

Postmodernity and Theology

By

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I. DEFINITIONS

(a) What is Modern? What is Postmodern?

Postmodernity is a habit of thinking coming after the habit of thinking of modernity. The five pillars of modernity are: confidence in science-based technology, the sovereignty of nation-states, bureaucratic nationalism, profit maximization and the belief in steady progress. Modernity's legitimators are Fichte, Hegel, the rightist Hegelians (Bauer) and the leftists Hegelians (Marx). Their point of departure is rational consciousness as a possibility; their aim and purpose is the implementation of rationality and rational constructs within all the domains of life. Reason or Logos is the centre. Its dominion ought to cover the totality of life. Nature outside us must be conquered, nature within us must be disciplined. In the medium of rationality we are present to ourselves, and to the logic of history in which the divine logos is revealed.

Postmodernity inaugurates a paradigm shift in that it questions the unambiguous univocity of reason, and tries to get rid of a standardized logos and its authoritarian, if not totalitarian rule. Postmodernity engages in a fight against logocentrism, which has to be dismantled, unmade, and deconstructed.

The Coryphaeus of postmodernity is Nietzsche. The neo-Nietzschean school lists names such as Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard, and Richard Rorty. Their common aim is to show that human reason is rooted in the senses, and that cut off from sensuous

life reason is only able to act as a tyrant, hostile to the revelatory power of sense-impulses. Each of these authors share Nietzsche's anti-intellectualism, as it comes to the fore in the latter's attack on platonism: "The true world! An idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating! An idea which has become useless and superfluous-consequently, a refuted idea: let us abolish it!" In postmodernity sensual imagination and freewheeling creativity are to replace rational conduct. Nature within ourselves ought to be freed from the yoke of oppressive calculation. A plurality of interpretations, to be repeated again and again ought to supersede the monopoly of one standard world-view. Instead of clarity we should opt for a lucid ambiguity to live by. Instead of concepts we should use metaphors. Tired of substantial forms and linear finalities, we should content ourselves with momentary configurations and playful enjoyment of actual now successions. The period of the great, encompassing stories and ideologies has come to a close. We are only left with micro-stories to share with each other. Their multiplicity cannot be reduced to oneness. Perspectivism, difference and deviance are much more attractive than just living under the umbrella of the one monad. Monotheism is experienced as monotontheism. Polytheism sets the new agenda.

This paradigm shift comes to bear on the five pillars of modernity, which are deprived now of their coopting power. The science-based technology is scattered now, and qualified as a proliferation of mostly immaterial techniques (micro-chips, computers, communication through satellites and electronics). Modernity's heavy industry plants are being replaced by smaller factories spread over various places, and communicating with each other through faxes and databanks. Sovereign nations are invaded by multinationals. Bureaucratic rationalism is undergoing stratified transformations through the use of computer designs which try out alternative planning. Profit maximization is being combined with creativity and the improvement of human relations. Belief in steady progress is getting diversified and tempered by functional pragmatism. Free market is no longer globally planned, but is really given the freedom to experiment with competition. These transformations of the five pillars of modernity have been described already a long time ago by Alvin Tofler in his work: "The Third Wave", whereas Jean-Francois Lyotard has given the philosophical underpinning of it in his book "The Postmodern Condition": Artistic creativity and the inventiveness of high tech and electronics go hand in hand.

As far as Derrida and Foucault are concerned, they rather continue their destructive work of the unmaking of modernity's logocentrism. They raise this deconstructionism to the heights of an anti-metaphysics that still keeps up a conversation with metaphysics. Their refusal to reduce the many to the all-absorbing one is still metaphysics, be it in the mode of anti-metaphysics: just as Heidegger's battle against onto-theology was waged in order to save the meaning of existence as a whole (*Dasein*).

(b) Theology: Modern Theology, Post-modern Theology

According to Aquinas the specific subject of theology is either God or the created things regarded under the aspect of their relation to God. Theology deals with God's being and with the other beings seen in the light of God's being. This definition sounds rather Aristotelian, in as far as every scientific study deals with a specific entity and with the way other things are tied to this specific entity. But it goes beyond Aristotle in that it presupposes that God's being and the way this one being transpires in all the rest, is only known to us through infused wisdom. Only God's light illuminating our intellect makes us understand, worship, and articulate God and all that refers to Him. The vision which makes us see the one underneath and within the manyness, is a vision of grace, sustained by the fullness of God's mystery.

