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FROM SECULARISATION  
TO DETRADITIONALISATION AND PLURALISATION:  
A CHALLENGING SHIFT FOR CONTEMPORARY  
THEOLOGY\*

## I. THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN FAITH AND CULTURE

In Western (European) societies there is a widening gap between the Christian faith and the cultural context in which Christians live. Awareness of this gap has provided much cause for thought among Christians in recent years. In a society which is increasingly subject to secularisation, or better 'detraditionalisation'<sup>1</sup> and in which the Christian perspective has taken its

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<sup>1</sup> In the last centuries, the relationship between theology and culture was most often thought of in terms of a dialogue (or refusal of dialogue) between theology with a secularising context. The secularisation thesis, however, has nowadays been placed under serious doubt. Two of its former protagonists, Harvey Cox and Peter Berger, distance themselves from it because they perceive a world wide religious revival. Cf. H. Cox. *The Myth of the Twentieth Century. The Rise and Fall of 'Secularisation*. In: *The Twentieth Century. A Theological Overview*. Ed. G. Baum. New York 1999; P. Berger. *The Desecularisation of the World: A Global Overview*. In: *The Desecularisation of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Ed. P. Berger. Washington D.C. 1999. Berger admits that Europe is an exception to

place as one among many, people no longer tend to take their Christian identity for granted as something automatically given at birth. Indeed, the formation of a Christian identity no longer follows the same preconceived and unquestioned patterns as it used to some decades ago. Individual free choice (even if it is explained in a religious way as vocation) is increasingly becoming an important element in such formation. Culture and society today no longer intrinsically support being a Christian: the common Christian horizon has more or less vanished together with our familiarity with Christian discourse. Secularisation, de-traditionalisation and individualisation: the process of modernisation is heading unimpeded towards completion<sup>2</sup> Society is becoming increasingly pluralised, and Christian faith, from the socio-cultural perspective at least, is just one option among many<sup>3</sup>

In the preceding decades, Christians have reacted to this social and cultural transformation in a variety of ways. Between the overtly traditionalist reaction of the radical rejection of modern culture and the all too facile surrender of Christianity to modern thought and behaviour, many, inspired by Vatican II, have endeavoured to redefine their Christian faith in the dialogue between Christian tradition and modern – secular – culture. Inspired by the Council's most outspoken and influential text in this regard, the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, they started this dialogue based on the presumption that the values of modern culture and of Christian faith should not exclude one another, sharing as they do the same dynamics. For Christians, forces for good in society and culture might even be considered more than objective allies on the journey towards the realisation of God's dream for humanity and the world. What was considered good in human terms ought to be identified in Christian terms as part of God's plan. According to this perspective, faith and (secular) daily life in modern culture and society participated in an intense interaction with one another, to the mutual benefit

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the 'deseccularisation thesis,' although its situation remains ambiguous: rather than secularisation he would define it as a shift in the institutional location of religion.

<sup>2</sup> As for Belgium, this is clearly shown in the results of the European Value Study. The titles of the three subsequent books reporting these results are particularly telling. In 1984, the research group in charge of this study published for Belgium: 'The Silent Turn,' showing that Belgium had turned away from a more traditional Roman Catholic profile. In 1992 the same group published 'The Accelerated Turn,' claiming that the change was evolving faster than ever. The title of the third book, 'Lost Certainty,' indicates that the processes of detraditionalisation are reaching their end. In no more than a few decades, Belgium has evolved from a society perceived in general as Catholic into a detraditionalised and pluralised country.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. L. Boeve. *Interrupting Tradition. An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*. Leuven: Peeters Press 2003.

of both. The Christian narrative was thus successful in its integration (and, in a number of cases, recuperation) of modern developments. This '(critical) correlation' between faith and modern culture provided vigour to modern theology which had disengaged itself from the traditional neo-Thomistic framework. We refer here to well-known theologians such as Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Hans Küng, Jürgen Moltmann and David Tracy.

