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CATHOLIC SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND
NATIONAL SOCIALISM

On 6th December 1939, three months after the beginning of World War II, Karl Adam, Professor of Systematic Theology in Tuebingen, a town in Southwest Germany, gave a lecture to a large number of Catholic priests and laity in the city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle).¹ In his lecture, Adam spoke about “The Spiritual Situation of German Catholicism”. Adam offered his lecture to address his belief that many German Catholics had lost respect for their church. Adam especially wanted to reach Catholics who were German nationalists and who had also begun to turn away from the church because of continued church state conflicts. Adam argued that the NS-ideology (*Weltanschauung*), “which forms our way of thinking and our intentions and dominates the whole German person“ influences the spiritual situation of German Catholicism.² In his view, Catholicism and National Socialism were compatible and completed each other. In turn, this fact demanded particular reforms in theology and the life of the church. Through his Aachen lecture, Adam wanted to show, especially to National Socialists, that loyalty and patriotism toward the German nation clearly existed in Catholicism. The loss of faith in German Catholicism among nationalist Catholics continued to remain a concern for Adam long after his Aachen lecture. For example, in 1944 Adam told Josef Thomé, a fellow theologian:

¹ See Karl Adam, *Die geistige Lage des deutschen Katholizismus*, Diözesanarchiv Rottenburg, Nachlass Karl Adam (DAR N 67), No. 32.

² Adam, *Die geistige Lage*, f. 2 („... die unser persönliches Denken und Wollen formt und den ganzen deutschen Menschen beansprucht.“).

“I am still deeply concerned about the ideas I expressed in 1939 in my Aachen-lecture.”³

Adam’s ideas were controversial from the beginning. Cardinal Schulte from the archdiocese of Cologne and Suffragan Bishop Hünemann from Aachen disapproved of Adam’s proposals of reform. The Archbishop of Freiburg, Conrad Gröber, and Bishop of Augsburg, Joseph Kumpfmüller, protested against the lecture. Adam was prepared to publish the lecture but needed to receive the obligatory “imprimatur” from the bishop of Augsburg, because the publishers who agreed to print the lecture resided in the city of Augsburg. The “imprimatur” was refused. Nevertheless, through the help of the editor of the Catholic based *Kolpingsblatt*, Josef Bagus, who copied and distributed the lecture, Adam was able to disseminate his lecture throughout Germany. Bagus who was himself an ardent Nazi and Gestapo collaborator and informer was more than happy to assist Adam to propagate his ideas. Many theologians, including Michael Schmaus, Joseph Wittig, and Adolf Herte agreed with Adam and wrote him letters of support.⁴ For example on May 23, 1940, Schmaus wrote:

“The other day I received an authentic text of your Aachen lecture ... I congratulate you for your courageous effort. Without such bravery, but also risky endeavours, stagnation would take place in the church and in theology. It is unfortunate that you live so far away. Otherwise, I would love to discuss these questions with you in person. The crucial point, you see, is the difficult relationship between nature and super-nature. Upon reading your lecture, I was highly affected by your burning pastoral concern, which is evident throughout your lecture. Every page reveals an author who does not care about the preservation of time-bound

³ Karl Adam to Josef Thomé, May 7, 1944, in *Der Rheinische Reformkreis: Dokumente zu Modernismus und Reformkatholizismus 1942-1955*, Vol. II, eds. Hubert Wolf and Claus Arnold (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 75-77, here 77 („Sie sehen, was ich 1939 in meinem Aachener Vortrag ausführte, liegt mir immer noch am Herzen.“).