As far as modernity holds on to rational consciousness, its proper definition of theology is going to be changed. This can be seen on two levels, that of dogmatic theology and that of philosophical theology. Dogmatic theology from now on wants to compete with modernity's scientificity and ordered classifications. This results in systematic theologies which either make use of modern philosophies or try to refine the syllogisms of scholastic philosophy. In both cases God's fulfilling mystery bats the retreat, recedes and shrinks. Its empty place is occupied now by rational understanding the reasoning. In philosophical theologies or doctrine of God, the same rationalism comes to the fore, and perhaps still more so. An example in case is Leibniz's theodocce which in the name of reason attempts to exonerate God from any responsibility for the existence of evil in the world. The other example is Hegel in whose philosophy of history God's providence coincides with the logic of the progressive deployment of civilization, inspite of the victims of war.

To postmodernists, now, this rational approach to life and to the understanding of God is a dead alley. The younger generation will not easily be stirred by the story of the all-powerful God, creator of heaven and earth, who governs everything according to the Leibnizean and Hegelian precedence of the power of the whole over the particular. How could they love a God who has sold his soul to the big institutions of power in this world and who has become apathetic toward the particular destiny of people in their daily life circumstances. However much this God calls himself Father, he is in no way different from a Moloch who feeds on the blood of his children. No, no one who wants life can feel a nostalgia for such a God. Since God, for cultural reasons in modernity, has been connected to the dominating grip of the whole, so that individuals experience him as the repressor of their life force, his name can no longer lead to an ecstasy which makes people dance and sing. The *mono*-theistic God, who grounds the monotonous atmpsphee of murderous totalities, must die. He may not rise again; otherwise there will be no place for a new search which would allow individuals to affirm their uniqueness in the face of a

totally regulated world. Postmodern theology will be fashioned under the sign of the self-affirmation of the subject who defends this "differential uniqueness" against the centripetal pull of the all-determining whole.

This option for a heretical, heterogeneous standpoint is already to be found in the Nietzschean theory of interpretation. In his footsteps, the postmodern person wants to liberate him – or herself from the boring emptiness bequeathed her by cultural monotheism. Hence, the postmodernist is not satisfied with schemes of solutions which are pre-programmed; on the contrary he or she remains faithful to the vital need to create one's own beautiful image of the world which makes existence more or less bearable. Without her own differential interpretation, the postmodern person feels herself subjected to the blind games of anonymous powers. But once the power of the "will to life" and creative imagination are released in her, she comes to view the world, or at least certain parts of it, through new eyes. The world of will and representation is then inhabited by a multitude of gods and goddesses who look with benevolence upon the person.

II. Postmodern Theologians

A. Overview

Derrida and Foucault wrote in the seventies. Their reception by theologians took place in the eighties. Dependent on this French school there are, in my opinion, only three theologians who deserve the name of postmodern theologians in the strict sense: Don Cupitt, lecturer in the Philosophy of Religion in Cambridge (Great Britain), Mark Taylor, professor of Religion at Williams College, Massachusetts USA, and David Tracy, professor of Foundational Theology at the University of Chicago USA.¹

All three deal with the God-problem in the area of cultural decentralization. They want to save the disperse many and the deviant against the centripetal pull of the monistic one. Their method is that of philosophical theology.

But besides these three, there are a lot of other authors who are postmodern by instinct or who at least claim to be so. Their reception of postmodernity is rather selective, and – in application to church problems – after all arbitrary. This is the case for Harvey Cox's book *"Religion in the Secular City"* (1984) in which he focuses on new, often chaotic religious movements like the televangelists in the US and the liberationist base communities in Latin America – movements which cannot be brought in line with modernity's rationalism, but which have nothing in common. The same selective use of postmodernity is also true for Hans Küng,

¹See DON CUPITT, *Life Lines* (1986), *The Long-Legged Fly* (1987); MARK TAYLOR, *Deconstructing Theology* (1982), *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (1984); DAVID TRACY, *Plurality and Ambiguity* (1987).

Theology for the Third Millennium. For him the postmodern paradigm for the church is radical pluralism, ecumenical dialogue, and the dialogue among religions. The problems Küng tackles are serious, but in my view not typically postmodern, or at least not reflecting the postmodern mind. Postmodern, without using the name, are rather the authors who have an ecological and cosmic concern, like Matthew Fox (*Original Blessing*) and Fitj Capra (*Zen and the New Quantum Physics*), in as far as they reject a mechanistic cosmology. And also Jacques Pohier's "God in Fragments", which is a critique of the monolythic authoritarian God. Subjects related to postmodernity, though not in a direct way, are feminist theologies and theologies of inculturation.