The cultural shift from modern to postmodern, however, coincides with the loss of plausibility of modernity's 'grand' or 'master narratives' of knowledge and emancipation. 'Rationality,' together with 'humanity,' 'freedom,' 'autonomy,' 'emancipation' and 'solidarity,' have become polysemic concepts which can nowadays be explained from a variety of sometimes even conflicting perspectives. Because of the collapse of a common horizon, Christian theologies which were the result of the dialogue with modern culture, and thus formulated against the background of this horizon, are experiencing increasing difficulty in maintaining their credibility. The 'truly Christian' and the 'truly human' no longer coincide to any significant extent<sup>4</sup>

## II. BEING A CHRISTIAN: FROM UNQUESTIONED GIVEN TO OPTIONAL ALTERNATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR THEOLOGY

Recent transformations in modern culture and the virtual disappearance of the cultural givenness of the Christian faith – opposite sides of the same coin – raise questions concerning any overtly facile correlation between faith and culture as practised in modern theology. While this need not imply the end of the dialogue between Christian faith and culture as such, it does imply that the results of this dialogue might be other than we expected. From the perspective of contemporary culture, in which present day Christians continue to play an ongoing part, it is no longer the case that an evident Christian faith stands open to be challenged by the modern rationality of knowledge and emancipation. Reality, in fact, would appear to suggest the opposite: in a culture of plurality, Christians are becoming more and more aware of the uniqueness of their tradition and of the optional character of belonging to the Christian narrative community. The fact that being Christian is no longer evident has compelled believers – once again from a cultural perspective – to reflect on their Christian identity. This new situation questions the

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<sup>4</sup> I elaborated this point a.o. in L. Boeve. *L'interruption sacramentelle des rites d'existence*. „Questions Liturgiques” / „Studies in Liturgy” 83:2002 pp. 30-51.

basic presumptions of modern theology: a modern theology of correlation can only function where there is sufficient overlap between culture and faith, where human experience (even if only implicitly) continues to appeal to images and explanatory frameworks which have their roots in and resonate with the Christian tradition. It is this very overlap which would appear at present to be on the decline.

From time immemorial, shifts in the context have caused Christians to think about their identity in relation to these contextual changes. Far from being a mere intellectual diversion, such reflection has tended to have a renewing effect on the Christian self-understanding in confrontation with the novelty of the modified context. The many documents which go to make up the New Testament bear witness to this renewal as do the works of Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas as well as modern theologians such as Karl Rahner, Johann-Baptist Metz and Edward Schillebeeckx. In each case, the theologians in question undertook to *recontextualise* the Christian faith in a new context<sup>5</sup> The nature of the shifted context which confronts us today, however, urges a twofold inquiry, because the culturally unquestioned givenness of Christianity – which *de facto*, to a significant extent, has remained in place throughout modernity – is also disappearing. Dialogue with present day culture, therefore, must imply, at the very least, that the particular position of the believer and his/her Christian faith is recognised and clarified within this same culture. It is for this reason that, in the postmodern context, Christians have begun to reflect on their faith almost of necessity, thus consciously engaging in a process of *fides quaerens intellectum*. It is precisely at this point that dialogue with the present day context takes off.

### III. WHAT DOES THE CONTEXT TEACH CHRISTIANS ABOUT THEIR FAITH?

(1) *Plurality*. Philosophers of culture like to employ the term ‘plurality’ in describing our contemporary context<sup>6</sup> With the disappearance of the ‘master narratives’ we no longer enjoy a unifying, all-inclusive perspective on reality: from now on, nobody can still claim to hold the epistemological observer’s position. One’s perspective changes according to the standpoint one takes. There is no longer a ‘supra’-perspective which can subsume all other

<sup>5</sup> For the concept of ‘recontextualisation,’ see Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*. Chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. for example: W Welsh, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. Weinheim 1987.

component perspectives. The plurality of religions and the impossibility of achieving any kind of 'religious Esperanto' illustrates this fact at the macro-level. Where plurality was hitherto restricted to inter-cultural matters, immigration and de-traditionalisation have now raised plurality to an unmistakably intra-cultural characteristic. In our contemporary situation, for example, there are many forms of partner-relationships, many patterns to follow in raising and educating one's children, many ways to earn a living, many possibilities to enjoy one's leisure time, and many preferences and values which inform and determine the concrete options and judgements of the individual.

In the same way, there are many ways to explain (i.e. 'narrate') human existence; Christianity (which in its turn conceals a plurality of Christian lifestyles) is only one of them.

(2) *Particularity*. Whatever a person's attitude and lifestyle, the unavoidable fact of plurality necessitates that it is considered *particular* and *bound to a very concrete context*. Because no one can withdraw to an observer's position, claiming objectivity and neutrality, we are all direct participants whether we like it or not. From the start, all of us have already adopted a specified position, located in a specific time and space and bound up with a variety of concrete factors and circumstances. A Christian is not a Buddhist and a Christian who becomes a Buddhist is no longer a Christian. The fact that for many this is far from evident, only supports the point we are making: relativism reveals the absence of objective criteria.

The fact that today manifold options are available among which one can legitimately choose, highlights the particular character of our personal option. Refusing to choose is either impossible or already a choice. Even if we are satisfied with our personal options and could not even imagine that we would have chosen differently, the very fact that other options are possible makes the particularity of our own specific position as participants all the more evident.

Moreover, everything could have been different. If we had been born in Asia, for example, our identity would have been drastically other. The fact that things are as they are today, therefore, is not the result of some kind of necessary development, it is due rather to contextual historical factors, choices, chances, events, etc. – identity is not only particular, it is also contingent.

Christians must also be aware of the fact that they confess their participation in a particular narrative which itself is the result of a historical-contextual development.

(3) Awareness of our own particularity (and that of other positions) and its optional character result, when reflected upon more deeply, in a renewal of the way in which we appropriate this particularity. Far from illustrating some kind of universal law (as if Christianity – and Buddhism for that matter – conformed to a general religious blueprint), particularity is perceived as irreducible, something which ought to be taken seriously for its own sake, should we wish to understand what it is about. Instead of leading to relativism, a deepened reflective awareness of plurality and particularity achieves its very opposite: if there is nothing other than particularity, contingency and contextuality, then we cannot do without it. Relativism, by contrast, continues to maintain the observer's position. In order to play one particular perspective off against another one has to abstract from one's own particular perspective as participant.

Therefore: insight into the particular character of the Christian narrative does not lead Christians to relativise their religion but rather results in a renewed attention and respect for its very particularity.

(4) *Otherness, conflict and irreconcilability.* Continuing our reflection further: because of our unavoidably participant's perspective the resulting 'plurality of context-bound particularities' can in no way be considered a static set of entities. It involves, rather, a *dynamic* interplay of particularities standing in different relations to each other. Even more: radical plurality implies *conflict and irreconcilability*. The very fact that other options are possible does not only point to the limited and determinate character of our own choices but also calls them into question. One option often excludes another. To take up one of the examples mentioned above: other forms of partner-relations, leisure, value judgements etc. challenge us to justify our personal options, and do so with respect to both our apparently trivial preferences and the more significant, fundamental life decisions we make. With the absence of a foundational and legitimating meta-narrative, the other – in light of its otherness – constitutes the boundary to our particularity, a boundary which we cannot make our own, which constantly recedes from us and which we cannot overtake. There is always otherness (another option) revealing the limits of our own position, which cannot be made our own. There is always something which escapes, always something which happens and interrupts our own narrative. Plurality and conflict lead

to a fundamental awareness of a persistent remainder of otherness – alterity, difference – which escapes every effort to make it our own.

An important question addressed to the Christian faith and stemming from our contextual-critical awareness thus concerns Christianity's attitude to otherness.

#### IV. THE KEY TO POSTMODERN CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The so-called postmodern 'thinkers of difference' have drawn attention to this otherness which always escapes our efforts to make it our own. It is perhaps here that we can locate the specificity of postmodern critical consciousness: i.e. in the sensitivity for irreducible otherness which withdraws whenever we attempt to grasp or integrate it<sup>7</sup>

