a-vis God has been revealed and therefore, also the possibility to turn against God has been created.¹¹⁶

Only when God is been conceived as radically God was it possible also to deny him in a radical way.¹¹⁷

Exploring the historical roots of modern atheism gives the chance to embark on a proper discussion between the atheistic and theistic world views. For theism and atheism to be able to have a fruitful discussion the interlocutors must have a common understanding of what is actually meant by human transcendence.¹¹⁸ An atheist finds a basis for his arguments in the inner insecurity of Christianity: if the Christians do not even themselves know what the object of their belief is, how could they ever convince anyone else? Kasper takes seriously the external critique of Christianity, but answers it from within the Christian tradition and with its own language. According to Kasper, the most central thing to notice is the two-thousand-year-old Christian tradition. From the inner understanding of Christianity it is not possible to develop a new natural theology that would imply abandonment of the entire earlier theological tradition. The answer can, instead, be

¹¹⁶ AT; 30–31: “Erst die Christliche Freiheit hat den ganzen Abgrund menschlicher Freiheit als Freiheit im Gegenüber Gott zu Gott entdeckt und damit auch die Möglichkeit geschaffen, sich gegen Gott zu wenden.” See also: “Erfahrung der Abwesenheit Gottes” in *Die Theologie angesichts des heutigen Atheismus*: TAA, 73.

¹¹⁷ GJ, 64: “Erst, nachdem Gott radikal als Gott gedacht war, konnte man ihn auch radikal leugnen.” See also *McMichael* 2006, 35.

¹¹⁸ AGV, 36.

found in the Christian tradition and especially in the tradition of apophatic theology.¹¹⁹ Atheism, in turn, must acknowledge its own philosophical background and the transcendental-philosophical apparatus it uses. A naïve ignorant atheism is as useless a dialogue partner as is fundamentalist Christianity. Kasper's argument is that atheism became actually possible only because God was conceived radically as God. Thus Kasper argues that only when God is really and truly understood as something *totaliter aliter*, something that is completely beyond our capability to understand; when a person realises that God is something eternally mysterious and beyond our grasp, he or she can also deny God's existence. The experience of total unfamiliarity also brings the possibility for a complete estrangement from God.

Kasper derives his own understanding from modern philosophy and theology of history and makes natural theology a tool instead of seeing it as the ground of faith. He claims that faith grounds natural theology, not vice versa. Natural theology remains as a relatively independent entity and is thus, in Kasper's thought, grounded in freedom. Kasper maintains that there is one truth instead of many, and argues that faith can claim knowledge of the ultimate meaning of reality. This ultimate meaning is for him the revelation of Jesus Christ which makes him conclude that

The reasonableness of faith has for its starting point the fact that in Jesus Christ the definitive truth about God, man and the world has made its appearance.¹²⁰

Therefore, Kasper asks non-believers if they have a better explanation for our present reality, that is, if they can deny the fact that believer can find the ultimate meaning of reality through faith. He claims that it is a fact that created reality and the reality of salvation are not contradictory. Furthermore, he asks if the counterarguments to this stated fact are coherent and sound and answers himself in the negative.¹²¹ Kasper obviously acknowledges the fact of modern cultural and religious pluralism, but does not accept its claim regarding the relativity of truth and its claim that talk about universal truth is presumptuous Eurocentrism and that instead, pluralism should be considered as the new paradigm.¹²² He is open to dialogue but insists that an honest dialogue can only happen if one is first aware of his or her own position. One must know his or her own culture and religion and engage it before a fruitful dialogue with other cultures and religions is possible. Dialogue is not about compromising with one's own position: it is rather a mutual respect towards each others backgrounds, beliefs and values.

The dialogue between atheism and Christianity is often characterised by casting aspersions and efforts to make the counterpart look ridiculous.¹²³ Although from a philosophical reasoning we cannot find a satisfactory explanation for the question of why

¹¹⁹ AGV, 40–45.

¹²⁰ GJ, 153: "Dem Glauben eigenen Vernünftigkeit geht davon aus, dass in Jesus Christus die endgültige Wahrheit über Gott, den Menschen und die Welt erschienen ist." See also OG, 53.

¹²¹ GJ, 153–154.

¹²² GJ, 20; OG, 78–79; TK2, 252–255. Ratzinger has a similar view of pluralism, Eurocentrism and Western secularisation, see *Habermas & Ratzinger* 2006, 77–80.

¹²³ *Turner* 2002, 16.

some believe and some do not, Kasper tries to find an explanation from the Christian teaching on nature, the Fall, sin, love and grace.

The fact that man asks questions about his own origin is actually, says Kasper, due to the fact that sin has distorted the natural order of creation. Because of sin, man is unable to answer the question for himself. Only through grace the sinful nature of man can attain to its own full determination. The history between God and the human race is not for Kasper, however, a purely linear narrative of *pure state–fall–sinful state–redemption through grace–salvation and restoration* of nature. The history of God and man is, instead, a complex, dynamic history. Not even sin fully negates man's worth in front of God. Therefore, it can be maintained that “*grace presupposes nature and completes it*” but also that grace is the intrinsic presupposition of nature.¹²⁴ The duality between grace and nature is intrinsic to Christianity. It does not mean a dualism between spirit and matter, but rather a simultaneous difference and unity between them. The grace/nature distinction and their unity must, therefore, also be understood from the perspective of the cornerstone of analogical thinking in Kasper's theology: analogy is similarity and comparability, including the difference and similarity at the same time.¹²⁵

People who live in Western civilisation are used to seek proof and reason for every belief; this is why atheism has become a considerable competitor to Christianity. If one does not find unambiguous proof for his beliefs, atheism is considered as the only possible conclusion: there cannot be any God, because we cannot see, touch, smell, hear or feel him. God remains unreachable to our senses. Kasper strives to prove that despite the lack of the possibility of contact through the senses, God makes himself audible, visible and recognisable. The two-thousand-year-old Christian faith is not dead and moldy ideology but instead is a living reality here and now.

4.4. How Revelation Works: Experience of Meaning

If the dialogue of Christian faith with modern culture cannot begin with mathematical proof or empirical verification, the common ground for the dialogue must be found elsewhere. Here Kasper's insistence on metaphysics becomes necessary. Philosophy and metaphysics as its tool, can help to find the common denominator in our reality on which to base the dialogue. Beyond mathematical and empirical verification, philosophy gives room for experiences, feelings and imagination. Philosophy stretches the reality of our being – in a very similar way to theology – beyond what can be seen. If a common denominator for a dialogue with secular culture can be found at all, it is reasonable to seek it in the field of philosophy. In Kasper's philosophical-theological approach this universal denominator is the concept of freedom. Even though he characterises freedom as essentially divine concept, it is also a concept that can be grasped from a purely secular point of view. It is something that is commonly desired and treasured. It is a mode of being that every living (or at least to some extent thinking and feeling) creature can (at least relatively) recognise as a desirable state of being. In the above mentioned encounter with the infinite (or the

¹²⁴ GJ, 147–148; NGK, 83.

¹²⁵ GJ, 176; NGK, 83.

collision with the groundless ground of being, *Abgrund*) and in the philosophy of freedom, Kasper finds the philosophical framework for the search for meaning.

Kasper argues that as the ultimate ground of everything, God is also the ground of human freedom and love. According to this logic, only a genuinely free person can recognise what is free. Only a genuine freedom that is beyond any definition can make one truly free. For Kasper the essential question is that of the possibility for a human being to transcend the limits of his or her own being. Paradoxically, awareness of finitude leads to the experience of the infinite. The possibility of perceiving the limits of one's own being and reason enables one to reach beyond and transcend those limitations. It is not possible to understand the concept of "infinite" fully, without first encountering the limits of finitude. Although there remains both a qualitative and a quantitative difference between the infinite and the finite¹²⁶, through the analogy of freedom we can grasp something of divine reality: "Because he (God) is free, he can be recognised only in freedom".¹²⁷ Human freedom based on the being of God gives man the possibility to respond to God's address affirmatively or negatively: In other words, the human being corresponds freely, without any force or pressure whatsoever.

The human being's capacity for understanding the limits of his own being enables him to step across the borderline of his or her own limits and realise that there must be something infinite behind those limits.¹²⁸ Precisely in the encounter between finite and infinite lies the possibility of connecting with God. Kasper calls this encounter the "meaning experience" (*Sinnerfahrung*¹²⁹ or *Grunderfahrung*¹³⁰) – in this experience a person understands something of himself and of God, something with the help of which he can also redirect his own being, goals and the meaning of his life in the right direction.¹³¹ If one acknowledges that, in fact, there can be found at least partial meanings in our reality (for example in the partial knowledge we acquire from reality but also, as Kasper emphasises, especially in love and friendship between human beings) we can see these partial meanings as pre-apprehensions of the meaning of reality as a whole. Therefore, the meaning experience (*Sinnerfahrung*) leads to understanding the meaning of all of reality. This is not a proven reality, however, but one that is based on hope.¹³²

It is a question of the meaning dimension that is always there [in the historical situation of experience] already implicitly without an expression. When examined more

¹²⁶ See also on Kierkegaard's analysis of the "eternal essential and qualitative difference", *Podmore* 2005, 8–12. Kierkegaard takes the concept of the Abyss (*Afgrunden*) and places it within man himself. When gazing upon the abyss and realising the difference between himself and God, man is actually gazing to an abyss within himself, that is, sin.

¹²⁷ GJ, 182. "Weil er frei ist, kann er nur in Freiheit anerkannt werden."

¹²⁸ GJ, 181–183.

¹²⁹ GJ, 164–165; 195–196.

¹³⁰ GJ, 162.

¹³¹ GJ, 195–196.

¹³² GJ, 195–196.

thoroughly, the question of spiritual science is not any more about explanation of nature but rather of the human-historical expressions of life.¹³³

According to Kasper, man realises the limits of his own being and reason when he encounters infinite reality. Before God's infinity, man inevitably comprehends the finitude of his own being. From the moment of his realisation of his own finite being man can have connection to God as he realises that God is the infinite ground of being from which everything originates and to which everything owes their being. Man has the possibility to recognise these qualities in himself only after he realises the limits of his own being.¹³⁴ This is the philosophical description of an experience that is at least relatively common to every intelligent creature. A human being attaches himself not only to his or her own history but to human history in general as well. The question of the finitude of our being is a universal phenomenon among people, no matter of what culture or religion.

When we ask about the meaning of life, the world and being, we are looking for a common ground which gives us the ultimate answer. Therefore:

Above all, the meaningfulness of the whole cannot come from finite man but only from a meaning and a Spirit that embraces both man and the world, from a Spirit which is at the same time the all-determining reality and thus from what in the language of religion we call God.¹³⁵

The experience of meaning arises from the ultimate experience of meaninglessness, of the experience of finitude. In Anglo-Saxon philosophy, this experience is called a *disclosure situation* (German *Erschließungssituation*): it refers to individual experiences that somehow surpass ordinary experiences, experiences that are, in Kasper's words 'in, with and under'¹³⁶ concrete experiences.¹³⁷ This is "where" revelation takes place as well.¹³⁸ Revelation is also indirect in this sense.

Every revelation presupposes a pre-apprehension of revelation; it is tied to earlier revelation, reminds one of it and brings it to mind, and at the same time it foreshadows a future, fulfilled revelation.¹³⁹

¹³³ G, 129: "Es geht um die Sinn-Dimension, die dort unausdrücklich immer schon impliziert ist. Näherhin geht es den Geisteswissenschaften nicht mehr um das Erklären der Natur, sondern um das Verstehen der menschlich-geschichtlichen Lebensäußerungen." The concept of "spiritual science" originates from Wilhelm Dilthey 1974, 108–124; see also OG, 81–82.

¹³⁴ Cf. Tillich 1956, 223: "Unendlichkeit ist: sich selbst grenzenlos transzendierende Endlichkeit."

¹³⁵ GJ, 196: "Die Sinnhaftigkeit des Ganzen kann vor allem nicht aus dem endlichen Menschen kommen, sondern nur aus einem Sinn und einem Geist, der Mensch und Welt nochmals umgreift, aus einem Geist, der zugleich die alles bestimmende Wirklichkeit ist, also von dem, den wir in der Sprache der Religion Gott nennen."

¹³⁶ GJ, 163: "'in, mit und unter konkreten Erfahrung'"

¹³⁷ GJ, 163; GJ, 208; KK, 115.

¹³⁸ GJ, 212; OG, 66–67.

¹³⁹ OG, 71: "Jede Offenbarung setzt bereits ein Vorverständnis von Offenbarung voraus; sie knüpft an frühere Offenbarung an, erinnert und vergegenwärtigt diese, und sie weist zugleich auf eine künftige, endgültige Offenbarung voraus." Cf. GJ, 181: "Jeder endliche Begriff setzt einen Vorgriff auf das Unendliche voraus." See also DV, 12; 24.

These experiences open up total meaning and total context. This is where analogy becomes useful: like religious experience itself, it also refers to a reality beyond itself.

The “meaning experience”, however, remains an ambiguous concept if it lacks a concrete point of reference in concrete reality. The experience receives its meaning when it attaches itself to previous experiences or concrete situations. The Eucharist is a good example of this kind of experience. The Eucharist is the ultimate realisation of religious experience as something that happens *in, with and under* our concrete experience (cf. Christ’s presence in the Eucharist taking place *in, cum* and *sub*). It is at the same time a concrete event in this reality (sharing and consuming bread and wine) while it also refers to the reality beyond (the bread and wine as the body and blood of Christ). The Eucharist also has an ecclesiological aspect, which could be described as a positive circular function: the faithful join together in the Eucharist and are thus, in this act of joining together, members of the faithful.¹⁴⁰ The meaning experience emerges when a finite being reaches out from its finitude towards the infinite. In Christian language, this is an experience of mercy and freedom. This meaning experience is, however, never comprehensive because ultimately the reality of God always remains a mystery.

Experience stands in a tension between past, present and future and is always open to the new. Kasper states that we do not only have direct experiences but that they can also be experiences of experiences or indirect experiences. With this ambiguous definition Kasper tries to grasp the experiencing of infinite reality. Because we can never grasp infinite reality as such, we can only have indirect experience of it. The concept “indirect experience” is central for Kasper: it is his way of explaining the experience of a reality that we cannot fully and totally grasp. The experience is indirect in the sense that it comes in vague, inexplicable form. The Eucharist has all the elements of indirect experience: it points to a reality beyond ours and when receiving it, we get a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the reality the Eucharist points to. When celebrating the Eucharist we are concretely, yet mysteriously connected to the reality beyond ours. Conceptually it is related to the concept of *Vorgriff*, a pre-apprehension, or an intuition. Kasper uses the phrase *in, with and under* (other) experiences, and what he tries to express could be further illustrated with expressions like “dreamlike” or “incomplete”. This is how Kasper provides an explanation of the necessity of transmission of community for religious experience: religious experience finds its authenticity in the testing and co-experiencing of others. As an individual, single “experience, which we can only have ‘in, with and under’ our other experiences”¹⁴¹ it would be too vague, when evaluated in the light of the community (*communio*). However, when similar experiences are lived and experienced within the

¹⁴⁰ Henri DeLubac wrote in his 1944 book *Corpus Mysticum: Essai sur l’Eucharistie et l’Eglise au Moyen Age*: “the church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the church”. Kerr 2007, 71–72. DeLubac also noted that before the encyclical *Corporis Christi* of Pius XII, the mystical body of Christ referred to the Eucharistic body of Christ, not to the Church community of Christ. This shift in interpretation of the mystical body of Christ, led to the formulation of Eucharistic ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. See also Kasper’s analysis of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and its relation to Eucharistic theology: B, 118.

¹⁴¹ GJ, 162: “Eine Erfahrung, die wir mit, in und unter’ unserer sonstigen Erfahrung machen.” See also KK, 115.

community and some common denominator for those experiences can be found, their authenticity can be at least relatively verified. This is one reason why the Eucharist cannot be celebrated alone – it is always an event of the whole community of believers (*communio*).

Kasper states that especially contrasting experiences, the new and unfamiliar that we encounter, challenge us and are the most fruitful. The most challenging experience is the experience of finitude. For Kasper, this is the *Gründerfahrung*, the fundamental experience.¹⁴² He claims that the paradoxical character of the concept of experience of transcendent reality reflects the paradoxical character of reality. Kasper argues that transcendence is what makes experience possible in the first place but that it is itself historically contingent. This means that transcendental experience, or basic experience, is by its character at the same time the experience that presides every other experience and gives meaning to them. The mystery dimension that opens up in the experience of transcendence is the reality to which all other experiences point. This is, however, not a scientifically exact description of the ambiguous philosophical concept of experience (which Kasper admits is one of the most difficult to define in the field of philosophy), but rather Kasper's own analysis of experience of transcendence based on experience. That is, based on his own conviction Kasper argues that there lies a mysterious, great, unfathomable ground of all existence beyond this reality that we observe only with our senses and of which we get only "direct" information. Therefore, religious experience is always the sum and a mediator of other experiences and in this sense an indirect experience.

This historical-philosophical reasoning cannot, however, be taken as proof of the existence of God. If the meaning of life is to be found at a universal level, Kasper insists that it is logical to ask: is not this universality something that touches and encounters us personally? When we ask about the meaning of life, the world and being, we try to find a common ground which gives us the ultimate answer. In a modern context this common ground has been lost:

Once the meaning of the whole has been lost and once the reality of God as that which ordains, governs and supports the whole has been removed, every individual reality also becomes ultimately meaningless. Everything descends into an abyss of nothingness.¹⁴³

To be able to understand Kasper's arguments one must, therefore, take into account as well the context within which he makes his arguments. For example, to a natural scientist the meaning experience (*Sinn-Erfahrung*) described by Kasper perhaps would not open up at all as an experience of divine reality. The collision of a man with his own limits can also happen without the inevitable experience of the transcendent reality behind those limits. There is no *logical* necessity to state that meaning – and especially meaning in the form of an absolute or a god – is a universal concept. Quite to the contrary, in the modern

¹⁴² GJ, 162. In Rahner's and Johannes Baptist Lotz's thinking the experience of our finitude is called *transcendental experience*. See also OG, 67.

¹⁴³ GJ, 57: "Mit dem Wegfall des Sinns des Ganzen, mit dem Wegfall der alles bestimmenden, durchwaltenden und tagenden Wirklichkeit Gottes wird auch alles einzelne letztlich sinnlos. Es fällt alles in einen Abgrund des Nichts." See also B, 127.

context one can base one's conviction, for example, on blind chance as the universal explanation for the findings of quantum physics. Blind chance, even as a universal explanation, is an apersonal, materialistic explanation of everything. Therefore, equally valid an argument would be that meaning is perfected through every particular experience of meaning, without any reference to a universal reality, or to any explanatory "greater reality beyond ours". A reductionist interpretation of physics would explain everything as nothing but the sum of its parts, and that an account of it can be reduced to accounts of individual parts of it.¹⁴⁴ Without the interpretation of the philosophy of freedom, which in Kasper's thought, opens for us a window to divine reality, an atheist or an agnostic may encounter only himself on the borderline and receive the experience that existence really and truly is limited and finite and that everything ends in death.¹⁴⁵ Or, in the case of the whole universe, that everything ends where the existing, known universe ends. That is, beyond the totality of the universe there literally "is" "nothing" – nothingness "is" nothing. Only nothingness prevails as an absolute. Nothing.

Moreover, even the concept of freedom needs a theological explanation for it to act as an explanation for the divine concept of meaningfulness. What is interesting in current physics is, though, that even scientists admit that it will probably never be possible to explain everything (with only the help of empirical reality) because the computing ability of the universe would not be sufficient for it! What an interface between believers and atheists: there absolutely, definitely is "the something" (whatever it is) that we cannot, and probably never will be able to, exhaustively explain. At least there is something in common.

This is why the concept of *Abgrund*¹⁴⁶ is helpful if we truly try to find a common starting point for a dialogue with secular culture. The "nothing" beyond one's own finitude is just that: nothing, a gap, an emptiness, a complete and thorough finitude and nothingness – unless that experience is understood in the light of the idea of *Sinn-*

¹⁴⁴ The reductionist theory also has its critics. See PNAS 4/2000, vol 97: *Laughlin, R.B. & Pines, David*: "Theory of Everything": "[...] in most respects the reductionist ideal has reached its limits as a guiding principle. Rather than a Theory of Everything we appear to face a hierarchy of Theories of Things, each emerging from its parent and evolving into its children as the energy scale is lowered. The end of reductionism is, however, not the end of science, or even the end of theoretical physics."

¹⁴⁵ Although many of Kasper's writings also touch upon the concept of death, he has written relatively little on the subject of death. In *Wann darf ich kommen und Gottes Anlitz schauen? (Ps 42,3) Eschatologie als endgültige Gottesbegegnung* (GAS) Kasper discusses the concept of death from both a philosophical and a theological point of view. He treats death using the concept of the "limit experience." It is both alien to us (for no one still living has experienced death first hand) and familiar (for many experience death through the loss of those close to them). As an experience it is thus attached to the experience of others but as something unfamiliar it is something indescribable. Death is ultimate estrangement from God who, as opposed to the final and devastating destiny of nothingness, wants us to live. The universal hope lies in the promise of Jesus in the coming Kingdom of God. The new aeon that was begun in his death and Resurrection gives us an anticipatory glimpse into the heavenly Kingdom. In death we take our whole human constitution with us, body and soul (Kasper rejects the common definition of death as separation of body and soul). In the holy vision of God (*in der seligen Gottesschau*) we are no longer bound by time, but our experiences in time are brought into fulfilment. The Christian hope is transformed a fulfilled hope, no longer anticipation but instead a fulfilled hope, peace and joy. GAS, 11–12; 16; 24. See also GJ, 268–269.

¹⁴⁶ *Abgrund* is also a basic concept of Meister Eckhart: *Abgrund* can be characterised as the "mystical consciousness" where the human and divine encounter happens. See e.g. *McGinn* 2001, 39–40.

Erfahrung, a meaning-experience. The *Sinn-Erfahrung* gives the person undergoing it an experience of something absolutely meaningful and deep, as opposed to a horrifying experience of all-consuming emptiness. This all-consuming emptiness has found its explanation in Christian theology: *the Fall* blurs human beings' capability to understand something of Divine reality (*capax Dei, Vorgriff*). Therefore, in a Christian explanation, *sin* is the cause of *Gottesfinsternis*. However, one could also adopt Feuerbach's reversal of Hegel's dialectical understanding of God and man and ask if consciousness of the infinite is not only a consciousness (or rather a hope) of man's own infiniteness so that in the end faith is actually a projection of the need for God that turns into finding it in ourselves.¹⁴⁷

Kasper does not, however, try to convert persons with an atheistic view of life to Christianity. After all, the values related to customs and views of life are always dependent on culture, upbringing and personal choice, and they can only rarely be engaged by means of intellectual argumentation. Kasper applies his philosophy of freedom to the question of belief or non-belief: no one can demonstrate that God is the ground of all being from outside a person. The conviction, the belief, must come from inside. This requires man to open himself in freedom to this truth. Moreover, in his commentary on the Declaration on Religious Freedom of the Second Vatican Council (*Dignitatis humanae*)¹⁴⁸, Kasper notes that freedom and truth are intertwined. For freedom to be perfect, truth must be its ontological prerequisite. Therefore, Kasper combines the idea of perfect freedom with truth and indirectly claims that God as perfect being in freedom must also be the perfect truth.¹⁴⁹ *The Vorgriff*—nature of belief means that man has to surrender himself or herself to his own finitude, in face of the reality of death, in order to gain himself or herself. This can only happen as an interior process and cannot be forced from the outside.

Kasper's arguments can be challenged by the claim that they are valid only for the person who has faith. But once faith is there, it can give a fulfilling answer to the whole meaning of being. The meaning experience thus not only gives the answer to the question of who is God for us, it also answers the question of man himself. For Kasper, the meaning experience, given to us through the revelation of Jesus Christ, provides a satisfying explanation for the inexplicable in ourselves.

The trinitarian self-revelation of God is thus the surpassing answer to the question and quest which man not only has but is: the question and quest of God. The trinitarian revelation and the trinitarian confession of faith are the ultimate, eschatological and definitive determination of the indeterminate openness of man.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ GJ, 81–82.

¹⁴⁸ Declaration on Religious Freedom: *Dignitatis humanae*: On the right of the person and on communities to social and civil freedom in matters religious. Promulgated 7th of December 1965 by Pope Paul VI.

¹⁴⁹ WF, 31.

¹⁵⁰ GJ, 477: "Die trinitarische Selbstoffenbarung Gottes ist also die überbietende Antwort auf die Frage, die der Mensch nicht nur hat, sondern ist: die Frage nach Gott. Die trinitarische Offenbarung und das Trinitätsbekenntnis sind die letzte, eschatologisch-endgültige Bestimmung der unbestimmten Offenheit des Menschen." See also OG, 74.

4.5. Reasonable and Paradoxical Revelation

The dialectical tension between the logical or rational and the paradoxical nature of revelation can be seen throughout Kasper's theological system. In its most definitive form this can be seen in Kasper's interpretation of the Pauline theology of the Cross. Kasper argues that in his uttermost humiliation on the Cross God is actually at his strongest. Kasper makes the distinctions between poor and rich, humiliated and exalted, tiny and great, diminutive and grand, the cornerstone of his theological system. From the point of view of mere human beings the destiny of Jesus seems like a great failure but from the point of view of Kingdom of God, hope and salvation, it appears as a great victory.¹⁵¹ If the Incarnation, life of Jesus Christ, his death and Resurrection are the culmination of God's self-revelation, then the paradox of victory versus failure lives inside the entire salvation history and inside God's self-revelation. Kasper assimilates the victory on the Cross to the paradoxical nature of revelation and makes the ability to rise from poverty to wealth, from humiliation to victory the whole basic intention of revelation. Kasper writes: "The Kingdom of God comes in obscurity and failure."¹⁵² The demand for *something new* reaches its apex in the unexpectedness of God's Kingdom. It is a paradox at its deepest sense. It is also in line with Kasper's basic axiom of analogy: *finitum est capax infiniti*. One can realise one's own dependence on infinite reality only by realising deeply one's own finitude. The paradox of something new comes forth from the parable of Kingdom of God. From poverty to richness, from failure to victory, from death to life. From finitude to eternal life.

Jesus talks of the mystery of the Kingdom (Mk 4,11). What is that mystery which alone makes everything else clear and intelligible?¹⁵³

Kasper states that the parable of the Sower and the Seed (Mt 13,24) illustrates the nature of God's Kingdom: as the seed which is planted on stony ground and brings forth fruit, in the same way God's kingdom affects our reality, bringing forth something new in the most unexpected way. Kasper argues that in the world of the New Testament the modern idea of growth through natural development was alien and, therefore, the parable becomes even more powerful: people did not only see natural development, they saw a miracle of God. Therefore, the parable is even stronger. It tries to describe reality in a way honest to the nature of the Kingdom itself: the Kingdom is itself a parable to which the parables try to point.¹⁵⁴ In our reality the Church represents the mystery of God, a *communio*, where the paschal mystery of Christ becomes a living reality. The Church is not primarily an institution or an organisation, but a community of believers who actively participate in the mystery of Christ.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ JC, 121–122; B, 85–86; 122–123.

¹⁵² JC, 122: "So kommt die Gottesherrschaft in Verborgenheit, ja Misserfolg." See also JC, 156–157; B, 123.

¹⁵³ JC, 156: "Jesus spricht vom Geheimnis der Gottesherrschaft (Mk 4,11). Was ist dieses Geheimnis, von dem her alles andere erst seine Eindeutigkeit und Verständlichkeit bekommt?"

¹⁵⁴ JC, 122; GJ, 139.

¹⁵⁵ KK, 139–141; RS, 281; MM, 15–16.

Kasper defends the nature of revelation as mystery.¹⁵⁶ Not everything can, nor need be, explained rationally:

If man tries to explain, organise and manipulate everything rationally, he is sure to become a victim of that very planning and manipulation.¹⁵⁷

In the field of comparative religion, Rudolf Otto developed the central concepts of the phenomenology of the sacred: the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* – the numinous reality which is at the same time terrifying and fascinating.¹⁵⁸ The philosophical thought of Schelling is also behind Otto's thought. According to Schelling, at the core of reality horror and fear prevail: *Grund*, God, numinous reality, is beyond all our attempts to understand it. It remains beyond our grasp and as such it is hidden, frightening and horrifying and yet attractive at the same time. Kasper compares the modern view of reality to that of the pre-Enlightenment era. Divine reality was easier to understand from the mythological perspective of the pre-modern era in which gods were understood "simply" as the depth dimension of nature:

The Divine was – so to speak – the dimension in depth of all reality, filling everything with a numinous radiance.¹⁵⁹

The divine is the depth dimension of the world; it is as it were a predicate applied to a cosmos that is understood as numinous.¹⁶⁰

In the pre-Enlightenment period people saw the mysterious, even frightening ground of their own being as something to rely on and something with which one could trust one's life. It was at the same time a frightening and comforting reality. In our time, paradoxically, the nature of this numinous reality as mysterious or hidden makes people turn away from it. In antiquity, order in the divine dimension meant in turn order in the secular context. If someone questioned this (that is, for example the prevailing gods), he would be questioning the entire cosmic order. The punishment could be as serious as death.¹⁶¹ In Christianity the conception of God changed from the depth dimension into a personal and living God. Kasper emphasises the Christian influence in the development of the modern concept of human beings as invaluable and of individuality based on the biblical understanding of man

¹⁵⁶ KK, 116.

¹⁵⁷ JC, 84: "Wenn nämlich der Mensch versucht, alles rational zu erklären, zu organisieren und zu manipulieren, dann muß er damit rechnen, am Ende selbst verplant und manipuliert zu werden."

¹⁵⁸ OG, 61; GJ, 164.

¹⁵⁹ JC, 246: "Das Göttliche war gleichsam die Tiefendimension aller Wirklichkeit, die alles mit einem numinosen Glanz erfüllte." See also JC, 79; NGK, 82.

¹⁶⁰ GJ, 235: "Das Göttliche ist die Tiefendimension der Welt, sozusagen ein Prädikat eines numinos verstandenen Kosmos." See also JC, 79; OG, 61.

¹⁶¹ NGK, 82. See also *Nongbri* 2013, 63–64; 154–159. Nongbri argues that the concept of "religion" is actually a relatively late term in cultural history and is rooted in a mix of Christian development of truth claims, European colonial practices and in the formation of nation-states. In the ancient world and cultures (and part of this is still true in modern, non-European cultures) there was no definitive word for practices that would be described as "religious" in a pre-Modern or Modern (European) context. Instead, people actually described the sacred dimension of life in terms that actually do not separate the "religious" dimension of life from the "secular". Therefore, the entire differentiation between religious/secular is actually quite late.

as created in the image of God.¹⁶² In Kasper's understanding it was not until the Christian conception of God as a personal and communicative God that humanity as well received its true value.

