



When the Ark is Wrecked

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A brave vessel,
Who had no doubt some noble creature in her,
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished.
Had I been any god of power, I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth ...
Shakespeare, The Tempest

We have everything under control on the sinking vessel

Don't be afraid. This is not a sigh made by a rector who is discouraged in the middle of his mandate in a university which is traditionally called: "The University of the Swiss Catholics." It's rather the translation of the title of a song which was quite popular in the eighties. *Wir haben alles im Griff auf dem sinkenden Schiff. Volle Kraft voraus auf das nächstbeste Riff.* We have everything under control on the sinking vessel. Full power! Straight forward – towards the next reef. You hear the cynical undertone of that time: Oil-crisis, cold war, ambivalent development in a prosperous society of consumption. The song has not lost its actuality today – if I think about the ongoing financial crisis.

But it was not the pop singer who inspired me when I had to find a title for my lecture. It was rather the German-Baltic author, Edzard Schaper, who spent the last part of his life in Switzerland and who became an honorary doctor of our University in 1961. At the age of 27, he wrote a novel in which he tells – using the metaphor of shipwreck – the story of the difficult years he passed as a refugee. *The ark which was wrecked* (Die Arche, die Schiffbruch erlitt).

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The Salomonski Circus presents in its sensational predators' cage animals from four continents but the flashy advertising should only hide the poor means and the modest circumstances of the circus. After a tour in Sweden, which was not very successful, the circus gets in the last minute onboard; a ship brings the animals and artists home, just in time before winter comes. A storm is announced – at first it seems to be unreal. But the storm comes like a deluge, which floods the deck and carries off the animals: Stella, the cow which has some arithmetic capacities and also the proud lion, which – although almost saved – jumps over board in a moment of despair and ultimate dignity. Finally only one small monkey remains – the person who saved it pays almost with his life. The artists survive this catastrophe with great difficulty – the fate is too cruel. Nevertheless, life goes on after the incident. “The young daughter of the circus director dances on the tightrope, and terribly freezes in her light T-Shirt. The tamer performs a funny wrestling with one of his comrades. Two chickens reluctantly drag a tiny wheelbarrow, which is conducted by a wrinkled and shriveled, freezing small monkey.” Life goes on – also for Edzard Schaper. In the Baltic countries he is taken between the frontlines of Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. He is condemned to death by both – flees to Sweden and is invited by Swiss German scholars to live in Wallis, where he finds a place to go on writing. He dies in Bern on the 29th of January 1984. The local newspapers announce his passing with this title: The end of a flight.

The shipwreck of the ark – an image of life? Who could deny it? Who would not recognize his own life in this mirror? The shipwreck of the saving ark – an image of science, of the intellectual formation in the context of late modernity? Oh no! One would spontaneously answer.

Science is the ark, which provides security against the rigours of life. Science – especially our philosophical and theological formation – is able to perfect warning about the gale, it makes the ships more seaworthy, heals the seasick and trains competent and clever steersmen, who are able to cope with waves and storms. But if we look more carefully at the history of science, we can observe that this history starts with reflections about the experience of a shipwreck.

I would like to explore those beginnings, try to see what has grown out of it – and make some considerations about the current task of formation and of the intellectual mission of the Order.

The “second navigation” of Socrates

No less a person than Socrates invites us to consider the first shipwreck. He argued with the group of sophists, the intellectual and political elite of his time. They pretended to walk on a safe rational foundation. They even made a profit out of it. Through his persistent questioning, Socrates shakes that foundation. The sophists made the experience of shipwreck with respect to three essential domains of life.

But the philosopher does not confine himself to a destruction of their supposed knowledge. He does not even speak directly about the sailing, which has failed, but he pleads for a second navigation – *deuteros plous*.

1. *Human beings want to know reality – and they capsize.* In his dialogue *Phaidon*, Socrates mocks natural science and physical investigations which pretend to describe the ultimate causes, which keep him from fleeing prison in Athens, just by explaining the way he moves his bones, tendons and joints. It is quite evident, bones, tendons and joints are needed to move from one place to another, “but to say that is because of them that I do what I am doing, and not through choice of what is best – although my actions are controlled by mind – would be a very lax and inaccurate form of expression. Fancy being unable to distinguish between the cause of a thing and the condition without which it could not be a cause.” Reality is bound and held together by goodness or moral obligation. Those who want to know the real causes which move reality need another way of thinking. “I have worked out my own makeshift approach (*deuteros plous*) to the problem of causation. Would you like me to give you a demonstration of it?” Then Socrates offers his disciples the other solution – he explains the theory which helps to discover the truth about things, the doctrine of ideas as an expression of the participation of finite reality in eternal truth. *Deuteros plous*: a second way of “navigation,” which is safer – to rely on the force of your own thinking, literally: using oars when there is no wind for the sails (Cf. *Phaidon* 99b).

2. *Human beings want to achieve justice – and they capsize.* Neither the static observance of law nor the arbitrary use of power by the rulers can guarantee a perfect way of conducting the state. Socrates discusses this problem in the dialogue *Politicos* (Statesman). Also in this domain, we have to choose a *deuteros plous*, an alternative method of government. Laws are made in order to forbid an individual or a group to perform any act in contravention of these laws. But it could appear as if these laws were just written copies of scientific truth about the various kinds of human activity, copies based as far as possible on the instructions received from those who really possess the scientific truth about these matters. “The man with the real knowledge, the true statesman, will in many instances allow his activities to be dictated by his art and pay no regard to written prescriptions. He will do this whenever he is convinced that there are measures which are better than the instructions he previously wrote and sent to people at a time when he could not be there to control them personally” (300c). We find the metaphor “the ship of state” in political terminology – it was introduced also by Horace, who in *Carmina*

1,14 gives the advice to the ship of state to remain in the safe harbor: *O navis, referent in mare te novi fluctus. O quid agis! Fortiter occupa portum ...* (O ship, new billows threaten to bear thee out to sea again. Beware! Haste valiantly to reach the haven!).