⁴ See Lucia Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform mit Hilfe des Nationalsozialismus: Karl Adam als kontextueller Theologe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 256-260.

formulas but about the salvation of the people living in Germany today. From your remarks, one sees that the way is paved for a meeting in which one proclaims Christianity in its truest sense. The moment the preacher of the Word of God decides not to offer a well-ordered inherited system of principles, but to allow the reality of revelation to shine forth, is the point when today's generation will hear God's call."⁵

On May 27, 1940, Adam answered Schmaus by first thanking him for his words. Adam also stated that he agreed with Schmaus that the central question was the relationship between nature and grace. Adam argued that theologians must not separate nature and super-nature – a separation that theologians have made since the time of Thomas Aquinas. Adam believed that theology and the church would change seriously in the future. He did not hesitate to compare the situation to the age of Reformation. Adam stated that unlike 1517, modern day theologians had to be aware that they “had to prepare the Catholic soul for this hour, when [they] would get rid of many ideas taken as essential by a stubborn traditional theology. I

⁵ Michael Schmaus to Karl Adam, May 23, 1940, DAR N 67, No. 33 („Dieser Tage erhielt ich einen authentischen Text ihres vielbesprochenen Aachener Vortrags, nachdem ich schon seit vielen Wochen eine schlechte Nachschrift hatte. Ich beglückwünsche Sie zu diesem mutigen Vorstoß. Ohne solche tapfere, aber auch gefährliche Eroberungszüge müsste in der Kirche und in der Theologie Stagnation eintreten. Schade, dass Sie so weit weg sind. Sonst könnte ich meinem Bedürfnis nachgeben, mich mit Ihnen über einige Fragen noch eingehender zu unterhalten. Man sieht, der Angelpunkt der ganzen Frage ist das schwierige Verhältnis von Natur und Übernatur. Auf das stärkste war ich bei der Lektüre des Vortrags von dem brennenden seelsorgerlichen Eros ergriffen, der das Ganze durchglüht. Man spürt auf jeder Seite, dass hier ein Mann spricht, dem es nicht um die sorgsame Konservierung zeitgebundener Formen, sondern um das Heil der lebendigen Menschen im heutigen Deutschland zu tun ist. Aus Ihren Ausführungen sieht man, dass die Wege zu einer Begegnung gebahnt werden, indem man das Christentum in seinem wahren Sinne verkündet. Sobald die Verkündiger des Wortes Gottes sich dazu entschließen, nicht ein wohlgeordnetes, schon von den Vorfahren ererbtes Sätzesystem darzubieten, sondern die in der Offenbarung erschlossene Wirklichkeit aufleuchten zu lassen, hört auch der heutige Mensch den Anruf Gottes.“).

trust more in you than in any other dogmatist. Reading your text I always feel our spiritual connection. Therefore *unitis viribus* ready for battle *carissime!* Heil Hitler!"⁶

In the 1930s and 1940s, Karl Adam was the most famous and popular Catholic theologian in Germany. His books had been translated into many languages whereby his ideas had spread all over the world. In comparison, Michael Schmaus was only beginning his career as a theologian. Since 1933, he had been teaching dogmatics in the city of Münster, Westphalia. Nevertheless, many considered Schmaus to be a rising star in theological academics. After the war, Cardinal Faulhaber called Schmaus to Munich to help to restore the faculty of theology at the University of Munich, which had only recently reopened. In 1965, Schmaus retired but continued to teach or lecture at the university until his death in 1993. Both theologians are considered pioneers of Vatican Council II. Schmaus himself worked as an advisor to Vatican II. The Vatican also invited Adam to be a member of one of the Council's preparatory commissions. Unfortunately, his age and illness prevented him from fulfilling this invitation. Adam's and Schmaus' theological approaches decisively influenced the development of Catholic theology during the twentieth century. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to point out their affirmation of Nazi-ideology.

The letters reveal Adam and Schmaus as two theologians deeply concerned about doing theology in the spirit of the age. They intended to prove the relevance of Christian proclamation to the society of their day. Therefore, they called for theological reforms in their tradition. They argued that old expressions of faith should be abandoned in favour of modern ones.

⁶ Karl Adam to Michael Schmaus, May 27, 1940 (shorthand note), DAR N 67, No. 33, („Wir müssen schon jetzt [die katholische Seele] für jene Stunde, wo vieles fallen wird, was sture Schultheologie [] für wesentlich hielt, vorbereiten. Auf keinen Dogmatiker vertraue ich in dieser Hinsicht mehr wie auf Sie. Immer wieder spüre ich aus Ihren Schriften, wie sehr sich unsere geistige Haltung berührt. Darum *unitis viribus* in den Kampf, *carissime!* Heil Hitler!“).