4.5.1. The Risk of Faith and Responsible Hope

Kasper emphasises that belief always involves taking a risk: faith can never be based on empirical evidence derived from our reality. In the end it is always a question of a personal choice of giving oneself to God, a leap of faith, in the words of Kierkegaard. Faith can be rational and logical in the context of the community of believers, but it can never be objectively verified and neither does it have to be.¹⁶³ Because the infinite can never be captured in finite concepts, God can only be known if he wants himself to be known. Kasper's understanding of the debate over *analogia entis* (involving Barth, Erich Przywara and Balthasar) follows the basic orientation of Przywara, but Kasper associates his theology-of-history approach with Balthasar's idea of the salvation historical work of God. Przywara (as well as Kasper) emphasises that there always lies a larger difference than similitude between the Creator and the creature. Kasper agrees with Balthasar on this, but diverges from Przywara in emphasising the analogical relationship between nature and order of redemption. For Balthasar, the free act of God in Jesus Christ is central. This is also Kasper's interpretation. The difference between the Creator and creature remains, but the historical act of God in Jesus Christ, the Incarnation, that is the ultimate revelation of God, appears in history not as words but as love. Przywara emphasises the *totaliter aliter* in God's being by arguing that in God's gift for his creatures he is always new and unexpected. Whereas Przywara interprets this "newness" in God's revelation as something emphasising the difference between the Creator and creature, Balthasar and Kasper see this "newness" as something that is revealed and given to us in love. In Kasper's approach, in the course of history the tension between the infinite and finite reality is overcome. In the freedom that is based on infinite reality, the human being is "bigger than himself or herself". For Kasper, human beings never exist only "on their own" but only in relation to the entirety of reality. This orientation is the human being's true freedom, received from its infinite source. Therefore, Kasper's approach is different from both Barth and Rahner as well as Przywara and Balthasar, but takes, however, something from all these approaches.¹⁶⁴

Revelation, however, already is present from the first moment of creation. It reflects the inner reality of the Trinitarian God. Therefore, revelation is right from the start the basis for all knowledge of God. For Kasper, revelation is not a propositional message, a statement from God, a proof given from the world beyond ours. Divine revelation is above all communication. It is not, however, only unidirectional communication from God to man; in the *event* of revelation the recipient of revelation (man opening to the revelation of God) is as important as God, the one who reveals. Revelation is not, however, irrational

¹⁶² NGK, 82–83.

¹⁶³ GVF, 517.

¹⁶⁴ See *Joha* 1992, 38–41; 76; 95. See also *Casarella* 2011, 192–206.

and purely experience-based. Kasper emphasises that there has to be a common ground on which the reality of revelation is based.

Kasper insists that understanding the meaning experience (*die Sinnerfahrung*) and the question of meaning (*die Sinnfrage*) help us find an answer to the question of the intelligible understanding of the concept of faith. Though we can never fully grasp God from his revelation, we can find meaning and reason in it. Kasper's explanation of the meaning experience (*Sinnerfahrung*) goes even further: he uses the terms "responsible risk" (*ein verantwortetes Risiko*) and "responsible hope" (*eine verantwortete Hoffnung*). Once again Kasper distances himself from the search for scientific evidence and instead finds a Christian alternative to convince nonbelievers that there is a reasonable, intellectual content to Christian beliefs. Kasper takes Pascal's wager¹⁶⁵ as an example. He does not simply assimilate Pascal's idea of a bet, but uses it as a helpful tool to describe his vision of faith as a risk. Both belief and unbelief are risks for a human being. A human being's risk-taking is based on his or her personal apprehension of faith: that is, whether it is convincing to him or her or not. But it is also more than only a matter of being convinced: in the end it is a question of life and death. Thus it is not unusual that a nonbeliever becomes a believer on his or her deathbed. According to Kasper, a person who does believe is offered security in revelation and the testimony of other believers, which guarantees his or her beliefs. Neither revelation nor the faith can be defined comprehensively. There is and always will be something unrevealed and mysterious about them. However, Kasper insists that faith is under no circumstances a reckless, irrational wager – and neither is it "insurance to be on the safe side" as in Pascal's theory. Faith embraces the inner logic of faith and the inner logos of faith. Faith gives people hope, which is neither irrational nor abstract but is instead based on reliable testimony. The theme of testimony brings Kasper's view close to one of his most used biblical quotations: "Simply proclaim the Lord Christ holy in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you have." (1 Peter 3, 15).¹⁶⁶ It can also be applied to one of his theses: "The proclamation of the Gospel of Christian freedom is the primary service the Church can offer to the world"¹⁶⁷ Therefore, in Kasper's understanding the testimony of revelation's affecting power and the view of hope that is based on revelation is always a responsible hope.

¹⁶⁵ cf. Pröpper 2011, 54. Pascal's basic argument was that if you believe and are right, you win everything; if you believe and are wrong, you lose nothing. Therefore, it is only logical to believe, even if it is only "just in case". What was revelatory in Pascal's argument was that instead of trying to prove that belief in the *existence* of God is reasonable (that is, existence of God is a reasonable presumption), it strove to prove that *belief* itself was pragmatically reasonable. Jordan argues that there are four versions of Pascal's wager: see Jordan 2005, 170–179. The difference between the versions is the weight given to the various possibilities and their outcomes: what happens if one believes or does not believe, what if God exists or he does not exist. Even though Pascal himself (although so falsely quoted) did not suggest hell being the "worst option", he was still convinced that the results of believing would always outweigh the results of nonbelief. If the gain is infinite, it remains infinite even if any finite objections are subtracted from it.

¹⁶⁶ GVF, 516-517; GJ, 16; 140; 145; ZZD, 260; THH, 12; KK, 87; HT, 251; 253; RS, 290.

¹⁶⁷ CUF, 40.

Kasper argues that human existence implies a universal quest for meaning and hope:

Whenever man refuses to despair in the meaning of history, and instead hopes against all hope for a meaning to his human existence, he is supported by a pre-comprehension of salvation and redemption. Ultimate hope is possible in history only on the basis of a qualitatively new beginning which is not derivable from history itself. And the new start is the worldly external form of what the Christ message means by redemption, grace and salvation.¹⁶⁸

Hope, therefore, is always based on a vision of the future. No one can see nor predict the future: that is why hope always remains a pre-comprehension (*Vorgriff*) at its best of what might be (if everything goes well). In Kasper's thought hope is intimately bound to the "underivably new" (*unableitbar Neues*) and to salvation.

History is not only moved by the quest and hope for salvation but contains signs of salvation which alone give meaning to hope in an ultimate meaning and a universal salvation in history. These signs of salvation are to be found wherever the underivably new comes into being. Wherever new life originates hope breaks forth.¹⁶⁹

The "new" is located at the same time in the present moment (the historical moment in which we anticipate the future) and in the future (the fulfilment of the hope). Here hope is the central term. Kasper seeks to distance himself from the straightforward evolutionary understanding of "anthropology becoming Christology", in which Christology is understood as a process of anthropological progress or its culmination point.¹⁷⁰ Kasper argues that the evidence we already face in the world today shows us that there is no sign of Christology becoming an evolutionary world order. He states: "there are signs and pointers of meaning *in* the world but there are no signs of a meaning *of* the world."¹⁷¹ Because suffering and non-fulfilment still remain in the world, it is more honest for a theologian to say there is no universal explanation of meaning through Christology as an evolutionary process. Accordingly, Jesus Christ can only be an explanation and meaning of all the reality if he also takes the agony, suffering and incompleteness of world and humanity to himself. For Kasper, Jesus Christ can only be the fulfilment of history in the sense that he takes everything, the greatness and the imperfection alike, to himself.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁸ JC, 100: "Wenn immer der Mensch nicht am Sinn der Geschichte verzweifelt, sondern gegen alle Hoffnung auf einen Sinn seines Menschseins hofft, wird er getragen von einem Vorverständnis von Heil und Erlösung. Denn eine letzte Hoffnung ist in der Geschichte nur möglich aufgrund eines aus der Geschichte selbst unableitbaren, qualitativ neuen Anfangs. Ein solcher Neuanfang ist aber nichts anderes als die weltliche Außengestalt dessen, was die christliche Botschaft von Erlösung, Gnade und Heil meint." English translation has been modified.

¹⁶⁹ JC, 102–103: "Die Geschichte ist nicht nur bewegt von der Frage und von der Hoffnung nach Heil, es finden sich in ihr auch schon Zeichen des Heils, die die Hoffnung auf einen letzten Sinn und auf ein universales Heil in der Geschichte erst sinnvoll machen. Solche Zeichen des Heils finden sich überall, wo unableitbar Neues wird; wo neues Leben entsteht, da bricht Hoffnung auf." See also OG, 62; JC, 371–372.

¹⁷⁰ Kasper claims that Karl Rahner and Teilhard de Chardin represent such an anthropologically-oriented evolutionary Christology.

¹⁷¹ JC, 103: "Es gibt Zeichen und Hinweise auf Sinn *in* der Welt; aber es gibt nicht Zeichen für einen Sinn *der* Welt".

¹⁷² JC, 103.

The theme of responsible hope is essentially bound up with the question of being and that of the meaning of being. Kasper explains that it is no longer possible to rely on the old means of trying to understand faith, and that the discussion of God must be done in a responsible way, with honesty to the context of the modern world.¹⁷³ Kasper aims to make faith understandable right now, in this specific cultural and historical context. It is the only way to give hope to the future as well. Man is an open question himself: there is an inbuilt question of meaning, sense and future within him. These questions also include that of where we are to attach our own hopes. In the Christian God Kasper finds the light of the future:

As we speak of God as the power of the future, we do not make God a stopgap; he is not the answer to this or that single question, but the answer to the basic situation people are in.¹⁷⁴

God is not a conceivable entity, an open book and a ready-given answer to our search for meaning.

Kasper remarks that now more than ever people are constantly searching for answers to the ultimate questions, adding that “we encounter bitter disappointment when we offer rocks instead of bread”¹⁷⁵ In the background lies an even more extensive idea of Christianity being a living faith in a living God who is present in our reality instead of a God of strict commandments and doctrines. Kasper is wary of the loss of symbolic reality and the depth dimension of faith in which the faith of the Church becomes too rational and doctrine-oriented. Secularism is not only a threat from outside the Church, it lurks inside the Church as well. The agony of being cannot be addressed with a rigid system of doctrine. This basic critique arises from Kasper’s characterisation of the modern era as “a second Enlightenment” (*Eine zweite Aufklärung*).¹⁷⁶ In this age, our expectations of religions are not diminished but quite to the contrary are increased. People rely on their reason and want answers to be reasonable. But at the same time the answers they are looking for cannot be ascertained with pure reasoning alone. An open question, the question of meaning and purpose, requires an answer that touches the whole of existence. Church must offer living, reasonable, understandable and appealing bread. One cannot be nourished, truly encountered in heart and soul, with mathematical logic, clichés or formulations appealing only to reason.

Meaning (*der Sinn*) is equivalent to God’s promise (*die Verheissung*) in the Bible: God has given his word to people.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ EJC, 31.

¹⁷⁴ EJC, 46: “Wenn wir so von Gott als der Macht der Zukunft reden, dann machen wir Gott nicht wieder zum Lückenbüsser; er ist uns nicht die Antwort auf diese oder jene Einzelfrage, sondern die Antwort auf die Grundsituation des Menschen.”

¹⁷⁵ EJC, 32: “Deshalb ist auch die Enttäuschung so bitter, wenn wir Steine statt Brot geben.” See also D, 41–42.

¹⁷⁶ EJC, 29.

¹⁷⁷ EJC, 44.

The meaning experience must be called an experience of transcendence; only so can one do justice to both, the experience of unattainable meaning and experience of the attainable meaning.¹⁷⁸

Kasper claims that the very possibility of the question of the meaning of life demands the existence of God, the Creator and Sustainer of all. Only the existence of God can, he says, give a satisfactory answer to the questions of being, finitude and estrangement. The reliable hope can be an answer to man's ultimate questions but only if he in his own finite being is willing to grasp the meaning of the infinite. Absolute meaning, according to Kasper, is only possible in the form of hope. Hope, for one, is not a self-evident quality for human beings. Human life can be, and often is, hopeless. Hope that is located in the future and has its fulfilment in God can only be possible if God is also the source of all human yearning, the source of freedom and the foundation of reality.¹⁷⁹

According to Kasper, a believer and a non-believer are both equal: both have to justify their stance with beliefs, neither has verifiable answers regarding the nature of reality and whether there is a God beyond that reality or not.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, Kasper states:

So both the believer and non-believer live a risk: both – to speak with Pascal – make a wager. The argument between belief and unbelief cannot be historically solved or concluded definitively. But a believer can ask a non-believer: where is and who has a better offer? To where should we then go? Where are such words of life? (cf. Joh 6:68).¹⁸¹

In this sense but this sense only Pascal's wager is a valid argument: "if you win you win everything, if you lose you lose nothing."¹⁸² Kasper asks, where can we find our hope if not from the object of our belief. To believe is to take a risk and hope never comes without responsibility. But the valid question is: is there a better offer in sight? According to Kasper the symbolic meaning horizon (*der Deutungshorizont*) can be found in the vertical reality, from the words and signs of God's revelation.¹⁸³

4.5.2. The Mystery of the Self-Communicating Love of God

As we have earlier established, Kasper points out that a theology that tries to define God is doomed to failure. The result is a caricature of God which is actually stripped of all divinity. Kasper's critique is directed toward a poorly constructed ontotheology, which he also accuses Schelling of perpetuating. In Kasper's view the ontotheological error is that it fails to acknowledge the being of God being "more than only being": God as the Creator, the

¹⁷⁸ EJC, 45: "Sinnerfahrung muss also als Transzendenzerfahrung gedeutet werden; nur so kann man beiden Erfahrungen gerecht werden, der Erfahrung von der Unverfügbarkeit und der Erfahrung des Gegebenseins von Sinn."

¹⁷⁹ GJ, 196–197; B, 14–15.

¹⁸⁰ GVF, 516–517; B, 14.

¹⁸¹ GVF, 517: "So leben beide, der Gläubige und der Nichtgläubige, ein Risiko; beide gehen – um mit Pascal zu sprechen – eine Wette ein. Der Streit des Glaubens mit dem Unglauben kann darum geschichtlich nicht ein für alle Mal entschieden und beendet werden. Aber der Glaubende kann den Nichtglaubenden fragen: Wo ist und wer hat ein besseres und ein vernünftigeres Angebot? Wohin sollen wir sonst gehen? Wo sind sonst solche Worte des Lebens? (vgl. Joh 6,68)"

¹⁸² GJ, 192: "Wenn Sie gewinnen, gewinnen Sie alles, wenn Sie verlieren, verlieren Sie nichts".

¹⁸³ GVF, 515; B, 13–15.

Revealer, the Incarnate, the personal God of history.¹⁸⁴ According to Kasper, a theology which attempts to make rational definitions cannot fight against superstition but will itself become one, and finally will lead to the disappearance of the Absolute.¹⁸⁵ A fully comprehensible idea of God is absurd, even impossible: if one understands it, it cannot be God. By definition, God is something or someone that/who is beyond even our best attempts to understand.

Behind Kasper's metaphysical perspective lies Heidegger's understanding of metaphysics,¹⁸⁶ especially Heidegger's conception of the historicist thesis, which can be characterised briefly as follows. Heidegger redefined the concept of ontology from the point of view of historical revelation. He asked if the question of the being of God should only be asked as such, or if it ought to be asked within the framework of historical revelation. Heidegger thus defines metaphysics as both ontology (the study of what beings have in common) and theology (what is the highest and best of being). To this basic description Heidegger adds the historicist thesis: in each era the metaphysical framework is constructed anew.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, Heidegger admits that there may not be any "one truth" of the whole, but rather that the whole (of reality) is evolving and/or mutable. In his later work Heidegger saw in ontotheology a danger of putting "God in service of making the world intelligible to us and so at our manipulative disposal"¹⁸⁸. This kind of worry is behind Kasper's critique of one-sided ontotheology. As we can see from his own theological argumentation, however, Kasper does not abandon ontotheological reasoning altogether, but tries instead to keep in mind the ultimate nature of God as mystery. In the end God's being remains hidden from us, but the gift of revelation is for the purpose of our grasping something of his being that is essential to our understanding of this reality and our own being. In *GJ* the dependence of Kasper's conception of metaphysics to that of Heidegger's can be clearly detected.¹⁸⁹ The question of being is exactly what relates Kasper's metaphysics to that of Heidegger's:

¹⁸⁴ In her article *What's Wrong with the Ontotheological Error?* Marilyn Adams refutes much of the critique of ontotheology. See Adams 2014, 1–5. She points out that the ontotheological approaches of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus (among others) do not content themselves solely with Plotinus' approach to the ineffable One. Instead, they combine the Neoplatonic philosophy of the One with the biblical understanding of a personal God. Aquinas' perception of God's being is *ipsum esse*, the being itself, from whom all created beings receive their being. He is the groundless ground of being, the cause of every created being there is. The being of God differs from other beings in that his being is not based on anything but is itself the basis of everything else there is. Aquinas' approach is called metaphysics of participation. Duns Scotus insisted that being must be a univocal instead of analogical concept. For him, God shares the essence of "being" with his creatures but in a way that does not contradict the fact that he is in his being "simple, externally unproducible and independently productive, necessarily extant, immutable, eternal, etc." Scotus argued that this univocity must be metaphysically (and semantically) safeguarded: this would not, however, mean a total sameness identity between God and his creature. Therefore, the difference between Aquinas and Duns Scotus, is a semantic at most. Both emphasise the "higher" nature of the being of God. Keeping this medieval theology in mind, we can try to understand Kasper's post-Heideggerian metaphysical framework.

¹⁸⁵ GJ, 59–60; CUF, 32–33.

¹⁸⁶ GJ, 253. See also e.g. HT, 249–250; Galles 2012, 379; Godzieba 2014, 44–45; McMichael 2006, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Adams 2014, 7. See also M, 15–16, n.7.

¹⁸⁸ Adams 2014, 8.

¹⁸⁹ GJ, 119; see also Godzieba 1995, 6; 12; Godzieba 2014, 44–45; 53; Galles 2012, 379–380.

Heidegger's basic objections to both traditional metaphysics and the modern philosophy of subjectivity is their forgetfulness of being. They think of being only in relation to what is and have forgotten the question of meaning of being itself.¹⁹⁰

If God is thought only as the ground of being, a *causa sui*, the meaning dimension of being is lost. This kind of God cannot be prayed to or sacrificed to. The God of "pure" philosophical thinking of being is the dead God that Nietzsche anticipated. In the being of the true, divine God the meaning in being includes an element of mystery.

Kasper approaches the question of God's hiddenness and the mystery of God from two basic aspects of the misunderstanding of the concept of mystery in theological tradition. The first misunderstanding is that the concept of reason is defined and restricted in a purely negative way in relation to human reason. Kasper argues that human mind itself is constituted so that it reaches beyond itself and towards an impenetrable mystery. Kasper remarks that this is precisely why revelation is man's salvation: because it helps us to see mystery as mystery. Revelation speaks the mystery (and sacramental) language of "in, with and under". It reveals something of the reality that is hidden from us. In the language of sacramental theology, the words "in, with and under" are employed in describing the presence of Christ in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Kasper's use of this language shows how central the sacramental understanding of the nature of mystery is to him. The second misunderstanding concerns the definition of mystery as the opposite of categorical knowledge. In Kasper's opinion this narrows the concept of mystery to mysteries or to only one definition of God's qualities among the many, instead of the concept actually being the definitive attribute that determines and grounds the whole.¹⁹¹ Kasper's starting point is the human being as the being of mystery.¹⁹² Mystery is not the opposite of knowledge (as something negative) but instead it is actually the original type of knowledge.¹⁹³

Kasper attaches the Christian Trinitarian confession to the nature of God's revelation as mystery and states:

¹⁹⁰ GJ, 119: "Der Grundvorwurf Heideggers an die traditionelle Metaphysik wie an die neuzeitliche Subjektivitätsphilosophie ist der Vorwurf der Seinsvergessenheit. Sie betrachten das Sein nur in Relation zum Seienden und haben die Frage nach dem Sinn des Seins selbst vergessen." See also *Podhorecki* 2001, 124.

¹⁹¹ GJ, 221.

¹⁹² Here Kasper is in accordance with the anthropological approach of Karl Rahner. For Rahner, all human concepts point to a reality beyond, to a nameless, unfathomable reality. For Rahner, "mystery is even the *a priori* condition for all categorical knowledge" GJ, 222. Rahner opened up a whole new point of view on the discussion of atheism and a hidden God. AGV, 35–37. In his 1967 article *Atheismus und implizites Christentum* Karl Rahner categorises the relationship of man to the transcendent into four categories: (a chosen) theism, practical and theoretical atheism, anonymous theism and careless atheism (der Theismus, der praktische und theoretische Atheismus, anonymen Theismus, der schuldhaftige Atheismus). Of these four categories the fourth is the one without the possibility of salvation, because for careless atheism an atheistic orientation is chosen instead of accidental one. *Rahner* 1967, 200–202; GJ, 118.

¹⁹³ On the problems of theology and mystery see *Wainwright* 2009, 80–85.

The Trinitarian profession of faith is, therefore, not only the summation of the revelation of the mystery of God; it is also the concrete exposition of the hiddenness of God, which is the origin, goal and essential content of all revelation.¹⁹⁴

The revelation of God, therefore, is the “in, with and under” of our experience. It gives us a perspective of hope: hope that what we experience through our senses is not all there is. But furthermore, this experience is not an esoteric experience of a higher meaning. It is also the explanation of ourselves, of who we are. It is a paradoxical hope. A hope of something new. A hope of a grasp on a mystery, and experience “in, with and under”, a hope for a *meaning*. Therefore, the mystery is first of all not an epistemological but theological proposition: it is the foundational content of God’s revelation. Second of all, God’s hiddenness is the way he is with us in the course of history. That is, we can never be fully informed about God but instead God is hidden within revelation. He is *being-for-us* in history. More accurately, his mystery is revealed in love in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is God’s last word: in the revelation of Jesus Christ the eschatological fulfilment of God’s revelation is already present.

God’s hiddenness and the mystical nature of God’s self-revelation can be understood from the dialectical relationship between the concepts of mystery and the Cross in Kasper’s theology. Kasper explains the theology of the Cross from the incomprehensible mystery of God’s love: his glory is hidden in the death and suffering of Jesus Christ.¹⁹⁵ The positive meaning of the mystery (of the Cross) is that human beings are fully, unconditionally and definitively accepted in Jesus Christ. Third, mystery is a practical message of salvation. Revelation is not primarily knowledge or information; it is rather an event that *happens* inside human history and gives us a kind of interface with the reality of God. God can never be fully known through any human endeavour. This is why revelation is, according to Kasper, a message of both judgment and of grace. It judges them who “want to be like God”, it condemns our efforts to find a God where he is not: that is, from worldly idols. Positively understood, the mystery of God means that we can be accepted in God’s grace even with our limitations: this means that we have to acknowledge our limitations but that through grace we are accepted even with them.¹⁹⁶

In Kasper’s view, there is always a double aspect of mystery in the revelation of God. On the one hand, Kasper thinks that only through understanding the reality of God as the ground of all reality and being can we also find a meaning (*Sinn*).¹⁹⁷ On the other hand, God’s revelation never finds its complete fulfilment in this age but something always remains hidden from us: God reveals himself, but we can never attain definitive information

¹⁹⁴ GJ, 222–223: “Das trinitarische Bekenntnis ist deshalb nicht nur die Zusammenfassung der Offenbarung des Geheimnisses Gottes, es ist auch die konkrete Auslegung der Verborgenheit Gottes, die der Ursprung, das Ziel und der Inbegriff aller Offenbarung ist.”

¹⁹⁵ GM, 22; NGK, 93.

¹⁹⁶ GJ, 223–225; B, 50; 83–84; NGK, 81.

¹⁹⁷ EJC, 45; GPV, 146.

of him, not even through revelation. This is also true of the Incarnation and Resurrection as well as with the appearances of the risen Lord:

God reveals himself as the hidden God (cf. Jes 45:15), God's revelation is not enlightenment, but the revelation of his hiddenness and mysteriousness.¹⁹⁸

God's revelation of himself is kind of a glimpse into his reality, but the ultimate truth remains hidden from us. However, instead of only following the concept of hiddenness of God presented for example in the theologies of Bernhard Welte and Meister Eckhart, Kasper's conception of the metaphysics of God differs in one important point. He claims that the idea of nothingness or non-being can result in the danger of God vanishing into nothingness.¹⁹⁹ A non-objective understanding of God is in danger of losing its object.²⁰⁰ While affirming the idea of nothingness for safeguarding the hiddenness and mysterious nature of God, what Kasper means by this is that there is only a thin line between a theology of nothingness and actual atheism.²⁰¹ Kasper argues that a (purely) mystical understanding of God is very far removed from the personal, loving God of the Bible, who personally approaches his creatures in the course of history.²⁰² For Kasper, however illuminating the concepts of nothingness and hiddenness might be in understanding the mystery of God, the testimony of Scripture to a God who is personal and loving, is primordial. The paradox lies exactly in the revelation: in his revelation God reveals

¹⁹⁸ JC, 213–214: "Gott offenbart sich ja eben als der verborgene Gott (vgl. Jes 45,15). Gottes Offenbarung ist nicht Aufklärung, sondern Offenbarung seiner Verborgenheit und Geheimnishaftigkeit." See also OG, 58.

¹⁹⁹ GJ, 120–121; Kolakowski notes the same problem: "Insofar as the Absolute looms indistinctly on the horizon of all possible languages, invincibly elusive, never pinpointed, always groped for, it cannot, within the limits of our conceptual capacities, be conceived of as a person or a god [...] it cannot be addressed as 'thou', it is, rather, a symbolic entity [...] Kolakowski 2001, 59. See also Kasper on Kolakowski: ZZD, 266. Cf. Welte 1985, 47–51. For a more thorough analysis of the Dionysian corpus, God's ineffability, and negative theology: Knepper 2014, xi–xvii.

²⁰⁰ David Bentley Hart argues that Heidegger's philosophy had the same consequence: while accurately describing the nihilist tendency in our time by expressing his concern that modern man no longer acknowledges the difference between being and beings, at the same time, he is in danger of losing the object of his philosophical system altogether. In his late philosophy Heidegger describes how everything has become a matter of material observation, reality has become an object of man's exploration, and man has ceased to appreciate the marvel that being itself is. However, in giving this pessimistic analysis (and quite accurate diagnosis of our time) Heidegger abandoned metaphysics and failed to develop a coherent, compensatory ontology of his own. See Hart 2011, 50: "Because he had left himself no room for any kind of language of analogy, which might have allowed him to say how transcendent being shows itself in immanent existence while still preserving its transcendence, and because, moreover, he had decided in advance that one cannot speak of being in other than temporal terms, he really could not escape lapsing into a certain fatalism regarding the history he described."

²⁰¹ Conor Cunningham acknowledges this same problem in *Genealogy of Nihilism* (2002, xiii–xvii). He differentiates between ontotheology and meontotheology. Whereas, Cunningham argues, the questions of ontotheology are asked by an answer, *the something*, meontotheology places the answer to *not-something* or something *as nothing*. Therefore, in meontotheology being is grounded in non-being. Cunningham draws here a distinction between nihilism and the logic of nihilism, claiming that the logic of nihilism of meontotheology is useful as long as it points to creation *ex nihilo*. This means, however, that meontotheology must be complemented with theo-ontology which claims that being *qua* being is beyond; being itself is beyond. Cunningham uses the word "thought" to aid the understanding: "beyond of thought" – not beyond thought but beyond *of* thought.

²⁰² GJ, 120–121. See also on problems of mystical or apophatic theology: Wainwright 2009, 80–85; Knepper 2010, 269–284.

something of himself to us. Without his self-revelation we would not have anything to hold on to. The fact that the revelation at the same time both reveals and hides tells us something important about the being of God: he is the primordial mystery of all being but he wants to open himself to dialogue with his creatures. In God there exists a paradox between his hidden being and the personal God of history. In the historical event of revelation he gives, donates himself, but this giving is simultaneously hiding and revealing.

Kasper wants to emphasise the free will and God's grace that is based on the fact that he is absolute freedom. Instead of vanishing God into nothingness²⁰³ Kasper remarks that God is beyond all worldly reality, beyond anything that serves a worldly function.²⁰⁴ His being is not static, he is not an unmovable mover or an unchangeable source; he is perfect being in freedom and love. In Kasper's use the concept of nothingness reveals the hiddenness of God behind the experience of nothingness. Nothingness can thus be interpreted as the "hidden presence of the Absolute" (*die verbergende Anwesenheit des Absoluten*).²⁰⁵ Kasper acknowledges, however, the danger in this kind of approach. The "purely" mystical understanding of God (nothingness being the mysteriousness of God's being) is as far from the biblical understanding of a personal God as is the classical metaphysical approach (God as the groundless ground of everything). If the line between theism and atheism becomes unclear, it becomes eventually difficult to define what is meaningful and what is meaningless. The question of God must be, instead, treated within the context of the question of the meaningfulness of life. This is why the personal-relational aspect of God's being becomes important for Kasper. The dialectical perception of reality can be seen in Kasper's thought: the I-thou relationship of God and man is perfected in freedom and in love, which are the true content of God's revelation. The nature of revelation is that of a free gift of love. Therefore, Kasper's answer to the nothingness of modern atheism is the claim that God is not necessary but that he is ever-greater. He can only be grasped in a relationship with him, in love and in freedom.²⁰⁶

God's divinity consists in the sovereignty of his love. This means that he can give himself without losing himself. He is himself precisely when he enters into that which is other than himself. It is by surrendering himself that he shows his divinity. Concealment is, therefore, the way in which God's glory is revealed in the world.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ This is a danger that lies in adopting the groundless ground of being (*Abgrund*) of Schelling's philosophy. As opposed to (for example) Heidegger's interpretation of the hiddenness of being as something final, Kasper follows rather the religious mysticism of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart: God is hidden from us but not from himself. Even though God is mystery, he is not mysterious to himself. On the mystical thought of Thomas Aquinas and Meister Eckhart, see *Caputo* 1982, 280; *McGinn* 2001, 35–52.

²⁰⁴ GJ, 122. However, Kolakowski asks if this kind of explanation of the "God-person" takes our minds and linguistic resources beyond their limits with the result that we truly face the limitations of our experience and speech. *Kolakowski* 2001, 59.

²⁰⁵ GJ, 120.

²⁰⁶ GJ, 121–122. Kasper refers here to Balthasar's theology of love: for Balthasar, being and love are co-extensive. In the loving encounter of "you" our being as "me" is enlightened. Our own being is constituted in loving another being.

²⁰⁷ JC, 133: "Gottes Gottsein besteht in der Souveränität seiner Liebe. Deshalb kann er sich radikal wegschenken, ohne sich aufzugeben. Gerade wenn er eingeht ins andere seiner Selbst, ist er bei sich selbst."

Revelation has both hiding and revealing implications. Hiddenness is simultaneously a paradox of illumination. Acceptance of the hiddenness of God is acceptance of his ultimate being. Revelation is not primarily a fact but an event; it is not given (*Gegeben*) but self-giving (*Sichgebende*) and happening (*geschehen*).²⁰⁸ Once again, Kasper's view of functional and dogmatic interpretation can be seen. Revelation is only effective within its function, its dogmatic interpretation is secondary. For faith, the revelation event is fundamental.²⁰⁹ The nature of revelation as happening comes closer to human reality in faith. It is characteristic of it that it is not factual knowledge, direct information but *ipso facto* happening revelation. Faith is a gift which gives a completely new context, a new perspective for viewing reality. It is a paradox in which we grasp "the something" that we still, ultimately cannot grasp. This twofold way of understanding revelation is also reflected in Kasper's definition of revelation:

The word 'revelation' serves as a categorical expression for those worldly experiences, areas of experience and aspects of experience in which man sees signals, signs and symbols in which the inexpressible divine mystery discloses itself to him.²¹⁰

Kasper, therefore, interprets revelation primarily from an *experiential* point of view. Revelation is something that is experienced in our reality, in a way that is understandable to us. Revelation is not a categorical but a transcendental, a meta-categorical concept, to which everything is attached.²¹¹ It happens in history, in the real world. God works in history and through history. From this point of view we can understand Kasper's outlook on the experience of God. The experience is not merely a subjective experience of an individual, but the experience has an objective dimension as well: it is an experience of the *communio*. By this Kasper means that in a biblical sense there is no such thing as an individual experience: the experiences of individuals are always reflected in the entire context of believers. Even when a single individual has an experience, it only gets its definitive meaning in the context of *communio*. Perhaps the most striking example of this

Gerade in der Selbstentäußerung zeigt er sein Gottsein. Die Verborgenheit ist darum die Art und Weise, wie Gottes Herrlichkeit in der Welt erscheint."