3. *Human beings seek to come to terms with themselves – and they capsize.* In the dialogue *Philebus*, a person called Protarchos finds himself in a conflict: he wants to know everything in order to be able to choose between different kinds of pleasure. What brings the highest happiness to mankind? The *deuteros plous*, the real alternative is “to realize one’s own position” – literally: not to escape from oneself (Cf. *Philebus* 19c). “There is something which may properly be called a better good than pleasure at all events – namely, reason, knowledge, understanding, skill” (*nous, epiteme, sunesis, techne*).

The *deuteros plous* should not be considered as a second choice – as an alternative when the best choice is missed or not available. Quite the reverse: since the direct way to knowledge, justice and to oneself is closed – in effect or in principle – the *deuteros plous* becomes in reality the best of all navigation. For we see that the daring departure for the first and supposedly better navigation ends in shipwreck. Is there a second sailing for our universities?

Shipwreck and its spectators

The metaphor of shipwreck corresponds to the metaphor of the sea – the quintessence of everything which imposes threatening limits on the way human beings have been trying to dominate the earth. Only God would be able to see and to limit the disaster caused by the destructive force of the waters. As a matter of fact, on the first pages of Holy Scripture the creator himself has to put barriers to the deluge. And in the last book, the Apocalypse, the new earth and the new heaven receive as promise and consolation: “And the sea was no more” (Apoc. 21, 1). Representations of the Last Judgment are often based on the dramatic scenes of Apocalypse 20, 13: “The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.” (*Picture of a gigantic fresco on the walls of the Church of the Monastery in Voronet*)

Classical philosophers show something like a Socratic modesty. They even tend to be very critical of all efforts to dominate the forces of nature – shown in the brave attempts to go to sea. The first representative of the Ionian philosophers of nature, Thales of Milet, expresses the feeling of the permanent threat for human life, when he holds that all continents as a flat disk are floating on the world ocean.

Shipwreck is not merely a failure – it is the starting-point of our search for knowledge. Diogenes Laertius speaks about Zenon, the founder of the Stoic tradition and quotes him: I now find that I made a prosperous voyage when I was wrecked. (*nun euploëka hote nenauagèka*)¹ One could translate: only in view of the limits of knowledge, I have become a philosopher – and why not add: a theologian?

But the safe port is not really an alternative. In his book entitled “Schiffbruch mit Zuschauer” (Shipwreck with spectator) Hans Blumenberg describes the efforts of former philosophers to take the point of view of a neutral or disinterested spectator. But does the possibility of such neutrality in relation to reality exist? We think about the famous text of Lucretius in the beginning of Book II of his *De Rerum Natura*: *Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis, e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem. Non quia vexari quemquam est jocund voluptas, sed, quibus ipse malis careas, quia cernere suave est.* (Pleasant it is, when over a great sea the winds trouble the waters, to gaze from shore upon another’s great tribulation: not because any man’s troubles are a delectable joy, but because to perceive what ills you are free from yourself is pleasant).

For Lucretius, the universe is a wild movement of atoms – an ocean of matter – out of which the different and changing, coming and going forms of nature appear “as when many great shipwrecks have come about” (*quasi naufragiis magnis multisque coortis*) and have thrown things scattered to the shore. The physical, visible reality is something like the remnants of a gigantic shipwreck. Reality is a combination of catastrophes and productivity. This provides a warning for mortals (*indicium mortalibus*) to keep distance, to remain spectators and not to go beyond the limits of our possibilities. Lucretius is a perfect ally of all those who are critical – as well of cultural expressions as of nature in general. “Why do the seasons of the year bring disease? Why does untimely death stalk abroad? The further the child, like a sailor cast forth by the cruel waves, lies naked upon the ground, speechless, in need of every kind of vital support, as soon as nature has spilt him forth with throes from his mother’s womb into the regions of light, and he fills all around with doleful wailings; as is but just, seeing that so much trouble awaits him in life to pass through” (*De rerum natura*, V, 222-227). To be born is nothing else than to be shipwrecked! “Mankind labors always in vain and to no purpose, consuming their days in empty cares, plainly because they know not the limit of possession and how far it is ever possible for real pleasure to grow: and this little by little has carried life out into the deep sea (*non*

¹ “But at last he left Crates, and became the pupil of the philosophers whom I have mentioned before, and continued with them for twenty years. So that it is related that he said, **I now find that I made a prosperous voyage when I was wrecked.** (*nun euploëka hote nenauagèka*) But some affirm that he made this speech in reference to Crates. Others say, that while he was staying at Athens he heard of a shipwreck, and said, “Fortune does well in having driven us on philosophy.” But as some relate the affair, he was not wrecked at all, but sold all his cargo at Athens, and then turned to philosophy.”

cognovit quae sit habendi finis et omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas. Idque minutatim vitam provexit in altum), and has stirred up from the bottom the great billows of war” (De rerum natura, V, 1430-1435). Those who go into deep sea, have to be aware that shipwreck is a permanent threat; but the real shipwreck is, that mankind does no longer respect the limits of the human condition.

Shipwreck from Heaven

As Christianity appears, the image of the Ark takes a profound turn. Christianity enters into the ancient world – not as a religion, but as an answer to the experience of the shipwreck of humanity. Only those who are in need of salvation can perceive the offer of Salvation; only the one who is shipwrecked appreciates the value of the Ark as a symbol of the Church, the little boat of Peter, and the value of the cross, the saving plank after shipwreck, to use an old image familiar to the Church Fathers when they speak about baptism and penitence. Jesus Christ is not considered to be the founder of a religion, but the promise that God is not the spectator of the shipwreck of the world. His cross and the sacraments of the Church are the saving Ark in the midst of the storms which are shaking the world. It is the symbol of the little ship which accompanies the efforts of the ecumenical movement to overcome separation within the Church. For the Armenian Church, the Ark remains up to now the sign of salvation and confidence for a nation scattered through persecution – we remember Genesis 8,4: “The ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat” (*Vulgata: Requievit arca mense septimo vicesima septima die mensis super montes Armeniae*).² (*Picture of Mount Ararat*)

Since they are encouraged through the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians drop their anchor into another world. The full assurance of hope is “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered ...” (Hebrews 6, 19-20). Should not this hope also make grow on earth the boldness to explore new shores?

This hope, widened into the infinite, might also increase the temptation to overestimate one’s own abilities. According to the letter to the Hebrews, Christ has come “to free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death” (2, 15). But we are not free from limitations: death, the quintessence of all our limitations, remains within the world, within the Church.

At the beginning of modernity, mankind falls literally from heaven. If the ocean of the world reaches into heaven, shipwreck comes also from heaven.

² « *Poenitentia quae post naufragium Aadae et originalis peccati, secunda tabula est. Prima enim est baptismus* » (Petrus Lombardus, Sent. IV, Dist. XIV,1 – PL 192,1097). Cf. Hugo Rahner, Antenna Crucis VII. Die Arche Noe als Schiff des Heils, in: Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie, 86 (1964) 137-179.

Many artists, thinkers and poets take up the antique myth about Icarus. (Picture Brueghel). Pieter Brueghel painted 1558 the “Fall of Icarus.”

*Daedalus was a famous architect, inventor, and master craftsman. His homeland was Athens. He fled to the island of Crete, where he began to work at the court of King Minos and Queen Pasiphae, in the magnificent palace of Knossos. There he constructed a wooden cow for the queen to hide in to satisfy her amorous longings for a white bull sent by Poseidon, and by which she became pregnant with the Minotaur. When the Minotaur was born, Daedalus built the Labyrinth to contain the monstrous half-man, half-bull. For years Minos demanded a tribute of youths from Athens to feed the creature. Eventually, the hero Theseus came to Crete to attempt to slay the Minotaur. Ariadne, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae, fell in love with Theseus and asked Daedalus to help him. Daedalus gave her a flaxen thread for Theseus to tie to the door of the Labyrinth as he entered, and by which he could find his way out after killing the monster. Theseus succeeded, and escaped Crete with Ariadne. Minos, enraged at the loss of his daughter, not to mention the killing of the Minotaur, shut Daedalus and his son Icarus into the Labyrinth. Daedalus managed to get out of the Labyrinth - after all, he had built it and knew his way around. Daedalus decided that he and his son Icarus had to leave Crete and get away from Minos, before he brought them harm. However, Minos controlled the sea around Crete and there was no route of escape there. Daedalus realized that the only way out was by air. To escape, Daedalus built wings for himself and Icarus, fashioned with feathers held together with wax. **Daedalus warned his son not to fly too close to the sun, as it would melt his wings, and not too close to the sea, as it would dampen them and make it hard to fly.** They successfully flew from Crete, but Icarus grew exhilarated by the thrill of flying and began getting careless. Flying too close to the sun god Helios, the wax holding together his wings melted from the heat and he fell to his death, drowning in the sea. The Icarian Sea, where he fell, was named after him and it is said that Heracles (Hercules), who passed by, gave him burial. (Cf. <http://thanasis.com/icarus.htm>)*

Brueghel has seen in this myth of the fall of Icarus a symbol of the destiny of mankind. Called for the highest vocation, mankind is exposed to the danger of the deepest fall. In the painting, this destiny is even more dramatic: all this happens behind our backs, labor and commerce continue without taking notice of the fall of Icarus – the symbol of their own fate. We are so used to the tragedy of the human

spirit that we don't even notice any more in every day's life the falling Icarus. One has to be very attentive to discover the leg of the drowning Icarus.

The New Ark

The division in the Western Church during the 16th century makes this experience even more painful. The fundamental Christian hope could pave a way to heaven – it did not seem to be useful for establishing justice and peace on earth. Christian denominations were at war with each other. Christianity could no longer offer the appropriate framework for the interpretation of the shipwreck within the world. It became a religion among others. Faith was reduced to a kind of religious experience – but the self-awareness and the epistemological, fundamental self-confidence of reason remained.

On the threshold of modernity, the questions of Socrates must be posed again: How do we access knowledge? Where do we find justice? Who are we? Those who promise security and certainty – be it on the religious, philosophical or political level – will be heard. For Martin Luther, faith was not enough – he wanted to attain the certainty of being saved. In his *Discours de la methode*, René Descartes sought a *fundamentum inconcussum* for knowledge; Thomas Hobbes proclaimed the political absolutism as the highest expression of reason; armament and bureaucracy appeared as the most efficient instruments in order to get the experiences of limitation under control. Here began the career of natural science as the new Ark.

Theodore Rabb, a historian of the early European modern age, describes this ascent with a certain irony: “The quick and decisive triumph of this handful of scientists is one of the most amazing episodes in European history ... One is thus driven to the conclusion that the triumph of science was as much a symptom as a cause of the wave of settlement of the late seventeenth century ... What the age wanted to hear was that the world was harmonious and sensible; that human beings were marvellously capable, endowed with an orderly Reason that could solve all problems” (*The Struggle for Stability in Early Modern Europe*, 112–114).

The natural sciences become the hard core of the sciences, mathematics the hard core of the natural sciences, as Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker states when he looks back to the history of science. The term “Faculty of Sciences,” which we use in Fribourg for our faculty of mathematics and natural sciences recalls this age of self-confidence. It came to my ears that some weeks ago, a colleague from this faculty was not sure whether the word “scientific” would be suitable to describe projects of the Faculty of Theology, but also of the Faculty of Law and of Economics and Social Sciences.

Initially, everybody seemed satisfied – finally, there was again a strong foundation under our feet. Only few people realised that the globalisation of the

mathematical methods and of the laws of causality changed mankind more and more into a determined bunch of scientific facts and that, in this way, the so beloved individuality was undermined. Knowledge seemed to be saved and peace assured – even at the price of war, as far as the external relations were concerned, and at the price of submission under the absolute sovereign for the internal aspect. Under the secularised benediction of Descartes and in order to receive this gain, which was very welcome, the *Ego* was ready to bring this sacrifice and to forget, to be accountable to himself and for himself and his freedom.

Nous Sommes Embarqués

Blaise Pascal, the universal genius of the 17th century, belongs to the few people who reflected on the danger the new Ark brings about. Pascal tried to reconcile in his person the scientist, the philosopher and the believing soul. The limits of knowledge appear to him where those limits are transcended – i.e. in the human person. *L'homme passe infiniment l'homme*. All dimensions of the experience of his time wrestle in himself – but they are not reconciled. He is an enthusiastic inventor, who develops a calculator, who analyses conic sections and experiments with vacuum. He is the apologist for the Ark of the Church. *Il y a plaisir d'être dans un vaisseau battu de l'orage, lorsqu'on est assuré qu'il ne périra point. Les persécutions qui travaillent l'Eglise sont de cette nature* (fr. 859 : There is a pleasure in being in a ship beaten about by a storm, when we are sure that it will not founder. The persecutions which harass the Church are of this nature.) He is also the philosophical theologian who knows, that there is no neutrality possible when we are confronted with the decisive questions of life. *Vous êtes embarqué* he says to his dialogue partner when is developing the famous argument of the wager. (fr. 233: Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. You are embarked. Which will you choose then? Let us see. Since you must choose, let us see which interests you least. You have two things to lose, the true and the good; and two things to stake, your reason and your will, your knowledge and your happiness; and your nature has two things to shun, error and misery. Your reason is no more shocked in choosing one rather than the other, since you must of necessity choose. This is one point settled. But your happiness? Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is). (*Picture of Blaise Pascal*). It is the same thinker who is terrified when he looks at his world: *Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m'effraie* (fr. 205-206: When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, the little space which I fill and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant and which know me not, I am frightened and am astonished at being here rather than there; for there is no reason why here rather than there, why now rather than then. Who has put me here? By whose order and direction have this place and time been allotted to me?

Memoria hospitis unius diei praetereuntis. The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me.)

From now on, the shipwreck becomes more and more dramatic and mortal, even murderous. The romanticism of Robinson Crusoe, who is stranded on a desert island, and who on his island imitates the habits of his English homeland, belongs to the beginning of the 18th century (Daniel Defoe published his book for the first time 1719). The sinking of the Titanic in 1912 becomes a symbol of the crisis which has touched the whole civilization and its scientific certainty. Between those two dates, in 1819, appears the *Raft of the Medusa*. (Picture). When Théodore Géricault presented his immense painting (dimensions: 5X7 meters) in 1819 in Paris for the first time, he provoked a scandal. It was outrageous.

“June 1816, the French frigate *Méduse* departed from Rochefort, bound for the Senegalese port of Saint-Louis. She headed a convoy of three other ships: the storeship *Loire*, the brig *Argus* and the corvette *Écho*. Viscount Hugues Duroy de Chaumereys had been appointed captain of the frigate despite having scarcely sailed in 20 years. The frigate’s mission was to accept the British surrender of Senegal. The appointed French governor of Senegal, Colonel Julien-Désiré Schmaltz, and his wife Reine Schmaltz were among the passengers. In an effort to make good time, the *Méduse* overtook the other ships, but due to its speed it drifted 100 miles (161 km) off course. On July 2, it ran aground on a sandbank off the West African coast, near today’s Mauritania. The collision was widely blamed on the incompetence of De Chaumereys, a returned émigré who lacked experience and ability, but had been granted his commission as a result of an act of political preferment. Efforts to free the ship failed, so, on July 5, the frightened passengers and crew started an attempt to travel the 60 miles (97 km) to the African coast in the frigate’s six boats. Although the *Méduse* was carrying 400 people, including 160 crew, there was space for only about 250 in the boats. The remainder of the ship’s complement—at least 146 men and one woman—were piled onto a hastily-built raft, that partially submerged once it was loaded. Seventeen crew members opted to stay aboard the grounded *Méduse*. The captain and crew aboard the other boats intended to tow the raft, but after only a few miles the raft was turned loose. For sustenance the crew of the raft had only a bag of ship’s biscuit (consumed on the first day), two casks of water (lost overboard during fighting) and a few casks of wine. According to the critic Jonathan Miles, the raft carried the survivors “to the frontiers of human experience. Crazed, parched and starved, they slaughtered mutineers, ate their dead companions and killed the weakest.” After 13 days, on July 17, 1816, the raft was rescued by the *Argus* by chance—no particular search effort was made by the French for the raft. By this time only 15 men were still alive; the others had been killed or thrown overboard by their comrades, died of starvation, or thrown themselves into the sea in despair. The incident became a huge public embarrassment for the French monarchy, only recently restored to power after Napoleon’s defeat in 1815.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Raft_of_the_Medusa)