Adam and Schmaus could not be labelled as conservative or traditionalists. Rather, they viewed themselves as reformers within the Catholic church. Indeed, their obituaries praised them as reformers who completely changed Catholic theology by dismissing the principles of neo-scholasticism in favour of a contemporary theology.⁷ In this view, reforms within church and theology generally were agreeable or even desirable. But what happened when two theologians offered a contemporary theological approach in Nazi-Germany? Which parts of the Church's teaching and practices did they have to alter to appeal to a generation which was deeply influenced by National Socialist ideology? Why did they revise the neo-scholastic interpretation of nature and grace for that purpose?

In neo-scholastic theology "nature" referred to the essentials of a creature's natural life and his or her natural aim, but did not adhere the relationship between God and human beings. "Grace" was strictly separated from "nature" to save the gratuity of God's grace. God must not be imagined as one who is obliged to be gracious because of the demands of human nature. In this respect, "nature" was used as a philosophical term. It did not consist of any biological or ecological aspect. It was neo-scholasticism's shortcoming in that it neglected the idea that as creatures of God, human beings are "naturally" inclined toward God.

In Schmaus' and Adam's approaches, nature and grace were deeply related. In his Aachen lecture, Adam talked about an organic communion of nature and grace, rather than a hostile opposition or an indifferent coexistence.⁸ For Adam,

⁷ See Walter Kasper, „Karl Adam: Zu seinem 100. Geburtstag und 10. Todestag,“ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 156 (1976) 251-258; „Ein Geschenk Gottes für die Theologie und für die Kirche: Predigt des Erzbischofs von München und Freising Friedrich Kardinal Wetter beim Requiem für Herrn Professor Dr. Michael Schmaus am 13. Dezember 1993 in Gauting,“ *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 45 (1994) 115-117, here 115; Richard Heinzmann, „Michael Schmaus in memoriam,“ *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 45 (1994) 123-127, at 124.

⁸ See Adam, *Die geistige Lage*, f. 18.

God's grace needed an empirical foundation because becoming a Christian occurred through the union of nature and super-nature. In Adam's view, human nature carried this synthesis. According to the spiritual situation of German Catholicism, the German nature became the bearer of Christian reality. For Adam nature never existed in an abstract way, but has always been formed concretely by blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*). Adam asked how super-nature and nature as well as Christianity and German character corresponded. Both were integrally joined, so that the life of grace was formed in accordance with the German national character (*Volkscharakter*). Spirituality and theology were always racially ethnic (*völkisch*). Adam rejected all attempts of the church to ignore this coherence. He violently attacked the opinion that the universally human precedes the participation in a community through the same blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*). Adam scorned this universalistic view as a "consumptive faith," an "anaemic faith," or an "impotent trivial Christianity."⁹

Adam blamed theology for the church's poor image in National Socialist Germany. According to him, theologians had failed to explain the authentic Catholic attitude towards the relationship of nature and super-nature, especially concerning Catholics' relationship to the *Volksgemeinschaft*. If German blood was the basis of grace, then the bond between those of the same blood was stronger than among Christians of different blood. Adam stated: "German blood is and remains the substantial bearer of our Christian reality. And the same blood also unites us in an indivisible community of blood with those who are not of our faith. Through this, the question whether a Catholic is closer to the believing savage than to the unbelieving compatriot becomes obsolete. In the Catholic view, the non-religious German remains our brother, even though he is a brother who is mistaken. And for this reason, he precedes every stranger (*Artfremden*) in the hierarchy of

⁹ Adam, *Die geistige Lage*, f. 19 („schwindsüchtiger Glaube“, „Glaube ohne Blut“, „lendenlahmes Allerweltschristentum“).

love.”¹⁰ In 1933, Adam used the same arguments to justify the National Socialist racial teaching. In his opinion, the demand for “purity of blood” in no way opposed church doctrine. For Adam, blood that was healthy and not contaminated by intermarriage between people of different races offered the best foundation for the supernatural work of the church.¹¹