B. Mark Taylor's theory of postmodernity

As an example in case of a typically postmodern Theology I would like to present Mark Taylor's *Erring*.

This author sets himself the task to communicate what theological imagination is about in a culture that has grown hostile against an authoritarian God. His model is Jacques Derrida who drew his inspiration from Nietzsche, the *Kabbala*, and French post-structuralism. Derrida is of Jewish descent. Hence his interest in the life-world of the Book (the bible) –in the accumulated experiences it contains–, in the midrashim and comments added to the text in the processes of interpretation.

(a) *deconstructionism: death of the proto-author.*

The starting point, thus, is the reception of the book, as an open-ended event. This reception has never come to an end; for each generation is adding its own perspectival reading to the decodification of the text. But Derrida and Taylor not only examine how scripture (the book, the text) relates to rewriting/reinterpretation and vice-versa. They also try to expand this model to a theoretical construct to understand contemporary culture and religiosity. Culture as a whole is looked at in the light of the continuous migration of wandering texts – texts and meanings which detach themselves from a given context in order to insert themselves into new contexts (in passing: postmodernity was first used in architecture, where it pointed to the use of composite styles). In their eyes this 'construct' is valid. We are living in a migration culture, characterized by the splitting up of things that formerly used to be united – into new specialties, differentiations, and fragments. Postmodern life is caught up in an ongoing process of change, becoming, and in the emergence of unexpectedly new perspectives: a dance of novelty. Each generation, indeed each person, uses her own schemes of looking at things. There is no longer any coercion to let oneself be determined by the decodation method used by antecedent generations. Why should the 'ancestors' be normative since, on closer inspection, their decodation norms also amount to just being interpretations of something. Cultural life consists of interpretations of interpretations.

In this light Derrida and Taylor proclaim the death of the primordial authoritative author. Authority dies with the author. More drastically: the God-author whom earlier generations had worshipped as the fountain-head inspirator and the unquestionable begin author(ity) and norm of the holy book is dead (see also Nietzsche: God is dead). Postmodern perspectivism maintains that the alleged proto-author of the allegedly normative text has expired with the passing of the years. Were he to stand up to claim his rights of founding-father, one would have to murder him. French structuralism relativizes the rights of authorship. It only believes in the value of the text, liberated from the author's claim to ownership and adequate interpretation. The author being dead, we are only left with the structure of the text, to be decoded again and again. The new time consciousness no longer allows for permanent authoritative meaning. Each author is just a link in the chain of the flow of interpretations.

The results are: relativism, pluralism, and discontinuity with the past. Relativism because a person's dependence on an extant model can never be total. The use one makes of a corpus of texts is always selective, colored by our momentary experiences: No text can be read twice in the same manner (Heraclitus *redevivus*). Moreover, each person makes a selective use of various texts at once. For the postmodern person is essentially pluralistic, inhabited by various, often contradictory moods and choices at the same time. This free-floating attitude creates a discontinuity with the past in which it was still believed that to specific words corresponded a particular meaning. For postmodernists the meaning of the words changes along with their reception by persons with a multifaceted soul. Serious doubts arise as to whether there exists a *first signified* (meaning) to which the *signifiers* (words) unvariedly refer. For even the signified thing appears to be the result of names given to them. But knowledge is not only name-giving. We find ourselves in a labyrinth of words that refer the one to the other and which fail to serve as pointers to reality in itself. Reality has gone, we are only left with a mirror palace of self-referring appearances – appearances which are empty, shallow and nonetheless enigmatically beautiful.

(c) *end of great stories*

This a-substantial view on the world has tremendous implications for theology and the God-talk. It ushers in the end of the great macro-stories concerning world and history.² It means the end of history as a straightforward finality "There is no straightforward logos, there are only hieroglyphs",³ enigmatic signs, fooling us. The great meta-stories designed to enrapture and to motivate people for engaging in a common struggle and practice -the Jewish exodus story, the proclamation of the kingdom of

²See also Fijimuro, *The End of History*, 1991.

³MARK TAYLOR, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, 1984, p. 97.

God, the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, the emancipatory ideals of the Enlightenment period – threaten to become insignificant. Not only have they lost their universally binding inspiration, they also begin to be looked at with suspicion: meta-stories may well serve to legitimate power-positions in society. Therefore postmodernists seek to debunk and to deconstruct the meta-stories, so as to lay bare their ill-founded and captivating power. In their eyes narratives can only exist in the form of fragmental, perspective small stories or micro-stories: short novels, biographical statements, momentarily communicated impressions: hieroglyphs scribbled off today in order to be rescribbled tomorrow. Postmodernity inaugurates a post-epic era. The new computerized society estimates it can do without root-or master-narrative. Fixed authority of tradition is replaced now by the ever changing play of new creations, new visions, new comments, and new metaphors related to the unexpected.

c) *difference and becoming, dissimulation*

According to Taylor there is no way back to the affirmation of the authority of the first author of the book. The book of revelation has been scattered for ever and ever. The only thing we can do is to gather the fragments and to tentatively try to reconstruct the original meaning, which can only reach us in the way of absence. This is one of the basic ideas of *kabbala*. It is in this sense also that Taylor interprets the meaning of Christ's incarnation: God who allows himself to be scattered into the world. Christ is the *logos spermatikos*, the dissiminated *logos*. The original World in the order of time – *logos* – is to be compared to the seed that, once sown, gives rise to a new organism elsewhere. In this new organism the origin only shows itself in the way of disappearing: "The word appears only by disappearing. This unstoppable interplay shows that the *logos* is always *logos spermatikos*, endlessly propagated by dissimulation. Dissimulation inscribes the way to the eternal recurrence of the divine milieu of the free play of marks and traces. To dissiminate is to scatter abroad, as in sowing seed. By extension dissimulation refers to the action of dispersing, diffusing, broadcasting, spreading, scattering, diffusion, publication".⁴ Besides the parable of the sower, also the eucharist is seen as an act of scattering, in which the Son of God gives up his heavenly centered life. Bread and wine to be distributed symbolize the freely accepted death of God as *arche*, primordial beginning and the allowance of the diffusion into sacred alterity, without ending. Christ's blood flows out, never to return to Himself. This is what divine *kenosis* means. The non-return of the blood to Christ paradoxically expresses his presence in the mode of absence. Don Cupitt is saying more or less the same thing: "The work of Christ was to transfer divinity from Heaven to the heart. In Christ the old objectified power-God was humanized, broken up, dispersed and poured-out as Spirit in each human heart, to be known under a

⁴*Ibidem*, p. 119. Cf. J. DERRIDA, *Dissimulation*, 1968, pp. 92-93; 127-153.

different name in each human heart, to be known under a different name in each."⁵ The point, however, is that in this dispersal the person begins to behave like a wandering Jew: he begins to err; he becomes heretical and deviant and embarks on a nomadic wandering.

(d) *disenchantment and laughter*

According to Taylor postmodern nomadic erring is a joyous journey, the joy flowing from the discovery of the enigmatic beauty of each ambiguous now-moment: "Impermanence can actually liberate. Shifty vagrants who err endlessly do not feel the need to deprive the world of its disturbing and enigmatic character. Certainty is the reign of death, uncertainty the valley of life. When it no longer seems necessary to reduce manyness to oneness and to translate the equivocal as univocal and to make eternal delight in the enigmatic/Beauty of each beautiful enigma. In the undecidable interplay of signifiers, enigmatic form is living form, like life, an iridescence, an invitation to dance: a temptation, or irritation. No satisfying solutions, nothing to rest in, nothing to weigh us down."⁶

This text can, at a first glance, be read as the expression of mystical jubilation because of the beauty of the world one is allowed to live in. Yet, as all things in postmodernity this text is fraught with ambivalence. World is understood here not as the givenness of nature – with its typhoons and volcanic eruptions. World typically means our human construct of a world, made up of language and interpretation. It is in this world of interpretation that the joyous erring takes place. But to realize this, necessary leads to the experience of a disenchanted laughter.

Indeed, postmodernism is to a certain extent a retrieval of 14th century nominalism, which for the first time discovered that our concepts are not just copying nature in its givenness. Our concepts are designed to linguistically organize our human, humanized world. We must content ourselves with this linguistic construct – it is our house to live in – and give up the illusion that this construct is grounded in a reality prior to it. We are just living in the house of language, and that is both our prison and paradise, our labyrinth to wander in. For those who are used to have a realistic approach to the world, this discovery must end up in disenchantment, but also in bursts of laughter; because as a realist one had been fooling oneself that long.

A good introduction to the life-world of neo-nominalism is Umberto Eco's novel: "The Name of the Rose." Here, too, the plot is situated in the world of scribes and texts, and the library functions as a labyrinth of

⁵DON CUPITT, *Radicals and the Future of the Church*, 1989, p. 17.

⁶MARK TAYLOR, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, 1984, pp. 176-177. With reference to NORMAN BROWN, *Love's Body*, 1968, p. 246 and MICHAEL HARR, *Nietzsche and Metaphysical Language*, in D. ALLISON, *The New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation*, 1979, p. 7.

wisdom. William Baskerville, the nominalist english franciscan asks himself the question whether our words (signifies) are grounded in an existing reality that precedes them (the Signified). Also the riddle of the multiple murders is tied to this question. Killed are those who seek to lay hands on Aristotle's *Poetica*, the section about metaphors and laughter. For laughter is forbidden (Father Jorge): science is no laughing matter. Thus the book must remain concealed. It would be too ridiculous, indeed, if one were to find out that our words only metaphorically relate to other words, without having a real foundation in reality. Better to burn the whole library than to render the message of that book. Taylor's laughter must be seen in this climate. It is the laughter stirred by the ridiculous disenchantment that there is no corresponding reality to our words: "The signified is neither independent of nor superior to the signifier. To the contrary, the signified is also a signifier. Consciousness, therefore deals only with signs and never reaches the thing in itself. More precisely, the thing itself is not an independent entity (be it real or ideal) to which all signs refer, but is itself a sign."⁷ The conclusion drawn from it is that we have to endlessly wander within labyrinth of signs – adding our micro-stories to it as new signs to be interpreted by the human community. After the disenchanted laughter because of the loss of reality, this nomadic wandering and erring becomes pleasant and enjoyable. It is even liberative when one thinks of the heavy pressure that modern rational consciousness used to put on our lives. At least we become receptive, now, to other things than just rationality: such as the pleasure of living at the surface of our momentary impressions, and enjoying the rapidity of the changing flow of signs around us. For "there is no gravity to weigh us down."

(e) *questions addressed to Taylor*

Taylor's theologizing stays very close to Derridas's analysis of post-modern society and the kabbalistic reading of it. It tries to show that there is still a meaning to life after the death of metaphysics, and also that the christian melodies of Christ's kenotic self-emptying, and the dispersal of life in the eucharistic celebration may add itself to that postmodern orchestration. In as far as possible this theology seeks also to establish points of contact with the absent God, with the lost unificator of history and existence. This lost origin remains present as the absent one, as the God who has deliberately withdrawn himself so that we may wander in freedom and creative mobility. But on the whole, this theology seems to give in too much to the cultural postmodern trend of easygoingness, giving it a theological justification, and being not critical enough of its possible demonic character. One has to jump outside theology to Jean-François Lyotard's considerations about the meaning of the sublime, to come across a critical voice of postmodernity's playful deviating wandering

⁷MARK TAYLOR, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology*, p. 105.

(erring). In his first work on postmodernity "The Postmodern Condition" (1983) Lyotard had tried to give a picture of what postmodernity is about. He had done so to respond to an invitation of the Canadian government to explore this area for practical purposes; to set up new education programs, creation of job, marketing, etc. The picture that came out of this research was indeed that of a free-floating, technologically creative generation which knew to combine pragmatism and creativity, (and) which had emancipated itself from the standardized rational conduct of the moderns. Free wandering within the house of human language, if you like. But at the same time he had pointed out that this house of language was more and more being specified as a house of mass media and electronics. Postmodernity is typically a television-culture, a culture of glamor and entertainment with programs that avoid deep questions and do not hesitate to interrupt serious theatre and sport performances with advertisements. The dance of the signs and the signifiers. So in his work "Postmodernity explained to Children" (1987) he began to question the values of this inevitable TV-culture and looked for moments where this circulation of images might be interrupted by something shocking, if the shocking elements were not already swallowed by the glamor of the medium. This shock he called the sublime, a notion that is reminiscent of Kant's *Erhabene* as contradistinguished from the beautiful (Kant, Critique of the Faculty of Judgment). But in the postmodern era, according to Lyotard, the sublime can only be represented by the void or the disfigurement of glamor. This interrupting void can be found in the paintings of contemporary avant-garde artists who protest against the abuse of beautiful forms in arts and mass-media. The challenging gesture of the void should give us a shock, especially when we commemorate the victims of Dachau, Cambodia and the Gulag-archipelago. But also the victims of the Iraq-war which the media that reported about it, presented as an apotheosis of technologically refined military fire-work. Horror that interrupt the glamor should bring us in contact again with the Holy and the sublime, experienced in its absence and withdrawal.

With Taylor now, this horror does not come into the picture. In his labyrinth of signs and wandering among signs there is nothing that can shockingly interrupt the joyful trip. As far as Don Cupitt is concerned, in his "Long Legged Fly" he knows about the abuse that can be made by the mass media of the theologically justified centrifugal wandering. In that book he desperately seeks to escape the tentacles of the free-floating media. The only answer he can give is a preference for the bohemians, the ugly artist, the ironically jeering deviants, and their satirizing micro-stories.

To give more bite to his theology, Cupitt should have developed a bit more this aspect of dissenting irony, as an inbuilt reaction to the free-wheeling culture he believes in. Of course, he does so in so far as he also takes Kierkegaard as a model, but then only to combat modernity's logocentrism and not post-modernity's lightheartedness. I'm still waiting

for a theologian who begins to write about irony as a substitute form of religion. That theology would be the adequate one for postmodern civilization.

Playfulness and its counterparts, jeer and irony, are thus typical attitudes of the postmodern mind. This attitude is already common among the youngsters in Europe. Their protests take a non-violent character, except perhaps for the verbal violence lurking in the irony which they employ. Their public expression is that of symbolic action. The calculated, yet ludicrous protest actions of the Greenpeace movement, such as the staged funeral of the dead Rhine, or their masquerading the undesirable visits of foreign presidents, corresponds to the strategy of mockery which is used as a weapon in the postmodern area. This playful note points to the fragmentary breakthrough of a creative imagination, but it also reveals the concomitant seriousness of a will to a better world. If this will is not released in a ludicrous way, it might turn into a morbid fury which strikes out blindly. With the help of fantasy and irony they try to overcome the impulsive imperialism of violence.

III. Pre-modernity in the Guise of Postmodernity

In one of the issues of *Communio* last year Cardinal Lustigier of Paris addressed the postmodern youth of France. He stretched a hand out to their festival mood and told them that the church with her joyous celebrations was a bastion against the deadly rationalism of modernity. Join the church to be happy, and sing with her the songs of joy, was the device.

John Paul II, too likes festivals, gatherings and crowds cheering, and in his good days he really used to act as an actor on the stage, playing with the feelings and reactions of his audience. The new catholic movements, too, Focolare, Neo-catechumenate, Opus Dei like to display their smile when recruiting new adepts. In short, the times are ripe for the church to show her post-modern face. This post-modern face of the church – and this is typical – comes to the fore whenever she declares that the modern culture is in crisis. According to John Paul, “modern culture is revealing itself as a mechanistic civilization of Faustian destruction, fundamentally threatening human dignity, and ultimately human life”.⁸ Humanity is getting instrumentalized by its own modern technological tools, whereas the enslavement by technology flows from modernity’s loss of spiritual transcendence, which leads to a loss of human transcendence and of human creativity. “Obvious signs of this modern instrumentalization are communism’s political oppression of the second world (the com-

⁸JOE HOLLAND, “The Cultural Vision of Pope John Paul II: Toward a Conservative/Liberal Postmodern Dialogue,” in DAVID GRIFFIN, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, 1989, p. 112.

munist nations) and capitalism's economic oppression of the Third World (Africa, Asia, and Latin America). But apparently more fundamental, in the pope's eyes, is the cultural seduction of the first world, especially in the United States, because America is the propagandizing center of modern consumer culture and thereby the crucial key to the entire modern project. In other words, for John Paul, modernity's economic and political oppression is derivative from its cultural seduction".⁹ This cultural seduction takes on the three fold form of "hedonism, consumerism and sexualism."