Jean-Baptiste Henri Savigny, the medical doctor of the Medusa, who survived the atrocious experience, wrote: “We could not believe that we were lost until the boats had disappeared. But then we felt into a deep despair.”

“ .. *there is no longer any land!*”

And what would have happened, if the hope for knowledge and justice, for an unconditional quality of the *Ego* had been a big mistake and an illusion? During the 19th century, the claim for absoluteness fights its ultimate battles – from the absolute self-consciousness of the spirit in Hegel’s philosophy to the absolute scientific formula of the world and the so called claim for the absoluteness of Christianity. At the same time, those who do not close their eyes to the limits of knowledge start to doubt. Without mercy – as usual – Friedrich Nietzsche draws the conclusions in his book *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. “*Wir haben das Land verlassen und sind zu Schiff gegangen! Wir haben die Brücke hinter uns, — mehr noch, wir haben das Land hinter uns abgebrochen! Nun, Schiffelein! sieh’ dich vor! Neben dir liegt der Ozean, es ist wahr, er brüllt nicht immer, und mitunter liegt er da, wie Seide und Gold und Träumerei der Güte. Aber es kommen Stunden, wo du erkennen wirst, dass er unendlich ist und dass es nichts Furchtbareres gibt, als Unendlichkeit. Oh des armen Vogels, der sich frei gefühlt hat und nun an die Wände dieses Käfigs stößt! Wehe, wenn das Land-Heimweh dich befällt, als ob dort mehr Freiheit gewesen wäre, — und es gibt kein ‚Land‘ mehr!*” (Drittes Buch, 124)

(*In the horizon of the infinite.*— We have left the land and have embarked! We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed; we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lays spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any “land”!)

For Nietzsche “shipwreck” is, in a certain sense, the extradition of the finite reality to the infiniteness. The lost land is the order of the world which was safeguarded or secured by metaphysics. The philosopher anticipates what the natural sciences will have to catch up in a long mourning: Quantum physics cannot honor or meet the reliability which Newton’s mechanics had promised. And also the expression “God does not throw dice” shows, how concerned Einstein was about the loss of a determinate order of the world – a loss which through his own discoveries was no longer provisional, but which could be considered as definitive. The collapse of the great political ideologies of the 19th and 20th century in East and West destroyed also in this domain the hope that progress and public order would be something like natural law.

Consequently, the infiniteness of the finite reality has been replaced by the radical finiteness of finite reality. In the view of the postmodern thinker Gianni Vattimo we have to do without the ultimate support of ontological stability. Being has become weak or faint. To this experience corresponds a weak reason (*pensiero debole*). We are beginning to become perfect nihilists – which means according to Vattimo: humanity is rolling from the center into an unknown X. Being is reduced to its exchange value. Expressions such as “The end of progress,” “The end of history,” “The end of the subject” become familiar. Those who still want to sell their books don’t speak yet about the end of knowledge and those who want to win the election campaign would not dare to speak about the end of justice. At the very end, it looks like shipwreck *without* spectators: the expression reveals its macabre sound if we think about a possible ecological catastrophe, which will no longer have any disinterested spectators. It becomes popular to speak about the Apocalypse.

Shipwreck all along the line?

Could this be the balance and the result of our voyage of exploration? Those who have dreamt about one unique formula for the world would answer: yes! Those who remember Socrates and his irony, which was not at all nihilistic, could eventually develop more hopeful perspectives. Is there a *deuteros plous* – another way to knowledge, to justice and to ourselves which is not totalitarian, which does not promise a false infiniteness? What do this question and its challenge mean for our purpose: the task and the future of a Christian university?

In the line of what I have tried to develop in this more historical (and metaphoric) survey, I could say: our main task is to indicate a *deuteros plous for a knowledge based society*, which is always exposed to the danger of forgetting the limits of its own capacities.

“I have (therefore) found it necessary to deny *knowledge*, in order to make room *for faith*. The dogmatism of metaphysics, that is, the preconception that it is possible to make headway in metaphysics with-out a previous criticism of pure reason, is the source of all that unbelief, always very dogmatic, which wars against morality.” – we all know the famous phrase of Immanuel Kant in the Foreword of the second edition of his Critique of Pure Reason. The translation seems to suggest an opposition between reason and faith. “To deny knowledge” – the German text says: *das Wissen aufheben*. The word *aufheben* has rich connotations such as: to put upright, to keep carefully. Kant wanted to give a very certain foundation to scientific knowledge through the application of a rigorous methodology, based on systematically established experience but also limited to the objects which can appear to the same experience. This knowledge leaves a certain place open for faith – the domain of morality, for the search of sustainable happiness, of freedom which constitutes the basis for a just order and a life without war.

Without adopting Kant's solution, we can nevertheless say that the problem of the relation between faith and reason is the heritage left to our intellectual formation by the Enlightenment. But Kant is situated at the end of a long tradition which requested freedom for reason and faith with regard to the scientific requirements of their *respective* development. The medieval understanding of theology as *fides quaerens intellectum* – *fides in statu scientiae* – claimed the same freedom as Kant's search for better established sciences without dogmatism. But the scientific knowledge which Kant wants to bring about is not a mere reproduction or an image of the world; his affirmations are not objective representations of reality: they only develop the models of a rational comprehension of this reality with the help of the categories of reason. In this way, Kant establishes the foundations of what we call today *knowledge based society*.

A Dominican house of studies, a university – *universitas scientiarum* – with a Christian background has to remind, within this society, that this knowledge is limited – that this ark of knowledge would necessary be shipwrecked without this reminder.

The global system of university training is dominated by the aim of the construction of a knowledge based society; it is, e.g., also the ideal of the actual European university organization according to the Bologna agreements. Such as capital and labor, knowledge is at the service of the process of technical production and integrated in the exchanges of the global market. The modern university as a place of formation should – according to this ideal – put its curricula, organization and finance at the service of this society of knowledge. Its characteristics are among others:

1. This society is based on new technologies of information and communication and on their use in the management of the institution.
2. The production of knowledge is considered as the most important cause of economic growth. It contributes – through costly “first class” technologies – to the production of what this society needs for its welfare in medical care, mobility, energy but also in the domain of telecommunication, banking and business services.
3. This requires life-long-learning given the rapid and permanent change and growing of knowledge – a lifetime experience is no longer considered to be valuable knowledge. The Kantian ideal of humanization is identified with the demand to improve theoretical and practical skills in confrontation with the growing number of competitors on the market of employment.

4. The knowledge based society requires the will and the intensive capacity of changing and planning, competent logistics and the management of research – again with a specific attention to the position on the market.

One could be tempted to ask: is there any place for real innovation, for creative reproduction of knowledge and, even more, for faith, for a Christian inspired philosophical formation, for theological faculties, but even for other disciplines of the humanities within this new management of rationality? We should not feel forced to fight a permanent battle of retreat. The encyclical *Fides et Ratio* reminds us that the dialogue of faith and reason should be a guarantee of the mind's capacity to be open for larger and other horizons beyond the fragmentation of knowledge in modern society: to pass from *phenomenon* to *foundation*.³ It is important to establish a scientific knowledge which does not reduce "reason to merely accessory functions, with no real passion for the search for truth."⁴

If we want to participate in this debate about truth, we have to concentrate critically on the notion of knowledge based society. Knowledge should not be reduced to information or to practical know-how in matters of economic management and new technologies. We have to develop a rationality which has a link to the concrete world and the social acting of persons, their expectations and even more, their deceptions with regard to the promises of globalised knowledge. The experience of deregulation of the structures, which have supported up to now social life (beliefs, norms and traditions, practically acquired knowledge and forms of communication), calls for the

³ The encyclical speaks about "the need for a philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical* range, capable, that is, of transcending empirical data in order to attain something absolute, ultimate and foundational in its search for truth. This requirement is implicit in sapiential and analytical knowledge alike; and in particular, it is a requirement for knowing the moral good, which has its ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good, God himself. Here, I do not mean to speak of metaphysics in the sense of a specific school or a particular historical current of thought. I want only to state that reality and truth do transcend the factual and the empirical, and to vindicate the human being's capacity to know this transcendent and metaphysical dimension in a way that is true and certain, albeit imperfect and analogical. In this sense, metaphysics should not be seen as an alternative to anthropology, since it is metaphysics which makes it possible to ground the concept of personal dignity in virtue of their spiritual nature. In a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry. Wherever men and women discover a call to the absolute and transcendent, the metaphysical dimension of reality opens up before them: in truth, in beauty, in moral values, in other persons, in being itself, in God. We face a great challenge at the end of this millennium to move from *phenomenon* to *foundation*, a step as necessary as it is urgent. We cannot stop short at experience alone; even if experience does reveal the human being's interiority and spirituality, speculative thinking must penetrate to the spiritual core and the ground from which it rises. Therefore, a philosophy which shuns metaphysics would be radically unsuited to the task of mediation in the understanding of Revelation." (*Fides et Ratio* 83)

⁴ *Fides et Ratio* 81: *ne humana ratio in usum dumtaxat alicuius instrumenti reducat, omni vero veritatis inquirendae studio sublato.*

constitution of new forms of life, which leave again space for models of inter-personal understanding as well as for questioning the dominating system of knowledge, which in principle wants to be universally valuable and non-temporal. A knowledge based society needs institutions which help persons to integrate the experiences of non-knowing, the experiences of the risk which is contained in scientific experimentation and the simple protest of the people who want to confess their temporality and to acknowledge their limits.

Kant had already reminded us that in each act of knowing the subject is involved with the finite conditions of knowledge (i.e., the categories of time and space). And the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig rediscovers the subject through the insight that the world cannot totally become the object of our knowledge. "I, just as I am dust and ash, I, the common, private subject, I, name and surname, I am still there." I am there, we are there: we think, we do research, we teach, we share what we have discovered. We can mistrust this experience, but we are not forced to do it. We are the only ones who are able to delete or cross out ourselves – do we dare and are we willing to trust the capacity of reason to know the truth and to communicate it to the human community? This was also the plea made in the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. This is really the *deuteroplous* given to those who have gone through the crisis of modernity and who refuse to bow before the idols of skepticism or before the icons of total knowledge.

To know all things would be totalitarian – it would eliminate freedom, make disappear the person as a human being. To know the limits of knowledge means to allow new things, new insights to appear beyond those limits: the productive coincidence, the other who demands my presence (Emmanuel Levinas), the challenge of my "Lebenswelt" to which I am called to respond. For the sociologist Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy this relation to the other and to the world is no longer determined by the Cartesian *Cogito*. He describes this new, basic relation as: *respondeo, etsi mutabor*. I answer and I assume responsibility – even if I will be changed through this commitment.

We could take this advice and orient our intellectual mission towards the responsibility which all sciences have to assume today together. In our universities, representatives of the natural sciences who recognize the limits and the social implications of their scientific activities can collaborate with sociologists, lawyers, economists, philosophers and theologians in order to deal with the preoccupying questions concerning the future of humanity; in our houses of study and faculties we should learn to deal in a multidisciplinary way with:

- questions of power and justice, the future of democracy and the way of integrating minorities

- questions related to bio-ethics and ecology
- questions of sustainable peace in the diversity of cultures and religious traditions
- questions of justice within an economy dominated by the violent mechanisms of profit-seeking and rivalry
- questions of rationality of faith versus fundamentalism
- questions of credibility of religious practice
- questions of respect for the legitimate autonomy of knowledge and the freedom of conscience.

Again, Descartes proclaimed with his *cogito ergo sum* the program of reflexive autonomy and self-assurance, which became the basis of a dominating attitude towards the world as the object of knowledge. The Russian philosopher Vladimir Solov'ev, Nietzsche's contemporary, proposes to add at least this: *I am, because my mother has given me birth.*

Today, sciences don't want to dominate any longer– as if their capacities had no limits and as if their methods were applied without any prejudice. Like Socrates, we can continue to pose questions, to explore and to invest the resources of sense, to insist on the *logos*-character of reality and on our possibilities to know the truth. But we have to realize that we are always thrown back to the beginnings of understanding (Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *zurückgeworfen auf die Anfänge des Verstehens*) – and that we have to respect the limits of understanding and knowledge. What is important: the so oft- forgotten and poor self – the unique person of the student, the brother and colleague – and also the political and social responsibility of our teaching and research are at the center of our attention.

Nous sommes embarqués – yes, but our places of intellectual commitment should not become the Raft of Medusa, where everybody struggles to survive. They should rather become places of hope – in spite of bigger or smaller inundations or even shipwrecks; places where the rainbow is seen in the clouds as God's sign of covenant with every living creature.

Preachers: *Amatores Sapientiae*

Let me finish with a plea for a good basic philosophical training – taking in consideration the reciprocal and circular relationship between philosophy and theology. “Theology needs philosophy as a partner of dialogue in order to confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims” (*Fides et Ratio* 77) – a truth immersed in time and history, with a human face – Jesus Christ and which is said and proclaimed in an understandable language.

Not every brother who studies philosophy is willing or is called to become a professional philosopher. But this does not mean that philosophy has only to be considered as a function of theology. The encyclical affirms clearly the autonomy of philosophical thinking. But at the same time, it is said that philosophy has to tackle questions which are difficult to resolve if the data of Revelation are ignored (Cf. 76). There are specific contributions of faith to philosophical thinking. One can mention among others the notion of person as a spiritual being, the importance of history as event (Cf. 76). But some questions remain – also among our students in formation: what do we really mean by philosophy? What is the importance of philosophy? What do we really learn through philosophy? I would like to answer briefly those questions with the help of some thoughts – may be they are just motivations – formulated by Josef Pieper in his book *Was heisst philosophieren?*

1. Philosophy is useless – it cannot be used or applied immediately in a world, in which everything is ordered according to practical concerns. It's the attitude of wonder – which children still can have, which inspires poets and lovers. It's the expression of freedom towards reality without calculating the usefulness and the practical application of thinking. Learning and teaching philosophy has first of all to do with *theorein*, contemplation – looking at things, receiving reality in its being, without the primary intention to change it. In spite of Descartes, the philosopher does not consider himself as *maître et possesseur de la nature*, in spite of Marx, he continues to be an interpreter of reality, who wants to understand and not just to change the world.

2. In philosophy, we become aware of our deepest relation to the world in which we live: it is not merely a relation of work and production. We can know reality as it is – in its truth. We learn that our presence to the world in its totality is a “spiritual” one, and that, through this presence to the world – and to the others – we become also present to ourselves as persons. In this sense, philosophy has to be epistemology and anthropology at once – theory of knowledge and spirituality, i.e. doctrine of man in its concrete relation to the whole of reality.

3. In philosophy we learn to ask radical questions. What is this *finally*? *Quomodo sit verum quod dicitur*? The philosopher is not the person who has last answers, but he or she who dares to deal with ultimate questions. Traditional philosophy has seen in *thaumadsein*, astonishment, wonder, Erstaunen, mirari, the basic impulse for philosophy, its very permanent origin. Modern philosophy has changed this. At its beginning has been put the methodological doubt! The inner direction of the astonishment is not to produce doubt, but to awaken the insight that being is not understandable and mysterious – that being in itself is a mystery – not darkness, but a light, inexhaustible, unlimited. To be astonished means: not to know, not to

understand – but in the sense, that there is the acting desire to know. There seems to be a relation between astonishment and joy. Philosophy as a contribution to the joy of discovering what is not known yet, what is new, never heard and seen ... There is an intimate relation between philosophy based on astonishment and hope, which is basically linked with our existence as pilgrims, *viatores*. Philosophical thinking has the structure of hope! Philosophical questions are never definitively answered. Philosophy is, as a matter of fact, the quest for wisdom. Philosophers are *amatores sapientiae*. But who is really wise and who owns wisdom as its own possession? Who knows finally the essence of reality? The wisdom which we acquire in this loving quest for truth is always something which we receive as a loan. It is at the very end the wisdom, which only God possesses – since He is himself origin and ultimate aim of all reality. This means for the philosophical thinking, that it accepts the fundamental distinction between God and the world and the conviction, that philosophy cannot be conceived as a system, which is closed in itself as if it were the complete explanation of the world, the golden formula! And yet: *Illud modicum quod ex ea habetur, praeponderat omnibus quae per alias scientias cognoscuntur* (Thomas, In *Metaphysicam* 1, 3).

4. A philosophy which is really alive, has to be developed as the counterpoint – not as the opposite – to Christian theology, to the radical and existential questions linked with Christian revelation. Revealed truth makes philosophy more difficult, more complicated, because it forbids to escape into easy solutions e.g. regarding the understanding of the human person, the problem of evil and justice. It obliges the philosopher to oppose to those options which offer quick answers to the problems in link with history, science and technology, human acting. It forbids the flirt with nihilism in the guise of aesthetics.

In our formation we do not just prepare philosophers – we prepare brothers to become preachers of the Word of God, who are able to arrive at a personal critical judgement about the world in which they live, to which they are sent. In II-II q 45 a 2 Saint Thomas points out, that wisdom involves *rectitudo iudicii*. But this is not just the right use of reason. It is realised *per connaturalitatem quandam ad ea de quibus iam est iudicandum*. The philosophical knowledge should, for that reason, not just be abstract – it should be a knowledge linked with a form of life, of community in the quest for the truth: *in dulcedine societatis quaerere veritatem* (Saint Albert).

Why do we study philosophy and why do we have to prepare philosophers? Not just for the sake of theology – although the arguments which Saint Thomas uses in Boetii de Trinitate, Proem., q. II, a.3 remains valuable. (*Illi qui utuntur philosophicis documentis in sacra Scriptura redigendo in obsequium fidei, non miscent aquam vino, sed convertunt aquam in vinum*).

We study philosophy in order to learn how to understand ourselves in a world marked by the problems of modernity – by its global social, economic, political and religious consequences. Those problems show a progressive rationalisation, which partly has the positive effect of liberating people from prejudices, anxieties, superstition, non-questioned domination by powers. It has set free new possibilities and applications of science in technology, medicine, education and communication. But there are questions to be answered! Has modernity really given an answer to the need for a new form of life (*Lebensform*) – after the loss of confidence in the continuity of life and its possibilities within a given divine order of things? Everything can be submitted to radical criticism. This is a move without end, without *telos*. But did the only light of reason really enlighten the world and eliminate all forms of irrationality? Why are we not already living in Utopia? Why must the so called progress be bought at the price of so many sufferings of innocent victims? Or should we replace ethics just by a theory of communication, which explores the formal conditions and necessary procedures for an endless discourse (Jürgen Habermas)? Can we stick to linguistic analysis as if the language we use really the clear mirror of reason? Must we not rather go back to the exploration of the historical conditions of our understanding and get to know the *loci*, *topoi*, in and through which our understanding, the rationality of our living together with different cultures and religions, is shaped? Yes, we are thrown back to the beginnings of understanding (D. Bonhoeffer) in order to learn the sense of basic epistemological realities such like history, experience, communication. We have to deal with the *problem of history*, with the secular eschatological visions and their development of power; with the *problem of language*, i.e. the problem of interpretation (hermeneutics) and with new forms of communication and the hidden lies in the domain of the all present media; with the *problem of aesthetics* and the creation of an illusionary and virtual world, in which we can live in a permanent ‘as if all is beautiful, good and true’, with questions concerning the *plurality* of the forms of religious commitment

All this comes to the basic question: how do we live together in freedom, how can we learn to understand and accept the other, how do we act in a responsible way in order to prepare a common future? It seems to me that our teaching of philosophy (history of ancient and modern philosophy, ethics and anthropology, epistemology, philosophy of language and hermeneutics, philosophy of religion) has to prepare our brothers to perceive the Christian offer of a form of life as an answer to the questions I have formulated – to take the risk to expose this answer in an arguing way to the requirements of reason and its quest for truth.

Fides et Ratio: the problem is given back to us. *Philosophia ancilla theologiae*? “The term can scarcely be used today, given the principle of autonomy to which we have referred, but it has served throughout history to indicate the necessity of the link

between the two sciences and the impossibility of their separation.” (*Fides et Ratio*, 77). Rationality is the inner dimension of faith, as its permanent and sometimes uncomfortable company, as its moment of inner restlessness.

We do well to listen to Meister Eckhart in his Exposition on the Gospel of Saint John, where he says: “learn to look more carefully and attentively, and if you can, join reason and faith. Its presumptuous and an expression of temerity if you only want to believe when you have understood. But on the other side it is also a sign of laziness and carelessness if you do not investigate what you believe with the help of natural reasons and comparisons, especially because all creatures has at least a trace of the creator and more general the effect of his cause.” (*Diligentius intueri et fidem si poteris rationemque coniungere. Sicut enim praesumptionis est et temeritatis nolle credere, nisi intellexeris, sic ignaviae est et desidiosum quod fide credis, rationibus naturalibus et similitudinibus non investigare, praesertim cum omnis creatura ad minus sit vestigium creatoris et effectus universaliter suae causae.*)

