

A Response to Christoph Theobald

PETER BEXELL

Peter Bexell relaterar i sitt svar till Christoph Theobald insikter från det franska sammanhanget till det svenska, och drar några konsekvenser för den svenska teologins reflektion över förhållandet mellan teologi och kultur. Bexell är stiftsadjunkt i Växjö stift och disputerade 1997 på en avhandling om den franske teologen Henri de Lubac.

«Trends in French theology»: What commentaries could be given from a Swedish point of view? I will only direct the attention to some specific approaches in professor Theobald's representation, which could serve as commentaries to the Swedish and Scandinavian theological situation.

My first reflection is very simple. It starts in the fact that we obviously talk about French (and Swedish) theology as «French» and as «Swedish» — such a distinction would hardly be made if this were a conference on medical things. Whether about philosophy or fundamental theology — the conference's theme and its lectures all presuppose the fact that religion and theological reflection are social phenomena. This means that the actual Church and its handing-over of religious tradition is a vital counterpart for the making of theology. This is something to learn for Swedish theology. Theology cannot happen just inside your head. It is related to religious life and to actual faith among actual human beings.

My second reflection is a consequence of this. Even if professor Theobald stresses that younger French theologians know that Catholic theological reflection has a secular context in French culture, and thus question the ecclesiality of their theology (III:1), still the influence of Catholicisms on «French structural identity» (I:3) is on the stage for the Church and thus for adequate theological reflection — and in some way it has to be so.

This statement of course first evokes the ancient and conflicting ideas of French Catholicism's ambivalent relation to Rome — *fluctuat nec mergit*: on one side those of «Rome's eldest

daughter» and *action catholique*, on the other side those of gallicanism, *les semaines sociales* and *les prêtres-ouvriers*.

But eventually, the basic analysis of the relation between church and culture has to be set in a wider context. Today the establishment of the relation between faith and multicultural ethos, «universalism but not totalitarianism» is at the same time necessary to do and impossible to carry through. I think this ambition is the driving force of the people in the French version of the periodical *Communio*. And I think this is vital for us Scandinavians to learn — maybe with the exception of some Danes, who know how to do part of it. For us the main ecclesiological agenda today is how to remain a national church — «folkkyrka» — after disestablishment and in an increasingly multicultural situation. We have to find methods for that way of making close local theologies and force them to meet the worldwide interchange.

And — from this point of view — I even think this «ecclesiality-in-secularism» maybe could be a common project for Lutheran ecclesiologists, for the *Communio* people and for some American (and WCC-related) makers of local Catholic theologies. And of course, Anglicans and the *Concilium* people should be most generously invited to such an exciting project.

My third reflection is a short and more theoretical statement, starting from professor Theobald's remarks about the presence of church and presence of culture as the take-offs for theological reflection in France. Taking a long view, this starting-point means an interesting way of relating social theory and theology, which I find promising and perhaps is drawing

near in Swedish theology too — making theology from the finding that human beings are social as well as they are individuals. The problem is that here it has not the background in the philosophical reflection, which has continued in France, where it — after the crash in the modernist crisis — was re-built in the method of immanence and in *la nouvelle théologie*, and today e.g. in Jean-Luc Marion's Heidegger criticism, and in the British discussion on Radical orthodoxy programme.¹ This means that we in Sweden have to learn and to reflect a lot on what I would like to call the fundamental theological implications of the fact that humanity is a social or in some way a congregational being. You can express it so: what will here be the outcome if you go all the way with the word «humanity» in its dual meaning: humankind and human «existential».

The rest of my reflections are all on the central role of the concept of revelation in professor Theobald's paper — a presence which I mean in a provocative and favourable way challenges Swedish theological reflection as a whole. At the same time, I want to put a methodological question to the role the paper gives to revelation.

It is obvious that Jean-Luc Marion's theology of gift² is a significant and promising step in the discussion on Heidegger's rejection of metaphysics — and moreover the fact that Marion has his theological roots in *la nouvelle théologie* and has gained some hearing in Cambridge. Now, I would wonder if his theology of gift could be regarded as a most interesting development not so much of the theology of revelation, as of the theology of grace. Thus it could revitalize the continuing (but more and

more quiet) ecumenical discussions after the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* — and make the history of theology enter into today's theological arena.