Schmaus agreed completely with Adam’s interpretation of nature and grace. In the summer of 1933, Schmaus gave a lecture that encompassed argumentation similar to Adam to students at the University of Münster.¹² In this lecture, he argued that the foundation of solidarity of the German people was their blood and ancestry. Schmaus believed that this same blood influenced the German people’s feelings, thought and religion. So he was convinced that grace was not alienated from the national character (*Volkstum*) but led it to perfection – or as scholasticism taught: grace presupposes nature and perfects nature.¹³ According to him, God had given one of the greatest historical tasks to the German nation. Therefore, Germany occupied a higher status in the history of the world than, for example, the “nigger-republic of Liberia”.¹⁴

Here Schmaus intertwined his theological reflection on nature and grace with elements of historical philosophy. In

¹⁰ Adam, *Die geistige Lage*, f. 22 („Das deutsche Blut ist und bleibt der substantielle Träger auch unserer christlichen Wirklichkeit. Und dasselbe deutsche Blut verbindet uns auch mit all jenen, die nicht unseres Glaubens sind, zu unlöslicher Blutgemeinschaft. Damit erledigt sich die bis zum Überdruß aufgeworfene Frage, ob dem Katholiken ‘der gläubige Hottentot näher stehe als der ungläubige Volksgenosse’. Für die katholische Betrachtungsweise bleibt auch der glaubenslose Deutsche unser Bruder, wenn auch ein irrender Bruder. Und darum steht er in der Stufenfolge der Liebe jedem Artfremden voran.“).

¹¹ See Karl Adam, „Deutsches Volkstum und katholisches Christentum,“ *Theologische Quartalschrift* 114 (1933) 40-63, here 61.

¹² See Michael Schmaus, *Begegnungen zwischen katholischem Christentum und nationalsozialistischer Weltanschauung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1933).

¹³ See Schmaus, *Begegnungen*, 36.

¹⁴ Schmaus, *Begegnungen*, 30 („die Negerrepublik Liberia“).

addition, he compared the relationship between nature and grace to the convergence of National Socialism and Christianity. Examining National Socialist censorship of sexual enlightenment, literature, theatre and film, he was able to find similarities between the goals of the Nazi state and the Catholic church in regard to morality.¹⁵ Schmaus stressed that the Nazi state created so-called work-communities (*Betriebsgemeinschaften*), which seemed to unite bosses and workers in one vocational corporation to overcome class conflict. This view of community seemed to be compatible to the social doctrine of the Church. For Schmaus, National Socialism and Catholicism had to face the same task, but on different levels: National Socialism had to struggle for Germany's natural welfare, while the church promoted supernatural salvation.

Overall, Adam and Schmaus attempted to adopt traditional theological terms for a rapprochement between Catholicism and National Socialism. In fact, Klaus Scholder found that all Catholic theologians who sought cooperation between the church and the Nazi state utilized this pattern in their central argument.¹⁶ Unfortunately, he concluded that it was neo-scholasticism which enabled Catholic theologians to embrace National Socialism. But theologians like Adam and Schmaus adopted those traditional terms only to legitimate their arguments. In reality, by joining nature and grace so closely, they went directly against neo-scholasticism and its forms of argumentation that separated the two. They made this connection in their interest to create a synthesis of National Socialism and Catholicism based on German blood. For both theologians, this was not a passing-fade of the year of the seizure of power (1933), but something they embraced through the end of the Second World War.

What happens to "nature" in this interpretation? Biological and racist elements are added to a term that once has been a

¹⁵ See Schmaus, *Begegnungen*, 31.

¹⁶ See Klaus Scholder, *Die Kirchen und das Dritte Reich*, Vol. I (Frankfurt/Main-Berlin: Ullstein, 1986), 541-544.

purely philosophical one referring only to the natural conditions of a being. However, through this particular transformation the term “nature” did not change. Consequently, both theologians did not need to alter their approaches in the post-war years. In contrast, they only had to dispense with their nationalist and racist interpretations. After the war, their theology succeeded completely – even though it was controversial for sometime. