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CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE POSTMODERN CONDITION
NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEOLOGY?[*]

In an attempt to clarify our present-day postmodern context and to ascertain the critical consciousness of our time, I study a number of main lines of thought in the work of the postmodernist thinkers: Wolfgang Welsch, Jean-François Lyotard and Richard Rorty. Afterwards, I elaborate on the position of Jürgen Habermas in the postmodern debate. In the second section I present a schematic overview of this postmodern panorama, pointing out the main similarities and differences of the theorists under consideration. A critical discussion of and with these authors, in the third section, yields the model of the 'open narrative' as a possible form of contemporary critical consciousness. This model will help me to recontextualize the Christian narrative in our postmodern context. In the conclusion I shed some light upon this recontextualization[**]

During the last two millennia, many Christian theologians have often had to search for better ways of establishing reflexively the plausibility of their religious narrative, following the Anselmian adage of *fides quaerens intelle-*

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ctum. As such, their perspective was not that of an observer but of a partici-pant. Caught up in a never-ending and open hermeneutical process, they have sought to understand what faith is about, but always from within a commit-ment to it. Since plausibility is always essentially contextual, they made use of thought patterns developed by their contemporaries, most often philoso-phers. This was the case for many of the Church Fathers who were inspired by (neo-)platonic thought patterns, as well as for the scholastic theologians from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries who entered into dialogue with Aristotle and his Arab commentators. More recently, in the diverse modern philosophical and scientific attempts to understand the world, nature, the human person, society, and history, theologians of the twentieth century have found a reflexive potential to reframe Christian theology. More precisely, one can claim that theology is intrinsically woven into a process of 'recontextualization': tradition, and theology as its reflexive moment, are subject to ongoing processes of repetition and interpretation, processes of handing down and selection. In this regard, tradition and context are dynami-cally interrelated. Changes in context challenge the reading of tradition, while this reading sheds new light on the changed context. Newness, shifts in the context, urge recontextualization because of the pressure they exert on the contextual plausibility of the then elaborated theology. A successful recontextualization takes place when one succeeds in understanding faith anew in a contextually plausible way. This certainly does not imply that theology merely adapts or assimilates itself. In this contribution, I intend to take up the challenge that our contemporary culture of plurality has posed for the Christian narrative, especially for theology, and engage the critical con-sciousness it has been developing.

I. CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS
IN THE POSTMODERN CONDITION

Wolfgang Welsch, Jean-François Lyotard, and Richard Rorty have each emphasized an aspect that is perhaps characteristic for the postmodern age. Welsch identifies the postmodern with the coming to consciousness of radi-calized plurality, Lyotard with the attention for the moment of radical hetero-geneity that radiates in the midst of plurality, and Rorty with an insight into the radical particularity and contextuality of every narrative. Habermas, on

the contrary, sides with authors inspired mainly by modern (and as a matter of fact also by more pre-modern [cf. e.g. Koslowski, 1987; Griffin, 1989]) thought patterns that ultimately relativize plurality, heterogeneity, and particularity and contextuality, in search of an over-arching – or perhaps underlying – universality.

1. *Wolfgang Welsch: Radical Plurality*

In *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*, Wolfgang Welsch labels the experience of radical plurality as the distinctive characteristic of the postmodern age. For him, this means that one and the same reality can be considered, with as much right, from completely differentiated perspectives, and that each specific point of view is valuable in itself, even if they would not be strictly compatible with one another. This basic experience presents itself in such extremely diverse areas of the human life-world as literature, architecture, sculpture and painting, the philosophies of culture and of science, economics and politics. It results from a multi-faceted process of change, a process of radical pluralization or differentiation. This process was initiated with modernity and is nearing, at present – in postmodern form – its completion. Welsch accordingly describes postmodernity as radicalized or realized modernity: i.e. the completion of the process of differentiation (secularization, pluralization, detraditionalization, emancipation, individualization).

Plurality persists as a presupposition of all thought and action. Each claim to universality and all-encompassing-totality is unmasked as a particular point of view that has been absolutized. The latter explains why Welsch uses the term 'postmodern' and does not describe himself, for example, as 'radically modern' In modernity, one still attempted to regulate the differentiation process by a 'master narrative' (Lyotard, 1979; 1983), i.e. an all-encompassing, systematizing structure which is able to consider pluralization from a unifying point. One becomes postmodern when one realizes the futility of attempts at unification: the postmodern person consciously describes his/her world as plural; he/she does not mourn the lost unifying view but joyfully sees broadened opportunities for freedom and humanity in the multiplicity of rationality types, patterns of action and lifestyles. Welsch nevertheless pleads not only for the recognition and acknowledgment of the fact of radical plurality, but also, and at the same time, for its further development in its normativity. With this, the postmodern person consciously assumes radical plurality as an opportunity to come to a quantitatively increased and qualita-

tively intensified freedom. The relativizing of any absolute truth claim need not lead to a general laissez-faire relativism, but can lead to a new self-understanding with its very own critical consciousness in the indictment of any pretension to unity. The gradual occurrence of different possibilities in thinking, acting and living does not lead, therefore, to indifference – i.e. a capitulation to an irreversible multiplicity by means of which all distinctions are swallowed up in indistinctness. On the contrary, this new situation offers a reserve of modes of thinking, acting and living which invite – even require – people to make choices and new combinations. Freedom is present precisely in the coercion to select.

In this postmodern engaging plurality, one can – in accordance with Welsch's view – likewise discover a new form of reasonableness, a 'transversal rationality' which no longer functions meta-rationally (modernity), but inter-rationally (postmodernity). This reasonableness does not seek to encompass the plurality of different strands of rationality from some absolute unifying point, but offers the possibility of orienting oneself in the midst of multiplicity by laying out transverse connections between the diverse strands.

2. *Jean-François Lyotard: Radical Heterogeneity*

Welsch's concept of plurality has been inspired by Lyotard's philosophical language pragmatics, but does not follow it entirely. Lyotard himself is not primarily concerned with the strands of rationality, but prefers to speak in the categories of language pragmatics. According to Lyotard, after identifying the postmodern condition with the discovery of radical plurality, there still remains much to be said. In his view, multiplicity is not a static but a dynamic reality; plurality brings about conflict, is tantamount to irreconciliation and even irreconcilability.

Lyotard attempts to clarify this by examining what takes place during speaking, during the sequence of one sentence after the other (Lyotard, 1983). Such a sequence does not simply transpire as if by design. After a certain sentence 'A' – already belonging to a specific order of sentences (descriptive, imperative, interrogative, exclamatory) – a number of sentences can, in principle, follow, and all according to the nature of the discourse-type which regulates the 'linking' of the sentences. Examples of such discourse-types include: narrative, argument, prayer, education, humor, etc. What is specific to plurality, then, is the fact that the many discourse-types are fundamentally heterogeneous and incommensurable among themselves, and that no single

discourse-type is privileged. In other words, all discourse-types equally possess the right to provide something in the linking. The only thing assured is *that* a sentence (only one sentence) always follows – even silence being a sentence – not *which* sentence follows. This means that between two sentences, a moment of indeterminacy, of indecision, always occurs. Every sentence that has happened arouses an expectation; every new sentence implies an event. The nature of the new sentence which intends to fill in the expectation aroused by the former sentence is always contingent. Two sentences are thereby separated by an elusive moment of relative nothingness. This, however, can just as well be called a moment of absolute fullness: a moment of irrecurable heterogeneity, difference, differend – unutterable, inexpressible, irreducible – an event.

Plurality thus understood, necessarily implies conflict, irreconciliation, and irreconcilability. Inevitably, each choice for a specific sentence to complete the linking resolves a conflict (a differend) unjustly, considering that diverse legitimate possibilities are available. The linking of this specific sentence prevents the actualization of another, no less justified possibility. In the absence of a meta-language or an all-encompassing discourse-type, it is impossible to fill in the created expectation adequately. No single sentence could succeed in totally expressing the multiplicity of possible linking sentences, or better still, the moment of indeterminacy, of heterogeneity. In other words, no single sentence is capable of pronouncing at the same time its own being-event. The feeling of 'it happens' cannot be contained in words, in a sentence. But neither can it be mastered hegemonically. What Lyotard leads us to think of as a sensibility for the impossible sentence can not itself be stated, but only referred to. One can only bear witness to it; or better still, one must bear witness to it. The sense of the event demands witnessing. Through this sense it mobilizes action against any hegemonic, totalizing discourse that proclaims itself the privileged master of the linking, thus weakening, forgetting or rejecting the event as event.

Lyotard considers such witnessing to the event to be the task of present-day philosophy. In this way, philosophy can function as a critical consciousness, questioning that which does not respect the event, the so-called – not necessarily modern – master narratives. Such discourse-types, which claim to be privileged, aim at regulating the linking exclusively, and therefore hegemonically Such hegemonic discourse-types either make themselves the master of the event or they exclude it. Narratives which either negate the power of the appeal of the event or subjugate it to the recounting of its own narrative become totalitarian. Lyotard reproaches the modern master narra-

tives of rationality and emancipation for precisely this. Since they were not able to allow their own narrative to be interrupted by the moment of indeterminable heterogeneity that accompanies every linking, they became counterproductive and were reduced to their antithesis; they actually became narratives of irrationality and oppressive alienation.

3. *Richard Rorty: Radical Particularity*

Richard Rorty has also been struck by plurality and the conflict that this implies. What interests him the most is the disappearance of the epistemological position of the observer, the allegedly objective viewpoint of the third person. For Rorty, human knowing and living are caught in an inescapable perspectivism. Our manner of coping with plurality is thereby characterized by radical particularity.

Already in 1979, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (published in the same year as *La condition postmoderne*), Rorty pleads for a philosophy that abandons the mirror-metaphor. Herein, there is no pre-given reality that is reflected in our knowledge, over which reality itself eventually judges concerning its truth claims. Rorty rejects epistemological foundationalism and pleads for a hermeneutic philosophy which distances itself from any privileged perspective.

He develops this in his reflections on language (Rorty, 1987; 1991a). Language consists of propositions and language-games or vocabularies, corresponding roughly with Lyotard's sentences and discourse-types. A vocabulary is a tool in order to reach a specific goal. With this, success is only reserved for the best tool. The efficiency of a vocabulary, in comparison with other vocabularies, eventually determines whether that vocabulary is used or not. Moreover, which vocabulary to use does not primarily depend on the user, but on the reigning context which provides the conditions of existence and use. In other words, the criteria for judgment of a vocabulary are provided contextually.

In the multiplicity of vocabularies, Rorty distinguishes between basic and final vocabularies. These latter are the fundamental narratives or foundational theories that attempt to bring the presuppositions of an effective particular language use to expression − in other words, to also make the context (partially) explicit. They can only be judged in themselves; there is no overarching, correctly mirroring basic vocabulary which can provide a definitive answer to the truth claim, albeit unjustified, of a specific vocabulary. Rorty designates such a final vocabulary with the term 'narrative' (in preference to

'theory'). A narrative connects the present with the past and the future. It offers, on the one hand, a re-description – or better yet, a recontextualization – of the past. The narrative wants to show why someone is what he or she is, how it has come about that he or she is what he or she is. On the other hand, it looks forward to the future, articulating expectations and hope.

Rorty links his understanding of the contingency and particularity of narratives with the idea of a self-creating, active subject. The particular narrative by which one lives, functions in this process of self-construction as a basic vocabulary, a tool, or better, a point of departure for creative self-realization, i.e. a re-description of the 'self' which would be original, but because of the consciousness of contingency, also always ironic. There are, in principle, no limits to this creativity. In practice, according to Rorty, society has to provide some limits and rules, which facilitate the co-existence of self-realization and community life. Rorty is convinced that the model of the liberal society offers the best chances for this. Unsurprisingly he thinks so not because this model of society would be founded in, and legitimated by, some presumed nature or essence of social life, but only because it offers the best opportunities to combine creative self-realization and social life.

This creativity, for Rorty, is due to the fact that vocabularies and narratives are not static entities of sentences and linkings. Through the constant confrontation with novelty, they remain incessantly involved in a process of re-description, or recontextualization. Novelty can, on the one hand, be absorbed or integrated within the fixed current framework. On the other hand, it can lead to a breaking open of the existing framework. The framework thus presents itself as incapable of reworking the new, but needs to be reorganized in order to take up the new, such that the original vocabulary is fundamentally changed in its constitution. Such novelty, Rorty argues, can only be woven into a learning process where the current context shifts accordingly – as in the way one learns a language. The altered vocabulary is then irrevocably different. This novelty can emerge from very diverse sources: it can be caused by metaphors – i.e. words which in the entirety of the existing vocabulary do not posses any literal meaning, any contextual predictability and therefore are not entirely fitting; or it can arise either from the encounter – conversation – with other vocabularies, or from the occurrence of exceptional events. In any case, the result of these processes can never be claimed to be more than particular and contextual. Even a vocabulary that happens to include the whole world community – product of a worldwide conversation – cannot be considered universal but only cosmopolitan, an extended particular narrative.

4. *Jürgen Habermas and the Unaccomplished Modern Project*

The German philosopher of the Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, does acknowledge, at least to some degree, the plurality and particularity of the language discourses we live by, but refuses to accept that there is nothing more to say. With its specific communicative rationality focused on the formation of consensus, Habermas considers the life-world the privileged place to integrate modern differentiation and rationalization. Moreover, his theory of communicative action attempts to rescue the modern project of rationalization that originated in the Enlightenment. According to Habermas, modernity is too easily identified with everything that went wrong in the recent past. But more important, rejecting modernity also threatens to break our hold on its many unquestionably positive achievements.

For Habermas, the crisis of modernity is due to the colonization of the life-world by functionalistic systemic forms of rationality (Habermas, 1981; 1985a). These are function-specific derivatives from the ordinary communicative praxis, that originally stem from an attempt to reduce the tensions produced by the growing complexity of the life-world. In fact, the function of these rationalities is to steer the material reproduction (economy) and the organization of society (the state). Paradoxically, in the late modern life-world these economic and the bureaucratic system-rationalities, intended to support and relieve the communicative action, have actually taken over the life-world and suppress normal communicative praxis. Because of this inversion the processes of vital importance for the subsistence of the life-world have been seriously damaged. These are (1) cultural tradition (responsible for the handing over and acknowledgement of truth and meaning), (2) social integration (focused on building community and solidarity) and (3) socialization (in view of construction of individual and social identity). The results of this disturbance include (1) the loss of meaning, legitimation and orientation, (2) anomy and disrupted solidarity, and (3) psychopathologies and irresponsibility. For Habermas, only a consistently executed rationalization of the life-world can help in this situation of colonization; the life-world-specific communicative rationality – i.e. a dialogical interaction directed at mutual understanding and consensus – must be fully developed. The range of rationalities behind the economy and state bureaucracy must be reduced to a normal, far more moderate proportion. The economy and the state can only function as subsystems, created to facilitate the material reproduction of the life-world. In this way, labor and politics regain their legitimate place in the life-world, which has in turn become reflexive by a fully developed communica-

tive rationality. A consistently executed rationalization (modernization) in the three aspects of the life-world – (1) culture, (2) society (3) personality – will bare the real fruits of the modern project: (1) cultural reflexivity, (2) normative universality and (3) individuating socialization. It is not modernity which is on trial here, but the identification of happiness and emancipation with power and production.

Looking more carefully into Habermas' theory of communicative rationality, one notices that he examines the formal conditions of valid utterances. In doing so, he replaces the privilege of the knowing subject and its knowledge of the object with the paradigm of interpersonal relations (communication) and the formation of consensus (Habermas, 1985b, 1988). Since post-metaphysical theory no longer has privileged access to truth, trying instead to discern the conditions of valid speech (utterances), Habermas develops a formal, procedural concept of rationality to replace a material one. Accordingly, truth happens in concrete dialogue, where universal validity claims are made, claims which aim at intersubjective acknowledgement. Because of the fact that this urge for intersubjective acknowledgement is founded upon a implicit generality embedded in local contexts, not only local but also universal consensus is *in principle* possible. In other words, Habermas contends that particularity is neither irreducible nor unsurmountable, but once it has become rationalized by communicative praxis, it provides access to universal (1) truth, (2) normativity, and (3) authenticity.
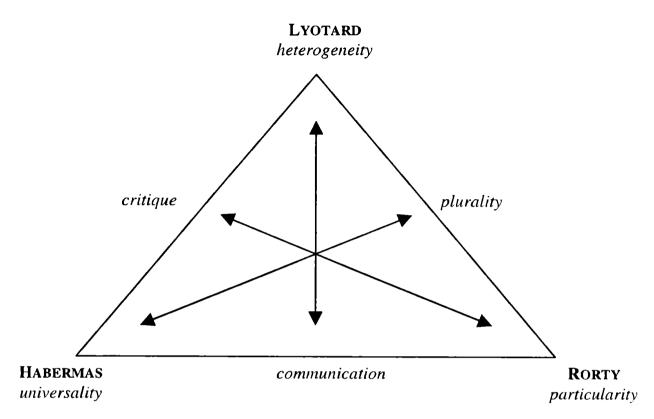
On closer inspection, this means that diverse particular life-worlds are capable, each one from its own presuppositions and within its own context, of entering into mutual dialogue, and discovering, each one in and for itself, the material for general consensus. If this were the case, one can no longer deny that from the beginning the procedural rationality aims at material universality (a material consensus) – even if Habermas holds that this is no longer possible in a philosophical 'post-metaphysical' discourse. Ultimately, the source of consensus is not the intersubjectively acknowledged validity, but an implicit layer of generality, which is presumed to be universally present in the various particular narratives, and which, in an ideal situation of undamaged or intact intersubjectivity, could be rendered fully explicit. (The idea of an 'undamaged or intact inter-subjectivity' arises when one considers the conditions of communication which aims at the formation of consensus. This idea cannot be projected as a vision or promising future in the historical dimension of our time; it is neither more nor less than "the formal categorizing of the necessary predicaments for non-anticipational forms of successful life" [Habermas, 1988, 186]).

This specific interrelation between particularity and universal truth is aptly illustrated by Habermas' evaluation of the use of his theory in theology (Habermas, 1992). He states – in my opinion, rightly – that a consistent application abolishes the particular character, and thus the specificity, of the Christian tradition and theology. Specific theological truth claims loose their validity outside of the particularity of the Christian religious discourse. "The process of a critical appropriation of the essential contents of religious tradition is still underway and the outcome is difficult to predict. [...] As long as religious language bears with itself inspiring, indeed, unrelinquishable semantic contents which elude (for the moment?) the expressive power of a philosophical language and still await translation into a discourse that gives reasons for its positions, philosophy, even in its postmetaphysical form, will neither be able to replace nor to repress religion" (237).

In this regard, Habermas inherently disagrees with the main streams of postmodern thinking and can neither acknowledge their pleas for irreducible plurality and heterogeneity, nor accept the radical particularity and contextuality of the narratives we live by.

II. THE TRIANGLE
OF POSTMODERN CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

On the basis of what has been said in the foregoing, I now venture to propose a schematic comparison of the theories of Habermas, Lyotard, and Rorty; afterwards I will consider Welsch's position. Using a triangle I intend to situate these authors according to the similarities and divergences in their theories. At the corners the names of the first three authors named are mentioned, followed by the key characteristic of their theory. On the lines connecting two corners (and thus two theories), I record a property which is common to the two theories. This common property is at the same time either absent, challenged, or simply rejected by the theory of the thinker occupying the opposite corner. This results in the following scheme.

LYOTARD
heterogeneity

critique   *plurality*

HABERMAS   *communication*   **RORTY**
universality   *particularity*

Lyotard is identified as the theoretician who, beginning from plurality, radically thinks heterogeneity (up to heteronomy). He accordingly develops a criticism against hegemonic master narratives. As such, communication has no privileged place in his thinking since the radicality of heterogeneity precludes complete communicability (even as an ideal). Instead bearing witness in the communication of what in itself is incommunicable, neither can nor should ever succeed. Habermas, however, is convinced that he has found in communicative rationality the adequate means for sustaining the universal pretensions of reason. He also considers this to be a way out of the suffocating logic of functionalistic rationality. For it is precisely the colonization of the life-world by the latter which forms the object of his criticism of modernity, moving him to reformulate and reaffirm the modern project. He is resolutely against views which advocate radical plurality; instead the unity of reason speaks in its many voices. Rorty, for his part, is the theoretician of absolute particularity, without excluding communication between different narratives. This communication – in Rorty' terminology 'conversation' – happens however under the conditions of the particular vocabulary of western liberal society, which results in an unquestioned ethnocentric position. The lack of openness for the radical otherness of the other does not allow for a further critical attitude.

Welsch can also be situated in the triangle. He undoubtedly has prematurely presumed that Rorty's position confirms his own, since the latter will never consider the linking made in the conversation between eventually incommensurable discourses to be transversal reason. Welsch seemingly makes an abstraction of the neo-pragmatic approach of Rorty. Moreover, he thinks that in his theoretical framework it is possible to soften and even harmonize, with the help of the concept of 'transversal reason' the sharp differences between Habermas and Lyotard (Welsch, 1987, 314-315). He probably belongs somewhere in the middle of the triangle: he is a thinker neither of absolute heterogeneity, nor of presupposed universality, nor of radical particularity. On closer inspection, on the level of rationality, he probably has more in common with Habermas than with Rorty if one considers it from the perspective of particularity. Similarly, on the level of heterogeneity there is more Habermas in his thinking than Lyotard. Transversality and communicability could be more than mere objective allies. (Note also that the concrete elaboration of Welsch's theory concerning the plurality of cultures, and the ability to cope with it, seems to imply that a transcultural unity will result from 'reasonably' coping with this plurality − a formal unity which because of its 'rationality' probably can claim to be more than a mere factual, accidental consensus [Welsch, 1992]). Therefore, it is probably better to move Welsch more to the left, inclining downwards, towards Habermas' position.

In light of this schematic comparison of the main players on the postmodern field, I would like to open up a discussion with and about them, seeking a model which at the same time benefits from the postmodern critical consciousness, and yet nevertheless does not fall prey to the vices attributed by many, including Habermas, to radical postmodernists: differentiation leading to indifferentism (against Welsch), elitist exaltation of heterogeneity and radical otherness (against Lyotard), and relativism of diverse irreducible particularisms (against Rorty).

III. THE 'OPEN NARRATIVE':
A PROPOSAL FOR A SPECIFIC POSTMODERN NARRATIVITY

What is typical for postmodernity, according to Lyotard, is not so much a coming to awareness of plurality in itself (Welsch) as indeed a sensibility for *radical heterogeneity which is revealed in the midst of plurality*. The

absence of an over-arching hegemonic discourse-type or master narrative causes an elusive moment, a now-moment of indeterminacy and inexpressibility that comes to light with every linking of two sentences – an inexpressibility which, on the one hand, makes speaking possible, and, on the other hand, determines it in its specific limitedness.

For within Lyotard, two ways of coping with the feeling for heterogeneity, for the event, can be distinguished. The strategy of the 'master narrative' unfolds a discourse that makes all linkings and all strategies for linkings (other discourse-types) hegemonically subordinate to its own finality (for example, the establishment of the classless society, or of the free market, or the restoration of an earlier image of society and of the world, etc.). Sensibility to the event itself has no chance since it is taken up along with the narrative. The other, non-hegemonic way of engaging the event is seen by Lyotard as present in the discourse of philosophy. He deems this discourse to be capable of dealing with a multiplicity of finalities (discourse-types) that are irreconcilable among themselves, without having to master over them. In the linking of two sentences philosophy is called to bear witnes to the event, to the now-moment of indeterminacy.

Lyotard, however, does not pay sufficient attention to *the radically particular character of this witnessing*, a point that Rorty strongly emphasizes. In fact, Lyotard's philosophical discourse is also woven into a diachronic and synchronic context, using a very specific vocabulary, specific sentences and strategies of linkings, in order to give witness to the 'event' In so far as the inexpressible that accompanies speaking is truly inexpressible, attempts to bear witness to it will never evoke it completely, but only contextually. Every witnessing thus receives the character of an essentially particular recontextualization whereby the event as 'novelty' breaks open the established narrative, compelling it to bear witness to this 'novelty' Perhaps, Lyotard's philosophical discourse is not alone in its capacity for such a recontextualizing bearing witness, but shares this with other narratives and narrative traditions, which possibly also deal with the event in an analogous – but always particular – way. He himself mentions that this is the case in Jewish thought (Lyotard, 1988a, 86; 1988b; 1993, 95-102). In contrast with the way in which *hegemonic* narratives are closed towards plurality and heterogeneity, this mode is better entitled the *'open narrative'*

'Open narratives' on the one hand, stand *open for the event and accept the claim which this makes on the narrative.* They are, on the other hand, aware of the fact that *every witnessing to the event is always radically particular,* that the inexpressible can only be brought into the discussion in a con-

textual manner and by way of reference. Precisely from their constantly erupting sensibility to the inexpressible, 'open narratives' refuse to put forward claims to absoluteness and universality and are always prepared to recontextualize.

This distinguishes the 'open narrative' from the position that Rorty takes. It is not recontextualization in itself that is characteristic of 'open narratives' but rather the disposition of openness towards the event. What is characteristic is the receptive openness towards alterity (terminologically better than 'novelty'), in a sort of fundamental contemplative attitude, whereby the character of the event that resolutely breaks open its own narrative is appreciated. With Rorty, recontextualization does not reach so deeply. For him, the point of departure and the final goal form a single narrative that sees in the encounter with alien novelty a renewed opportunity to establish itself. As a matter of fact, Rorty's fundamental thesis of the non-representational character of language may then level a fundamental critique upon every narrative that claims to be reflective of reality. This presupposition likewise implies for Rorty that every critique of one's own narrative can only be discourse-internal. The event has never been so perceived that it puts the narrating in itself under critique. The conflicting heterogeneity between the diverse discourse-types and narratives is not a symptom of the inexpressible that requires critical witnessing, but is simply a factual situation where the strongest wins. Again, critique can only be intra-narrative. The event does not radically tear the narrative as narrative into pieces.

To express this differently, 'open narratives' bear within themselves the impetus towards continual radical contextualization: the event as alterity precludes adequate description in either existing or renewed vocabulary. Every attempt to inscribe the event is coupled with a fundamental dispute of what has been written earlier, even if its own narrative and its own narrative tradition remain the background of every attempt to bear witness, and are themselves always recontextualized along with it. The narrative tradition offers a constant source and inexhaustible resource for bearing witness to the event in so far as it is also re-described in the existing, opened vocabulary (tradition cannot be received in a non-re-described way – one always reads it within the framework of the present context). Or, as Rorty puts it, in a narrative that binds the past with the present and the future, one also comes to know who s/he is. An 'open narrative' however, functions only in so far as it is actually, consciously, particularly 'narrative' and 'open'

How does the model of the 'open narrative' fit in the triangle of postmodern critical consciousness? (1) The 'open narrative'-thought patterns are substantially anchored in Lyotard's philosophy of heterogeneity. However, (2) the special accent on the particularity and contextuality of each narrative is inspired by some of Rorty's insights, although the model contradicts the latter's lack of radical openness and critical distance vis-à-vis his own (ethnocentric) discourse – even if he has abandoned every pretension to perfect representation. (3) Habermas' formal and material conception of universality is irreconcilable with the presuppositions of the model presented. The same is true for Welsch's position, especially when recalling the charge that he 'forgets' the event, and the suspicions of a possible sympathy with Habermas.

In the model of the 'open narrative' Lyotard's principle of heterogeneity, with the heteronomic characterization it receives in his thinking, is fundamentally maintained; provided, however, that the particularity of the discourse of heterogeneity – the open discourse – is better honored. This is why the characteristics of criticism, plurality and particularity in perspective of heterogeneity are also rightly attributed to the concept of the 'open narrative'

Still, universality and communication are not completely absent, even if they are stripped of every claim or pretension to hegemony. The concept of the 'open narrative' therefore clearly opposes Habermas' plea for formal (which is in fact also material) universality. Nevertheless, in the discourse of the 'open narrative' the category of a fundamentally unrepresentable universality emerges, where the discourse is broken open by the indeterminable event of heterogeneity. The attempt to bring this unrepresentable universality to speech always fails to such a degree that the concept can be represented only in the dimension of an absence of universality. Considering communication, obviously each demand for complete communicability and commensurability is invalid, be it on principle or in fact, either from a universal discourse of rationality, or from an ethnocentric, hegemonic, particular narrative. It must be clear, however, that an 'open narrative' cannot confine itself within its own cocoon – as it were in some pure contemplativity. Each narrative is embedded in its specific context, without which it could not exist, and which, as radical as the sensibility for the heterogeneity may be, determines over and again its appearance. Moreover, a monadic conception of 'open narrativity' fails to appreciate its kerygmatic component, in which each bearing witness, each reference to the indeterminable, is possible only through determination and reference to determination. An 'open narrative' – and precisely this constitutes its particular dimension – does not exist without

a minimum of communicability, although it remains true that a demand for perfect communicability precludes every possible openness.

IV BY WAY OF CONCLUSION:
THEOLOGY IN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

I have applied this reflexive framework of the 'open narrative' elsewhere in order to delineate a postmodern theology as an 'open narrative' – a present-day theology which complies with both theological as well as postmodern, culture-philosophical criteria. (For an evaluation of the Christian narrative as a master narrative according to Lyotard's criteria, cf. Boeve, 1994) This theological recontextualization starts from the awareness that the Christian faith and the model of the 'open narrative' possess an analogous structure (cf. Boeve 2003). At its best, the Christian narrative aims at representing the unrepresentable, and this – at least this is what apophatic theology intends to teach us – in such a way that the unrepresentability is not nullified in the representation (although history teaches us that the hermeneutical-critical consequences of such an apophatically inspired theological epistemology have not always been adequately drawn). Theologically speaking, the relatedness of an 'open Christian narrative' to the unrepresentable, and the consciousness of the very particularity and contingency this implies, must not be considered to be counter-indications for its authenticity and truth. On the contrary, they are in fact constitutive of it in so far as the Christian narrative always relates contextually to that which ultimately withdraws itself time and again from every narrative, every truth claim.

Few philosophers will easily accept the idea that one can talk about God in the context of the thinking of Lyotard, Welsch and Rorty. Many theologians will also object to such an exercise since, in their view, what this is able to say about transcendence and immanence, is simply not enough. *Is* God maybe then nothing more than a series of events (in fact, language gaps), nothing more than inexpressibility and ungraspebility, etc.? Such a discourse is indeed linking up theological and philosophical discourses too closely and too unproblematically (cf. Boeve 2001, 2002). For the theologian, however, as opposed to the philosopher, that which succeeds the Christian narrative, but which is nevertheless constitutive for it, is spoken of, and narrated about in this narrative. Therefore the theologian can apply the rela-

tedness of the particular narrative to the inexpressible, to the event itself, in order to conceptually grasp the relation between God and human persons, without being forced any longer to assign God a place anchored in, or secured by metaphysics (i.e. in an ontologically structured conceptual universe mirroring the world 'out there'). Transcendence and immanence can be thought together dynamically from the happening of the event, i.e. transcendent heterogeneity breaking in, interrupting, the immanence of discourses and narratives. Theologically speaking, the transcendent God, as event, as the Other, is conceived then from the infringement which the event opens in the narrated narrative. Talking about God then must take into account God's inexpressibility, and implies the involvement in particularly and contextually embedded relatedness, characterized by 'opening oneself to' and 'bearing witness to' (Boeve, 1995).

Theologians inspired by the critical consciousness articulated by postmodern philosophy, are thus able, in spite of – or perhaps because of – an expanded sense of particularity, to 'account for' the faith motivating them and their communities, to assess its plausibility (which is not to be confused with an attempt to rigorously found, ground, or legitimate it). In this way, *fides quaerens intellectum* functions again. Likewise, the hermeneutical-critical dynamism, proper to this tradition, acquires new life in the wake of the criticism of master narratives and by standing up for those who are hegemonically oppressed by them. In the process of recontextualization of the Christian traditional narrative in the postmodern context, Christians are not only heirs but also responsible witnesses. In our postmodern society, which is essentially characterized by the experience of radical contingency, particularity and plurality, the postmodern Christian narrative manifests itself as a way of standing in the world which can be affirmed at the same time as truly Christian and truly postmodern.

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ŚWIADOMOŚĆ KRYTYCZNA
W UWARUNKOWANIACH POSTMODERNIZMU
CZY NOWE MOŻLIWOŚCI DLA TEOLOGII?

Streszczenie

Punktem wyjścia analiz prof. L. Boeve jest przekonanie, że współczesnej teologii potrzebny jest dialog ze współczesną filozofią, dzięki któremu teologia ma szansę mówienia tym samym językiem i w tych samych płaszczyznach semantycznych, co współczesne kierunki filozoficzne. Te ostatnie oscylują wokół kwestii lingwistycznych i pschologicznych. Dlatego w wykładzie belgijskiego Teologa znalazły się analizy poglądów Wolfganga Welscha, Jean-François Lyotarda, Richarda Rorty'ego i Jürgena Habermasa.

Wychodząc z założeń idealistycznej filozofii amerykańskiej Wolfgang Welsch wypracował system, który można określić mianem „radykalnego pluralizmu" W swym dziele *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* Welsch kreśli system akceptujący doświadczenie pluralizmu jako cechy wyróżniającej erę ponowoczesną. Jean-François Lyotard reprezentuje w pewnym sensie przeciwstawną postawę intelektualną, kładącą akcent na radykalną heterogeniczność poznania, wyrastającą na gruncie filozofii języka. Poglądy Richarda Rorty'ego to w praktyce uzasadnienie poglądu o radykalnym uszczegółowieniu poznania. Jego zdaniem nie ma żadnego zewnętrznego kryterium pozwalającego na definitywność odpowiedzi o prawdzie. Myśl Jürgena Habermasa płynie być może z chęci pogodzenia opcji radykalnego pluralizmu z tendencjami do relatywizacji poznania. W jego koncepcji istotne znaczenie posiada diagnoza współczesnych tendencji kulturotwórczych. Życie współczesnych społeczeństw rozwiniętych stoi na krawędzi ryzyka samozniszczenia, bowiem przestają się liczyć takie dynamizmy, jak tradycja kulturalna (warunkująca postawy poszukiwania prawdy i znaczenia), nastawienie na integrację społeczną (skoncentrowane na budowaniu wspólnoty i solidarności oraz socjalizacja (pozwalająca budować indywidualną i społeczną identyfikację tożsamości).

W swych poglądach na wpływ myśli omawianych filozofów na teologię prof. Boeve stosuje metodę analogii, przenosząc niektóre z elementów myślenia filozoficznego na grunt analizy dogmatu i elementów nauczania Magisterium. Dzięki takiej postawie intelektualnej w nowym świetle ukazane zostały w wykładzie m.in. podstawy działalności misyjnej Kościoła, jego prerogatywy związków z prawdą antropologiczną, kosmologiczną i religijną. W tej perspektywie rysują się dla teologii nowe przestrzenie dialogu interreligijnego i wewnątrzchrześcijańskiego. Szerzej też można wykorzystać osiągnięcia praktyki i teorii współczesnej kultury i kulturologii.

W dyskusji po wykładzie przedmiotem rozmowy uczyniono m.in. zagadnienie wyznaniowości w mówieniu o kształcie i zasadach metodologicznych współczesnej teologii. Zauważono dynamiczny wpływ metodologii protestanckich ujawniający się we współczesnej teologii. Zwrócono też uwagę na zastosowanie niektórych elementów „otwartej narratywności" w katechezie, działalności misyjnej (szczególnie w europejskich społeczeństwach postchrześcijańskich) i teorii życia wewnętrznego.

Streścił Karol Klauza