Modernity's 'grand' or 'master narratives' were guilty of paying scant attention to the irreducible character of otherness and the other. These very narratives endeavoured, often in a planned and systematic way, either to absorb otherness, or, if they did not succeed, to exclude it<sup>8</sup> For the 'master narratives of knowledge' (e.g. Hegel's philosophy, Comte's positivism etc.) the other is either knowable and thus rationally explicable, or irrational and thus unreal. For the 'master narratives of emancipation' (the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century societal '-isms' striving for emancipation from oppression and alienation, such as Liberalism, Communism, Feminism etc.) the other forms either an absorbable potential for liberation or is a hindrance thereto and must be conquered. Each of these narratives has established all inclusive and compelling patterns designed to integrate and give meaning to 'everything.' Humanity, history, society, nature and cosmos are comprehended and thus circumscribed by their schemas. Concreteness, particularity and contingency are immediately integrated in the all-embracing logic of the narrative and thus reduced to 'more of the same.' The other, then, is stripped of its very otherness. For this reason, such 'master narratives' may correctly be described as 'closed narratives.'

The experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, has shown that these attempts to integrate the totality of existence in one narrative and thus to grasp

<sup>7</sup> For the following paragraphs see L. Boeve. *Bearing Witness to the Differend. A Model for Theologizing in the Postmodern Context.* „Louvain Studies” 20:1995 pp. 362-379; *idem.* *Critical Consciousness in the Postmodern Condition. A New Opportunity for Theology?* „Philosophy and Theology” 10:1997 pp. 449-468.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J.-F. Lyotard. *Le différend.* Paris 1983.

the whole, paradoxically resulted in its opposite. Mastering gave birth to the emergence of the 'unmasterable.' Many attempts to humanise and develop society and the world have gone hand in hand with new forms of dehumanisation and devastation. Our *attitude to otherness* has thus become the *key of postmodern critical consciousness*.

#### V. OTHERNESS AND PARTICULARITY: THE MODEL OF THE 'OPEN NARRATIVE'

When one immediately considers otherness – encountered in an always concrete other – either as something which one can or must make one's own, or as a threat to one's own identity and thus to be avoided, then one approaches this otherness using the patterns of 'grand,' 'master' or 'closed' narratives. The question remains, however, whether an alternative attitude to the other is even possible. In our encounter with the other, is it not inevitable that we automatically reduce him/her/it to a familiar element of our own narrative? Is it not the case that we see the 'other' always with our 'own' eyes? How do we see African dance groups, for example, or the ethical decisions of those whose options differ from our own? In what way do we understand religious plurality and aspects of other religions which seem analogous or conflicting to our own? The ultimate question, therefore, runs as follows: is it possible to conceive of a 'narrativity' (irreducibly marked by particularity, contextuality, and contingency) which does not immediately undo otherness from its very otherness in reducing it to 'more of the same'? Can a narrative be structured on the basis of our sensitivity to the otherness which constitutes its borders and interrupts it by its irreducible otherness so preventing the narrative from closing itself too easily?

In the attempt to develop such an alternative mode of narrativity, we propose the model of the 'open narrative.' I have endeavoured to answer these questions, remaining conscious of the fact that the pitfall of the closing of narratives seems to belong to the very structure of narrativity. In this model of the 'open narrative,' one concedes that the other is encountered in terms of one's own particularity. Nevertheless, even if one is unable to leave the particularity and contextuality of one's own narrative behind, it is still in the very encounter with otherness that this narrative is interrupted, taken to its boundaries (showing the narrative's insurmountable particularity). While it is also true that one can only discuss this interruption and boundary experience in terms of one's own narrative, the encounter still makes one aware that this narrative has been interrupted and has reached its boundaries. Pre-



cisely this intense intrinsic link between (b) interruption by irreducible otherness and (a) insurmountable particular expression constitutes the kernel of the structure displayed in the model of the open narrative, combining – relating – (b) the postmodern sensibility for the otherness of the other (*open*) and (a) the particular and contextual format in which this encounter takes place and is borne witness to (*narrative*).

Structurally speaking, an ‘open narrative’ stands for a way of living that is characterised by three qualities which one can distinguish methodologically, but which in practice are interwoven. (1) First of all an ‘open narrative’ is generated by a broadened *sensitivity for otherness*, a capacity to let oneself be touched by that which interrupts. This concerns, in other words, a basic attitude of openness, susceptibility, and vulnerability, i.e. a sensitivity for what ‘happens,’ on the one hand, and results, on the other hand, in the fundamental refusal to immediately integrate this ‘happening’ in one’s own narrative. (2) Moreover: precisely because of this sensitivity, the basic challenge with which the narrative is confronted is to put this interruption of the narrative into (one’s own particular) words. This means: to *give witness* to it in word, deed and life while respecting its interruptive nature, and to restructure the narrative as a consequence. Caught up in its own particularity and contextuality, one’s narrative thus becomes broken open in order to give witness to that which in principle already escapes our (necessarily particular and contextual) witness. (3) At the same time and from the very outset, this generates an intense self-criticism and world-criticism. Where the other is restlessly included or excluded, and thus not respected in its otherness, the sensitivity for otherness gives rise to a critique of closed narrative patterns. Obviously, this critique also can only be expressed in terms of one’s own narrative. One is never able to go beyond one’s particularity, arriving at the meta-narrative realm.

The ‘open narrative,’ therefore, does not exist as such. This model concerns rather the structure of narrativity. Many particular narratives, including perhaps the Christian narrative, may have the capacity to foster this sensitivity for otherness and provide an *openness* towards the other in their own narrative pattern. (a) It is this openness which generates genuine mutual tolerance and dialogue between people of different religions and philosophies. Although an all-encompassing and reconciling meta-narrative must be excluded as illegitimate, the recognition of reciprocal kinship as regards the open structure of one’s narrative (which leads to the appreciation rather than the abolition of particularity) can be the outcome. (b) It is this openness which should enable particular narratives to deal with plurality and otherness

in a non-totalising way. Given the lessons learned from the loss of plausibility of the master narratives of modernity, it would appear that respect for otherness or the absence of this respect is the final criterion enabling us to determine whether a narrative is totalising and thus harmful, or less totalising. Only thus can the resistance offered by the latter sort of narrative to the former be said to have any degree of reflexive plausibility. A sharp distinction between the two sorts of narrative, however, is far from evident: self-criticism remains a primary condition for open narratives. (c) It is also this openness which must offset the postmodern slogan ‘anything goes’ as well as every sort of relativism. Indeed, also the master narratives of postmodernity do not take the other in its otherness seriously, assuming it to be simply ‘more of the same.’ Only when concrete particular narratives are considered to be concerned with the otherness which escapes them, and are able to discern the happening of this otherness in the concrete other who confronts them, will they avoid being submerged by particularism and contextualism. (d) To conclude, to the extent that a plurality of narratives and no single narrative determines our identity and that of our community, we might even assume that, in our present circumstances, many ‘small open narratives’ give form to our relationship with plurality and the other.

As we have already noted, however, *the* open narrative as such does not exist. There are only particular narratives which must learn the lessons of our recent past. This is also true for the Christian narrative. The question arising from the context then reads: *can the Christian narrative reformulate itself as a consciously particular, and contextually embedded way of dealing with plurality and otherness?*

## VI. FAITH IN SEARCH OF UNDERSTANDING IN DIALOGUE WITH THE CURRENT CONTEXT: A TWOFOLD CHALLENGE

Recontextualisation implies not only (1) engaging in a confrontation with contextual critical consciousness but also, and more importantly, (2) searching for a contextually anchored understanding of our Christian faith, i.e. developing a theology for today.

(1) As we have already noted, dialogue with contextual critical consciousness teaches Christians in the first instance that their faith is, culturally speaking, a particular narrative among other narratives. As such, the Christian narrative enjoys its own perspective on reality (the perception of which is irreducibly determined by this narrative from the outset): Jesus, confessed

as the Christ, whose story, witnessed to by the apostles, teaches Christians that the mystery of reality is called Love. More concretely this means that, structurally speaking, Christians in our present day culture are opting for a specific narrative (including a community bearing this narrative) which is one among many. Culture as such does no longer support this choice as in the past. Even more: dialogue with culture does not lead to the construction of a sort of common denominator (a encompassing consensus) but rather to the recognition of the specific and unique identity of the Christian faith. This means, among other things, that in general faith and life no longer simply overlap: in present-day culture, 'life' has become a highly pluri-interpretable concept. This also implies that 'God' is only to be included in the definition of 'human being' for 'those who believe in God.' Human depth-experiences are no longer automatically perceived as Christian experiences of God's involvement with humanity. Even for Christians, experiences are often only interpreted in terms of the Christian narrative *a posteriori*, after the facts. If one too easily forgets this, one will very likely arrive at a merely human narrative, which in essence has little to do with the Christian narrative, because it is nothing more than a duplication of another narrative. Basically, it is familiarity with the Christian narrative and integration into the Christian community which make Christians Christian.

The Christian faith, moreover, cannot claim an absolute perspective since this would lead, of necessity, to totalitarianism. Contextual plausibility can only be gained when it structures itself as *an open narrative*. This is a narrative which has learned to perceive itself as a respectful, particular witness to radical otherness (apparent in the otherness of the concrete other) and develops a praxis of the open narrative (implying openness to the other, witness to the other, and self- and world-criticism). It is precisely here, in the relation to otherness, that *truth claims* find their anchor: the truth of a narrative then is no longer a matter of true propositions, it is perceived according to the quality of its relation to otherness. In other words: the truth of the Christian tradition is bound to the authenticity of the tradition's stance towards the other. It should be clear, however, that confronting these aspects of the contextual critical consciousness has far reaching consequences for the way in which narrative and community ought to function. This implies, for example, a Church which resolutely rejects, even internally, master narrative patterns, a Church in which narrative and community submit to the critique of and constitute a multiform witness to the God who, as the irreducible Other has made himself known as Love. This brings us to the second step (to

be distinguished, not to be separated) of the recontextualisation process which the present contribution has been treating.

(2) While the critical consciousness of our time might possibly lead us to the borders of engaging faith, it cannot, however, take us beyond the leap of faith. The belief that God has come close to us in Jesus cannot be rationally determined nor enforced. After all, it remains an act of the will, a surrender which, especially in our days, can be accompanied by often recurring doubt. This does not mean, however, that faith is a matter of a (fideistic) leap into the irrational. On the contrary: it is precisely in the dialogue with contemporary critical consciousness that theologians can discern the patterns and conceptual models which in turn, when theologically received, can demonstrate the rationality of the faith. It is at this level that the unique character of the Christian narrative can be reflexively clarified for contemporary Christians.

While the fact that the Christian narrative should be an open narrative, can (and should) be motivated on contextual grounds, nevertheless this can only be done legitimately on theological grounds (i.e. in the narrative's own terms): does the structure of the open narrative also enjoy theological validity? Is it conceivable for Christians to understand the Christian narrative as witness to the 'other' who as 'event' continually interrupts the narrative and challenges us to develop a critical praxis? What place does God have in such a scenario? I have endeavoured to make clear elsewhere that the very structure of the open narrative offers promising opportunities for formulating a contextual and theologically plausible stance with respect to God and the place of Jesus Christ.

God is then understood as the Other who becomes visible in the concrete other, especially in the excluded other<sup>9</sup> God becomes impalpably revealed 'as absent presence' in the 'graced event' which interrupts our narrative. As the interrupting, open-breaking Other, God calls us out of our closed narratives and summons us to conversion, to open up our narrative for God's coming. Precisely because God does not have a place in our narrative, God becomes the driving force behind the critical praxis of openness, bearing witness and engagement which constitute a Christian open narrative.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Onderbroken traditie, chapter 8 (pp. 115-126). See also: L. B o e v e. *Postmodernism and Negative Theology. The A/theologie of the 'open narrative.* „Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie” 58:1997 pp. 407-425; i d e m. *Post-Modern Sacramento-Theology: Retelling the Christian Story.* „Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses” 74:1998 pp. 326-343.

In his life, words and deeds, Jesus of Nazareth taught us to recognise this Other God as interrupting Love<sup>10</sup> However, it was only the experience of the resurrection – i.e. the experience of faith that God has reopened the closed and bloody narrative of Jesus – which led the first witnesses to proclaim Jesus as the Christ and to make him the normative perspective for their lives. The Christian tradition is, in essence, nothing more than the historical development, from context to context, of this perspective on the relationship between humanity and God.

All this prevents us from identifying the accentuation of the faith option on the one hand, and the particular character of the Christian narrative on the other with traditionalistic trends. On the contrary, these accents imply a dynamic concept of tradition which succeeds in handing down Christian faith in a recontextualised way, held up against the praxis of the open narrative of which it is the concrete form.

The past has seen a variety of methods for rationally clarifying God and God's involvement with humanity. In a context in which belief in God is no longer evident as such, the conceptualisation of God as the Other, as the One who always escapes and only comes to us as unmasterable interruption, offers a conceptual structure which can help us come to terms with our actual condition. The fact that God does not have a 'place' in the Christian narrative but can only be evoked in God's ungraspability, prevents us from falling anew into the trap of totalitarianism. At the same time, however, Christians today are also postmodern people, participants in a culture in which God's role has been played out and in which profoundly human or religious experiences no longer refer us directly and automatically to the God of Jesus Christ. If it were not for the fact that we possess the transmitted witness of God's engagement in the history of the world and of humanity, together with the communities which have made this witness contextually their own, then this God would be truly inaccessible. Every context provides both opportunities and dangers for a recontextualisation of Christian faith; this is also the case in our so-called postmodern context.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Onderbroken traditie, chapter 7 (pp. 91-114). See also T. Merrigan. *Christus Postmodernus: An Attempt at Apophatic Christology*. In: idem (ed.), *The Myriad Christ. Plurality and the Quest for Unity*. In *Contemporary Christology* (BETL, 152). Leuven 2000 pp. 577-593.

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OD SEKULARYZACJI DO DETRADYCJONALIZACJI I PLURALIZACJI:  
WYZYWAJĄCE PRZESUNIĘCIE WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ TEOLOGII

Streszczenie

W krajach Europy Zachodniej coraz bardziej zwiększa się dystans między wiarą chrześcijańską a kontekstem kulturowym i społecznym, w którym żyją chrześcijanie. Prowadzi to do sekularyzacji i indywidualnego podejścia do spraw związanych z wiarą w Boga. Społeczeństwo staje się coraz bardziej pluralistyczne i oderwane od swych chrześcijańskich korzeni, co Autor artykułu wyraża pojęciem „detradycjonalizacji”. Dialog chrześcijan ze współczesną kulturą musi zakładać świadomą konfrontację wierzących z problemami typowymi dla okresu postmodernistycznego, a mianowicie: pluralizmem, partykularyzmem, odczuciem własnej wyjątkowości (jak również wyjątkowości innych) oraz innością, konfliktem oraz niemożliwością pojednania różnych opcji i wyborów.

Następnie Autor podejmuje próbę określenia klucza do postmodernistycznej świadomości, traktując współczesność jako zespół „głównych i zasadniczych narratywów (dyskursów)”, które nazwać można również „zamkniętymi narratywami (dyskursami)”. Zwraca uwagę, że wiele prób humanizacji i rozwoju społeczeństwa oraz świata doprowadziło do dehumanizacji i dewastacji. Aby tego unikać, trzeba odwoływać się do inności i partykularyzmu jako modelu „otwartego narratywu”. Coraz to większa wrażliwość na innych rodzi samokrytycyzm i krytyczny stosunek do świata, co wyraża się w wielości współistniejących „narratywów”, które nadają tożsamość tak człowiekowi, jak i wspólnotie. Chrześcijanie muszą uczyć się z doświadczeń minionego czasu, by odnajdywać drogę radzenia sobie z pluralizmem i innością.

Końcowa część artykułu dotyczy problemu wiary poszukującej zrozumienia w dialogu ze współczesnym kontekstem kulturowym i społecznym. Autor stara się odpowiedzieć na pytania o miejsce Boga i świadectwa chrześcijańskiego we współczesnym świecie. Twierdzi też, że tradycja chrześcijańska, w swej istocie, nie jest niczym więcej, jak tylko historycznym rozwojem relacji między ludzkością i Bogiem.

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**Słowa kluczowe:** sekularyzacja, „detradycjonalizacja”, pluralizm, postmodernizm, współczesna teologia, model „otwartego dyskursu (narratywu)”

**Key words:** secularisation, ‘detraditionalisation,’ pluralisation, Postmodernism, contemporary theology, the model of ‘open narrative.’