My fifth reflection is that professor Theobald of course is right in his criticism of Marion's position, saying that he may end up in a more than questionable veneration for traditions and hierarchy: they receive a lot of spin off authority from that idea of ultimate givenness. In *God without being*, Marion discusses christology and eucharist as exponents of this fundamental givenness, and he has some controversial conclusions on Catholic hierarchy and Eucharist according to *Lumen gentium*³ — Werner Jeanrond has criticised this.⁴ But the question is, if that is a necessary conclusion from *any* idea of ultimate givenness. In the Cambridge discussion around Radical orthodoxy, Gerhard Loughlin has recently developed ultimate givenness as a basic theory of sacramental presence in the eucharist, without questions of hierarchy involved.⁵

Professor Theobald is not willing to support a concept of revelation defining it from its contents (III:3), and he daringly ask if it isn't enough — for the moment — to investigate it, starting in the way a human being is transfigured by meeting revelation — *dynamis* and *krisis* lead up to *metamorphosis*. It is of course a matter of pastoral wisdom, what to stress. When you reformulate a question and change a method, however, you are every time changing the worldview as well, and then you cannot discuss this as only a change of method. From the just intimated view of fundamental theology that distinction between form and contents is impossible. Theology cannot be reduced to phenomenology, God who is related to the world has to be present in our representations of that world. This means that you have to relate those pastoral phenomena to the fact that the church regards revelation as

¹ John Milbank: *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*. Blackwell, Oxford 1990; *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*. Ed: J.Milbank, C.Pickstock & G.Ward. Routledge, London 1999.

² Jean-Luc Marion: *Etant donné. Essai d'une phénoménologie de la donation*. PUF, Paris 1991; Marion: *De surcroît. Études sur les phénomènes saturés*. PUF, Paris 2001, supplemented by the texts by Marion and others discussing with Jacques Derrida his idea of forgiveness in *Questioning God*. Ed. J.D.Caputo, M.Dooley & M.J.Scanlon. Indiana University Press 2001; (reviewed in *STK 2002:4*).

³ Marion: *Dieu sans l'être*. 2 ed. PUF, Paris 1991, p. 197–222.

⁴ Werner Jeanrond: *Guds närvaro*. Arcus, Lund 1998, p. 178f.

⁵ Gerhard Loughlin: «Eucharist as Pure Gift.» *Christ the Sacramental Word. Incarnation, Sacrament and Poetry*. Ed: D.Brown & A.Loades. SPCK, London 1996, p. 123–144, with further references.

in some way God's giving of himself — and to a question about at least some pretenders of truth. This is, in fact, an aspect of the problem he has indicated with his key words «universalism but not totalitarianism».

This way of regarding fundamental theological reflection, related to an idea of the human person as its arena, will in its turn be the background to my last reflection. Claude Geffré's starting-point for the inter-faith dialogue — «the authentic human being» making that genuine experience of otherness, which is a position close to Karl Rahner's (*Hörer des Wortes*) — means the retreat from the idea of the *homo religiosus*. This change could also be described as a change of theological method similar to that indicated in my sixth remark — a more phenomenological method used when in postmodernity the human being «as such» is vanishing. But,

of course, still it is not just methodology. The question remains about human being as such, at least about myself as such, or ourselves as such (Church, congregation). It is the classical question from *la nouvelle théologie* — either the human being having a natural desire to see God — or this desire being provoked by revelation, or of other experiences of grace.

Here we are back to those remarks of professor Theobald, to which I by way of introduction paid the audience's attention: the relation between theology and culture, which also could be expressed as the relation between dogma and history. And I can give another formulation of that most thrilling question on humanity, a question of postmodernism which has been so wonderfully elucidated in professor Theobald's lecture: *Who* is «der Mensch der, wie Gott und nicht nur in Frankreich, lebt»?

Rum för något nytt!

Konferens om feminism och liturgi
Stiftsgården Åkersberg, Höör
2-4 oktober 2003

Medverkar gör bl a Kajsa Ahlstrand, Ninna Edgardh Beckman,
Anne-Louise Eriksson och Lena Sjöstrand

Arrangörer är Kvinnor i Svenska kyrkan, Lunds stift, Svenska kyrkan,
Sensus, Bilda, SEK och Forum för kvinnliga präster
Sista anmälningdag den 15 augusti

Information och anmälningstalong hos
Sensus, Box 4132, 203 12 Malmö, e-post skane-blekinge@sensus.se