In the Pope's view modernity as a whole is an illusory project and a dead end; it contains within itself its own destruction, as in his days Romano Guardini had already predicted in his work *The End of Modernity*. This statement echoes the thesis of the American conservative author Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Crisis of Modernity* (1982) and of the German philosopher of religion Robert Spämann who treats modernity as an historical failure and a regrettable interlude. Spämann's disciple, the philosopher of culture, Peter Koslowski, a brilliant young author specialized in economics, arts and gnostic mysticism, and on top of that cultural adviser of chancellor Kohl in Germany, pretty much talks the same language. He calls himself a postmodernist, because he feels he is living after the selfdestruction of the modern project. He therefore is already looking forward to a period in which economics, understood as free-market system, is going to espouse a flair of artistic expression. For as the French dictum says: art refines and softens the mores (*l'art adoucit les mœurs*). He also looks forward to liturgical celebrations enacted with good taste and orchestrated with good music, and for God's sake without politicized sermons. Church services are not there to moralize people, but to give them spiritual consolation.

According to Koslowski the postmodern person longs for moments of spiritual rapture amidst a world that is clothed in darkness. The darkness comes from hedonism, consumerism and sexualism (the key-words of the pope), and also from a democracy in which people decide on their values in terms of a majority rule. Democracy and even the welfare-state are stumble-blocks for persons to discover their true inner self. Discipline, work and competence are formative of the persons, not a social security system that cares for them and keeps them in tutelage. Just like in the Valentinian gnosis, happiness and wisdom are reserved for the few elected. The truly elected know what real spiritual life is about in the midst of a world that tends to mediocracy, levelling-down of ideals, and to modern massification of the citizens. Ortega y Gasset with his contempt for the masses is around the corner.

It goes without saying that the new ideals of this conservative postmodernism are pretty much the same as those of the aristocracy of

⁹*Ibidem*, p. 113.

premodernity. They have only been transposed into the setting of high-technology, ultra-modern stockmarket and electronic communication. Esthetics too are given their due, but only when cleansed of sexuality and animal passions. God is beauty and beauty is God. The theological esthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar figure, without doubt, within this conservative postmodern project. Especially volume three: "Theo-aesthetics in the realm of metaphysics" in which the rise of modernity is seen as blocking and suffocating the emergence of the beautiful. On the church-political level, further, conservative postmodernity is being promoted as the new ideology in view of the unification of Europe. The old saints and founders of christianity, Saint Benedict and Saint Cyrill and Methodius, are being elevated unto the altars of post-modern christianity. In the period after virtue (McIntire), it is said, we need the inspiration of those genuine founding fathers. After the collapse of modern culture the new christian Europe is going to extend itself from the Atlantic to the Urals. The fall of communism in the East-Block is the direct preparation for this dream to come true.

Conclusion

I have not tackled the problem of liberation theologians calling themselves postmodern (Pablo Richard and others). Unexamined in this paper is also the affinity inspite of nuances between Derrida's, Taylor's, Cupitt's, and Lyotard's postmodernity and late-modern authors such as Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer (who also critiqued the ruthlessness of reason in their *Dialects of Enlightenment*). I also left out Habermas' critical examination of artistic postmodernity (in his *Discourse of Modernity*) and of conservative postmodernity (in *Modernity an Unfinished Project*). The only focus I have to this paper is what the essence of post-modern joyful wandering is about in contrast to the rigid planning of modernity. As an annex I presented then the conservative recuperation of postmodernity of which perhaps elements can be found in the Filipino ecclesiastical landscape.

There are only two statements with which I want to conclude this paper. First. Postmodern easygoingness and creative joy is unthinkable without the achievements of modernity's rational planning. Economically the post-modern artists and artist theologians feed on the industrial and technological infrastructure called into being by modernity. Hence post-modernity can never forget its indebtment to modernity. The new sensitivity to sensorial impressions, ever rapid creativity, and centrifugal joy is only a corrective to the modern thrust that made those new attitudes possible. In short, it is an illusion to think that a pre-modern society could just step in into postmodernity, without having gone through modernization. This is a warning against Third World Theologians who, attracted by postmodernity's joy and festivity, would too rapidly be bend on integrating that trend in their theologizing.

Second. Postmodern theologians should be cautioned against the ambivalence of their postmodern enterprise. The joyful erring away from the center is to be sure, a great relief. And also that in the mostmodern setting, this can be done without tenacious struggle. An erratic life on the rhythm of fantasy and plurality, is, indeed desirable. On the other hand, the theologians should be mindful that they have to speak about God. And that in the dramatic situations, which are also part of postmodernity, this God can only be present in the mode of the shocking void that we must hold open within the glamorous chain of floating images and sensations. □