²⁰⁸ OG, 67–68; GJ, 208; KK, 115. Accordingly history (*Historie*) is only progressing; alongside with man the history (*Geschichte*) is also happening, through the human experience also opens up the meaning of history.

²⁰⁹ Kasper follows Rahner's distinguishing of two subcategories in revelation: a categorical concept of revelation (*kategorialen Begriff von Offenbarung*), which means a single revelation event and its definition; and a transcendental concept of revelation (*transzendentalen Begriff*), which means a meta-categorical event in which the mystery of all reality is opened up. The distinction is originally made by Karl Rahner, cf. McGrath 1993, 541. With the help of transcendental method one can distinguish between a natural knowledge of God (a non-categorical revelation event) and a Christian, supernatural God-knowledge (a categorical revelation). Rahner was a representative of the so-called inclusivistic model and therefore it was natural for him to think that supernatural God-knowledge deepens the natural knowledge of God although he emphasised the special position of Christianity. Rahner stated that other religions besides Christianity may not necessarily be true although they may have such elements that channel God's mercy, such as love of neighbour. Cf. Rahner 1976, 157–161. See also OG, 77.

²¹⁰ GJ, 207: "Das Wort Offenbarung dient als kategorialer Ausdruck für solche weltliche Erfahrungen, Erfahrungsbereiche und Aspekte der Erfahrung, in denen der Mensch Signale, Zeichen, Symbole erkennt, durch die sich ihm das unsagbare göttliche Geheimnis eröffnet." English translation has been modified. See also KK, 115.

²¹¹ KK, 115. Kasper means transcendental here in a Rahnerian sense.

is the pregnancy of Mary: it is *de facto* her own experience, described in the Bible very powerfully, but it most definitely has also a communal meaning, a meaning that affects the whole of humanity.

Kasper's definition of the meaning of faith gives us further enlightenment on the matter:

Believing means trusting and building on the power of God which is at work in Jesus, making God the foundation of existence. It means letting God act, letting God go into action, letting God be God, giving him glory, recognising his rule. Where people believe this way, God's rule becomes reality in the ordinary events of history. Faith is like a mold in which the Dasein of the Kingdom of God takes shape.²¹²

Faith is the response to the revelation, which has the Kingdom of God at its core.²¹³ For Kasper faith is an active taking part in the Trinitarian life of God while acknowledging his rule: in worship, both the Kingdom of God and an active taking part become a living reality. Kasper emphasises that the coming Kingdom of God cannot be advanced through faith but that it is a sovereign act of God himself. Kasper also states that faith is not a private matter but one of society, a community of believers. Once again his emphasis is on both the *communio* aspect of believers as well as on the importance of history in God's plan. God is an active God, acting among his people; faith is letting him be active, and history is the place where God's rule becomes reality. In the life of believers the place for this realisation is worship.²¹⁴

Kasper seeks to combine both the traditional philosophical-metaphysical (ontotheological) language describing God as simple, ineffable, "greater than can be thought", the infinite God; and the traditional, biblical image of God of the Bible as the active, personal God of history. Thus for this task Kasper uses both ontological argumentation and interpretation of the Bible. By combining both these aspects Kasper tries to avoid the problems of "pure philosophical reasoning" about what "constitutes" God on the one hand, and to base his language about God on biblical tradition. This approach makes it possible to accept that God's properties are *de facto* incomprehensible to us and yet affirm that *some* understanding of God's being is still possible. If we think, for example, about one of the qualities usually attached in the history of philosophy and theology to the being of God, we can see how the purely logical approach is fruitless. For example, if we think of God as "absolutely perfect", we must exclude some other properties of his being, that is,

²¹² JC, 131: "Glauben meint also ein Trauen und Bauen auf die Jesus wirksame Macht Gottes, ein Gründen der Existenz in Gott. Glauben bedeutet also 'Gott wirken lassen', 'Gott-in-Aktion-treten-lassen', Gott Gott sein lassen und ihm die Ehre geben, also seine Herrschaft anerkennen. In einem solchen Glauben wird Gottes Herrschaft konkret Wirklichkeit in der Geschichte. Der Glaube ist gleichsam die Hohlform für das Dasein der Herrschaft Gottes." English translation has been modified.

²¹³ A similar interpretation can be found in Pannenberg: *Pannenberg* 1988b, 269–270; 287; 358.

²¹⁴ JC, 131–132.

imperfections. This means that if “absolutely perfect” actually defines God, it leaves imperfections outside him.²¹⁵ William Wainwright writes in his article on mystery:

Since being greater than can be thought is arguably entailed by God’s first-order perfections, if God were not greater than can be thought, he would necessarily lack one or more of those perfections and so would not be God, a being greater than which none can be thought.²¹⁶

Instead, we must come to the conclusion that in God’s being there is something that surpasses all our understanding in a way (to use the same example of perfection to make the point) that he not only is “absolutely perfect” but “too perfect” (for us to understand). In short, we must think that God transcends all our understanding and in his being there is something that must remain inexplicable and mysterious.

The nature of revelation as God’s giving of himself as a gift of mystery is central in Kasper’s theology. Revelation is at the same time given and hidden, revealing and mysterious. It can only be received as a gift of God’s grace.²¹⁷ The paradoxical nature of Kasper’s theological system can be frustrating if one gets stuck on its metaphysical logic and “grammatical” understanding of faith. Paul Galles criticises Kasper’s use of analogy for letting the paradox between “irreducibility” and “aposteriori testimony” of God simply stand.²¹⁸ Kasper maintains, however:

The definition of God as a person stipulates, paradoxically, that in the final analysis God cannot be defined.²¹⁹

Glenn Morrison also accuses Kasper of “philosophising reductionism”: “When [...] he emphasises that, ‘this “sym-pathetic” God as he reveals himself in Jesus Christ is the definitive answer to the question of theodicy.’ [...] For Kasper, God redeems suffering, removes its weakness, and transforms it into hope. Kenosis and suffering are not the last words; it is Christ’s Easter exaltation and transfiguration, which is effected in the world through the work of the Spirit. There is a danger here of reducing theology to objective categories, which fall ultimately into the irrationality of being forgetful of mystery – in the sense of maintaining that passivity of letting-oneself-be-encountered-by-mystery.”²²⁰ But in fact, as we established above, Kasper tries to combine both the “grammatical understanding” and appreciation of the ultimate mystery nature of theology. The “logic of faith” is literally what it sounds like: logical, but bound to faith:

²¹⁵ See *Wainwright* 2009, 84–85. See also *Knepper* 2014, xi: “How can that which is absolutely ineffable be or do something in particular? How, for that matter, can it be anything at all? For if it is or does anything at all, then something can be said of it. And if nothing can be said of it, then it cannot be or do anything at all.”

²¹⁶ *Wainwright* 2009, 85.

²¹⁷ NGK, 83.

²¹⁸ Paul Galles explicates his criticism of Kasper’s paradoxical system for not completely thinking it through: “das phänomenologische Paradox, welches direct von der Armut und dem Widersprüchlichkeit des Menschlichen ausgeht, geht nicht in eine paradoxe Denkform über.” *Galles* 2012, 520.

²¹⁹ GJ, 259: “Die Bestimmung Gottes als Person hält also paradoxerweise fest, dass man Gott letztlich nicht bestimmen, nicht definieren kann.”

²²⁰ *Morrison* 2007, 283. Cf. GJ, 315; B, 85; 99.

Theology [...] understands faith not as a darkening but an illumination (*illuminatio*) of reason. This does not mean faith becomes any kind of speculative or practical knowledge or a Christian world view, but faith's enlightenment about itself, an (*intellectus fidei*), an insight into the historically given faith in its inner truth, beauty and logic, which enables the believer to argue with those who dispute the truth-content of his faith.²²¹

Is it not, in fact, the essential content of revelation to be mysterious and paradoxical by nature? If revelation was to be understood in a completely orderly and reasonable manner, would it not then be rather knowledge of some knowable object rather than an attempt to say something about the unutterable? At the same time we can grasp something of the divine reality (because God wants to reveal something of himself to us) and yet the understanding remains incomplete. This is the basic assumption in Kasper's interpretation of analogy when he argues that analogy is something in between complete similarity and radical difference.²²² When speaking of God and Jesus Christ as a new, unforeseen category of being, it is a paradox *ipso facto*, and at the same time a fulfilling, yet not completely revealed, answer to the meaning of being.

²²¹ GJ, 17: "Die Theologie [...] versteht den Glauben nicht als Verdunkelung, sondern als Erleuchtung (*illuminatio*) der Vernunft. Damit meint sie nicht die Überführung des Glaubens in ein wie immer geartetes spekulatives oder praktisches Wissen, auch nicht eine christliche Weltanschauung, sondern die Aufklärung des Glaubens über sich selbst, ein *intellectus fidei*, eine Einsicht in den geschichtlich vorgegebenen Glauben selbst, in seine innere Wahrheit, Schönheit und Logik, die dann zur Auseinandersetzung mit denen befähigt, die den Wahrheitsgehalt des Glaubens bestreiten." English translation has been modified.

²²² TK, 175; GJ, 175-176; 178, 206, 298, 469; B, 99-100; CUF, 8-9.

5. The Mercy of God with Us: the “New” in Revelation

5.1. From Grace to Mercy: Reinterpreting the Central Concept of Grace

In the Second Vatican Council the discussion about nature and grace revolved around two poles: whether to approach the question from a more anthropological or a purely Christological, more doctrinal point of view. The Papal encyclical *Humani Generis* expressed the concern that the so-called *nouvelle théologie* would threaten to compromise the nature of grace as unmerited gift and collapse the supernatural order into the natural.¹ When we attempt to explain the motivation² of God’s willingness to reveal himself to us we come face-to-face with the concept of grace. Henri DeLubac explained that grace is actually the utmost manifestation of freedom, an abiding mode of freedom. If grace is understood as the ultimate stance of God towards the human being and if we understand the being of God as perfect being in freedom, then the ultimate manifestation of this freedom must be grace.³ Kasper follows this idea of the *nouvelle théologie* in his interpretation of the central concepts of love and grace. To be able to be truly free, we must take part in God’s own freedom. Kasper states – following the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar – that grace is not an overflow and excess of love, it is not its by-product. Rather, it must be already grounded in the being of God. It is necessarily grounded in love.⁴ It must, therefore, be constitutive of the being of the Trinitarian God: “only when God is in himself a self-communication in love, can his historical self-communication be free undeserved grace”.⁵ When the freedom of God works in people the outcome is love:

He is really free who is free from himself and his interests, in order to be wholly at the disposal of God and others. Positive freedom from the law is love. [...] But love is the reality which proved victorious in the Resurrection of Jesus. It offers freedom to anyone who surrenders himself to it in faith.⁶

¹ Hilkert 2014, 61. Hilkert remarks that the nature/grace discussion was at the forefront of theological renewal within the Catholic Church that led to the summoning of the Second Vatican Council. See also Plovanič 1990, 104–110.

² “Motivation” should not be understood here as anthropomorphism: for lack of a better word we use it here to describe salvation history as an indication of what the motivation in God’s actions might be: events throughout history in which aspects of God’s mystery are revealed to us, and on which we can base our conviction that based on these actions we actually can know something about the essence of God as well as something of his purpose to reveal to us something of himself.

³ JC, 279. On the freedom as manifestation of grace, see e.g. Pröpper 2011, 293.

⁴ JC, 279.

⁵ GJ, 33: “Nur, wenn Gott in sich selbst Selbstmitteilung in der Liebe ist, kann seine geschichtliche Selbstmitteilung freie ungeschuldete Gnade sein.” See also B, 51; HT, 254; NGK, 95.

⁶ JC, 240: “Wirklich frei ist, wer auch von sich und seinen Interessen frei ist, um ganz für Gott und die Andern da sein zu können. Positiv verwirklicht sich die Freiheit vom Gesetz also in der Liebe. [...] Die Liebe ist aber die Wirklichkeit, die in der Auferweckung Jesu zum Sieg gekommen ist und die dem, der glaubend sich darauf einlässt, die Freiheit schenkt.” English translation has been modified. See also NGK, 94–95.

In the spirit of doing theology in an understandable way in the modern context, Kasper approaches the question of nature and grace from the point of view of one of the central concepts of theology: mercy.

In 2012, a year before the beginning of Pope Francis' papacy, Kasper's book about mercy, *B*, was published.⁷ In this book he refers to the attribute of God's infinite mercy primarily using the word *Barmherzigkeit* instead of *Gnade*⁸. Kasper brings the discussion of nature/grace to the practical realm of Christian life by deepening his analysis of one of the most important attributes of the Trinitarian God. In *B* Kasper seeks to give the concept of mercy a place in our merciless age. He does this by placing its proper meaning in the context of the Trinitarian God himself:

In the gift of reconciliation, in which communal life in justice is granted to us anew, we are pointing to 'something' that is transcendent to us. In reconciliation, we bestow on the other 'something' that we don't 'have'; consciously or unconsciously, we are grasping after that which theologically is called grace and which scripture testifies is God's infinite mercy.⁹

The grace (*Gnade*) of God is, therefore, his majestic, exalted attribute that we cannot fully grasp as imperfect human beings. It is an attribute that belongs to the ineffable essence of God's being. Grace is something that we as mere humans cannot fully grasp as a concept, it remains a mystery to us. Grace is also the theological definition of something that has its meaning in our reality as God's infinite mercy towards his creatures. His empathy, pity, sympathy and love, however, are the attributes that we not only experience as God's infinite love towards us, his creatures, but which we can also extend towards others. The "something" that we grasp of God's being as his mercy, is actually his divine, higher attribute of grace. Grace is the new and unfathomable that can only be grasped through the sacraments, the infinite in God that can only be pointed towards in words and signs.¹⁰ Mercy is God's living presence, his infinite attitude of compassion towards his creatures.

The emphasis here on mercy is not, therefore, an abandonment of the doctrine of grace, but rather a deepening of it. Prior to the publication of *B*, Kasper primarily refers to

⁷ Pope Francis has taken the central theme of mercy as his own. See MV, 1–2.

⁸ The original meaning of the word *Gnade* (English grace) in Greek is *charis* – a favor, thanks, benevolence, a good will; whereas *charisma* means a gift given from a good will out of goodwill. *Charis* is also the attitude of the gods towards human beings; *eleos* means to have mercy with the feeling included in the act: to be merciful from deep down, with one's entire constitution. In Hebrew the meaning is even richer in nuances: *hēn* can mean favour, indulgence, God's unmerited turning to the chosen one; graciousness; but also beauty, gracefulness, amiability; whereas *hesed* is God's grace and mercy, his free and gracious turning toward human being; *hesed* is often bound with *rāṣōn*, a loving attitude, delightfulness or pleasantness. The general difference between the Greek and Hebrew is the attitude of the characterising attributes: in Greek the concepts can include feeling and mood, the Hebrew concepts focus on the aspects of law or the concrete center of body (like heart) as the source of personality. For full analysis of these terms see: Theologisches Begrifflexikon 1977, 52–59 (*Barmherzigkeit*) 590–498 (*Gnade*).

⁹ *B*, 200–201: "Im Geschenk der Versöhnung, in dem uns das gemeinsame Leben in Gerechtigkeit neu geschenkt wird, verweisen wir auf 'etwas', was uns transzendent ist, wir schenken dem anderen 'etwas', das wir nicht 'haben', wir greifen bewusst oder unbewusst vor und aus auf das, was theologisch Gnade heißt und was die Schrift uns als Gottes unendliches Erbarmen bezeugt." See also OG, 71.

¹⁰ NGK, 95; *B*, 51.

God's mercy using the word *Gnade*, "grace". In comparison, in *GJ* the word *Barmherzigkeit* appears only two times, in two consecutive sentences, in which Kasper analyses the concept of mercy in Islam.¹¹ The basic doctrinal orientation in the interpretation of the concepts of *Gnade/Barmherzigkeit* does not change, but the focus of their usage does. Generally, whereas *Gnade* represents the majestic quality of God's being, a divine, higher essence in his being, *Barmherzigkeit* is the manner in which his merciful nature appears in human history. *Barmherzigkeit/ Mitleid/ Mitgefühl* (mercy/ compassion/ misericordia/ sympathy/ pity)¹² – represent God's genuine taking part in the destiny of man. Unmerited grace is the mystical, eschatological and hidden gift of God; mercy is its pre-apprehension, a signpost towards it.¹³ Grace is God's infinite quality that reflects his saving will, his majestic orientation towards his economy of salvation and its execution. Mercy is God's prevailing freedom, love and fidelity towards his creation. When Kasper speaks of "God's mercy" or "God's merciful love", he does not mean that mercy is an ontological dimension of the Trinity, but he is, instead, inclined to combine the *ad extra* and *ad intra* perspectives when talking about the Trinity. His point is that mercy *reflects* the inner reality of the Trinitarian God. The distinction is analogous to Thomas Aquinas' distinction between the inner nature of God's being and the attributes attached to it. In *B*, Kasper raises the concept of mercy as the central concept of the biblical revelation. He states that God's mercy is not only the source, but also the goal of his activity.¹⁴ The abstract concept of freedom as God's essence is explained by Kasper with the concept of his actions, his mercy.

¹¹ *GJ*, 28. When speaking of the Christian concept of God's mercy/grace, the word is in this book always *Gnade*. In *KK* the theme of *Barmherzigkeit* is already developing but only in *B* does Kasper develop the full meaning of this concept.

¹² The English translator of *Barmherzigkeit*, William Madges, gives a comprehensive account of the multiple translations and uses of the word *Barmherzigkeit* that illuminate Kasper's usage of this concept. See English edition of *Mercy. The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*. 2014. New York: Paulist Press. ix–xiv.

¹³ See e.g. *KK*, 21; *B*, 61; *NGK*, 83.

¹⁴ *B*, 102. Daniel P. Moloney gives a critical review of Kasper's book *Mercy (B)* in *First Things*. See *Moloney* 2015, 60–62. His critique is based on the problematic use of the word "mercy" in the context of the immanent Trinity. Kasper argues that it is essential to "think through anew the entire teaching about God's attributes and, in the process, to allow mercy to assume its proper place" (*B*, 19: "Es verlangt danach, die gesamte Lehre von den Eigenschaften Gottes neu zu bedenken und dabei der Barmherzigkeit den ihr gebührenden Platz zukommen zu lassen."): not only its proper place but rather its place as *the* attribute of God's essence. Moloney criticises Kasper's usage of the term "mercy" precisely because he argues that Kasper elevates the use of the word "mercy" (*Barmherzigkeit*) to apply also to God's being. If this is the case, Moloney points out, the Trinitarian God would have to be merciful also among his persons. That is, the Father should show mercy to his Son and Son should show mercy to the Holy Spirit. Both Moloney and Kasper agree that this kind of interpretation of the concept of mercy would be a *reductio ad absurdum*. Kasper indirectly accuses Moloney of a deliberately wrong interpretation of his book and defends himself by stating that (unlike Moloney seems to claim, in Kasper's opinion) "[Eternal truths] aren't abstract eternal principles (i.e., of *dogmatic theology* [addition mine]). These eternal truths aren't without a concrete historical index and they have an inner dialogical character. Dogmatic theology cannot explain them—as Moloney wrongly requires—without relating (not adapting!) them to past and present history. On this point dogmatic theology distinguishes itself rigorously from ideology which loses contact with human history and human life." See *Kasper* 2015 [<http://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/03/cardinal-kasper-responds-to-first-things-review-of-mercy>] (accessed 26.5.2015).

The dogmatic explanation of God's being receives its functional interpretation in Kasper's analysis of the concept of mercy.

God's mercy is the primordial presupposition and ground of creation and of all salvation history.¹⁵

The emphasis on this citation is the overwhelming character of God's mercy. The change of focus – if not of intention – becomes clear when compared to Kasper's statement in the article *Natur – Gnade – Kultur* (NGK, 1990), in which Kasper compares the concepts of culture (*Kultur*) and grace (*Gnade*):

Culture is the concrete, manmade, historically handed-down and historically constantly changing *Lebenswelt*. In contrast to this, grace is neither a biologically nor a sociologically established entity; it cannot be achieved through scientific, technical, political or aesthetic accomplishments. It is God's undeserved, free gift [...] Grace is ultimately not 'something', it is God himself in his free self-giving to people.¹⁶

In NGK Kasper associates his analysis of the concept of grace with the old axiom *gratia supponit naturam* and declares that a more suitable axiom would be *gratia supponit personam*. He interprets *communio* with God as personal companionship. Grace is associated with a person's free choice of faith.¹⁷ Kasper characterises a person as a being who is recognised and accepted in love. By defining grace as "God himself in his free self-giving", Kasper approaches the interpretation of God's higher essence of grace as his loving gift (mercy) towards his creatures. This interpretation, therefore, comes close to the one presented in *B* although the word "mercy" (*Barmherzigkeit*) still remains absent in this context. In *B*, Kasper associates the comprehensive character of God's grace to its more practical application in the interpretation of the concept of mercy. However, we can see the development of the concept of grace: through love to mercy and love, then to God's ultimate stance towards his creation characterised as mercy.

If freedom is what philosophically characterises Kasper's conception of God's essence, mercy is the happening, the event within the creation which shows us what we need to know of God's essence. In essence this is the same thing that God reveals to Moses in the burning bush. *B* follows Kasper's systematic approach: philosophical background, biblical argumentation, systematic analysis. Mercy is the glue that holds together both the doctrine and its practical application: how we as Christians should act. Kasper explains that mercy rises from the need for justice. In the Bible, God is seen both as righteous (a God of justice) and as a merciful God. Kasper argues that if there is hope for eschatological justice, mercy should surpass the need for justice. God's attribute of

¹⁵ B, 103: "Die Barmherzigkeit Gottes ist die Urvoraussetzung und der Grund der Schöpfung wie der gesamten Heilsgeschichte."

¹⁶ NGK, 81: "Die Kultur ist [...] die konkrete, von Menschen gestaltete, geschichtlich überkommene und geschichtlich sich ständig verändernde Lebenswelt. Im Unterschied dazu ist die Gnade weder biologisch noch soziologisch aus der Herkunft ableitbar; sie ist weder durch wissenschaftliche, technische, politische noch durch ethische oder asketische Leistung machbar. Sie ist Gottes ungeschuldete, freie Gabe [...] Gnade ist letztlich nicht 'etwas', sie ist Gott selbst in seiner feinen Selbstmitteilung an den Menschen." See also OG, 67–68.

¹⁷ NGK, 92.

mercy has to prevail in the end (together with justice, but in a way that justice underscores mercy, not the other way around):

The call for mercy surpasses the cry for justice in the Bible. The Bible understands mercy as God's own justice. Mercy is the heart of the biblical message, not by undercutting justice, but by surpassing it.¹⁸

The evolution of the concept of grace into mercy can be interpreted as an outcome of Kasper's analysis of the concept of *communio* and how it is interpreted in a biblical context. Kasper discusses the concept of mercy in a sociological context.¹⁹ In short: God is merciful towards us and his mercy causes our hearts to be merciful towards others. This is not only in line with the relational/*communio* interpretation of mercy and a biblical approach to the concept, but also an illuminating addition to his answer to the question: how is the Gospel proclaimed in a modern, secular context? The biblical teaching of "love your neighbour" has perhaps never been so much needed as it is today. Kasper worries that our modern, secular culture leads us towards an indifferent and irresponsible society.

If the Trinitarian God is being-in-relation and if the whole of our reality reflects this relationality, then what are the logical consequences of this view for our interpretation of reality according to this "likeness of God"? Kasper follows Schelling's philosophy of freedom and establishes that authentic freedom can only be freedom without a ground, that is, freedom that exists only by its own force. Therefore, freedom is something that is not only an attribute of God but *the* attribute: God's existence is existence as perfect freedom. In his analysis of the concepts of grace and mercy Kasper argues that God's freedom appears in our reality as mercy. There is a distinct shift here from an ontological definition of grace as (quite abstractly) something that is connected to God's being as love and manifested in God's self-revelation, to something that is *the* center of Christian life and *the* manifestation of God's freedom in the course of history. In *GJ* Kasper unites love and grace as the same attributes in God's being:

The mystery of God is [...] his saving will, his turning to us, his total and unreserved self-communication in grace or, in a word, his love.²⁰

In *B* Kasper associates the concept of mercy with God's self-revelation as "wholly other". The mysteriousness of God's being is not an unknown secret as we understand a secret in a secular sense; the fact that God is mysterious is rather an overwhelming characterisation

¹⁸ B, 27: "Dabei überbietet die Bibel den Schrei nach Gerechtigkeit mit dem Ruf nach Barmherzigkeit. Sie versteht die Barmherzigkeit als die Gott eigene Gerechtigkeit. Sie ist als Überbietung, nicht als Unterbietung der Gerechtigkeit das Herz der biblischen Botschaft." See also EF, 79; PF, 49–52. Moloney also criticises this juxtaposition of the concepts of justice and mercy. If mercy is put in the place of the attribute of God's being, then all other attributes become secondary. If this is the case, then "it would mean that God could not exist without expressing mercy. But since God does not show mercy to himself, it would not be possible for him to exist without there also being sinners in need of his mercy—and that notion is absurd." See *Moloney* 2015, 60.

¹⁹ B, 11; 15–19; 22–25; 179–202; EF, 55–57; MM, 15–16.

²⁰ GJ, 224: "das Geheimnis Gottes ist [...] Gottes Heilswille, seine Zuwendung, seine restlose und vorbehaltlose Selbstmitteilung in Gnade, seine Liebe.

of his greatness and his inexhaustible love for his creatures. God's mysteriousness underlines his utter incomprehensibility:

God's mercy points us toward his Being Wholly Other and toward his complete incomprehensibility and reliability of his love and graciousness (*Huld*).²¹

God's mercy is the signpost pointing toward him. This is the apex of Kasper's interpretation of perfect freedom. If God is, in fact, perfect freedom in love, his appearance in history must be loyal to these attributes. However, because God's being is an inconceivable mystery, one can grasp it only through God's own will. This will is God's freedom, appearing in human history as love and mercy. Love and mercy are attributes that are incomprehensible, uncountable and undefined by their nature (one cannot speak of them as countable qualities, unless the quantity underlines the impossibility of defining them: "I love you a million"). Therefore, one can simultaneously truly, fully and fulfillingly experience them but at the same time, one cannot fully articulate what he or she is actually experiencing. One can paint a picture or write a poem or use all the most beautiful words in the world when trying to describe it, and still the source of this experience remains mysterious. Being surrounded by love, receiving love as well as giving love is at the same time a real and a surreal experience. In turn, the selfless giving of love, the undeserved mercy changes the recipient so that in truly encountering the love of God, self-love changes into a love for others. Love is an attribute that one cannot truly grasp, but the effects of which we can experience. The manifestation of God's freedom in human history appears as mercy: both as the mercy of God and as the mercy of humans towards each other. In human history the divine attribute of grace appears as mercy. In the event of revelation of God's being (especially in the Incarnation) we are called to show mercy towards each other as well.

In this universal human sense, *Barmherzigkeit/misericordia* names an attitude that transcends one's own egoism and one's own I-centeredness and has its heart not with itself, but rather with others, especially the poor and needy of every kind. Such self-transcendence in the direction of others and such self-forgetfulness is not weakness; it is strength. *It is true freedom*. For it is far more than self-love, which has fallen victim to its own ego; it is free self-determination and, as a result, self-realisation. It is so free that it can also be free of itself. It can overcome itself, forget itself, and – so to speak – change its spots.²² (Emphasis provided by author.)

Mercy is, therefore, the ultimate realisation of freedom. Only one who is truly free can express this freedom through mercy. A God whose essence is freedom is merciful towards his creatures. They, in turn, can be merciful towards each other when truly, really

²¹ B, 59: "Gottes Barmherzigkeit verweist uns auf das Ganz-anders-Sein Gottes und auf seine vollkommene Unbegreiflichkeit, welche zugleich die Unbegreiflichkeit und Verlässlichkeit seiner Huld und Liebe ist."

²² B, 29–30: "In diesem allgemein-menschlichen Sinn bedeutet Barmherzigkeit/*misericordia* die Haltung, welche den eigenen Egoismus und die eigene Ich-Zentriertheit überschreitet und das Herz nicht bei sich, sondern bei den Anderen, besonders bei den Armen und Notleidenden aller Art hat. Solche Selbstüberschreitung auf den anderen hin und solche Selbstvergessenheit ist nicht Schwäche, sie ist Stärke. Sie ist wahre Freiheit. Denn sie ist weit mehr als die an das eigene Ego verfallene Selbstverliebtheit, sie ist freie Selbstbestimmung und damit Selbstverwirklichung. Sie ist so frei, dass sie auch von sich selbst frei sein kann, sich selbst überwinden, sich selbst vergessen und sozusagen über den eigenen Schatten springen kann."

experiencing the authentic freedom of love that is given to them in God's mercifulness, given in connection with God's infinite freedom. Mercy is essentially bound to God's being. Kasper holds that there is a continuity between the seemingly different images of God in the Old and the New Testaments. Rather than detecting a conflict between the concepts of the righteous but wrathful God of the Old Testament and the loving Father of the New Testament, Kasper sees it rather as a continuum. He argues that mercy (a quality emphasised especially in the New Testament) underlines God's holiness (a quality, among righteousness and justice, emphasised especially in the Old Testament) and gives an expression to it.

The Hebrew word for holy, *qādōš*, comes from a verb root meaning to cut off or separate. There is a unity between God's mercy and holiness: God is wholly other in the sense also that his holiness is radical difference (*radikale Unterschiedenheit*) from everything worldly and evil. God's holiness awakens a sense of guilt and sinfulness in humans.²³ In emphasising this, Kasper wants to abolish the image of a God who is *only* eternally merciful, loving and forgiving *no matter what we do*. God's mercy is eternally bound to his holiness: his mercy exceeds his justice but it does not turn into indifference towards justice. He does eternally love his creature, the human race, but he hates sin, evil and wrongdoing. Love, mercy and justice are inseparable entities. This is what God's wrath means in the Old Testament. God hates evil because he is holy. Kasper underlines the importance of eschatological retribution: justice is not a fear-inducing judgment but rather gives hope. Eschatology concentrates on the hope of the coming merciful Messiah. Kasper argues that instead of expressing blind, furious anger, God holds back his wrath and God's justice appears in our reality as the possibility for conversion.²⁴ This emphasis safeguards the assertion that God's being is first and foremost love. He does not appear in anger, he appears in love. But Kasper wants to remind us that this love is not cheap grace, it is mercy and grace bound to God's justice.²⁵ "His mercy is his own distinctive justice"²⁶. Our behaviour as human beings should reflect God's mercy. This is what Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbour meant. It is not only deserved love and mercy, it is also undeserved, unselfish love, which expects nothing in return. In Kasper's own words: "it is not only central, it is radical"²⁷.

God's freedom and justice as well as his freedom and mercy are, therefore, bound together (and two sides of the same coin). God does not follow any predestined laws or act or judge according to definition of law and justice alien to him: he passes justice according to his own being. He is manifesting his freedom and sovereignty in the act of establishing what is right and what is wrong. The concept of freedom binds together

²³ B, 59–60.

²⁴ B, 61–62; on Marcion of Sinope and his rejection of the Old Testament and Marcion's view of the irreconcilable difference between the wrathful God of the Old Testament and the merciful God of the New Testament, and of the Great Church's rejection of this view, see B, 89–90. See also OG, 72.

²⁵ According to Kasper, defining mercy as God's central attribute was the pivotal insight that made possible the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999). See also PF, 49–52; MM, 16–17.

²⁶ B, 105: "Seine Barmherzigkeit ist die ihm eigene Gerechtigkeit."

²⁷ B, 138: "[Jesu Forderung der Nächstenliebe] ist nicht nur zentral, sie ist auch radikal."

Kasper's interpretation of the people of God (*communio*) and God's freedom. God is free in his relationship with humanity. It is not arbitrary freedom; it is freedom based in God's fidelity. God has freely established a covenant with his people, and in the course of history he promises to act by this covenant, loyal to it through his own, absolute free choice.²⁸ The name of God (his revelation) is bound to his being as sovereign freedom and grace. In the second giving of his Name he establishes grace and mercy as his central attributes:

Moses intercedes and reminds God of his promise. He asks God for grace and mercy: 'Let me see your countenance.' Then a second revelation of God's name occurs. God calls out his name to Moses in passing: 'I will be gracious (*hēn*) to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy (*rachamin*) on whom I will show mercy.' God's mercy is understood here not as the nearness of a close pal, but rather as the expression of God's absolute sovereignty and his irreducible freedom. Yahweh doesn't fit into any box, not even in the box of compensatory justice. In his mercy, he conforms only to himself and to his name revealed to Moses. So he commands Moses to prepare new tablets of the law. Despite their infidelity and stiff necks, he does not let his people sink into ruin and nothingness. God renews his covenant; he gives the people another chance and he does all of this out of pure freedom and pure grace.²⁹

In the third revelation of God's name in Exodus: "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful (*rahūm*) and gracious (*hannūn*), slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love (*hesed*) and faithfulness (*ēmet*)" (Ex 34,6) God declares that he is not only free and sovereign, he is also faithful and loyal. Kasper emphasises that from this third revelation on, the revelatory declaration became a credo for the people of Israel. The revelation was not a mystical experience or speculative statement but it was the gift of God, gift of himself.³⁰ In a more articulate fashion than in his earlier work, Kasper associates freedom as God's attribute with his appearance in history, to his loyalty and fidelity towards his people. The burning bush sets the basis for understanding the essence of the Trinitarian God in history:

1. I am who I am (in freedom).
2. I am with you in the course of history, always, no matter what (mercy in freedom).
3. And I stay loyal to my promise that I will be there at every historical moment (fidelity in freedom).

Freedom – mercy – fidelity also reflect the Trinitarian structure of God's being. God expresses his freedom in history as his being merciful towards his creatures. If God is freedom, and his being in history essentially appears as mercy (since mercy is, as the title of *B* declares, the "fundamental principle" (*Grundbegriff*) of the Gospel), then

²⁸ KK, 183; B, 107; EF, 55–56.

²⁹ B, 56: "Doch Mose legt Fürsprache ein und erinnert Gott an seine Verheißung; er bittet ihn um Gnade und Erbarmen: 'Lass mich doch dein Antlitz sehen'. Da kommt es zur zweiten Namensoffenbarung. Gott ruft dem Mose im Vorübergehen seinen Namen zu: 'Ich gewähre Gnade (*hēn*), wem ich will, und ich schenke Erbarmen (*rachamin*), wem ich will' (Ex 33, 19). Gottes Erbarmen wird hier nicht als distanzlose kumpelhafte Nähe, sondern vielmehr als Ausdruck der absoluten Souveränität Gottes und seiner unableitbaren Freiheit verstanden. Jahwe passt in kein Schema, auch nicht in das einer ausgleichenden Gerechtigkeit; mit seiner Barmherzigkeit entspricht er nur sich selbst und seinem dem Mose geoffenbarten Namen. So befiehlt er dem Mose, neue Gesetzestafeln anzufertigen. Er lässt sein Volk trotz dessen Untreue und Halsstarrigkeit nichts ins Leere und ins Unglück fallen; er erneuert seinen Bund; gibt dem Volk nochmals eine Chance und er tut dies aus reiner Freiheit und reiner Gnade." See also KÄ, 392; OG, 68.

³⁰ B, 56–57.

mercy actually is the “form” or “action” in which God affects our reality and our history. Ultimately this is, of course, an essentially Christological interpretation: by characterising God’s promise to be with us always as the expression of his freedom, fidelity and mercy, Kasper gives the concept of mercy an essentially Christological function. The following quotation demonstrates how the theology-of-history approach, the emphasis on the living God who reveals himself in history as well as functional interpretation over the dogmatic interpretation is summarised in the analysis of the recent discussion and theological consideration of the concept of mercy:

In the traditional as well as in the more recent dogmatic handbooks, God’s mercy is treated only as one of God’s attributes among others. [...] In the more recent handbooks, mercy is often completely absent [...] Here we should merely point out that, within the parameters of the metaphysical attributes of God, there is scarcely room for a concept of mercy which derives not from metaphysical essence, but rather from the historical self-revelation of God.³¹

Kasper’s motivation for renewing the understanding of mercy especially in our modern time reflects his central mission of seeking a way to explain the Gospel in an understandable fashion in the modern world. Because he feels that mercy as a concept is neglected in modern discussion, he conducts an in-depth analysis of the concept. He begins from the history of philosophy (while emphasising that Christian teaching in no way “simply repeats in a popular way what philosophers have discovered”³²) and understandings of compassion and mercy in human history. He also analyses the concept of mercy in other religions³³ and argues that the golden rule is a common denominator that can be found in some form in all world religions.³⁴ He suggests that it could form the basis for mutual discussion, as well as a rule for religious dialogue. However, he remarks that if the Golden rule is interpreted in the light of “least-common-nominator-sameness” (*Nivellierenden Gleichmacherei*) in the spirit of the Enlightenment, it loses its intended meaning. Kasper uses George Bernard Shaw’s apt sarcasm to enlighten this argument: “Don’t treat others as you would want them to treat you. Their taste may not be the same.”³⁵ The citation reveals Kasper’s fear of relativism: we cannot force into being a uniform culture because it is not a realistic goal. Cultures and religions cannot be forced into a quasi-universal ideology. The understanding of a variety of central concepts and practises is simply too diverse between them.³⁶ Instead, in order to incorporate the Golden Rule in Christian ethical teaching, Kasper ties the Golden Rule with Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon

³¹ B, 19–20: “In den traditionellen wie neueren dogmatischen Handbüchern wird die Barmherzigkeit Gottes nur als eine der Eigenschaften Gottes unter anderen [...] behandeln. [...] In neueren Handbüchern fehlt sie oft ganz [...] Es soll hier lediglich gezeigt werden, dass im Rahmen der metaphysischen Eigenschaften Gottes für die Barmherzigkeit, die sich ja nicht aus dem metaphysischen Wesen, sondern aus der geschichtlichen Selbstoffenbarung Gottes ergibt.”

³² B, 49: “[es wäre falsch zu meinen] das Christentum wiederhole nur auf volkstümliche Weise, was die Philosophen [...] herausgefunden [...] haben.”

³³ B, 40–44; cf. GJ, 28.

³⁴ B, 44–47; KK, 450.

³⁵ B, 45: “Behandle andere nicht, wie du möchtest, dass sie dich behandeln. Ihr Geschmack könnte nicht derselbe sein.”

³⁶ B, 43–47; OG, 78–79; GJ; 23–24.

on the Mount. Jesus combines the demand for mercy and compassion with the commandment of love, which includes loving one's enemy.³⁷

The proper understanding of the concept of mercy also has far-reaching consequences for the question of salvation and damnation. Kasper makes a relevant point about the modern-day tendency to think optimistically about salvation. He observes that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* (the salvation of all) is popular. Kasper argues, following the thinking of Johann Baptist Metz, that the doctrine of *apokatastasis* does not actually make Christianity more humane, but rather makes it superfluous. If God's mercy is understood only superficially, it contradicts his holiness and his justice.³⁸ Once again: God's justice and his mercy are not counterparts but two sides of his same essence. The cold hard reality of the Cross loses all its meaning if salvation is treated with groundless optimism. It also means injustice for all the victims of wrong. Responsibility for and the seriousness of human guilt must count. But as well the Augustinian doctrine of *massa damnata* that led to the idea of double predestination (damnation of some and salvation of the chosen) leads to a wrong interpretation of the Bible. If God's mercy cannot be found anywhere, it obliterates the saving work of Christ as much as the doctrine of the salvation of all.³⁹ Moreover:

Revelation has not identified the eternal damnation of any concrete individual; and the church has never taught, in a dogmatically obligatory way, that any particular human being has been subjected to eternal damnation.⁴⁰

Kasper decides that we are dealing with a matter that exceeds our mundane capability to understand. It surpasses our common-day experience. Like revelation, the reality of possible damnation is something that we cannot fully grasp with our human powers. What the possibility for damnation and the possibility for salvation can do for us is that it makes us take a stance. It forces us to make a choice, it urges us to convert. The possibility of Hell makes us realise that "eternal failure and completely missing the point of human existence is a real possibility".⁴¹ If there truly is a complete state of nothingness and insignificance, if all that there ultimately is, is nothing, and everything that happens in life slowly slides towards death and the annihilation of all, is this not then an apt definition of Hell? God desires our salvation, but not without our involvement. However, Kasper concludes with a cautious optimism: we can hope for the salvation of all, but we cannot know if all, in fact, will be saved.⁴²

Kasper comes to the conclusion that the Incarnation is, in fact, the appearance of God's mercy in history. Therefore, in Jesus Christ the definitive character of God's essence is revealed:

³⁷ B, 46.

³⁸ B, 110; TK2, 186; PF, 49–52; KK, 173–174; similarly also Dietrich Bonhoeffer: MM, 16–17.

³⁹ B, 105; KK, 173–174.

⁴⁰ B, 112: "Bei keinem konkreten Menschen ist uns die ewige Verdammung offenbart und die Kirche hat nie von irgendeinem Menschen dogmatisch verbindlich gelehrt, dass er der ewigen Verdammung verfallen ist."

⁴¹ B, 112: "es gibt die reale Möglichkeit des ewigen Scheiterns und des totalen Verfehlens des Sinns des Menschen." See also NGK, 82; 93.

⁴² B, 114; KK, 173–174.

The mercy definitively revealed in Jesus Christ stands as a sign before and over all of reality. It is the watermark of all reality. God's mercy is the primordial presupposition and ground of creation and of all salvation history.⁴³

Kasper treats the concept of mercy as an attempt to explain the difference between the concepts of faith and reason. Whereas the axiom *fides quaerens intellectum* is fundamental to Kasper's thought, he wants to emphasise that reason and faith are never equivalent, as in the equation $A=A$. The Church's confession of faith is comprehensible as "truth that makes sense in faith"⁴⁴. The truth that is expressed in confession is not an affirmation made by human reason but an affirmation of faith. Therefore, faith is the language and the "science" of what is believed. It is not contradictory to reason but it rather exceeds the limits of reason. It is a practical expression of the philosophical-theological concept of *Capax Dei*.

Kasper sees the reality of faith mirroring the Trinitarian mystery. As Jesus was abandoned on the Cross by God, so does the believer face frightening nothingness when he or she realises his or her own finitude. In the plunge into darkness God's presence is at its strongest: paradoxically, in the terror of the Cross God reveals his self-emptying love. In the dark night of the soul, the believer encounters the closeness of God. The Trinitarian mystery is revealed in a paradoxical manner. It is something that we cannot grasp with our reason but through faith only. As a concept, mercy cannot be foreign to its source: the Trinitarian God himself. Mercy is not a superimposed concept, a behavioural instruction or practical application of being a Christian, but rather it reflects the reality of the Trinitarian God himself. Because God is merciful, it should be reflected in our actions as well. Mercy is grounded in the reality of God and is, therefore, a central aspect of our reality as well.

Kasper concludes his almost half-century long analysis of the concept of freedom with his book on mercy (*B*). Mercy is the glue that holds together the metaphysical-philosophical framework of the concept of freedom, based on German idealist philosophy. As well, it functions as the relational interpretation of God whose being as freedom is the ground for human freedom as well. Moreover, Kasper's analysis of the concept of mercy binds together the practical understanding of the reality of revelation as well as its theological explanation: mercy is the "essence" of God's appearance in our reality. At the heart of revelation is the heart of Jesus Christ. He is God's mercy incarnate.⁴⁵

5.2. Immanuel – God with Us

To understand God's central attribute, mercy, in its fullness, a more thorough analysis of the apex of God's revelation, Incarnation in Jesus Christ, is required. Kasper argues that in order to find a proper interpretation of both the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, both must be united. Therefore, the Cross is not only the apex of God's salvific plan but the

⁴³ B, 103: "Die in Jesus Christus endgültig offenbare Barmherzigkeit steht als Vorzeichen vor und über aller Wirklichkeit. Sie ist das Wasserzeichen aller Wirklichkeit. Die Barmherzigkeit Gottes ist die Urvoraussetzung und der Grund der Schöpfung wie der gesamten Heilsgeschichte."

⁴⁴ B, 97: "im Glauben sinnvolle Wahrheit" See also HT, 251; GJ, 16–22; RS, 289–290.

⁴⁵ B, 116; TK2, 184–185; cf. GJ, 350–351; 356.

place where the meaning of the historical person and the object of faith come together as one. Kasper claims that there is a transition from the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith – they are at the same time something similar and something totally new. The confession “Jesus is the Christ” brings something new to the understanding of the person Jesus/Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ This something new is the historical character of God’s proclamation and Jesus’ life as the fulfilment of history and God’s revelation. Jesus Christ is the ultimate fulfilment of God’s history with humanity and the culmination of God’s revelation.⁴⁷

It is not enough, however, to say that Jesus is the criterion for Christology. Such a claim stumbles upon the problem of circular argumentation. Kasper formulates his own understanding of the hermeneutics of Christology as follows:

The new quest for the historical Jesus, therefore, maintains the hermeneutical circle, which is valid for all elucidation and understanding. It proceeds from the premises of present belief, and measures that faith by its content: Jesus Christ. It understands Jesus Christ in the light of Church belief, and it interprets Church belief from Jesus.⁴⁸

One must ask, however: what is the correct method for analysing Jesus’ life and deeds? That is, how, what and who decides what the correct interpretation is? The idea of the community of believers as witnesses to dogma may be idealised. We shall next consider the criteria that Kasper poses for historical-critical interpretation as well as for safeguarding the dogma in order to find the authentic proclamation of the Trinitarian God.

Jesus Christ is the eschatological, i.e. definitive and unsurpassable revelation of God in person; he is Immanuel, God with us.⁴⁹

Kasper’s interest lies not in the historical life of Jesus *per se* but rather in the theological meaning of his life, deeds and death on the Cross. Kasper states that Jesus does not fit any categories. He is unique and he remains a mystery. His meaning can only be partially revealed through examining his message: his activity among people and his message of God’s history with humanity and ultimately the coming Kingdom of God. Kasper concludes the chapter on Jesus’ history by stating: “The theological perspective is the only one which does justice to the person and work of Jesus.”⁵⁰ However, Kasper wants to ground his theological implications in an exegetical foundation while giving his own account of the theological meaning of Jesus Christ.⁵¹

⁴⁶ JC, 72.

⁴⁷ GJ, 213; OG, 53; see also DV, 4: “The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (see 1 Tim. 6:14 and Tit. 2:13).”

⁴⁸ JC, 68: “Die neue Frage nach dem historischen Jesus wahrte also den hermeneutischen Zirkel, der für alles Verstehen gilt. Sie geht aus von dem Vorverständnis, dem gegenwärtigen Glauben, und mißt diesen an seinem Inhalt, an Jesus Christus. Sie versteht Jesus im Licht des kirchlichen Glaubens, und sie interpretiert umgekehrt den kirchlichen Glauben von Jesus her.“

⁴⁹ NG, 178: “Jesus Christus ist die eschatologische, d.h. endgültige und unüberbietbare Offenbarung Gottes in Person; er ist der Emanuel, der Gott mit uns.” Similarly in: OG, 73; GPV, 155.

⁵⁰ JC, 115: “Die theologische Perspektive ist die einzige, die Person und Sache Jesu gerecht wird.”

⁵¹ ED, 74; cf. Baur 1977, 59.

In *JC*⁵² (1974) Kasper wished to establish his theological work on a comprehensive knowledge of a current historical-critical interpretation of the Bible. When *JC* was republished in 2007, Kasper wrote a new introduction to it, in which he gave an updated (albeit brief) analysis of the situation of research into the historical Jesus at the beginning of the 21st Century. Referring to the famous fiction book concerning Christology, *The Da Vinci Code*, Kasper emphasises that the importance of Christological discussion has not ceased but has, instead, become more and more a matter of interest in modern times. Jesus is an interesting, even controversial and rebellious character. In the modern search for meaning Christianity also has to be able to answer the question “who is Jesus Christ?” The answer to the mystery of Jesus Christ is the answer to the mystery of both God and human beings. Kasper admits that many Christological questions (like the then-popular programme of demythologising) became outdated after the publication of *JC* in 1974. Instead, new trends have come under discussion in the study of Jesus: for example, ever more profound ecumenical discussions, contextual theology (of Latin America, Africa and Asia), depth psychology (who ultimately is the person Jesus Christ) and inter-religious dialogue (how to deal with Christological questions in the situations of encounter with other religions). Kasper’s main goal and main concern after almost 40 years is still, however, the same: how to proclaim the unique message of Jesus Christ in our post-Enlightenment, secular, even atheist era?

5.2.1. Evil, Suffering and Sin: Theodicy and the Theology of the Cross

The perpetual problem in trying to defend the good, almighty God of Christianity is the problem of theodicy. It is also one of the most-used counterarguments against the reasonability of believing in God and, therefore, an inexhaustible source for atheists for attacking against theistic religions in general. The problem of theodicy is also an innate and painful question for the religions themselves, as there seems to prevail an unsolvable problem in reconciling the idea of an almighty, loving God with the countless, undeniably horrible things that happen in the world all the time.⁵³ Post-Auschwitz theology finds it impossible to speak of an omnipotent and good God in a responsible way.⁵⁴ In our modern society the problems have not ceased. Terrorism, religious extremism and growing inequality all raise questions that cannot be simply solved with dire clichés or religious pep talk. What problems and questions arise from the problem of evil and suffering in the light of the revelation of a living, good, almighty God? The basic formulation of the problem of evil is, as Epicurus put it:

Either God wants to get rid of evil but cannot – and then he is helpless and not God; or he can get rid of it but chooses not to – then he himself is wicked and at bottom is really the

⁵² For a brief, yet comprehensive analysis of *JC*, see: *Jesus the Christ in Retrospect and Prospect* by William P. Loewe in: *Speaking Truth in Love: The Theology of Cardinal Walter Kasper*. 2014. Ed. Colberg, Kristin M. & Krieg, Robert A. Minnesota: Liturgical Press.

⁵³ GJ, 265–266; B, 11–12; 27–28; 125–132.

⁵⁴ GJ, 68; 262–263; B, 12. Kasper identifies this as the “third category” of atheism: the protest against evil. He distinguishes it firmly from the two other categories mentioned above in this study: the category of atheism against the God-hypothesis and the category of atheism of liberation of the subject.

devil; or he does not want to and is not able – then both of the previous conclusions follow or he wants to and is able to – but then whence comes evil?⁵⁵

A related problem is the question of the salvation of humankind: if the threat of eternal damnation, a threat of Hell is real, is such a threat then not against God's merciful nature? How does the good God, who has promised to be with us in the course of history, allow somebody to be damned for eternity? Is not salvation for all? What are mercy, salvation and redemption ultimately worth? For these reasons the question of evil, suffering, sin and condemnation is relevant also in the light of revelation theology. Kasper's approach to the problem of evil is realistic: evil cannot be explained away. Somehow, in a yet not-fully-understandable way, suffering belongs to the entirety of creation. However, Kasper insists that there has to be an explanation for it: because if there is no further justice, no making things right, then neither is there any ultimate meaning to this world. If God ceases to be the foundation of all justice, the world inevitably becomes a meaningless place.⁵⁶

Kasper's approach is pastoral but he also wants to encounter the theological reality of a society that ceases to answer the question of why there is suffering. For if the questioning ends, is it not the end of caring as well?⁵⁷ If we do not want to or cannot discuss why bad things happen, does it not make us indifferent to them and also to other primordial questions? In many ways we already, in fact, live in such a society. The last two centuries have quite clearly shown us what a "godless", indifferent society can be at its most powerful. Kasper calls this situation "resignation in the face of the question of meaning" (*die Resignation vor der Sinnfrage*).⁵⁸ Kasper's effort in answering the problem of evil, sin and suffering starts from within his interpretation of autonomy and the relationship between the freedom of God and the freedom of man.

The problems of evil, suffering and sin are tied to the question of the limitations of our finite existence. Kasper states:

Reality [...] is ultimately inconceivable mystery. Therefore, man is always frustrated by reality. And that frustration finds its ultimate poignancy in death.⁵⁹

In death the limitedness of man's being is brutally realised: we encounter the limits of our being truly, really and irreversibly. According to Kasper,

Evil, therefore, may be described not merely as a lack of being but as a perversion of being: as the perversion of the meaning of existence. Evil is either the humiliation or the

⁵⁵ GJ, 263: "Gott will entweder das Übel abschaffen, aber er kann nicht –dann ist er ohnmächtig und nicht Gott, oder er kann und will es nicht– dann ist er böse, im Grunde ist er dann der Teufel, oder er will es weder, noch kann er es – was auf beide Folgerungen zugleich hinausläuft, oder er will und kann es – woher dann aber das Böse?"

⁵⁶ B, 13–14; 127.

⁵⁷ B, 12–13.

⁵⁸ B, 12; see also HT, 253–255.

⁵⁹ JC, 96: "Die Wirklichkeit ist [...] unbegreifliches Geheimnis. So scheitert der Mensch immer wieder an der Wirklichkeit; dieses Scheitern erfährt im Tod seine Letzte Zuspitzung."

violation of man. It brings man to the point of self-contradiction. For that reason, evil is absolute meaningless and perversion.⁶⁰

Kasper joins together the concepts of finiteness and evil: he states that if finiteness and evil remain, history cannot fulfil itself of its own accord.⁶¹

Kasper offers an interpretation of the dualistic world view of the Gospel of John. The Gospel of John recognises that despite the beginning of the new age of the Kingdom of God evil still prevails in the world.⁶² The central message of the gospel is God's kingdom breaking into the world and the love of God as part of human reality. Kasper interprets this reality accordingly: despite the new age of love and hope begun by Jesus Christ's Incarnation, life and death on the Cross, suffering and evil still remain in the world. Kasper calls this a dialectic of power and powerlessness. (*Dialektik von Macht und Ohnmacht*).⁶³ He claims that in human history evil still remains but at the same time the signs of the new age can be seen in the course of history. Kasper emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit: only he can open a view to the transcendent reality even in spite of the evilness in the world.⁶⁴

An authentic Christian understanding of the historical dimension means for Kasper that although the new age has already begun, the reality of this world is present at the same time. In other words, salvation history and profane history are intertwined. All utopian, meta-historical visions of the future and pseudo-messianic expectations about the future must be defeated.⁶⁵ In this reality, the love of God and evil coexist. Because the being of God is not bound by time, this kind of overlapping and a situation of paradox becomes possible. Kasper's argument is not, however, limited only to the being of God as supra-temporal. He bases his conviction on his basic interpretation of the philosophy of freedom. Human freedom is always bound by time and context; it is affected by random physical, sociological and biological variables and, therefore, it always belongs inside finite reality. Human freedom is not something that can be "taken into use". The freedom of an individual is always bound up with the fallen state of humanity. Human endeavours to defeat evil remain always incomplete and fragmentary. The constitution of human freedom also includes the possibility for evil.⁶⁶ However, the dialectical interpretation of reality provides a theological explanation for the problems of evil and suffering.

The question of God and the question of suffering belong [...] together. We would not be able to suffer from our situation unless we had at least an implicit pre-apprehension of an undamaged, happy, fulfilled kind of existence; unless we were at least implicitly looking

⁶⁰ JC, 99–100: "Das Böse läßt sich deshalb nicht einfach als Mangel an Sein, sondern eher als Verkehrung des Seins, als die Verkehrung des Sinns von Sein beschreiben. Das Böse ist entweder Verdemütigung oder 'Vergewaltigung' des Menschen. Es bringt den Menschen in Widerspruch mit sich selbst. Insofern ist das Böse das absolut Sinnlose und Verkehrte."

⁶¹ JC, 100.

⁶² Dunn 1990, 28–29.

⁶³ JC, 96–104.

⁶⁴ See, e.g., GJ, 262–269; Dunn 1990, 28–29; Dunderberg 1997, 292–293.

⁶⁵ G, 80–81; see also B, 64.

⁶⁶ GJ, 264–265; JC, 237–242.

for salvation and redemption. [...] Experiences of suffering are experiences of a contrast; it is precisely in our wretchedness that we also experience our greatness (B. Pascal).⁶⁷

Therefore, experiences of good and evil are both bound together with the constitutional freedom of man: his existence as a free agent. In a similar fashion, to the extent that human beings can recognise divine reality as their own ground of being, they can open their eyes to the reality of perfect and happy being. This is so, even if they approach this reality from the perspective of suffering and evil. Following the tradition of German idealism Kasper takes this duality (thesis-antithesis) and tries to find a synthesis of them, appropriate to his perception of reality. Kasper explains that evil makes a person take a thorough look at himself. If one does not want to give up one's humanity, one must protest against evil. Because the desire to conquer evil generally only brings forth more evil, we need a completely new beginning, a new start.⁶⁸ This new beginning is the new age begun by Jesus Christ. The dualistic evil-good situation of history is broken in front of the mystery of the Incarnation. Therefore, freedom is no longer a dualistic quality, a mere possibility for good or evil – through the Incarnation it receives back its original meaning: freedom is freedom in relation to God.

Kasper states that the evil forces that the Bible also talks about are “actions of principalities and powers” that the Bible refers to as demons. Kasper's definition remains vague, which can be interpreted as his unwillingness to allow any room for superstition and ancient mythological interpretations (Kasper himself refers to the “powers” as an element of an old mythology with which the Bible describes the universal human experience of evil).⁶⁹ It is as if Kasper does not want to specifically name any evil powers – they remain ambiguous, threatening, unexplainable “powers”, perhaps something that we can grasp intuitively but cannot really name. The “powers” are something that are against the constitution of the human being, against the human being's authentic freedom. The powers of evil are an aspect of reality that does not fit into any logical, philosophical-theological account of reality. They include an inexplicable element that silences us before them. In the end, human beings are powerless and very aware of their finitude in front of evil. Evil powers pose a threat to Christianity or more specifically, a threat to truth. At their core, they are a threat to the core structure of reality. For Kasper it is essential to emphasise that whatever these powers are, they are responsible for the distortion of human freedom. They prevent the human freedom from flourishing:

They determine human freedom in advance of every decision and, therefore, human beings can never be completely aware of them, let alone overcome them. They are

⁶⁷ GJ, 265–266: “Die Gottesfrage und die Leidensfrage gehören [...] zusammen. Wir können nämlich an unserer Situation gar nicht leiden, wenn wir nicht ein zumindest implizites Vorverständnis von einem nicht beschädigten, von einem geglückten und erfüllten Dasein hätten, wenn wir nicht ein zumindest implizit nach Heil und Erlösung fragen würden. [...] Leidenserfahrungen sind also Kontrasterfahrungen; gerade in unserem Elend erfahren wir auch unsere Größe.” See also OG, 76; JC, 103; 237–242.

⁶⁸ JC, 100.

⁶⁹ JC, 118–119.

responsible for the conflicts which characterise reality and for the tragic character of many situations.⁷⁰

Evil powers are a counterpart to the infinite God. The “determination of human freedom in advance” means that the powers appeal to those structures in the human being that find what those powers offer appealing without even noticing that instead of giving what they promise they actually prevent truth and freedom. They speak to the depth dimension inside of us. But instead of delivering what they promise, they only bring more grief and sorrow. Instead of the happiness they promise, they bring distortion and tragedy to human history. Kasper finds similarities in the modern era between subjectivism and sin. He claims that the original meaning of what is to be a human being is widely misunderstood. We justify even bestial actions by the phrase “that is only human”. Kasper finds this kind of use of language anti-Christian and actually inhuman. To justify sin by saying it is human actually negates the original meaning of what it means to be human. To be human is to be constituted in “intelligence, heart, will, conscience, holiness.”⁷¹ In Christian understanding, what constitutes what is human and what differentiates us from animals is that we have a special relationship to God through Jesus Christ. With this in mind, the phrase “that is only human” used to justify weakness and sinful behaviour becomes untenable. Sin is what actually breaks the connection between God and man and in the process makes man lose himself as well.

Scripture names the situation of distance from God and the resulting self-alienation as sin (*hamartia*).⁷²

What is essential for Kasper is that the forces of evil will be defeated in the age of coming Kingdom of God. However, although the mode of the Kingdom of God which is a reality already now is love, Kasper claims that in our reality love is often replaced with self-seeking, a selfishness that isolates and asserts itself bringing about an “incoherent and impenetrable meaninglessness.”⁷³ Sin often manifests itself as ultimate self-centeredness.

In practice, however, human beings have separated themselves from the love of God by sin and put themselves at the service of egoism, self-seeking, self-will, self-advantage and self-importance.⁷⁴

Kasper claims that the doctrine of original sin is indispensable if we want to avoid a dualistic interpretation of reality and safeguard both the freedom of God and that of man. If the wrong in the world is attributed to God, it would make him the devil. The reason and ground for the existence of evil must, therefore, be found somewhere else. Thus,

⁷⁰ JC, 119: “Sie bestimmen die menschliche Freiheitsituation vorgängig zu jeder Entscheidung und können deshalb vom Menschen nie ganz durchschaut oder gar überwunden werden. Sie bedingen die antagonistische Zerrissenheit der Wirklichkeit und den tragischen Charakter vieler Situationen.”

⁷¹ JC, 301–302: “der Verstand, das Herz, der Wille, das Gewissen, die Heiligkeit.“

⁷² JC, 302: “Situation der Gottferne und der dadurch bedingten Selbst-Entfremdung nennt die Schrift die Sünde (*hamartia*).” English translation has been modified.

⁷³ JC, 304: “zusammenhanglose, undurchschaubare Sinnlosigkeit“.

⁷⁴ JC, 138: “Faktisch hat sich aber der Mensch durch die Sünde von der Liebe Gottes losgesagt und sich dem Egoismus, der Selbstsucht, dem Eigenwillen, dem Eigennutz und Eigensinn verschrieben.“

there must be an original sin in which we all are jointly involved, because of which we make the wrong decisions by nature. Kasper acknowledges the problematic that this generally accepted doctrine creates, but argues that the alternatives are either a dualistic view of reality or a harmonising idealism. Without going more deeply into the alternative of harmonising idealism and its critics he simply shrugs and says:

If one does not want either to define metaphysically the power of sin or to minimise it and if he wants to be able to justify his solution intellectually, he must see that the traditional doctrine of original sin [...] in the sense in which it is really meant – is one of the greatest achievements in the history of theology.⁷⁵

Kasper argues that it is in human nature to destroy the conditions of freedom for oneself and for others, either intentionally or unintentionally. His view of humanity is rather depressing: even good intentions appear to fail because of defensiveness or one's own mistrust of other people.⁷⁶ Therefore, it can be said that Kasper's understanding of original sin is also based on his basic conviction of the necessity of something new. In order to overcome sin, the world needs a complete restoration. The coming Kingdom of God is, therefore, a promise of something new. Similarly to how the value of the human being is bound to the mystery of Jesus Christ, the problem of evil as well finds its answer only through the person of Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus on the Cross is the ultimate answer to suffering in the world. Kasper argues that through Jesus' death the intervention of God's Kingdom becomes obvious:

Being saved from death now becomes the way in which the eschatological kingdom of God intervenes.⁷⁷

In his violent death Jesus experienced total abandonment by God, but nevertheless never lost his faith. In death he experienced the limits of his own being and was faced with the unfathomable mystery of God. Instead of giving up his faith, Jesus becomes the vessel of God's salvific plan. Paradoxically, in his death the *Basileia* actually comes forth in love.⁷⁸ Saving act for all humanity grows from the suffering of the God-man. This can only happen if the destiny of all humanity is embraced by that of Jesus':

⁷⁵ JC, 304: "Wer also die Macht der Sünde weder metaphysisch fixieren noch sie verharmlosen möchte und wer dies auf eine auch vor dem Denken ausgewiesene Weise tun will, für den ist die klassische Erbsündenlehre, [...] ihrer gemeinten Sache nach, eine der größten Leistungen der Theologiegeschichte."

⁷⁶ JC, 304–305; B, 22–25.

⁷⁷ JC, 185: "Die Errettung aus Todesnot wird so die Einbruchsstelle der eschatologischen Gottesherrschaft."

⁷⁸ JC, 185–186; GJ, 218; B 129; 145–148. The New Testament scholar Simon Gathercole states that the evangelists retain the paradox in their account of the meaning of Jesus' death. He is at the same time the victorious Son of God and subject to death. *Gathercole* (2011, 63) concludes: "The Son of Man 'gives his life' (Mk 10:45): as such, it might be said that the Son's divine will can even be exerted over his life. His freedom extends even over his own existence in the earthly sphere." The same can be said of his love: in his moment of darkness and weakness the Kingdom of God actually comes forth, showing us the ultimate gift of love.

In the one humanity the existence of each and every one is determined by the existence of all. It is precisely in the body of Christ that salvation is personally exemplified and offered to us.⁷⁹

In Jesus Christ the *completely new* changes the whole destiny of humankind and this new gives us the ultimate meaning experience. In the mystery of the Incarnation the mystery of man is solved.⁸⁰ When revelation opens "the new" in our constitution, it changes us. Revelation gives our experiences an entirely new meaning. It thus has both external and internal meaning.⁸¹

Kasper emphasises, however, that the coming Kingdom is not brought about by a violent, forced kind of love: love is not a substitute for justice. Therefore, love must be accompanied with justice in the actions of people: love includes the demands of justice and brings them to perfection. A just human world can only be found with the help of love, but love is not a slogan or a weapon for the transformation and humanising of the world.⁸² Love cannot be used as force but instead it transforms our view of reality in a way which brings forth justice. This can only happen by the power of God, not from human endeavour. Like freedom, love also is a concept about God. It can only be correctly understood and correctly articulated in our incomplete reality in connection to its only true source: the Trinitarian God himself. Therefore, the only way to conquer evil, sin and suffering in the world is through the coming Kingdom of God. "The kingdom of demons" is hostility towards creation, alienation of man from God. If this situation is to be reversed, fellowship with God must be restored.⁸³ The "something new" is represented in this world by the eschatological sign of the Kingdom of God.⁸⁴

Only at the end of time will the Kingdom of God break into the world completely and be realised fully. Suffering is the antithesis of eschatological hope. In the light of this paradox, the human being can become aware of something much better:

Only because we as human beings are meant for salvation do we suffer at our calamitous situation and rebel against it. [...] If hope is to be at all possible in the face of the universal suffering and calamitous situation, if in the face of injustice that cries out to heaven human beings are not to surrender their dignity, then a new beginning must be possible that cannot be derived from the conditions present in our situation and there must be a final authority that is above all injustice and will have the last word to say at the end of history.⁸⁵

⁷⁹ JC, 305: "In der einen Menschheit das Sein eines jeden durch das Sein aller bestimmt wird. Eben im Leibe Christi ist uns das Heil leibhaftig vorgegeben und angeboten."

⁸⁰ See also GS, 10.

⁸¹ OG, 68–69. See also JC, 93–94.

⁸² JC, 138–139; NGK, 95; B, 49–50. See also Tillich's insights on the nature of love and its relation to power and justice: *Tillich* 1954, 11–17.

⁸³ JC, 150; B, 82–87.

⁸⁴ JC, 150–151.

⁸⁵ GJ, 265–266: "Nur weil wir als Menschen auf Heil angelegt sind, leiden wir an unserer Unheilssituation, nur deshalb bäumen wir uns gegen sie auf. Soll angesichts der universalen Leidens- und Unheilssituation überhaupt noch Hoffnung möglich sein, soll der Mensch angesichts himmelschreienden Unrechts seine Würde nicht aufgeben, so nur, wenn ein neuer Anfang möglich ist, der nicht aus den Bedingungen unserer Situation ableitbar ist, wenn eine Instanz existiert, die über alles Unrecht erhaben am Ende der Geschichte das letzte Wort sprechen wird." English translation has been modified. See also WF, 14–17.

The experience as well as actions of human beings are bound to their current historical situation. Because human beings are joined to the Trinitarian God through the person of Jesus Christ they can, when they realise and confess this connection, discern the nature of suffering as well and rebel against it. For Kasper, the experience of suffering is a definitive experience which gives meaning to the finitude of our existence. He states that we do not only have “pure”, instantaneous experiences but because of the possibility to have experiences as well as in the past, present and future we are able to have experiences out of and in these experiences as well. Kasper gives the concept of freedom the meaning of an ability to move beyond and over ourselves to experience and encounter reality. Kasper’s analysis of human experience serves to build a case for his idea of ultimate *Sinn-Erfahrung*: through the ultimate realisation of our finitude can we grasp some kind of *Vorgriff*, an apprehension of infinite reality.⁸⁶ Our experiences are not yet organised, fully understood and conceptual but rather only glimpses of something which ultimately escapes all definitions. Kasper says that this does not make the experience any less real.

This experience of our experience is in the final analysis an experience of the finiteness and incompleteness of our experience; it is thus an experience of suffering.⁸⁷

Kasper combines the experience of suffering and the experience of God into one reality: through the situation of contrast (suffering) man can direct himself towards something better (God). Suffering is only one (albeit rather central) experience of our finitude alongside the experience of the limits of life. The experience of nothingness, evil and suffering happens when we encounter our own finitude. When accepting the limits of our being (accepting our finitude) we also accept that the mysterious, hidden in God is something that can also appear as terrifying. When we turn towards God in our experience of our own finitude, we accept the fact that we turn to something that escapes all our understanding. We accept that the nothingness we face can really, truly shake us to our core, terrify us to our bones. Our will to escape evil is based on our ground of being, which lies in divine reality. Inherently we want to reach out to something that gives us an explanation of our own being, an explanation of the insufferable pain of existence. But in divine reality we also face something inexplicable. In modern times the experience of nothingness is so profound that it shakes our whole constitution. When we cannot find the ultimate answers to our ultimate, profound questions, we become empty shells behind the shining armour of the splendour of our modern age. Death, suffering and inequality become more the rule than an exception.⁸⁸ Nothingness and meaninglessness are something evil, something utterly foreign to our true constitution. The nihilist orientation toward a meaningless modernity is as far away from our constitution as the image of God as it possibly can be. For Kasper, experience can only be transformed into something positive if instead of finitude and emptiness we encounter something that is infinite, something that is

⁸⁶ KK, 99. Kasper asks whether all the partial meaning experiences are not also indicators of the meaning of the whole, the ultimate meaning.

⁸⁷ GJ, 161: “Diese Erfahrung mit unserer Erfahrung ist letztlich die *Erfahrung der Endlichkeit* und der Unabgeschlossenheit unserer Erfahrung und damit *Leidenserfahrung*.” Cf. *Tillich* 1956, 224: “Endlichkeit, wenn sie ihrer selbst gewahr wird, ist Angst.”

⁸⁸ NGK, 86–87.

the basis of our own being. This meaning experience can only happen if we can truly, really relate to it, only if it offers us something familiar instead of something unfamiliar. This is why God himself accepts evil and suffering into his own constitution. In becoming human, God himself experiences all the terrifying existential questions belonging to being human. In the Incarnation Jesus assumed the destiny of humankind entirely to himself: joys and sorrows, pains and sufferings. He thus gave meaning to being human. He is not only the hope of all humanity, he is also its fulfilment.⁸⁹

Love, freedom and grace are personified in the second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ. Only through his true humanity are we truly partial to God's reality. Suffering is not unfamiliar to Jesus. Our ability to transcend our finiteness and reach out toward the infinite God is possible only through Christ's experience of suffering. Jesus is the content of revelation in person, through him we ontologically become participants in divine reality.⁹⁰ Kasper follows the interpretation of Ignatius of Antioch and later of Meister Eckhart when he illuminates the meaning of the Incarnation: Jesus Christ is begotten in the silence of the Father. If this interpretation is evaluated in the light of the more well-known characterisation of Christ as the incarnate Word, it creates a dialectical interpretation of reality typical of Kasper's thought. The *Word* of God is begotten from the *silence* of God. God approaches humanity in its deepest, darkest night, in silence, and gives his Word to the world.⁹¹ Silence is transformed into the Word. In this silence the Divine reality truly confronts us in our darkest and most desperate hour.

Kasper explains the meaning of suffering in humanity through his analysis of the history of God with humanity as well as through the philosophy of freedom. The possibility of perceiving the presence of infinite reality is open to the eyes of faith. Jesus as the mediator between human beings and God is the place in history where the human and divine realities intertwine. Kasper displays remarkable similarities here to the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Balthasar also emphasises both the Church's and Scripture's role as "the privileged historical witnesses to the Christ-event" and participants in the original revelatory message. History is the place for revelation where God calls his creatures to a dialogue with himself. As does Kasper, Balthasar also sees the liberal, bourgeois project as a road to nihilism. Modern subjectivity can lead to determining revelation only from the anthropological point of view and ultimately make God only a human projection (as in Feuerbach and Freud). Instead, Balthasar argues that "theological reflection upon revelation must be "elliptical"; that is 'reasoning' from within the horizon of faith." The divine act can only be recognised by the mind that is elevated through grace.⁹² The binaries constituted of suffering and love, death and life are not only contrast experiences that open

⁸⁹ GJ, 282.

⁹⁰ The same idea also appears in the thought of Nicholas of Cusa, *De docta ignorantia*: Hopkins 1981, 2: "Just as God ontologically precedes and unites contradictories, so the universe ontologically precedes and unites contraries, and the humanity of Christ ontologically precedes and enfolds all creatable things."

⁹¹ B, 70–71.

⁹² Chapp 2004, 11–23. See also NGK, 93; OG, 62.

up the reality of revelation, but they are also a cry and demand for divine reality.⁹³ Kasper answers the problem of theodicy with the help of Pauline theology:

For sufferers the quest for God is a quest for divine compassion (in the proper sense of this word), an identification of God with the suffering and death of human beings. [...] The question of God, when given concrete form in the presence of evil and suffering, can, therefore, be answered only christologically and staurologically in the form of a *theologia crucis* (theology of the Cross).⁹⁴

Glenn Morrison asks if Kasper's answer is sustainable in the face of the question of theodicy. He argues:

In response to Kasper, I would suggest that it is a personal relationship of faithfulness to Christ amidst suffering that offers what is more a resolution than an answer to the question of theodicy. We cannot ultimately put our faith in answers, but rather in the divine person of Jesus Christ. Moreover, the person of Christ is more than an answer; Christ is a divine person who is beyond proofs, demonstrations and explanations. We need to question any theodicy that is founded merely on logical proofs.⁹⁵

Although Morrison makes an excellent point concerning the importance of not simply finding logical proof for the answer for theodicy, I do not think that actually is what Kasper is attempting to do. Although he gives an explanation (suffering is not foreign to God) it is not for Kasper an attempt to explain the suffering away. Instead, Kasper follows the ontology of love of Yves Congar,⁹⁶ and emphasises that if God actually is the ultimate reality and his being is love, then the ultimate meaning of reality is love. God is not apathetic to a human being's suffering because in his love he himself enters the human reality and literally gives himself to suffering. This does not empty human suffering of meaning, but it emphasises the nature of God's being for us: he is for us in love. The ontology of love can be explained neither by means of the self-contained substance (of ancient and medieval metaphysics) nor with the self-contained subject of our modern era.⁹⁷ Therefore, it can only be explained in the light of a communal and relational way of thinking, that is, in the light of the Trinity.

Kasper claims that the paradox of the Cross provides an explanation for the problem of evil as well: in his love and power God embraces human destiny in its fullness. The depth of the encounter between God and humanity is located in the Cross: God enters the human and the human enters God.⁹⁸ The divine status of Jesus is revealed in his weakest hour: when he embraces human suffering. God's power is greatest when it seems that the powers of evil are strongest, in Jesus' death on the Cross. This is the ultimate paradox: God actively wills something that seems to be utterly evil. God is usually understood as someone

⁹³ B, 40.

⁹⁴ GJ, 269: "Die Frage nach dem Gott für die Leidenden ist die Frage nach dem – im eigentlichen Sinn des Wortes verstanden – Mit-Leid Gottes, der Identifikation Gottes mit dem Leiden und sterben des Menschen. [...] Die Gottesfrage, wenn sie konkret angesichts des Bösen und des Leidens gestellt wird, ist darum nur christologisch und staurologisch als *theologia crucis* zu beantworten."

⁹⁵ Morrison 2007, 283–284.

⁹⁶ GJ, 266–267; B, 96.

⁹⁷ B, 96.

⁹⁸ JC, 228; B, 77–80.

with the greatest power and omnipotence. His stripping away of all divine properties from himself is called self-emptying, *kenosis*.⁹⁹

From this kenotic understanding of the Trinity, the Cross becomes understandable as the ultimate revelation of God's love.¹⁰⁰

Only absolute freedom can absolutely deny itself in love. So God's omnipotence, understood as omnipotent love, is not all-power but absolute powerlessness.¹⁰¹

Kasper explains the Cross as the paradox of Trinitarian mystery: at his lowest point God is actually at his highest.¹⁰² Jesus' death on the Cross is the ultimate revelation of love, the ultimate gift of self-giving. God gives himself for humanity. In his self-emptying, in *kenosis*, God actually appears in his omnipotent love. In this sense the Cross is "*id quo maius cogitari nequit*", that than which nothing greater can be thought. Kasper applies Hegel's interpretation of love and kenotic freedom: God is absolute freedom who empties himself in God's opposite (in death), and by this kenotic emptying of himself paradoxically obliterates death.¹⁰³ Kasper's paradoxical interpretation of the theology of the Cross is, therefore, also dependent on the German idealist philosophy, which in turn was greatly influenced by medieval mysticism and Neoplatonism, especially the thought of Nicolas of Cusa.¹⁰⁴

According to Kasper, correct interpretation of the meaning of the Cross leads to the conclusion that God has accepted humanity as a part of himself even in all its misery and powerlessness. The scandal of the Cross shows us that God is not distant and immutable in his eternity, but that he can be concretely encountered. He has true, social interaction with his people. God's transcendence is at the same time his immanence. God comes to human history concretely in the destiny of Jesus.¹⁰⁵ In this sense evil is not "outside of God". But instead of evil coming from God (which would be impossible if God is love), God accepts evil unto himself. He takes evil to himself in order to conquer it. His omnipotence is shown in that he does not relinquish his omnipotence but instead he allows himself to be affected by suffering while at the same time not putting himself under its control.¹⁰⁶ This interpretation is analogous to Kasper's analysis of nothingness described above: as God is hidden from us but not himself, so also evil can be accepted into God by God but it does not mean that God is possessed, owned by evil, powerless before it. In his all-powerfulness he opens himself to the possibility of evil but is not under its control.

⁹⁹ JC, 252–253; GJ, 315; KK, 119; B, 85; 99.

¹⁰⁰ GJ, 34: "Ausgehend von diesem kenotischen Verständnis der Trinität wird das Kreuz als äußerste Offenbarung von Gottes Liebe verstehbar." See also B, 99.

¹⁰¹ GJ, 36: "Nur absolute Freiheit kann sich in Liebe auch absolut zurück nehmen. Gottes Allmacht, als allmächtige Liebe verstanden, ist damit nicht Allgewalt, sondern absolute Gewaltlosigkeit."

¹⁰² OG, 73.

¹⁰³ GJ, 79–80; ZGR, 28; KK, 120–121; B, 85–86; 99.

¹⁰⁴ Hoff 2013, 7.

¹⁰⁵ OG, 73; JC, 247–255; B, 122–123. See also on the pagan reaction to the scandal of the Cross: Wainwright 2009, 81.

¹⁰⁶ B, 123. This thought originates from Kierkegaard.

Kasper argues, however, that exegetically Christ's death on the Cross is ambiguous: for Jesus' followers the Cross was a scandal and they strove to find an honourable explanation to it as God's will and deed.¹⁰⁷ Kasper argues that the formulation of confession stating that Jesus was crucified "according to the Scriptures" does not, in fact, refer to any specific passage of the Old Testament but means the Scriptures as a whole. Although Kasper notes that this reference to the fulfilment of the prophecies of the Old Testament is an explication of the Easter faith which already existed, he still emphasises that it is precisely a realisation of the divine will and *a complete alteration of our reality*.¹⁰⁸

Moreover, Kasper emphasises that the scandal of the actuality, the concreteness, of the promise of salvation as well as its actualisation in the life and death of Jesus Christ is something which determines the whole essence of Christianity.¹⁰⁹ The Church is not a triumphal community but one that constantly carries out the deep scandal of the Cross. In this way the paradox lives completely and truly inside the Church: it is at the same time a sign of salvation and a community aware that its roots are in the raw, incomplete and imperfect reality of humankind. Only this way does Kasper see it possible to connect the entire reality of humankind with God into history. Kasper takes this interpretation one step further: the Cross and the Resurrection are together a symbol of eschatological fulfilment and an image of God's acts. In Kasper's own words, *Christologie von unten* is only possible from within an interpretation centered on the theology of the Cross.¹¹⁰ The meaning of the Cross becomes understandable through the Resurrection: in the Cross and in the Resurrection the symbol and image of God's action can be seen.¹¹¹ Thus Kasper's interpretation of the theology of the Cross serves as a part of his theology-of-history approach. In the events of the Cross as well one can see both the concrete, historical event and God's effect in it. That is, one can see both the horizontal as well as the vertical aspect of the event:

Here God's omnipotence is completely absorbed into outward weakness; here God takes the human condition, the human destiny, upon himself, with all its consequences. He enters into abandonment by God. There is no longer any human situation that is in principle cut off from God and salvation. To that extent the death of Jesus on the Cross is not only the extreme consequence of his courageous ministry but a recapitulation and summary of his message. The death of Jesus on the cross is the final elucidation of what had been his sole concern: the coming of the eschatological reign of God.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ GJ, 284.

¹⁰⁸ JC, 251; B, 84–87.

¹⁰⁹ JC, 293–294; GJ, 284; KK, 120; 465.

¹¹⁰ JC, 251; GJ, 269.

¹¹¹ JC, 251; B, 82–87.

¹¹² GJ, 282: "Hier geht Gottes Allmacht vollends in die äußerste Ohnmacht ein; hier nimmt Gott die condition humaine, das Schicksal des Menschen, bis zur letzten Konsequenz auf sich. Gott geht ein in die Gottverlassenheit. Es gibt nun keine menschliche Situation mehr, die grundsätzlich gottlos und heillos wäre. Insofern ist Jesu Sterben am Kreuz nicht nur die äußerste Konsequenz seines mutigen Auftretens, sondern die Zusammenfassung und die Summe seiner Botschaft. Der Tod Jesu am Kreuz ist die letzte Verdeutlichung dessen, um was es ihm allein ging: das Kommen der eschatologischen Herrschaft Gottes." See about Kenotic Christology: GJ, 26; 35; 129; 287; 297–298; 304–316; 472.

Resurrection and exaltation mean: Jesus lives wholly and forever in God (Rom 6,9f). Ascension to the right hand of God does not therefore imply being spirited away to an otherworldly empyrean, but Jesus' being with God [...] It does not mean distance from the world, but a new way of being with us. Jesus is now with us from God and in God's way.¹¹³

These quotes illuminate Kasper's basic interpretation of his theology of the Cross: the power of God is hidden in his weakness. In the Cross opposites are at their strongest: death brings life; abandonment, love; emptiness, fulfilment. It shows us that God is not distant (*Deus absolutus*) but present (*Deus revelatus*), fully and thoroughly in the reality of the present age.¹¹⁴ In Jesus Christ God is always present in our reality and this being is *the* new in history. But at the same time this must be understood as a powerful paradox: the weakness of God in Christ on the Cross is not virtual, not some acted, unreal weakness, but real, bodily and spiritual, all-consuming weakness. The Cross is, according to Kasper, the answer to the problem of theodicy. The "Sympathetic God" (*Der "sympathische" Gott*) has himself suffered so that suffering is no longer alien to him.¹¹⁵ "He does not do away with suffering but transforms it into hope."¹¹⁶ This conviction can be traced to Kasper's dialectical concept of freedom: the suffering of God is sort of an "inverse revelation": a reciprocal, real, true interaction between man and God. He is with his people, always in the course of history, ever-present. Also in suffering.

The problem of evil, suffering, sin and condemnation find their proper places in Kasper's understanding of theology of history. It is notable that *B* begins with the question of theodicy. In Kasper's interpretation, our time is in dire need of mercy, however, on many occasions, the age does not seem to acknowledge this deficiency.¹¹⁷ The concept of suffering finds its new meaning in the context of human experience. Because experience is the event where the possibility of God's self-revelation in history is opened to us "in, with and under", it is also the window to infinite reality from the perspective of our finite context of being. Human experience can never find its fulfilment in our finite reality. To grasp the mystery of our existence we must have a transcendental character to our experience – it must reach beyond itself. Suffering can be understood as a positive sign, because it forces us to relate to the openness of our future. In a similar way to how our finite being struggles to go beyond its limitations, our suffering also is a sign that points to a reality where limitations and suffering no longer exist. From the nothingness we can find the fulfilment of the reality of the Absolute.

When reading Kasper's theoretical, theological explanation for suffering one cannot escape the feeling that it sounds truly comforting and truly plausible only to those who understand the concept of suffering only in theory, to those who have not (yet or ever

¹¹³ JC, 227: "Jesus lebt ganz und für immer für Gott (Röm 6.9f.). Die Erhöhung zur Rechten Gottes meint also nicht die Entrückung in ein weltenseitiges Empyreum, sondern das Sein Jesu bei Gott, Sie meint damit gerade nicht Weltferne, sondern eine neue Weise des Seins bei uns: Jesus ist nun mit uns von Gott her und in der Weise Gottes." English translation has been modified.

¹¹⁴ GJ, 218; OG, 73.

¹¹⁵ GJ, 315; NGK, 93; KK, 120–121; B, 77–82; 121–125.

¹¹⁶ GJ, 35: "Er schafft das Leiden nicht ab, aber er verwandelt es auf Hoffnung hin." See also B, 95–96.

¹¹⁷ B, 11–28.

will) encounter unbearable suffering in their lives. But what about those who really and truly suffer right here and right now? Those without hope here and now and those without any reason to believe that anything is going to get any better any time soon (or maybe ever), may find theological explications of suffering hollow. This is why Kasper attaches the concepts of empathy, hope and mercy to the concept of suffering. God is not an apathetic God. He is familiar with human suffering. He does not remain unattached to the situations of human beings but instead comes into the midst of human history and takes human being's destiny and suffering as his own.

Furthermore, living in Christian hope means also giving hope to others. It means living according to the hope that is given to us: that is, by practicing mercy. This is essentially what is meant by Christian hope. It is not an empty hope. It means living according to it with those who believe, and giving hope and mercy to those who are struggling, whether it is from spiritual emptiness or suffering in life. If hope is understood only as a static hope, silently waiting and hoping for God's Kingdom to appear, it is not living, authentic, Christian hope.¹¹⁸ Hope is meant to be given to others. We are called to act upon our own hope. The demand for sharing and giving hope also reflects Kasper's conception of reality as relational. We are first and foremost beings-in-relation and only after that individual persons. If a communal character is our true mode of being, then is it not "forcing" us, by our nature, to act towards others as if they were truly, bodily in *communio* with ourselves? Is it not in our ground of being to be there for others – just as our own ground of being was (on the Cross) and is (constantly in the course of history) there for us?

The theology of the Cross finds its meaning within the concept of mercy. God's love towards us is so all-encompassing that it takes the whole mystery of being human into the immanent reality of God himself. He takes suffering, longing, even questioning and losing sight of God ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), the ultimate experience of *Abgrund*, the meaninglessness and the absurdity of life unto himself.¹¹⁹ Ultimately the Cross gives the answer to the question of why the experience of finitude is simultaneously so different and so similar for a theist and for an atheist. In the encounter of finitude, nothingness, the unbearable inexplicability of suffering, death and meaninglessness of everything a theist finds the Cross of Jesus. In the darkness and abandonment by God the Cross illuminates the experience of meaninglessness and turns it into the deepest experience of meaning. Although suffering can also be interpreted as a contrast experience, as reality secondary to all that is good, this explanation by itself is too thin. Evil does not exist as a harmonising or adjusting function for the good, but rather the relativity of evil reveals its contradictory character. Evil is not a counter-experience for the promotion of the good, neither is it something that can be neatly explained away in any specific case of evil or suffering. Evil does not exist to glorify and underscore or highlight God's goodness. Instead, evil is emptiness and nothingness itself, something that

¹¹⁸ B, 131–132.

¹¹⁹ B, 129.

cannot and should not be explained away. Instead it should be understood in the light of God's revelation in his Son. No matter how strong the evil, God's giving of himself on the Cross defeats it in the act of his infinite love, goodness and mercy. When Kasper interprets evil as “emptiness itself” (*in sich nichtig*)¹²⁰ he does not simply put evil against good but rather distances the concept of evil from good (and therefore, God) completely. Whereas God represents everything that is good, evil represents nothingness, emptiness, meaninglessness. Although the experience of finitude may be similar for a theist and an atheist, the outcome of that experience is very different. The nothingness beyond the limits of our being is hollow and empty, literally nothing. For a Christian, in the ultimate experience of evil and suffering, in hollowness and emptiness (that is, in death) the hope is in the Cross of Jesus. Jesus has experienced death, the ultimate nothingness, and defeats it. This is ultimately the crucial difference between the worldview of a theist and that of an atheist: for an atheist, God as well as hope are both dead. For a Christian, the experience of nothingness translates to an experience of meaning, hope and God.

The freedom of God manifests itself to human beings in the form of infinite mercy. This has consequences for both interpretation of the doctrine of mercy but (and in the situation the Church finds itself today maybe even more importantly) for the answer the Church is able to give to the question: “why believe in God in this godless, merciless time?”

Three popes¹²¹ from the second half of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century have, therefore, handed on to us the issue of mercy. Truly it is no secondary theme, but rather a fundamental theme of the Old and New Testaments and a fundamental issue for the twenty-first century as an answer to the “signs of the times.”¹²²

The only way the Christian message can be the ultimate answer to the question about God, humanity, and the meaning and agony of being is that it must provide a reliable explanation for all of these, including the problem of suffering. The answer lies in the profoundly new and the profoundly meaningful we encounter in the revelation of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

5.2.2. The Christ-Event as the Reality of the “Something New”

Through Jesus Christ, people have the chance to understand the most central content of revelation and have a concrete medium of revelation.¹²³ Kasper summarises the core of the Christian understanding of God as follows:

¹²⁰ GJ, 268. This idea, *privatio boni*, is typically attributed to Augustine.

¹²¹ Had *Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens* been written after the election of Pope Francis, we could make mention of four popes advocating the theology of mercy: John XXIII, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis. See e.g. *Eberstadt* 2015, 33; 38.

¹²² B, 18–19: “Drei Päpste aus der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts und zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts haben uns damit das Thema der Barmherzigkeit vorgegeben. Es ist wahrlich kein Nebenthema, sondern ein grundlegendes Thema des Alten und des Neuen Testaments, ein grundlegendes Thema für das 21. Jahrhundert als Antwort auf die ‘Zeichen der Zeit.’”

¹²³ GJ, 376–377.

The Christian's concern is not with God in himself but with God-for-us, the God of Jesus Christ, who is a God of human beings (Heb. 11.16).¹²⁴

This Christological formulation can be held as the paradigm of Kasper's understanding of the relationship between basic metaphysics and living faith. He argues, however, that sometimes the juxtaposition between the philosophical formulation and living content of faith is too much emphasised. He remarks that even though the doctrinal formulations of early Christianity are sometimes criticised as being a Hellenisation of Christianity, they still represent a genuine achievement in the history of theology. For example, the term "homoousious" of the Council of Nicea (325) is in Kasper's thought more an expression of faith than an abstract theory. Kasper states that the theology of Gregory of Nyssa, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus that is the ground of the formulation *homoousious* "represents a genuine achievement of theology in coping intellectually with the data of the Christian faith"¹²⁵. In Kasper's opinion, what is positive in this formulation is the fact that it was de-Hellenising. By "de-Hellenising" Kasper means that it states that Christ is not a world principle but a salvation principle, and that the supreme, ultimate and highest reality is not nature or essence, not an autarcic, immutable God, but a person who encounters us personally in the course of history.¹²⁶

"The new metaphysics of Christianity" is for Kasper literally a new metaphysics of *Christianity*. Kasper argues that as a result of the Christ-event, the interpretation of reality has changed: Hellenistic philosophy was not discarded, but instead its concepts were re-interpreted. The new aeon that began in the life of Jesus permanently changed all reality and its destiny: this is why the old metaphysics requires new modes of interpretation.¹²⁷

By bringing the idea of "completely new and unforeseen" to the discussion of Christology, Kasper wishes to safeguard the idea of God's ultimate being as something mysterious and inexplicable. Kasper wishes to establish a mutual correspondence between Christological anthropocentrism and Christological theocentrism.¹²⁸ Kasper claims that only if we understand the Christ-event as something *totally new* can we begin to grasp the meaning it has for anthropology and for all humanity. The category of the new seems to be Kasper's way of avoiding a too-anthropologically-oriented Christology but also his way of safeguarding the uniqueness bound to the person of Jesus Christ. He argues that if we do not hold on to the idea of the totally new and unexpected in Jesus Christ, we may as well

¹²⁴ GJ, 262: "Es geht christlich nicht um den Gott an sich, sondern um den Gott für uns, den Gott Jesu Christi, der ein Gott der Menschen ist. (Hebr 11,16)" See also OG, 95.

¹²⁵ JC, 267: "Sie stellt eine genuine Leistung der Theologie in der denkerischen Auseinandersetzung mit Gegebenheiten des christlichen Glaubens dar." See also ZZZ, 258–259; NGK, 84.

¹²⁶ JC, 270.

¹²⁷ ZZZ, 259.

¹²⁸ Kasper's position is clarified in his critique of Rahner's anthropologically-oriented Christology. There is a confrontation between Rahner's idea of Jesus Christ being the ultimate fulfilment of humanity and Kasper's (and von Balthasar's) idea of Jesus Christ bringing something completely new and unprecedented to humanity. JC, 93–94; *Joha* 1992, 252; cf. *Palakeel* 1995, 263; GJ, 119. Kasper acknowledges Rahner's merit in showing that there is no opposition between the classical line of thought originating from Thomas Aquinas and modern transcendental thought.

relate the same properties to for example Mary.¹²⁹ The category of the totally new is also in line with Kasper's understanding of God as someone who we can never fully grasp. Even if we could grasp something of God's reality at the present moment, he always surprises us and surpasses every expectation. In him the future (which is unpredictable for us) is the "new" reality and the fulfilment of freedom.¹³⁰ God's being and his actions exceed every expectation of them, and in manifold ways. The reality of the unfamiliar is always presented to us in new ways. The nature of his revelation is to be always new. Paradox is characteristic to the concept of the always new: something that we can anticipate (*Vorgriff*) but never fully grasp until it already happens. Therefore, the ultimate, final revelation happens only at the end time. The paradox of God's revelation is that it is at the same time both familiar and unfamiliar.

Kasper remarks that the Neoplatonic teaching of emanation was helpful at the Council of Chalcedon (451) where the Christological formulation of "unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably" (the alpha-privatives: without confusion, change, admixture or separation) was introduced. With the Neoplatonic teaching of the "One" it was possible to think of a oneness "from above" and the "under" that emanates from it but is still a part of it: a reality that is on its own and a reality that is "set free" but is at the same time part of the reality of the one. Kasper reminds us that this Neoplatonic usage of language is only analogically applicable, because of the manner in which Christ exists: the two natures in Jesus Christ exist in a completely unique, unforeseeable way.¹³¹

The central doctrine of the Christian faith is, therefore, not the "essence" of God or the philosophical ground of God's being, but a person: God. The same idea can also be found in *JC*:

He who has been crucified is 'seen' in the *doxa*, the glory of God; that is, the glory of God is seen as the glorification of the Crucified One. What shines upon the witnesses is the glory of God, his divinity, which shows itself in his identification with the crucified Christ and his awakening from death to life.¹³²

In Jesus Christ, therefore, it is definitely revealed, not only who God is for man, but also who man is for God. In Jesus Christ the definitive nature of God and man becomes apparent to us.¹³³

Kasper remarks that the sentence "Jesus is Christ" is the core of the whole Christian faith and that Christology as doctrine is nothing but the explication of this confession.¹³⁴ God

¹²⁹ *JC*, 93.

¹³⁰ *GJ*, 174.

¹³¹ *NGK*, 84; *JC*, 27–28.

¹³² *JC*, 215: "'Geschehen' wird also der zuvor Gekreuzigte in der Doxa Gottes, bzw. die Doxa Gottes als Verherrlichung des Gekreuzigten. Was den Zeugen aufgeht, ist Gottes Herrlichkeit, sein Gottsein, das eben darin sich erweist, dass Gott sich mit dem Gekreuzigten identifiziert und ihn vom Tod zum Leben erweckt." English translation has been modified.

¹³³ *JC*, 317: "In Jesus Christus wird also nicht nur endgültig erschlossen, wer Gott für den Menschen, sondern auch, wer der Mensch für Gott ist. In Jesus Christus geht uns das endgültige Wesen Gottes und des Menschen auf."

¹³⁴ *JC*, 38.

approaches man in love and becomes incarnate in the world in his own being's complete opposite: a finite human being.¹³⁵ This is the basis of Kasper's revelation theology. The man – God –opposition, the dialectic between finite and infinite reality on the one hand and on the other reciprocity and possibility for communication which opens up from this position. Because of the theme of dialectical oppositions in Kasper's theology one might, at first, find similarities to the dialectical theology of Karl Barth. For Barth, the being of God and the non-being of man as a dialectical difference (thesis – antithesis) was inevitable in his reaching the conclusion that “the biggest difference between God and man is their unity”. In comparison to Barth Kasper sees in the infinite-finite dialectic between man and God the value and meaning of history and of the human being's being in history as well. Barth argued that historical being is non-being and hollow. Even though Barth also thinks that even as a non-being the historical being participates in the infinite divine being, he still sees the relationship between God and man in a much more pessimistic fashion. For Barth, the abyss between the finite and the infinite is unsurpassable; Kasper emphasises the meaning of God's revelation, especially that of Jesus Christ, and the possibility that that revelation gives for knowing and really, truly encountering the Trinitarian God in the course of history. Kasper's theology is, therefore, essentially relational, as opposed to that of Barth.¹³⁶ It is, so to speak, an opposition of mutual reciprocity but it also contains a paradoxical element which in Kasper's analysis is essential for safeguarding the ultimate mystery nature of God's revelation. The motive for God's willingness to communicate himself is love.¹³⁷ Because he, in his reciprocal sharing within his persons, is perfect love, he wants to direct this perfect love as well to his created interlocutor, man. Revelation cannot be exhaustively explained, therefore, in metaphysical formulations. They can only be an organising, helpful tool, a tool for the process of *fides quaerens intellectum*. The reality of revelation surpasses any metaphysical speculations. Revelation is a mystery, a paradox, the Second Person of the Godhead incarnate. It is a completely unforeseen, undefinable, radical, unexpected event.

In the Introduction of *JC*'s 11th edition (1998)¹³⁸ Kasper introduces three basic theses one must take into consideration when making basic Christological statements. He states that in biblical interpretation one must first find a current way to discuss doctrinal questions; second, doctrinal formulations must be discussed in the light of a new, creative hermeneutics, which ask for the truth in reality; third, a pneumatologically-motivated Christology must be further developed: the goal is an emphasis on Trinitarian intermediation.¹³⁹ Therefore, the paradigm of Trinitarian theology is always present in Kasper's work.

¹³⁵ See also DV, 13.

¹³⁶ See Barth 1978, 267–268. See also GJ, 126–127; NGK, 93; Huovinen 1999, 97–105.

¹³⁷ Similarly: Balthasar 2000, 55–65.

¹³⁸ 1998. *Jesus der Christus*, 11. Auflage. Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag.

¹³⁹ *JC* [1998 edition], XX–XXII. Kasper's emphasis on the concept of freedom is bound closely to these three theses. Kasper states that what is central in the renewal of hermeneutics is the acknowledgement of the basic problem: the relationship between truth and history. He states that in modern thought freedom is a key concept and that Christianity offers a valid answer to contemporary questions concerning freedom. *JC*

In Jesus Christ not only the inner being of God but also the existential mystery concerning ourselves is revealed. Although we cannot get definitive clarity about the being of God, we can trust that what he has revealed in Jesus Christ is definitive for our freedom, existence and identity. God's revelation in Jesus Christ shows us that God is specifically a God for people, not some distant, completely otherworldly God. In Christ, God shows us that Christ is the eternal "you" for us. It also shows us that reality does not consist of some distant being-in-itself, but that the nature of reality is to be in relation to another. In Christ this is fulfilled in the most perfect way. He is the ultimate being-for-another.¹⁴⁰ This also has consequences for Kasper's understanding of salvation: in God's revelation of himself in the Incarnation of Christ the world becomes whole and redeemed in love. A completely otherworldly God would always be ultimately alien to human beings, he would and could only examine human beings from a distance, from his self-contained plane of being. The history of God and his people would never be truly intimate, the destiny of humankind would remain unclear. God has to be a God for us, a God within human history. Jesus Christ, therefore, gives a definitive meaning to Ex 3,14. He is the Incarnate One, being-there-for-us present in history. The radical in Jesus' being-there (*Dasein*) for others and being-there for God is that in his person the being and meaning, the being and his mission are one and the same.¹⁴¹ In his person the mystery of both man and God is revealed. Kasper emphasises that the kind of belief in God that does not have a concrete meaning for human beings, a belief consisting merely of speculation on God's qualities, a belief in God *an sich*, is meaningless. Ultimately this kind of faith is belief in God shrunken to a mere ideology. The concrete meaning for faith can be found in the realisation that believing in God brings something essentially new, "a radically new beginning"¹⁴² to humanity: *God is the salvation of humanity*.

The starting point and centre of Christology is, according to Kasper, in the confessions of Jesus Christ as Lord (*Kyrios*). He emphasises that the acknowledgment of Christ as God is not doctrinal speculation, but that its ground is in *the faith* in the risen Lord. According to Kasper, the *Sitz im Leben* of this faith is in liturgical doxology. Liturgical doxology emphasises God's total giving of himself in history, for the sake of humanity, in the person of Jesus Christ. In a similar way that the word "God" is effective in its living history with believers, the word *Kyrios* underlines that the Christian faith is not an isolated, intellectually-processed grammatical doctrine but a living, affecting, life giving word of concrete truth. It is a testimony to a God who is with us in the course of history.¹⁴³ As religious language the confessions of Jesus Christ as Lord (*Kyrios*) also create the reality where and when they are spoken. When uttering the word "Kyrios", the community of believers affirms its content in faith: you are the Lord. The community of believers thus

[1998 edition], XXI: "In Jesus Christus Freiheit in einzigartiger und unableitbarer Weise *geschichtlich konkret* geworden ist." (Emphasis provided by author.)

¹⁴⁰ JC, 288–289; GJ, 430.

¹⁴¹ GJ, 280.

¹⁴² JC, 289: "ein radikal neuer Anfang"

gives its acceptance to the confession and hence embraces the reality of the Lord in their midst. Confessions of Jesus Christ as *Kyrios* can, therefore, also be interpreted as the New Testament equivalent to the giving of God's Name in Ex 3,14. "Kyrios" gives a new meaning to God's Name: he is with us in his Son.

Kasper remarks that in the Bible Jesus' death on the Cross and his Resurrection are the eschatological fulfilment of the salvation history.¹⁴⁴ He states:

The reality of the Resurrection is inseparable from its testimony. In considering the Resurrection, we are not only considering a unique and finished, identifiable fact of the past, but a present reality which influences Christians today.¹⁴⁵

The word "testimony" is here attached to the idea of "current influence". Testimony, a witness to the historical event, brings the event to our time in an authentic and real way.

When giving his account of the biblical interpretations of the Resurrection event and the appearance of Jesus to the disciples Kasper states:

The question, therefore, round which everything revolves, is whether the account of the appearances only represents legitimising formulas in order that the work of Jesus can be continued, or whether they express the experience of a new reality and, therefore, possess a substance of their own.¹⁴⁶

Kasper wonders if the reality experienced by the witnesses to the Resurrection and the event of the empty tomb can be interpreted as witnesses of the revelation event that open up a new, unforeseen reality. The experiences of the witnesses are important here: the Resurrection does not happen in a historical void, it is a lived, experienced and witnessed reality. In Kasper's interpretation the Resurrection is such that it not only is a legitimation for the "case of Jesus"; it is itself the new reality, a living revelation. Therefore, the Resurrection of Jesus can be characterised as a unity of historical, eschatological and theological events. It is an act of God's power, a new beginning (a new history)¹⁴⁷ and a reason for Christian hope.¹⁴⁸ It is the ultimate point of encounter between man and God – a definition of the nature of God's revelation – the event of the Radically New (*Ereignis des radikal Neuen*).¹⁴⁹

What is decisive in Kasper's Christology in the light of a theology of history is the distinction between descent- and ascent-Christologies¹⁵⁰. Kasper admits himself that differentiating between descent- and ascent-Christologies is not easy to do. He says that it

¹⁴⁴ GJ, 463–465.

¹⁴⁵ JC, 200: "Die Realität der Auferstehung ist unablässig von ihrer Bezeugung. Das bedeutet, dass es bei der Auferstehung nicht allein um ein einmaliges und abgeschlossenes, feststellbares Faktum der Vergangenheit geht, sondern um eine gegenwärtige, den Zeugen heute bestimmende Realität."

¹⁴⁶ JC, 207: "Die Frage, auf die deshalb alles hinausläuft, ist also, ob die Erscheinungsberichte nur Legitimationsformeln für das Weitergehen der Sache Jesu darstellen oder ob sie die Erfahrung einer neuen Wirklichkeit ausdrücken und damit eine eigene Inhaltlichkeit besitzen."

¹⁴⁷ JC, 242; NGK, 91; OG, 65.

¹⁴⁸ JC, 228; GJ, 196–197.

¹⁴⁹ GJ, 460: "Ereignis des radikal Neuen". Cf. *Rahner* 1967, 376: "Moment des radikal Neuen". See also JC, 289; NGK, 91.

¹⁵⁰ Descent- and ascent-Christologies are central concepts in Christian Neoplatonism.

is a question of the relationship of Resurrection to exaltation. Whereas in descent-Christology the divine-human being of Jesus is considered the ground of history, in ascent-Christology his being is constituted in and through history. The essential relationship between the two concerns our salvation: only because the Logos descended among us can we ascend to him. This differentiation brings Kasper to the decisive question of time and being in the sense of history as a whole. The historical question of Jesus is closely bound to the question of history itself.¹⁵¹ Kasper unites descent and ascent Christologies in his interpretation of the Incarnation as the radically new in history. This interpretation is also a paradox: Jesus is simultaneously *the* ground of history *and* his meaning is constituted in and through history. His meaning cannot be exhaustively explained with reference to a certain time, place and event (the Incarnation). Instead, he gives himself to us, becomes available to us in every moment of existence. His gift of himself is not bound to time or place. His giving of himself offers us an active meaning, a meaning in presence. It is grounded in the creation. It is a necessary revelation of God's being, but not one that happens out of necessity. It is new in the course of history but the newness itself is a paradox, a mystery.

Schelling's dialectical perception of reality, which can be detected behind Kasper's theological thinking, is also the context from which he evaluates the position of the Bible in Christianity. In line with the documents of Vatican II Kasper identifies the transcendental theological approach of Vatican I as his starting point but then turns it into a concretely-historical and salvation-historical interpretation. The combining of the two is fundamental for Kasper's thought but he acknowledges that integrating these two viewpoints requires foundational dogmatic reflection.¹⁵²

A central aspect of Kasper's use of the Bible is his finding arguments there for the core belief of Christians: Jesus was truly a man and truly God. Especially from Paul's letters Kasper finds all the necessary arguments for Jesus' true humanity and its significance for Christians. First, corporeality is an essential part of being human and is, therefore, also a part of God's creation. Second, having a bodily form is essential for life (1 Cor 15:35 ff, 2 Cor 5:1 ff). According to the Christian view, the body is good and vitally important and according to the Bible life after death without a bodily form is impossible.¹⁵³ Kasper remarks that the body defines us as persons and that it is the location of all our actions and experiences. Third (and this is the most central thing according to the Christian faith): the body is where God placed himself when he came into human history. God's plan of salvation opens up to man only from his own horizon of being. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that God take human form when he enters the human history. These three points of view show us that for Kasper, the body is not only essential for our human *Gestalt*, but

¹⁵¹ JC, 72–73; cf. B, 136.

¹⁵² GJ, 143.

¹⁵³ JC, 229; GAS, 11. Gnostic and Ancient Greek traditions represent a completely different kind of interpretation of corporeality. For the Gnostics, the body was conceived of as evil and the goal was to get away from corporeality. In a similar way the ancient Greeks saw the body as a "grave of soul" (*soma sēma*).

is also the feature that literally binds us to God. Kasper takes up Paul's words: "This is my body, which is for you" (1 Cor 11:24).¹⁵⁴ Through Christ's body the whole of reality is already assumed into the divine reality. Christ's corporeality is the culmination of concreteness. Never before has the Incarnation happened, nor will it happen again. The Incarnation is the revelation of the totality of God's being with us.

The dialectical relationship between the infinite and the finite can be seen, according to Kasper's understanding in the Christ-event as well. The infinite God comes into finite history and takes the form of finite humanity as his own. At the same time, he is the second Person of the Godhead. On this doctrine of the two natures in Christ Kasper bases his view of the possibility for finite man to understand something of infinite reality. When in revelation and in personal encounter the infinite himself comes to finite reality, the encounter situation or revelation is actualised in the most concrete way possible. The Christian God enters human history, takes bodily form and takes humanity to himself. This is what Kasper means by the "radically new". The Incarnate Christian God is "the wholly other" compared to any other historical event. The concept of the "radically new" is itself a paradox. It includes both the aspects of the familiar and unfamiliar and points beyond itself. God's being is not magically transformed in the Incarnation. The "essence", the being of God is what it is, always. The Incarnation must, therefore, always be present in the being, in the relations of God. History is the place where the Incarnation appears as new and radical. However, the word "radical" has its etymological background in the Latin word *radix, radices*, root(s).¹⁵⁵ Therefore, something radical is something that goes back to the original, true meaning. The radical and new is paradoxically something that actually is forever and eternal. In the language of Christian theology: the radical is something that can be traced back to the origin of revelation itself, to the Trinitarian God. "Radically new" means at the same time both that God's revelation is ever-new and points to the future and that it is present in the being of God eternally. This does not diminish the effect of the revelation in human beings. In time, when revelation becomes a living reality in particular historical moments, it is radically new and radically wondrous to its recipients. It is always the same, and at the same time, always new.

Christology occupies a key position in Kasper's theology because Jesus' life, death and Resurrection are not only the culmination of God's revelation in the Bible but also constitute a concrete bond between God and man. Because God became a human being, we can have a true, authentic connection with him. This connection is based on the true humanity of Jesus and his true participation of human history. Because the gap between the finite and the infinite is insurmountable, a mediator (*der Mittler*) who bridges the realities of God and man is needed.¹⁵⁶ Because this surpassing cannot happen in any meta-historical or meta-spatial location it has to happen in created reality. Because the creature

¹⁵⁴ JC, 230: "Der Leib des Herrn sei der Leib für uns. (*to sōma to hyper hymōn*) (1 Kor 11,24)."

¹⁵⁵ EF, 11; PF, 35.

¹⁵⁶ JC, 338–401; OG, 53.

is incapable of reaching God by means of its own power, God enters history in a form of one of God's creatures and the image of God, the human being.

In the 1984 document of The Pontifical Biblical Commission *De Sacra Scriptura et Christologia*¹⁵⁷ Kasper's Christology is defined – among many other Christologies – as a schema which aims to combine both Christology from below and Christology from above (*Christologie von oben* and *Christologie von unten*). It is typical for this kind of schema that the investigation begins with careful study of texts of the New Testament. The goal of this careful study is to demonstrate that the Christology implicit in the words of Jesus to which the gospels bear witness constitutes a certain continuum and is fundamentally united in the Christologies of the New Testament. The document states that this kind of combining of Christologies from above and from below is typical for modern dogmatics but that its variations are manifold.¹⁵⁸ Central for Kasper is the emphasis that modern Christology is rooted in the early Christologies of the New Testament as well as in modern Christological understanding. For this reason he pays much attention to the presentation and argumentation of the scholarly studies on the New Testament Christologies as well as to the Christological reflections of the Church Fathers.¹⁵⁹ Kasper does not emphasise either point of view (from above or from below) but sees them as equals. The most central point for his interpretation of revelation is the totality of God's actions and what they mean for human beings, as well as the way these acts are presented in the Bible.

This is a natural consequence of Kasper's way of comprehending the core truths of Christian faith: the earthly Jesus must be definitively human in order not to compromise his role as mediator. If the humanity of Jesus were to be interpreted docetically, the *Christologie von oben* would lose its foundation. If Jesus was only virtually human, a distant and autarchic God, he would have no concrete relationship to humanity and in such a case his saving work would only be virtual.

From this point of view it is understandable that Kasper emphasises the true humanity, obedience and free will of Jesus in his earthly life *von unten* and similarly the divinity of the resurrected Christ *von oben*. Hereby Kasper combines both Christologies from below and from above and avoids the anthropological reduction of Christology which he strongly criticises. He explains the true meaning of Jesus' person to human beings here and now in a relevant way which truly touches human reality. At the same time he preserves in his interpretation both the mystery and immutability of Jesus' divine person. In uniting Christologies from above and below Kasper manages to establish a Christology which combines and preserves both theocentric and anthropocentric Christologies.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ For an English translation see *Fitzmyer* 1986. The official versions in Italian and Latin can be found from the collections of the Libreria Editrice Vaticana: [http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20090608_bibbia-cristologia_it.html] (accessed: 26.5.2015).

¹⁵⁸ *Fitzmyer* 1986, 17; 90–96.

¹⁵⁹ JC, 280–291; 338–375; GJ, 274–316.

¹⁶⁰ *Palakeel* 1995, 263.

It is essential for Christianity to understand the person of Jesus both from the point of view of history (interpretation) and faith (practical application). The bringing of the life, person, message and meaning of Christ's person to the consciousness of human beings relevantly in this age is (with a good reason) a central task of theology.¹⁶¹ Kasper directly combines this reference to context with soteriology: the saving purpose of Jesus must be understood from this time on. In other words, soteriology has become more concrete.¹⁶² Kasper emphasises that:

The person and history of Jesus are inseparable from their universal significance; and, equally, that the significance of Jesus is inseparable from his person and history.¹⁶³

By this Kasper means that the soteriological perspective – the universal meaning of Christ – should always be considered in doctrinal formulations. The meaning of Christ is opened up from both eschatological and universal perspectives. In Christ is revealed not only the destination of humankind but also the universal nature of this destination. In him the mystery of being human is revealed. The functional approach to the dogmatic formulation of Christology is thus: that all humanity now participates in the divine nature through Christ's own full humanity.

Kasper remarks that the question of God can not be discussed separately from the question of the Messiah. He appeals to the witness of the Acts of the Apostles in which it is stated that Jesus is the Messiah (Cf. Acts 17:3; 18:5¹⁶⁴). Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the fulfilment of the messianic expectation of the Old Testament.¹⁶⁵ Therefore, the coming of Jesus and the Kingdom of God are strongly bound to each other.

¹⁶¹ JC, 37–52; G, 70; CP, 25–30. See also JC, 274–275.

¹⁶² In the foreword of the earlier, 11th edition, of *JC* (Jesus der Christus, 11. Auflage. Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald Verlag 1998, p. xi-xv.) Kasper discusses the questions of liberation theology, women's emancipation, poverty in the third world and inculturation. In the most recent edition (2007) these questions do not appear in the introduction, but instead Kasper concerns himself with the question of the "dictatorship of relativism" (*Diktatur des Relativismus*). The same idea is also presented in the new foreword to *GJ*: see GJ, 20; as well as in the article *Die geistigen Grundlagen Europas*: GGE, 23. For a relativist, everything is ultimately indifferent and any universally applicable statements become impossible to make. Kasper is concerned that modern culture is characterised by the (in itself valid) attempt to bring cultures and religions closer together. However, he claims that in this attempt there lurks a danger of becoming indifferent or even hostile to our own culture: in order to try to get along, some relinquish their own traditions and religious practices. Obviously this is not the goal of interreligious dialogue but that is its danger, Kasper suggests. JC, 23–25; GJ, 22–30; B, 43–44. However, the main point in both forewords remains the same: how to bring the salvific message of Jesus Christ to the modern day. Kasper criticises the effort of bringing Jesus' history *concretely* to the modern day, because in such a case the needed distance for the evaluation of history is lost, the distance which is much needed for it to be objective. The relativist attitude towards the truth is seen as a major problem also by many other theologians of Kasper's generation, for example by Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II, and Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI. See KK, 55; 456; *Habermas & Ratzinger* 2006, 73; *Kerr* 2007, 201–202.

¹⁶³ JC, 49: "[...] dass Person und Geschichte Jesu unablösbar sind von ihrer universalen Bedeutung, wie umgekehrt, dass die Bedeutung Jesu unablösbar ist von seiner Person und Geschichte." Similarly in: OG, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Apt 17:3: "explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah," Apt 18:5: "[...] Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah."

¹⁶⁵ GJ, 269.

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, which we cannot ‘make’, but which is given and given freely to us by God, [...] becomes reality for us in Jesus Christ himself, in whom God gives himself to us.¹⁶⁶

The question of the Messiah cannot be answered with the multiple Messiah-prophecies of the Old Testament alone. Kasper states that interpretation must be done in the light of the testimonies of both the Old and the New Testaments:

The unity of creation and redemption is, therefore, ‘the’ basic hermeneutical principle for the interpretation of the Scripture.¹⁶⁷

The key to Kasper’s messianic interpretation of the Old Testament is the set of relations: *David’s monarchy – God’s Kingdom* and *nomination of the earthly king as “Son of God” – the position of Christ as Son and Messiah*.¹⁶⁸ There is an essential difference between the idea of the Son of God in the Old Testament and the belief in the divine Sonship of Jesus in the New Testament. The functional and personal character of God’s chosen ones can, however, already be seen in the testimony of the Old Testament.

The person so chosen as Son of God receives a special mission within salvation history, binding him to obedience and service. The title of Son of God, therefore, is understood, not as natural-substantial, but *functionally* and *personally*.¹⁶⁹ (Emphasis provided by author.)

Kasper takes a more holistic approach to the interpretation of Son of God in the New Testament: it cannot be understood without its meaning for the early Church, for history and for the community of believers. In addition, Jesus’ Sonship differs essentially from the Son of God titles in the Old Testament: Jesus’ life, death and Resurrection are the history of God himself. In the New Testament the title Son of God is more emphatically associated with the person of Jesus Christ, but in a unique way. Its interpretation is neither Jewish-theocratic nor Hellenistic but rather strongly associated with Jesus’ mission.¹⁷⁰ The anticipation of the Messiah and God’s promise are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The coming Son of Man is the Logos and, therefore, wisdom itself: “In him God has definitively entered into history in order to establish his rule as a kingdom of freedom in love.”¹⁷¹

Every act that is directed toward his creation is an indication of love as God’s ultimate essence.¹⁷² The apex of these actions is the Incarnation, where God shows how

¹⁶⁶ JC, 16: “Die Verkündigung des Reiches Gottes, das wir nicht ‘machen’ können, das uns vielmehr von Gott gegeben und geschenkt wird, das uns in Jesus Christus selbst Wirklichkeit wird und in dem sich uns Gott selber gibt.”

¹⁶⁷ JC, 299: “Die Einheit von Schöpfung und Erlösung ist darum ‘das’ hermeneutische Grundprinzip für die Auslegung der Schrift.” See also OG, 79; 88.

¹⁶⁸ GJ, 269–282.

¹⁶⁹ JC, 246: “Der so zum Sohn Gottes Erwählte erhält eine besondere heilsgeschichtliche Sendung, die ihn zu Gehorsam und Dienst verpflichtet. Der Gottessohnstitel wird im Alten Testament also nicht naturhaft-substantiell, sondern funktional und personal verstanden.”

¹⁷⁰ JC, 246–249.

¹⁷¹ GJ, 273: “In ihm ist Gott endgültig in die Geschichte eingegangen, um seine Herrschaft als Reich der Freiheit in der Liebe zu errichten.”

¹⁷² GJ, 222; NGC, 34.

his love has abided and will abide among his people, from the beginning of time (history) to its end (eschatological events). Revelation is God's mediation of himself in love to us.

The most perfect form of revelation is the revelation in the person of Jesus Christ:

In Jesus of Nazareth God revealed and communicated himself once and for all, uniquely, unmistakably, definitely and unsurpassably.¹⁷³

In this moment the revelation is alive and present in the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁴ The Holy Spirit renews the gift of revelation in each historical age:

The Spirit enables us to recognise God's grace as grace; through him we are able to grasp God's gift as gift, his love as love; the Spirit is the subjective possibility of revelation.¹⁷⁵

The Spirit assists us in every particular historical time: he enables us to recognise the meaning of revelation. He is the key for opening the mystery, the gift that would otherwise remain completely hidden from us. The task for the Tradition of the Church is to make the historical message a living reality today. The Spirit gives life to the words and deeds of Christ at every particular moment.¹⁷⁶ The Spirit's work is to renew the eschatological reality of Jesus Christ in every particular moment of history. History has a concrete meaning for us: in a continuum we are linked directly to the person of Jesus Christ in the course of history. Kasper argues that there is always a tension between the letter and the Spirit and it cannot be removed through historical process.¹⁷⁷ Here he wants to distance himself from the tradition of idealist philosophy. He seeks on the one hand to safeguard the authority of the Spirit and on the other to avoid the danger of a one-sided spiritual utopianism. The Spirit is the key to interpretation, because "the Spirit is the subjective reality and possibility of the objective revelation of Jesus Christ."¹⁷⁸ The interpretation of revelation must happen in history, faithful to the testimonies of the Scripture, but in a corrective movement from the letter to meaning. This meaning is given to us through the Spirit, in the course of history, and it is tested by the Tradition (i.e., tested by the *communio* of believers). The Holy Spirit guides the Church: in the Church the "meaning of history and of reality as a whole comes to light"¹⁷⁹. In other words, in the proclamation of Church the transcendent reality which is the ground of our being, comes in the midst of the history and human reality. The Church proclaims the message which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, opens up infinite reality to human beings and, therefore, sheds light on the divine mystery. The mystery is present in the proclamation of the Church: it is at hand, ready to be received with faith.

¹⁷³ JC, 245: "Gott sich in Jesus von Nazaret ein für alle Mal, einzigartig, unvertauschbar, endgültig und unüberbietbar geoffenbart und mitgeteilt hat."

¹⁷⁴ OG, 74.

¹⁷⁵ GJ, 353: "Der Geist lässt uns Gottes Gnade als Gnade erkennen; durch ihn können wir Gottes Gabe als Gabe, seine Liebe als seine Liebe erfassen; er ist die subjektive Möglichkeit der Offenbarung."

¹⁷⁶ GJ, 331–332; AGP, 11; D, 112.

¹⁷⁷ GJ, 332.

¹⁷⁸ AGP, 10: "Denn der Geist ist ja die subjektive Wirklichkeit und Möglichkeit der objektiven Offenbarung in Jesus Christus."

¹⁷⁹ JC, 283–284: "sie ist der Ort, da der Sinn der Geschichte und der Wirklichkeit insgesamt aufleuchtet."

Therefore, Kasper concludes that the Trinitarian confession is not only a summary of God's revelation but also an explication of God's mystery. The mystery of God is the source, objective and content of God's revelation.¹⁸⁰ The New Testament does not, therefore, only give a name (*Kyrios*) and concreteness (the Incarnation) to the giving of God's name in Ex 3:14. It also gives it a content, a new form: God is love. God's free being, being as the ground of everything there is and the culmination of this being in the Incarnation provides a completely new interpretation of God's Name. God is perfect love in perfect freedom.¹⁸¹ However, this love must be correctly understood:

It does not mean that God is *der Liebe Gott* (the dear, kindly God) in the innocuous sense in which we tend to use the phrase. It means rather that the incomprehensible mystery to which man is introduced is not one of remote, judgmental distance but one of gracious, giving, protecting nearness, by means of which human beings are unconditionally and definitively accepted in Jesus Christ.¹⁸²

The meaning of Jesus, his being for God and man, exists simultaneously in his person.¹⁸³ Here a theological emphasis can be seen: the biblical image of Jesus is not primarily a psychological or historical description but it is a description of the proclamation (*kerygma*) after the Easter events.¹⁸⁴ Kasper wants to emphasise the earthly role of Jesus especially as a promulgator of God's Kingdom and the Resurrection of Jesus as the beginning of the eschatological Kingdom of God. It seems that for Kasper the divine role of the *earthly* (*der irdischer Jesus*) Jesus remains hidden. This is based on Kasper's interpretation of Jesus' view of himself: Jesus was did not proclaim himself but the coming Kingdom of God; neither did he offer a Christological doctrine of himself.¹⁸⁵ We cannot find an ontological expression of the doctrine of the two natures in the New Testament.¹⁸⁶ Kasper deems the functional Christology of the Bible more important than its doctrinal Christology: the message of Jesus also includes the meaning of his person. One can, therefore, also here see Kasper's distinction between *functional* and *dogmatic* interpretations. More precise categorisation is irrelevant to the matter. Once again, he lays

¹⁸⁰ GJ, 222–223; cf. *LaCugna* 1991, 176–178.

¹⁸¹ OG, 68–69. See also *Struys* 2003, 228–229: “If God is to keep his Godness and not become dependent on the world or man, then he must be co-existent (in German ‘Mitsein’) within himself. God must be thought of as relational within Himself, as an intra-relational person. In other words: God must be love. [...]” But if God *necessarily* needs someone to love, doesn't he cease to be God? *Struys* continues: “is God still God if he needs the human race and the world to be himself? So, God must be love within himself: he must be communication and self-emptying within himself. We have to presuppose an intra-relational, inner-divine love within God himself as an imperative condition for the possibility of preserving his absolute transcendence.”

¹⁸² GJ, 224: “Damit sagt es nicht, Gott sei der ‘Liebe Gott’ in dem harmlosen Sinn, mit dem wie dieses Wort meist verwenden. Es sagt vielmehr, dass das unbegreifliche Geheimnis, in das der Mensch hinweist, nicht ihm entzogene und ihn richtende Ferne, sondern ihm huldvoll zugewandte, bergende Nähe ist, durch die er in Jesus Christus unbedingt und endgültig angenommen ist.” See also B, 22; 59; 97–98; 107–108; NGK, 94–95.

¹⁸³ JC, 338–401; NGK, 95.

¹⁸⁴ EJC, 50; GJ, 274–275; 280.

¹⁸⁵ JC, 21; EJC, 57; GJ, 274–275.

¹⁸⁶ EJC, 59. See also OG, 96.

more weight on the function, instead of on its description: “his person is pure functionality”.¹⁸⁷

Praxis and theory are always intertwined and overlap; in practical theology they cannot be separated by any theologian who takes seriously both modern theological research and their human aspect and their practical relevance. In their concrete meaning the core truths of Christianity occur in the liturgy and proclamation of the Church:

This revelation of mystery is concretely realised by the proclamation of the Church (Eph 3:6; 8 ff). [...] The Church here is set within the broadest perspectives of salvation history and it is the point at which the meaning of history and of reality as a whole comes to light: it is the public manifestation of the mystery of all reality.¹⁸⁸

The historical concreteness of revelation becomes a living reality precisely in the liturgy, proclamation and worship of the Church, in the *communio* of believers. The liturgy is also an event of revelation. In the worship of the *communio* of believers the boundaries of time and place are overcome and life in God becomes a living reality in the midst of our concrete human history. The Eucharist is a living example of this: in the Eucharist God encounters us truly and comprehensively and gives himself to us. The events of Holy Thursday are thus Jesus’ promise for his disciples. He prepares them and promises them his abiding presence now and in the future. Though his earthly time is moving towards its violent end, he promises to be present in the life of his disciples whenever they gather together and break the bread. He promises that his revelation continues throughout the whole of real human history.

Worship, and the Eucharist as the center of the Church’s liturgical life, is the concrete place for encountering God. Kasper reminds us that Jesus himself talked about practical actions instead of theoretical reasons. The destiny of the world and the destiny of the Church belong together.¹⁸⁹ The Church should be understood as a community of act-being-unity (*Akt-Seins-Einheit*), where the proclamation of the Gospel lives as a mission to be carried on continually, to each generation, until Christ comes in glory. The Church is not a static organisation for the preservation of doctrine but is instead a living community where the Good News about the Word made flesh in Christ is treasured and proclaimed.¹⁹⁰

It is notable that in the same context Kasper also emphasises the unity of Jews and pagans with the Church because they are “in Christ with us” (*in Christus unter uns*). The new *aeon* which has begun in Christ is supposed to unite all the dispersed nations in common childhood of God. According to Kasper the new era that has begun in Christ will end the era of slavery (*Knechtschaft*) and instead inaugurate the Kingdom of Christ

¹⁸⁷ EJC, 59: “Seine Person ist reine Funktionalität.” See also EF, 78–79.

¹⁸⁸ JC, 283–284: “Konkret realisiert wird diese Offenbarung des Geheimnisses durch die Verkündigung der Kirche (Eph 3,6.8ff). [...] Die Kirche wird hier in umfassendste heilgeschichtliche und weltgeschichtliche Perspektiven eingeordnet; sie ist der Ort, da der Sinn der Geschichte und der Wirklichkeit insgesamt aufleuchtet; sie ist die ‘Öffentlichkeit’ des Geheimnisses aller Wirklichkeit.” See also OG, 87–89; NGK, 90; GPV, 147–148.

¹⁸⁹ NGK, 90. This is one of the basic themes of *Lumen Gentium*.

¹⁹⁰ GPV, 147–148; see also DV, 4.

(*Herrschaft Christi*), in which all people are received as children of God.¹⁹¹ He remarks that the Old Testament has permanent value as the holy book of the chosen people but that the New Testament fulfils and concludes the revelation which in the Old Testament remains open-ended.¹⁹²

Furthermore, Kasper emphasises that Jesus Christ is present for us in the Resurrection and the sending of the Spirit: if we had only knowledge of the historical Jesus with no interpretation of faith, he would only be a dead letter (*ein toter Buchstabe*) and hampering law (*ein unfrei machendes Gesetz*).¹⁹³ Therefore, modern Christology is characterised by a dialectic which has to take into account both the historical knowledge of Jesus Christ on the one hand and the progressive movement of Church doctrine and historical development on the other. With the help of historical-critical research we are able to uncover some information about the historical, earthly Jesus. Historical-critical research works on the basis of relatively autonomous criteria and gives us an objective as possible picture of the earthly Jesus. It also investigates the early Church confessions of him and the beginning of the belief in Jesus as Christ. However, we cannot content ourselves with only that dimension of Christological research but instead we also have to take into account the development of the Tradition in the course of history and in the life of the Church. This is Kasper's revelation-theological emphasis: The Christ of faith does not only live in the letter of the Bible, or even less in the critical, scientific research of history. He lives in the continuing revelation in the life of the Church, where he lives "in the Spirit". We have thus both historical-critical, but also direct access to Jesus Christ. The Spirit makes the "dead letter" alive in every particular historical moment. Both of these aspects – historical-critical as well as access provided by the Holy Spirit – are essential so that Christology is not be reduced to a groundless dogmatism.¹⁹⁴ The history and person of Jesus Christ must be present in theological reflection involving the dialectical tension between the two.¹⁹⁵

Christology in Kasper's revelation theology is not emptied of meaning by the foregoing dialectic. In *JC* Kasper thoroughly reviews the historical and doctrinal meaning of Jesus' life. The life and teaching of Jesus Christ, his death on the Cross, and Resurrection are only provide the structure for Kasper's central emphasis: the motivation of the Incarnation is found in the coming Kingdom of God. The entrance of God's Kingdom into the world is the ultimate destination of the history between God and man. Although the manifestation of God's Kingdom will be completed only in the eschatological events of end times, already now God's revelation is perfectly present in the world in an anticipatory fashion. God has become man, died and resurrected – no further revelation is necessary. In the life and death of Jesus Christ God comes concretely into human history, takes humanity as a part of himself and perfects human nature. In Christ all people are able to be joined to

¹⁹¹ *JC*, 281; *HT*, 254; see also *DV*, 7; 25.

¹⁹² *GJ*, 375–377; *OG*, 72; cf. *Dulles* 1978, 212: "Within [...] Trinitarian perspectives, Kasper seeks to revive the early Spirit Christology, which is biblical as well as Jewish-Christian." See *IBC*, IIIA: 2.

¹⁹³ *JC*, 70.

¹⁹⁴ *JC*, 70. The concept of "dogmatism" was originally used by J.A. Möhler in the same context.

¹⁹⁵ *JC*, 69–70.

their ground of being, the Trinitarian God. Through Christ, people are not only joined to God but also to each other.

Kasper's interpretation of the coming Kingdom of God illustrates his understanding of the relevance of theology of history. He briefly summarises the famous 18th-20th century attempts (from Kant to Tillich) to explain the meaning of the Kingdom of God in Jesus' parables and the tension in them between hiddenness and immanence.¹⁹⁶ Kasper concludes that the problem with these explanations is that they do not take into account the specific biblical understanding of time. According to Kasper, time in the Bible is not necessarily a quantitative but rather a qualitative entity. Time is understood with respect to what it is meant for. Kasper states that Jesus' proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God was meant to provoke a situation of *choice*.¹⁹⁷ The Kingdom appears as salvation to those who apprehend the present as the future of God while it appears as damnation to those who fail to accept the "now" of God.¹⁹⁸ Kasper tries to resolve the problem of the proclamation of an imminent Kingdom of God by stating that its immediate expectation and its delay are characteristic of the testimonies of both the Old and New Testaments. Kasper uses Martin Buber's term "active history", in which the events do not simply follow a plan but are rather a part of a dialogue between man and God. It leaves, according to Kasper, room for decision and fulfilment. The presence on the one hand of the Kingdom of God here and now and in the eschatological future on the other gives us a promise and hope. We are not left alone but we are free to make a choice.¹⁹⁹ For Kasper, the making of a choice and the concept of conversion are intertwined with the concepts of mercy and judgment. God urges us to conversion with words of judgment and makes our conversion (our choice to convert) possible through grace.²⁰⁰

The task of theology is to serve the mission of proclamation of the Trinitarian God. Kasper remarks that the task begins with soteriology and ends in doxology. The goal of Christian life is *communio* with the Trinitarian God.

¹⁹⁶ JC, 123–124. Kant saw the Kingdom of God as the highest good, the goal of human moral striving; J. Weiss, A. Schweizer and Werner emphasise that the Kingdom is something that is only pending, not present here and now, whereas Kümmel recognises eschatology in tension, and Cullmann a salvation-history eschatology. Kasper criticises Barth for neutralising eschatology in stating that eternity is an absolute simultaneity, an eternal moment and an eternal now. Kasper argues that in this interpretation "all time" can be interpreted as "no moment in time". Bultmann asks, if man puts his hope in his past or in the open future. For him it is not a question of dialectic of time and eternity but that of a specific human existential dialectic. Man has to decide for the Kingdom at every possible second of his existence. Kasper emphasises the tension between the *here and now* and the *forthcoming*. For him it is a question of correct interpretation of the concept of biblical understanding of time and history. As opposed to Barth's interpretation, Kasper argues that the interpretation of the Kingdom of God must not begin with the philosophical dialectic of time and eternity, but instead from the biblical understanding of time which he argues is often misinterpreted.

¹⁹⁷ JC, 170; KK, 135; B, 77; 112–113.

¹⁹⁸ JC, 125; cf. B, 113.

¹⁹⁹ JC, 126; NGK, 82.

²⁰⁰ B, 77; NGK, 82; see also CCC, 153.

It is therefore possible for theology to develop the anthropological relevance of what it says only if it remains theology and does not turn into anthropology. It is the acknowledgment of the Godness of God that leads to the humanisation of man.²⁰¹

The dialogue with modern atheism reminds theology of its task. The goal is not to become a theistic, powerless, general, ambiguous theology that has already been undermined by the Enlightenment and atheism and that continuously stumbles on the same problems it tries to avoid in its endeavour to conquer atheism. The strength of theology does not come from its desperately trying to find the most generic, all-embracing and relativist world view offering nothing anything special or radical. If theology attempts to become a science that everyone can accept, it loses its unique, salvific meaning. For the effort toward dialogue is not the same thing as attempting to please everyone. Kasper says that monotheism is central to a correct understanding of reality. Unity and meaning go hand-in-hand in the concept of monotheism.

It is precisely this ambiguous and open question that is specified in a concrete way by the Trinitarian self-revelation of God, so that the Trinitarian confession is concrete monotheism and as such the Christian answer to the God-question of the human person. *The God of Jesus Christ – that is, the God who gives himself to be known through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit – is the ultimate, eschatological and definitive determination of the indeterminate openness of man; he is therefore also the Christian answer to the situation created by modern atheism.*²⁰²

The Christian faith faces a radical challenge; therefore the response to it must also be radical. An ambiguous, vague world ideology is not the answer to the ambiguous question of man regarding the meaning of life and the meaning of himself. The answer is the mystery of the Trinitarian God who gives himself, the God who is known through his Son, Jesus, Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The promise of the future, the promise of eschatological fulfilment, is given to us here and now in the revelation of the Trinitarian God.

Taking Schelling's late philosophy as his starting point, Kasper interprets the theology of the Trinity as the culmination of the "dialectic of Christian existence"²⁰³. Trinitarian theology embraces a relational interpretation of reality while at the same time it adheres its paradoxical, inexplicable nature. Relationship is at the same time both a vulnerable, weak form of being (Aristotle), and the fundamental reality. This paradox embraces the entire mystery of Christian existence. Both our being (our existence) and our experience are fulfilled through the revelation that has happened in the event of Jesus

²⁰¹ GJ, 479: "Die Theologie kann deshalb die anthropologische Relevanz ihrer Aussagen nur dadurch entfalten, dass sie Theologie bleibt und nicht Anthropologie wird. Gerade die Anerkennung des Gottseins Gottes führt zur Vermenschlichung des Menschen."

²⁰² GJ, 478: "Eben diese unbestimmt offene Frage wird durch die trinitarische Selbstoffenbarung Gottes konkret bestimmt, so dass das Trinitätsbekenntnis konkreter Monotheismus und als solcher die christliche Antwort auf die Gottesfrage des Menschen ist. *Der Gott Jesu Christi, der Gott also, der sich durch Jesus Christus im Heiligen Geist zu erkennen gibt, ist die letzte, eschatologisch-endgültige Bestimmung der unbestimmten Offenheit des Menschen; er ist demnach auch die christliche Antwort auf die Situation des modernen Atheismus.*

²⁰³ GJ, 38: "Dialektik christlicher Existenz"

Christ. Jesus Christ is *the* paradox of the human mystery: fully human and fully God. In him the nature of God's revelation as a bridge between the realities of God and human being is thus brought to fulfilment: "revelation is in each case a fully divine and a fully human event."²⁰⁴

However, Kasper does not adopt Schelling's system wholesale. Even in his late writings Schelling remained a representative of idealist philosophy. Kasper's main critique of Schelling lies in Kasper's view that the revelation of God cannot be conceived of as something necessary. Christian belief cannot be deduced, he says, but is instead a free gift of God.²⁰⁵ The wisdom of God (*sofia tou Theou*) can only be accessed through the Word of God (*Logos tou Theou*).²⁰⁶ The wisdom of God becomes accessible to human beings in the event of the Incarnation. It is at this point where Kasper opposes Schelling's approach, which he describes as "theosophical."²⁰⁷ *Theology* can never be *theosophy*, says Kasper. The divine reality is too complex to be described fully by human means. Kasper also has thought the freedom of God and the importance of the manifestation of this freedom in history more fully than Schelling. Our freedom is never simply received nor can we exercise it as we wish. The freedom of God is radical and change-making.

The philosophy of Schelling offers a philosophical explanation for the possibility of human beings to grasp something of the reality of God. In the philosophy of Schelling Kasper also finds the philosophical basis for the idea that God is love and, therefore, that love is the ultimate horizon of the whole of reality.²⁰⁸ However, Kasper distances himself from Schelling's idealist philosophy by emphasising that the nature of reality is relational or dialogical rather than unambiguously dialectical. Kasper also remarks that the concept of freedom is too tenuous in the philosophy of Schelling. He notes that although the dialectical perception of reality helps us to grasp the relationship between the infinite and finite, it does not serve the Christian conception of reality completely. In Kasper's view, the self-revelation of God happens entirely freely, not by necessity. God's free self-revelation is based only in God himself and in history. Rather than the immutable ground of being, in Kasper's thought God is God for human beings, the God of history, who can be approached in and through his Son Jesus Christ. For Kasper, the Christian interpretation of reality deepens the dialectic view of reality: God is with us, by his own free will, and invites us into dialogue with himself.²⁰⁹

The ultimate being of God remains a mystery, and the quest of faith always exists in the tension between knowing and believing. For Kasper, knowing is not only something that can be rationally verified, something that is grasped through reason alone. For him, knowing is the possibility for a human being's self-transcendence. In this process that can be described as an experience of meaning (*Sinnerfahrung*), the mind paradoxically

²⁰⁴ See also OG, 70: "Die Offenbarung ist jeweils ein ganz göttliches und ein ganz menschliches Geschehen."

²⁰⁵ *Schüssler Fiorenza* 2014, 31.

²⁰⁶ A, 600.

²⁰⁷ A, 600–601; see also *Schüssler Fiorenza* 2014, 30–31.

²⁰⁸ GJ, 37.

²⁰⁹ A, 591–598.

acknowledges both its limitations and its infinite nature at the same time. The capacity for self-transcendence *is* knowing but at the same time it is believing. For Kasper, faith and reason can never be separated as they are actually two sides of the same coin.²¹⁰ If, as he firmly holds, the Logos is the truth, meaning, and reason in this world, then is it not rational and intellectually satisfactory to hold on to that truth, meaning, and reason?²¹¹ It is not so much for Kasper a question of the meaningfulness of *something* but rather the meaningfulness of the *whole*. At least to some extent this quest for meaning applies to every human being. If the truth is one, then also the answer to this quest is one. Being true to oneself is being true to one's ground of being, which is manifested in our reality in the revelation of God and in its culmination point: the Incarnation. In and through Christ we not only find God as the ground of our being – we also find the answer to the mystery of ourselves.

Kasper's answer to the question "what is revelation?" does not, therefore, consist only in theological and dogmatical analysis of the nature of revelation. Neither is it only a definition of who, how, when and where and with what authority one should read the Bible as God's revelation. Rather, his answer should be constructed from his point of departure for theology: ecclesialist theology (*Kirchlichkeit*), scientific orientation (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) and practically-oriented openness to the problems and questions of modern times (*Gegenwartsbezogenheit*). The Church is the community (*communio*) that proclaims the Gospel in each historical moment. Theology is the scientific field of investigation concerning revelation; and the orientation of the *communio* (Church) toward the prevailing culture. Asking relevant questions of our time is the practical application and task of the *communio* in our time.

In the 21st Century context all this means that the Church must offer something extraordinary, something extreme, something outrageous: something radical. The experiences, extremes and ultimates that modern man yearns for are already there, in the *communio* of the Church. The (ultimately) religious aspect of the human being has not changed.

Occasionally, *communio* is regarded as a new paradigm, not only for ecclesiology, but also as a kind of new 'world formula'. This makes sense if Jesus' life and sacrifice for the many, that is, for all (Mk 10,45), is understood as pro-existence and if one sees in it the revelation of God as self-giving love (1 John 4.8.6). God can only be love for the world and for us because God is love in himself, in the inner-Trinitarian *communio* of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If God is thus love and *communio*, then love and *communio* are the essence of all reality.²¹²

²¹⁰ OG, 76.

²¹¹ See also Morrison 2007, 278.

²¹² KK, 47: "Gelegentlich betrachtet man *communio* als ein neues Paradigma nicht nur für die Ekklesiologie, sondern als eine Art neuer 'Weltformel'. Das macht Sinn, wenn man Jesu Leben und Hingabe für die Vielen, das heißt für alle (*Mk 10, 45 par.*), als Proexistenz versteht und wenn man darin die Offenbarung Gottes als sich selbst verschenkende Liebe (*1 Joh 4, 8.16*) sieht. Liebe zur Welt und zu uns kann Gott nur sein, weil er Liebe in sich ist in der innertrinitarischen *communio* von Vater, Sohn und

The mission of the Church is to show where and how the Gospel becomes a living reality in the modern world,²¹³ how the Gospel answers to the question of ourselves. If Jesus Christ indeed is the answer for our yearning, if he is the ultimate truth of all reality and of ourselves, then the proclamation of Jesus Christ actually is the reality of something radically new and unexpected. If Christianity holds the answer to the meaning of all this, it is the person of Jesus Christ. His proclamation is the beginning of a new *aeon*; his person is the apex of the revelation of God but is also the end of the search for meaning, the ultimate revelation of the mystery of ourselves. He is the event of the radically new in person.

Heiligem Geist. Wenn Gott so Liebe und *communio* ist, dann sind Liebe und *communio* der Sinn aller Wirklichkeit." See also *Struys* 2003, 228–229.

²¹³ See GS, 2.

6. Conclusions: To Understand Revelation is to Understand Reality

“The most prominent event in the Catholic theology of our century is without a doubt the overcoming of Neoscholasticism.”¹ This sentence summarises Kasper’s, as well as his contemporary Catholic colleagues’, basic orientation to the task of theology in our age. The time of narrow-minded and strict dogmatism is over. Instead, it is time for a new age of engaging, dialogical, relational, pastoral and vivid faith. Kasper locates biblical arguments for defending a theology that engages the current historical moment. Revelation becomes a living reality in every historical moment. In our own secular age, the importance of understanding the culture around us is increasing. Kasper’s contribution to this task is his tireless attempt to examine, explain and clarify the Christian faith. Europe, which in previous centuries has been predominantly Christian, has slowly become a continent of secularism, atheism, relativism, new religious movements and growing diversity. This situation requires a new attitude from the Church as well, even though its message itself is eternal. The strength of Kasper’s theology lies in his vast knowledge of philosophical and theological developments and history particularly in the European context and his ability to apply this knowledge and articulate it in a comprehensible way in the current historical context.

In *GJ* Kasper summarises the importance of a thorough interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity for both answering the challenging situation of the modern age as well as for giving an account of the Trinitarian doctrine as the foundation for understanding our reality:

By the way of analogy the Trinitarian *communio*-unity shows itself to be the model for a Christian understanding of reality.²

Kasper is convinced that the Trinitarian mystery and the Incarnation as its culmination is the answer to the mystery of the meaning of being: the being of ourselves and of our reality. Thus, he argues, the proclamation of the Trinitarian God is the most important pastoral task in the modern world. In the revelation of the Trinitarian God Kasper finds not only the answer to the question of who is God for us, but also to the question of who we are to ourselves.

The aim of this study is to provide an account of Kasper’s concept of revelation using the method of systematic analysis. In order to offer a full account of his understanding of revelation, this study analyses the philosophical and theological background of his thought. This study introduced Kasper’s interpretation of the doctrine of

¹ TK, 7: “Das herausragende Ereignis in der katholischen Theologie unseres Jahrhunderts ist ohne Zweifel die Überwindung der Neuscholastik.”

² GJ, 472: “Die trinitarische *communio*-Einheit erweist sich auf dem Wege der Analogie als *Modell des christlichen Wirklichkeitsverständnisses*.”

the Church and his dogmatic method. Kasper's understanding of the meaning of revelation in the modern era was also discussed in this study. Therefore, this study presents both theoretical and practical application of the doctrine of revelation in the writings of Walter Kasper. The present study argues that there has been an evolution in Kasper's thought over the course of the 40 years between the main sources of this study: the 1970 article *Offenbarung Gottes in der Geschichte* and the 2012 book *Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens*. In these texts the evolution in Kasper's thought becomes evident, especially concerning his dedication to transmitting the gospel authentically in our time, and demonstrating how the concepts of grace and mercy are relevant in interpreting revelation in our cultural and sociological context.

The title of this study is *Event of the Radically New*. The most important observation concerning modern, anti-Neoscholastic, post Vatican II Catholic understanding of revelation theology is that rather than direct information, revelation is an event. It is an event that happens in every particular historical era. In revelation both the external event and the words that interpret it are present. Revelation is radical in the sense that it brings something completely new and completely transforming to our reality. But it is radical as well because it reflects the eternal spirit of the Gospel, the roots (*radices*) of Christian faith. Revelation is at the same time radically eternal and radically new, open to the future.

German idealist philosophy and its theological application is behind Kasper's theological thought. The love for abstractions and paradoxes characteristic of idealistic philosophy is one that persistently seems to prevail in post-19th-century German theologies. Despite his attempt to approach German idealist philosophy from a critical point of view, Kasper still remains, undoubtedly, within its sphere of influence. His background lies in the Tübingen School and most of his theological work was written after the Second Vatican Council. These are the three influences that have most affected Kasper's thought: German idealist philosophy, especially the thought of Schelling; the Tübingen School and the Second Vatican Council. The spirit of the Tübingen School is alive in the thought of all German theologians of the 20th and the 21st centuries and many of its main ideas are also those behind the change in intellectual spirit toward a more permissive approach toward the questions, problems and challenges of the modern era. The time period from Vatican I to Vatican II is determinative for the formulation of modern Catholic theology. In the Catholic Church the biggest reaction for confronting the challenges of modern day was the Second Vatican Council. Majority of Kasper's work has been written after the Second Vatican Council.

Kasper himself names three theological principles of the Tübingen School as his own theological guidelines: ecclesial theology (*Kirchlichkeit*), scientific orientation (*Wissenschaftlichkeit*) and practically-oriented openness to the problems and questions of modern times (*Gegenwartsbezogenheit*). These guidelines also effectively shed light on Kasper's position in the field of Catholic theology: the post-19th-century effort to overcome the Neoscholastic, rigid metaphysical approaches to doctrine; an emphasis on the importance of scientific study for the profession of theology; and the emphasis on the

meaning of the Church as a *communio* of believers that carries, transmits and interprets the *depositum fidei* over time. All these are central themes in Kasper's thought.

In this study Chapter Two focused on the scientific background that Kasper has as a theologian. Kasper represents a theology-of-history approach in his discourse. In his interpretation of theology of history, a God who reveals himself in the course of history is central. God, who is relational and communicative, calls his creatures into dialogue with himself. The concept of history is central for Kasper in two aspects. First, Kasper emphasises that God is present in human history at all times and that the place for the revelation event is this human history with God. Second, the Son of God became incarnate in history and took the whole of humanity unto himself in this event. Kasper calls the Incarnation the culmination of God's revelation. History is not only the place of God's actions but is also the place where his salvific plan is realised. Therefore, history has a twofold meaning in Christianity: first, it is the place for salvation history and as such the place for the encounter with God. It is also the definitive place for a specific moment in salvation history: the Incarnation. In the Incarnation the destiny of the human race is concretely bound to the reality of the Triune God. In history, the event of the Incarnation is radically new. In light of other world religions, God who becomes human is a unique, wondrous event.

Kasper's Tübingen heritage were also discussed in the present study. The question of the relationship between faith and reason and Kasper's view of the use of metaphysics in theology can be seen in all his theological work. Kasper seeks to overcome the old, Aristotelian metaphysics and instead base theology on a new, Christian metaphysics. He states that because of historical reasons it is not possible to discard metaphysics altogether: theology is always dependent on metaphysical arguments. But the reverse true as well: because metaphysics is a science that seeks to explain reality, it can never accomplish its task without taking into account theological, primordial questions as well.

Chapter Three discussed the conditions of revelation. In Kasper's view, religious language is both evocative and communicative in nature. The communicative use of language is deeply involved in practice. This means that communicative language actually creates *communio* when it is employed. The power of the use of language lies thus in its power to create reality. In Kasper's understanding, religious language is first and foremost testimonial speech. Testimonial speech is an example of language that creates reality: when a testimony is given, its receivers accept (or deny) it and remake their own interpretation of reality based on that testimony. In the speech-act God becomes accessible in an understandable and creative manner.

The closest theory of philosophy of language to Kasper's own view is the theory of the *historicity of language* (*Geschichtlichkeit der Sprache*). Language is affected by both the historical evolution of language and the historical situation and historical community in which language is used, as well as the pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) which directs the understanding of language in a particular way. Language thus interprets a certain historical situation in a way typical to a particular era and to a particular cultural context.

Therefore, Kasper also interprets language from the point of view of theology of history. In religious language the element of pre-apprehension, a possibility to grasp something of the beyond, is always present.

Traditional apophatic theology begins only after words have been exhausted. According to Kasper, there are three different phases in the theological doctrine of analogy: *via affirmativa*, *via negativa* and *via eminentiae*. According to Kasper, analogy is the grammar of faith (*Sprachlehre des Glaubens*). It is at the same time identity and difference: only through analogy can we grasp the similarities between things, but their differences as well. Analogy is something that lies in the tension between the familiar and unfamiliar, in the intersection between what is known and what is only a pre-comprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the “whole truth”. Analogy strives to grasp the “something” that escapes our capacity to understand. In Kasper’s thought, analogy must be transformed so that it corresponds to the salvation-historical understanding of reality. This means that analogy is the grammar and signpost that guides us towards the unknown with the help of the already-known. Revelation gives us the information necessary for this understanding. Analogy serves as a tool for understanding what ultimately cannot be fully understood.

Kasper interprets the traditional doctrine of analogy in a new way in order to develop his own analogy of freedom based on both the philosophy of freedom and the theology-of-history approach. Analogy of freedom is based on the basic axiom of dialectical philosophy: *finitum est capax infiniti*. Freedom exists in the tension between finite and infinite. Kasper’s analogy of freedom is based on the conviction that because God is freedom, he can be recognised only in freedom. Human freedom based on the being of God gives man the possibility to respond to God’s address. God is not indifferent to his creation even if he is not in physical continuity with it. In human history, however, he freely makes himself known to human beings, he reveals what he willingly in freedom wants to reveal. In theology of revelation this means that God freely opens himself to the human being, who, in turn, in his freedom will be able to answer God’s call. Kasper states that analogy can grasp the infinite only in the self-fulfilment of the Spirit. In other words, analogy is similarity and comparability including both difference and similarity at the same time. In Kasper’s thought the possibility of knowing something about God takes place at the intersection of the *via negativa* and the *via affirmativa*: the *via eminentiae* opens a mediating level of understanding through which we grasp reality as entirely open to us.

For Kasper the dialectic between the finite and infinite is central. This basic philosophical framework also reveals Kasper’s dependence on modern philosophy of freedom. Kasper’s basic axiom “every finite concept presupposes a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the infinite” serves as the philosophical basis for his theology of revelation. All of reality is based on the divine reality. God is relational both in his being (*immanent Trinity*) and in his actions (*economic Trinity*). Because the nature of his being is love, he wants to share himself with human beings. Not because he *has* to share himself – Kasper rejects the Hegelian Absolute God who necessarily acts in history in a deterministic manner – but because he freely wants to. Both creation and special revelation belong together. Since God’s being is freedom and love, in the history of the human race this self-sharing love is

freely manifested as grace. Therefore, freedom, love and grace are in Kasper's understanding qualities that are both conditions for and implied by the other. All these qualities are also qualities that can be detected from the way God works in history. God always acts according to his own being. The freedom of man is based on the infinite freedom of God. In Kasper's view, freedom is thus a quality that penetrates the whole of reality.

Kasper calls the particular moment for the revelation event "the meaning experience" (*Sinnerfahrung*). When man becomes aware of his own finitude he simultaneously becomes aware of the infinite reality that must be the ground of being of everything. Kasper has adopted this basic dialectical idea from the philosophy of Schelling: it is exactly the ultimate realisation of finitude which leads to the experience of infinite reality. The tension between the finite and infinite is thus the starting point for understanding Kasper's theology of revelation. In the encounter between the finite and infinite the meaning experience happens in which a human being realises that he stands before infinite reality. A meaning experience is a synthesis between the thesis (experience of finitude) and antithesis (realisation that there has to be an infinite reality as the ground of our reality; *Grund und Sinn aller Wirklichkeit*). In this view the strong connection to German idealist philosophy, especially to that of Schelling, can be seen. The experience of meaning can be characterised as a *negatio negationis*. It brings out the positive meaning of negation. The meaning experience emerges when a finite being reaches out from its finitude towards the infinite. Grace appears in the meaning experience as freedom to move beyond the limits of one's own being and to be confronted by the reality of the infinite God. Grace is the gift that enables one to open up to the realisation that he or she can become open to the reality of the infinite out of his or her own finite being. Grace transcends the experience of finitude, opening up to an experience of the infinite reality beyond ours. The divine basis of our being can, paradoxically, open up out of the experience of desperate realisation of the finitude of everything.

The experience of the limits of our being also gives justification for natural revelation. Based on the fact that man is created, he longs for the infinite ground of his own being. Man is both larger than the reality that he exists in and at the same time he can never really, truly grasp it. In his own existence man is capable of orientating himself towards God. This is not due to intellectual endeavour but instead is based on the idea that his being is grounded in the being of God. Because he is a creature of God, he can orientate himself towards the Creator.

In our temporal and spatial history the nature of God remains a mystery only to be completely revealed in the eschatological events of the end times. However, already now we can have a glimpse, a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the reality to come. The concepts of mystery and pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) are intertwined in Kasper's interpretation of revelation: in a dialectical manner they are the two sides of the same thing. Both the mystery and the pre-apprehension are already given and they reflect the ultimate reality of which God's revelation speaks, but in time and history the revelation still remains only partial. Revelation is an already-given reality, although in history and time it appears

to us only in part. Revelation reflects thus both the familiar and unfamiliar side of God's reality.

Since God himself is being-in-relations, the Trinitarian God, the reality of his revelation also reflects this relationality. Revelation appears in history as creation (the work of the Father) and redemption (the work of the Son) and is mediated in our time through the Holy Spirit. In the person and destiny of Jesus Christ the opening of the mystery of God begins. He is God's love, freedom and grace incarnate in our reality, into the continuum of history. Divine reality remains open in our reality in the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church towards its eschatological destiny. The Holy Spirit opens the reality of revelation to people through faith. However, only in the eschatological events is the true nature of the mystery and hiddenness of God fully revealed.

The opening of God's being is the basic act of revelation. In this study's examination of Kasper's functional and dogmatic interpretation of the Bible it became clear that the most important criterion for the interpretation of the Bible is the word of God. To avoid a circular argument Kasper argues that the word of God has to be interpreted within the community of believers, and thus he makes use of the modern theory of institutionalisation. Kasper emphasises the position of the *communio* in his interpretation of the Bible. He argues that there is a strong indication that although the subjectivity of one particular individual is always restricted, a "system" (as Kasper calls it), in this case the Church as institution, has the advantage of correction. The experiences of earlier generations are "stored" and "objectified" within the *communio* of believers. Hence the Church holds a *Tradition* of certain practices and beliefs and stands, therefore, as a certain guarantee for continuity and authenticity.

Although the Bible is written entirely in human words, it points to and refers to the Divine reality. Kasper emphasises that the Bible does not attempt to describe our reality scientifically but instead in terms of being a created reality. The Bible, Tradition and the proclamation of the Church, together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, ensure that the content of the faith is transmitted authentically to believers in the generations to come. The Gospel is living reality in the course of history. There always remains a tension between the Spirit and the letter. The authority of the Bible does not arise from the letter, but from the Spirit. Interpretation thus happens in history, guided by the Holy Spirit. Interpretation must be loyal to the testimony of the Scripture but in a corrective movement from letter to meaning. Meaning is given to us through the Spirit, in the course of history and tested by the Tradition. The emphasis of the concept of freedom in Kasper's thought can also be seen here: the freedom of the Gospel is not bound to Dogma, but instead it finds its form in the Holy Spirit. The authority of the Bible is not static and unchangeable, but is rather a part of a varied and living reality. The Bible is the true witness of the reality it describes, inspired by the Holy Spirit, but its authority is most of all the authority of the truth that it points and refers to. Because the Bible has been tested over and over again in the course of history, as interpreted and re-interpreted it reflects the living reality of faith of the *communio* that holds the keys to its correct interpretation. It does so not by the community's own power but by the power of the Holy Spirit that in our time leads the

Church. The two-sided movement (from letter to Spirit) is thus analogous to Kasper's dialectical understanding of interpreting reality as an entirety: it is a movement from the familiar (the written word) to the unfamiliar (the Spirit's guidance for the interpretation and the living interpretation of the Word in the course of history).

The starting point of dogmatics is a particular question followed by a living faith that searches for the answer in historical reality. For Kasper, the ideal for dogmatics is a holistic approach to faith in which the testimony of the Bible, the Tradition of the Church and the living faith of the believing community (*communio*) are combined. The idea of the Gospel as living Tradition means for Kasper that its message cannot be reduced to simple doctrinal statements but that it is instead attached to living reality and the historical continuum.

In this study an example of the interpretation of Ex 3,14 further illuminated Kasper's functional interpretation of the Bible. Kasper argues that God is first and foremost a communicative, active God, whose revelation happens in and within history. This study analysed Kasper's use of the Bible using the example of Ex 3,14 in order to give a full outline of his interpretation of revelation. The event of the burning bush in which God gives his Name, is also called the "revelation of revelations" (an expression coined by André LaCocque), a characterisation which is fitting for Kasper's analysis of the passage as well. In Kasper's interpretation, Ex 3,14 shows us that God wants to be with his people in the course of history. It also indicates that God wants human beings as "a you" to himself – he wants to communicate with human beings. Kasper thus establishes the analogy between the Trinitarian God constituted in relations and God wanting to communicate himself to his creatures in history. The New Testament and the Gospel of Jesus Christ give a final interpretation to God's Name: God is love. The self-revelation of God receives its full interpretation in the Incarnation and appears in our reality as love. Therefore, Kasper's intention becomes clear although he does not explicitly state it: in a way, Christ is already present in the event of the burning bush, when God promises always to be with his people. His promise, fidelity and love find its fulfilment in the events of the New Testament, in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus Ex 3,14 points to this promise of the future: God's being-with-us finds its culmination point when God becomes human himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

Even though Kasper is not afraid of criticising the Church he is still its loyal son. In *KK* he describes the Church with the words from the Song of Solomon: "dark yet beautiful" (*Schwarz aber schön*) (Sg. 1,5). The Church is the *communio* of Christ moving towards its eschatological fulfilment at the end of time. The Church as *communio* of believers reflects the relational reality of the Trinitarian God himself, although yet in a very incomplete way. Only in the events of the end time will the whole mystery of God, the Church and man be revealed.

Chapter Four introduced Kasper's answer to the challenges posed by modern secularism and atheism. Whereas Kasper thinks that the apex of secularism has already passed, he considers secularism, atheism and the nihilism that threatens in the form of the atheistic world view true challenges to Christianity. The urgent question for Kasper is how

to speak about God in the modern era in a manner loyal to the proclamation of the Church but at the same time understandable to a multicultural and pluralistic world.

In his latest work Kasper emphasises the need to proudly hold on to the Christian truth and rejects relativism which leads, according to him, to indifference and an inability to accept any universal truths. In Kasper's thought, one cause in particular has affected the emergence of the current secular situation in the Western world: a misunderstanding of the concept of freedom. Kasper emphasises that the Christian concept of freedom should be reinterpreted for our age. According to the original, biblical meaning, God is the ground of all being and perfect freedom. Accordingly, only in connection to our own ground of being can we also be free. A freedom that is not anchored in any value system leads to distortion, and in the end, to nihilism. Nietzsche's prediction of the death of God is, in Kasper's view, an accurate description of a purely secular world and its logical consequence. Kasper claims, however, that if God is dead, then the meaning of life is also lost and the mystery of man remains unsolved as well. The death of God thus also means the death of man. If we encounter no meaningful foundation in our lives, then a meaningless life becomes as possible as a meaningful one. For Kasper, his apologia for Christian faith is the answer to modern atheism. He is convinced that the answer to the question of man and the question of God can be found within the Christian faith. His theological system is based on an assumption of this holistic concept of truth and of reality.

Schelling's concept of the *Abgrund* is helpful, Kasper suggests, when trying to understand the definitive moment of belief or unbelief. The collision with the limits of our own being is violent, desperate and frightening. The concept of paradox is important here: the experience of one's own finitude can be very similar for an atheist and for a theist. The outcome is different, yet at the same time the experience itself is the same. Where a theist finds meaning and fulfilment, an atheist finds only the excruciating realisation of meaninglessness and nothingness, the agony of his or her own finitude. Rudolf Otto described the experience of the divine reality, the ultimate experience, as a *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. The reality that is the ground of our own existence, the divine reality, is at the same time terrifying and fascinating. Analogy can grasp the infinite only through the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit; in other words, in faith. The problem is that if the faith is not given to us, we only encounter darkness, a total and complete *Gottesfinsternis*, a complete eclipse of God. Infinite reality can thus appear to us both as an illumination of God's presence but also, paradoxically, as an experience of God's complete absence. For both an atheist and a theist what they encounter in the ultimate experience of their own limits, of their own finitude, can be called the *Abgrund*. For a theist, it is an encounter with the groundless ground of his or her own being; for an atheist, it is an excruciating realisation of nothingness and meaninglessness.

The meaning experience gives us a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the nature of God's reality as mystery and paradox. The concept of the meaning experience is something that can – at least relatively – be understood no matter what the religious background of the person. The question of what (if anything) there is beyond this time-bound existence of ours is a general human question. Kasper understands the meaning

experience as a window to transcendent, divine reality. In the meaning experience the limits of our being are transcended into an experience of a deeper meaning, the meaning of all reality. Our finitude makes us realise that there must be an infinite ground to all existence. If Kasper's view is applied to the general human struggle with the limits of our being, the sigh of an atheist towards a deeper meaning can also be interpreted as a sigh for God. When facing the concept of the infinite, both the theist and the atheist must admit: "I do not completely understand". The infinite is *ipso facto* something incomprehensible and indefinite from the point of view of finite reality. The infinite cannot live inside finite reality; contemplating the concept of infinite goes against common sense because it can never be experience-based. This study argues that the concept of the infinite and its utter incomprehensibility could, therefore, serve as a possible starting point for a dialogue between theists and atheists.

Chapter Five introduced Kasper's interpretation of the concepts of grace and mercy. It also discussed the importance of the concept of the "new" in Kasper's theology of revelation. Kasper takes the discussion of nature and grace into the practical realm of Christian life by deepening his analysis of one of the most important attributes of the Trinitarian God: grace. Kasper tries to give the concept of mercy a place in our merciless age. He does this by seeking to place its proper meaning in the context of the Trinitarian God himself. He states that the attribute of God that in the Bible is called "grace" appears in our reality as his infinite mercy. The meaning of grace, the exalted attribute of God's being, thus appears in our reality as God's infinite mercy. Kasper's analysis of the concept of mercy shows that in his recent theological work his thought has evolved in an even more practical direction. In his recent work he has remarked that in order to bring the eternal truth of Christianity to the awareness of modern people, the eternal truths of Christian faith must be relatable to the reality around us.

History as the place for the encounter with God receives an even more emphasised meaning in Kasper's thought. Kasper understands Christology as key for this task. For if the eternal Son of God is truly God become man, then his being must be the key for understanding the eternal revelation of God. Revelation only becomes understandable in a real human context: within human history, through God become man, Jesus Christ. The significance of Kasper's analysis of mercy is twofold: first, it provides a comprehensive, final meaning for what the Incarnation means for our existence and for our destiny as human beings; and second, mercy gives us a direct reflection of the inner being of the Trinitarian God himself and thus a clear paradigm for us for how to act as Christians.

The first meaning of the concept of mercy is revealed in the event of the Incarnation. God gives his ultimate gift of love in his Son and thus fulfils all his promises. In Jesus Christ, God's grace and fidelity become living reality among his people. In the saving work of Jesus Christ God's intention becomes clear: he wants every single human being to be united with himself. His eternal "you", Jesus Christ, becomes the paradigm for human beings as his "you" in dialogue in the course of history. This dialogue finds its fulfilment when sins are forgiven through God's Son become man, and the perfect union

with God already given to us in the event of creation is restored. In short: God's Son is God's mercy incarnate.

The second meaning of the concept of mercy works as a paradigm for us to follow. We should act towards each other in the way that Christ acted towards us. If mercy is the orientation of God toward us, then it should also be our orientation toward each other. Kasper emphasises, though, that mercy should be understood correctly as being united with the concept of justice. God's mercy is not cheap mercy but is based on his being both merciful and righteous. If mercy is understood only as forgiving love no matter what, then instead of underlining the importance of mercy it in fact strips it of its meaning. For mercy without justice does not elevate the core understanding of Christianity, but rather makes it irrelevant. If mercy is offered to us no matter what, then what meaning remains for the salvific work of Jesus Christ? Hence mercy and justice must go hand-in-hand.

Revelation is simultaneously present and hidden in our reality. Because God himself is relational, revelation also becomes manifest in relation. As Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, God is a reciprocal and communicative God. He wants to be in dialogue. Revelation does not appear "from above to us below" – it is horizontal as much as it is vertical. Thus the vertical reality of God opens something of itself to us in the horizontal events of our reality. In the horizontal reality revelation is actualised only in dialogue with human beings in the course of history. Man has to posit himself in relation with himself as well, and relate himself to the mystery of his own being which opens up in the person of Jesus Christ. One must find the traces of the infinite within this horizontal reality of ours.

Kasper's Christological core of theology of revelation becomes apparent in his relational interpretation of the Trinitarian God. The being of God cannot be based on the *necessity* of a created partner ("a you") for God. Instead, Jesus Christ is the *eternal you* for God. In the Holy Spirit people are accepted into this *communio* of love. In Christ, both the mystery of God and of man himself is revealed. The being of man is based on the divine ground of being and Christ is the mediator between our reality and God's. Faith, however, is not accomplished by our own endeavours but is only given through grace in the Holy Spirit. Faith is a free gift of God and man is free in the course of history to answer God's call or not. In Kasper's understanding, the concepts of freedom and grace are joined together as equal in the act of faith. In faith we can freely accept God's grace as a gift. Through faith human beings can have a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of the reality that will be fully revealed only in the eschatological events at the end of time.

Kasper interprets the concept of time in the New Testament as a possibility for both encountering God in history and for choosing faith. The Incarnation of God in human history has begun a new *aeon* of grace. The gospel of the new aeon is mediated through the New Testament. The New Testament gives the possibility for man to orientate himself towards the future, the eschatological fulfilment of the coming Kingdom of God. Because the being of man is based on the being of God in freedom and on God's free, creating will, the being of man is also free by nature. However, Kasper rejects the individualistic, self-centered aspects of freedom and instead emphasises that the authentic nature of freedom is based on the Trinitarian God. The special nature of human beings is

based on the fulfilment of revelation: God himself has entered history in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the incarnate love and freedom of God. In Christ, the final fulfilment of humanity is completed. God takes the form of a human being in its totality: his or her sufferings and victories, pains and joys, highs and lows. In turn man ontologically participates in God through Christ. The Incarnation is the climax of the encounter between finite and infinite reality, in which natural revelation is completed in the special revelation of Christ. Both the mystery of man and God are revealed in the Christ event. Revelation becomes a living reality, joining together the vertical and horizontal realities.

Not even faith can fully grasp the mystery of God's revelation in its total fullness: until the final, eschatological events, the final breaking in of the Kingdom of God, the ultimate content of revelation remains hidden. The human mind is capable of transcending itself, it is capable of reaching beyond its own limits. Because we exist in time and in history, we can transcend time in the sense that in our thoughts we move between the past, present and the future. This ability is bound to the freedom based on our ground of being. It also means that we can have experiences "in, with and under" (to use Kasper's terminology) our concrete experiences. For Kasper, the experience of God is this kind of indirect experience. He requires the concept of paradox to explain the complex relation between man and God. In human history this paradox reaches its culmination in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Kasper claims that the inability to talk about God is one of the most significant problems of our time. He strives to outline an apology for Christian faith that is both loyal to the tradition of Christian faith and open to dialogue with modern, secular culture. With the help of Schelling's dialectical theology, Kasper constructs a model of revelation theology that attempts to elucidate the common philosophical basis for Christian belief. This common ground can be found in the deep realization of our own finitude. Kasper develops the philosophical framework of dialectical theology into a dialogical theology. In his view, the meaning event (*Sinnerfahrung*) is a moment of enlightenment, a moment of being encountered, being noticed, being accepted in relationship with the Trinitarian God. The present study argues that because the search for meaning is a feature common to human life, the concept of meaning (*Sinn*) can serve as a starting point for a dialogue with other cultures and world views as well.

Although in the modern multicultural and multireligious situation people might not always be open to a strictly Christian world view, this study argues that Kasper's philosophical frame offers a common ground which might help to further a dialogue with secular, atheist, and religious world views. Kasper's possible contribution to dialogue with secular and atheist culture is that he bears witness to a reality with a meaning also for those who do not embrace a Christian worldview. That is, in the realization of our finitude we realise that precisely because we are finite there must be an infinite ground of our being. Whether we call it "blind chance," "cosmic power," "world spirit," the "Absolute" or "God," it is the common ground and basis of our being. Even if people do not confess the Trinitarian God of Christianity, Kasper's philosophical explanation can thus provide a common, mutually-understandable focal point for both partners of the dialogue. Kasper

argues that even a partial experience of meaning (*Sinnerfahrung*), even a sigh for God, is a pre-apprehension of the divine reality which Kasper argues is the relational reality of the Triune God. What makes the Christian interpretation of this realisation unique is that for Christians God does not merely exist passively and indifferently, he calls us into a dialogue with himself. In his revelation he gives us himself. Therefore, Kasper's theology of revelation can serve as a starting point for Christians for open dialogue with other world views as well. The present study thus strives to give room for theology of revelation in modern, dialogue-based interaction between Christianity and other world views.

If every finite concept is a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*) of infinite reality, Kasper argues, then these finite concepts only find their fulfilment when they are understood in the context of infinite reality. Accordingly, if the actual object of reason (*intellect*) is truth and the actual object of love is the good, then both these aspects are united in the Trinitarian God who is truth, love as well as them both combined in freedom. If we take God out of this equation, people holding an atheistic world view can still agree that it is good to both strive for good and to love rather than hate. But human endeavours to overcome hate and replace it with love are always doomed to fail. Accordingly, reason's attempts to find the truth (i.e. full knowledge) about reality always remain partial. When infinite concepts are treated like finite concepts, they inevitably lack that particular quality which makes them infinite. When these concepts are treated in a finite manner, they function only partially. In Christian language: sin obscures all attempts to reach out to what is perfect, pure and complete. As a finite person I am capable of loving because my being is grounded in him who is infinite love. However, my ability to love is finite and can never reach its fullness in my own incomplete endeavours to love. It could be argued, for example, that if the central concepts of reason, freedom, love and mercy are understood as separate entities, they are always understood incompletely (that is, love without reason is lust with all its implications; reason without love is false pride; love without freedom is violence; freedom without love is nihilism. Accordingly, reason without freedom is captivity and freedom without reason is anarchy. Mercy without reason, love and freedom is injustice.) Instead, all these realities belong together, that is, they must have a common, infinite ground if one wishes to understand them correctly. The same applies to any attempt to grasp infinite reality beyond ours – our conceptions always remain partial and incomplete.

Interpretation of reality as relation (and more accurately, as relation that is the Trinitarian God of Christianity) gives all the above mentioned entities the ground that ensures that they are understood correctly. In the language of soteriology: whereas the apex of the Fall is pride and *concupiscence*; the correct manifestation of love, freedom, reason and mercy happens in the Incarnation, in Christ and his self-giving love. Thus, in Kasper's interpretation the fulfilment modern man seeks in horizontal reality is already there, but it exists in a state of estrangement. The correct interpretation comes from within the Christian understanding of these basic concepts. If love, freedom, reason and mercy as finite qualities are understood as capacities that are bound to the *Capax Dei* and if they reflect the *Vorgriff* nature of eschatological reality, then their real intention is fulfilled in grace. God's exalted attribute of grace gives a *new* interpretation to the concepts of freedom, love, reason and

mercy if they are understood as entities that are based on the Trinitarian God himself and transmitted to people through the apex of revelation in the Incarnation.

In his self-emptying (*kenosis*), the Son of God takes the whole humanity upon himself. This is the central paradox in Kasper's thought: God is at his highest when he becomes the lowest. The paradox of Christian faith should not be explained away; instead it should be embraced. In the Incarnation God himself experiences the finitude of a finite creature in its totality. Kasper's interpretation of the theology of the Cross is based on his holistic interpretation of the whole of reality. If there is only one truth in this reality, for Kasper this truth is essentially the truth of Christian faith. Seeds of that perfect truth can be found everywhere in human history and human culture. But difference with other cultures and religions lies in the "something" in Christian reality that remains out of our reach but is, at the same time, still right there. This something at the same time fully encounters us and encircles us but still escapes us, it is something that we intuitively pursue to have and to hold, something that we find inside us and beyond ourselves but which still ultimately remains a mystery. What we try to understand in this "something" as human beings is part of our being, an inbuilt feature we all have, but something we do not fully understand. Human history is full of attempts to try to understand, understand ultimately. This intuitive understanding must be related to the truth, the explanation for everything. In the modern Western context Christianity is so deeply rooted in our culture, habits, ethics – in our everyday life – that it would be foolish to claim that there could be found a way of life that is completely free of any cultural influence from Christianity. Instead, understanding Christianity helps us to understand ourselves, whether we are believers or not.

Christianity adopts many things from human tradition, but it also criticises that tradition, makes many things more precise, and deepens them.³

God's plan becomes understandable from the point of view of faith. Because God is in relation, he approaches man in dialogue, becomes man himself. God's plan of salvation is fulfilled in history, in the midst of which the Son of God becomes man. In Jesus' death on the Cross the paradoxical moment of the ultimate meaning experience (*Sinnerfahrung*) reaches its culmination point: finite man encounters the infinite God. Where the suffering and the lowest point of life is realised in Jesus' destiny in a horrible way, paradoxically God is actually present in his fullest. At that point, God *freely* gives himself in *love* for others, and in the Resurrection turns his defeat into a victory. In Jesus the whole of humanity is united again with God. In him both the mystery of God and the mystery of man is revealed and a new *aeon* of grace begun. Therefore, the moment of despair, a moment of a/theism in the Cross, actually becomes the moment of God's real and true presence, his ultimate revelation and a realisation of his infinite mercy.

A Christian world view is the framework from which Kasper perceives reality. He interprets reality as the reflection of the Trinitarian God. It is not only one option

³ B, 49: "[Das Christentum] greift vieles aus der Menschheitstradition auf, aber es kritisiert es auch, es präzisiert vieles und vertieft es."

among many. Kasper argues that it is *the* option for the interpretation of reality and for locating meaning in reality. Especially in his recent work Kasper's personal commitment and engagement become clear: he believes that the explanation for the mystery of both God and man himself can be explained through the Christian faith. His enthusiasm for writing, explaining and clarifying this faith that he himself firmly professes has become missionary in quality. He is not interested in only producing scholarly, scientific theology within the ivory towers of universities. He firmly holds that true theology is practiced within the living community of believers. The truth and the faith live within the *communio* of believers. He continues to write, study, analyze and do theology. It is as if he passionately wants to use every word available in his vocabulary to explain and clarify the Christian truth. The erudite academic scholar and loyal son of the Church has found his identity as a truly apologetic and missionary theologian. Although his approach is dialogical, he holds that the truth can be found exactly in the Christian faith.

Kasper's profound certitude of the possibility of finding truth in the message of Christianity is not baseless. Modern man often forgets that the message of Christianity, based on the revelation witnessed to in Scriptures, reflects a civilisation dating back at least 4 millennia. Therefore, the books of the Bible bear witness to religions which have had a profound effect on world cultures, and which, through their place in the life of Jewish and Christian communities today, continue to have a profound effect – even if those communities' cultures do not have an historical connection to the descendants of the cultures of the ancient Middle East. Thus the cartoonish depiction of the Bible as “only an old storybook” (a description one often hears from some atheist critics of religion) appears as profoundly naïve. Certainly, the Bible is not to be used as a science text book. However, the canon of the Scriptures did come into existence through a long process of discernment in the communities for whom those texts were sacred. In addition, the truth and the meaning that people have found from the Bible throughout times continuously lives on in the communities interpreting the Bible and is brought to life in the practice of faith through time. Thus, if the Bible is only treated as an outdated old novel it not only desacralises its meaning, it also undermines it tragically. It forgets that the biblical narratives are central for more than one world religious tradition. The Scriptures tell the story of who we were, who we are and who we should be. It tells us about the One on whom we should rely and from where we can find the meaning in our lives.

We seem to live in a time in which stories cease to exist. We live in a time in which meaning easily gets lost. A truly meaningful life can only be built on enduring stories, on enduring wisdom, on the great storylines of the entirety of humanity. Without the contribution of others we simply cannot see the big picture. The Bible reflects the reality of God: not the whole truth of the reality of God, but still a considerable signpost pointing towards it, tested by time and previous generations: the whole *communio* of faith. A single person is unable to grasp the sempiternal wisdom of all the foregoing generations. Even the longest life is too short for that. This is why the true wisdom, the truth that also Kasper calls for, is in danger of vanishing in our subject-centered world. The theology of revelation can, therefore, serve as a basis for dialogue with modern culture. It reminds us of where we come from, who we are and who we ought to be. It explains and clarifies the storyline

captured in the Bible and it explains to us the reality of the revelation of God. God's dialogue with us in the course of history consists not only of single moments of enlightenment, but rather is a continuing process that is open for us to grasp, if we do not turn our backs on it. Kasper's theology of revelation strives to answer the questions of who we were (our roots, *radices*), who we are now and what is our destiny.

Kasper's revelation theology culminates in Christology. In Christ's full humanity the mystery of man, the enigma of the meaning of our being, the meaning of being human, is solved once and for all. In our age Christian faith faces a radical challenge: Therefore the response to it must also be radical. An ambiguous, vague world ideology is not the answer to the ambiguous question of man regarding the meaning of life and the meaning of himself. In Kasper's view, the answer is the mystery of the Trinitarian God who gives himself: the God who is known through his Son, Jesus, Christ, in the Holy Spirit. The promise of the future, the promise of eschatological fulfilment, is given to us in the revelation of the Trinitarian God. The ultimate search for meaning, the search for God, receives its final answer in Jesus: he is "*id quo maius cogitari nequit*" ("that than which nothing greater can be thought", to quote Anselm of Canterbury). He is the culmination of God's self-revelation and the answer to all search for meaning. In him reality is interpreted in a completely new, illuminating light. He brings meaning to being, he is the answer for the yearning we are yet incapable of grasping, the reality *in, with and under* our experiences. In him Christians find the fulfilment of their yearning for a new, meaningful experience and fulfilment that modern man so enthusiastically, but in vain, tries to find in the immanent reality. For true meaning can only arise from the reality beyond ours, from him who became a human being to give that ultimate meaning to us. Through his humanity he also fulfils our humanity. His Incarnation gives God's revelation in history its final form: in Jesus Christ we are completely and finally united with the reality of the Trinitarian God. He is the Word begotten in silence, he who was there when our reality was first created. He is the final meaning and culmination of the traces of God that were first detected by the witnesses to revelation in the Old Testament. He gives the final meaning to the word of the Bible when it is proclaimed in the life of the Church. He is present in the worship of the Church. He invigorates the reality of revelation every time the *communio* of believers celebrates the Eucharist in his memory. In the Eucharist he is really, truly present, bringing the final understanding to what "relational" means. He brings the eternal truth of God into the present moment. He transforms our reality once and for all and gives it a completely new meaning and purpose. He frees us for the freedom of God and gives us a reason to believe: he is the answer to the quest of *fides quaerens intellectum*. He is Jesus Christ, the event of the radically new.

7. Abbreviations

7.1. Abbreviations for Primary Sources (in alphabetical order)

B	Barmherzigkeit: Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens
GJ	Der Gott Jesu Christi
JC	Jesus der Christus
KK	Katholische Kirche: Wesen – Wirklichkeit – Sendung
OG	Offenbarung Gottes in der Geschichte

7.2. Abbreviations for Secondary Sources (in alphabetical order)

A	Das Absolute in der Geschichte
AGP	Aspekte gegenwärtiger Pneumatologie
AGV	Atheismus und Gottes Verborgenheit
AT	Autonomie und Theonomie
CP	Christologie im Präsens: Kritische Sichtung neuer Entwürfe
CUF	The Christian Understanding of Freedom and the History of Freedom in the Modern Era
D	Dogma unter dem Wort Gottes
DW	Dogmatik als Wissenschaft
ED	Das Verhältnis von Evangelium und Dogma
EDV	Exegese – Dogmatik – Verkündigung
EF	Das Evangelium von der Familie. Die Rede vor dem Konsistorium.
EJC	Das Evangelium Jesu Christi
FPM	Forgiveness and the Purification of Memory
G	Glaube und Geschichte
GAS	Wann darf ich kommen und Gottes Anlitz schauen? (Ps 42,3) Eschatologie als endgültige Gottesbegegnung
GGA	Gottes Glaube im Angesicht von säkularisierter und atheistischer Umwelt
GGE	Die geistigen Grundlagen Europas
GIG	Gott in der Geschichte
GM	Geheimnis Mensch
GPV	Die Gottesfrage als Problem der Verkündigung
GVF	Glaube, der nach seinem Verstehen fragt
GW	Glaube im Wandel der Geschichte
GZ	Gott und die Zukunft
HGS	Wo das Herz des Glaubens schlägt
HT	How to do Theology Today
JJ	Jesus ja – Kirche nein?
KJ	Die Kirche Jesu Christi
KOG	Kirche: Ort des Geistes
KUG	Die Kirche Unter dem Wort Gottes
KWS	Kommen wir zur Sache

KÄ	Die Kirche und ihre Ämter
LT	Die Lehre von der Tradition in der Römischen Schule
M	Die Methoden der Dogmatik
MM	The Message of Mercy
NE	Neue Evangelisierung – eine pastorale, theologische und geistliche Herausforderung
NG	Name und Wesen Gottes: Problem und Möglichkeit des theologischen Sprechens von Gott
NGC	Neuansätze gegenwärtiger Christologie
NGK	Natur – Gnade – Kultur
PES	Prolegomena zur Erneuerung der geistlichen Schriftauslegung
PF	Papst Franziskus: Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe
RS	Renewal from the Source: The Interpretation and Reception of the Second Vatican Council
ST	Das Verhältnis von Schrift und Tradition
STV	Schrift – Tradition - Verkündigung
TAA	Die Theologie angesichts des heutigen Atheismus
TE	Tradition als Erkenntnisprinzip
THH	Theologie und Heiligkeit
TK	Theologie und Kirche
TK2	Theologie und Kirche II
WF	Wahrheit und Freiheit: Die Erklärung über die Religionsfreiheit des II Vatikanischen Konzils
ZGR	Es ist Zeit, von Gott zu reden
ZZD	Zustimmung zum Denken

7.3. Church Documents

CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
DF	Dei Filius. Dogmatic Constitution Dei Filius
DV	Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum
GS	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes
IBC	Interpretation of the Bible in the Church
LG	Lumen Gentium
MV	Misericordiae Vultus
PO	Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests: Presbyterorum Ordinis

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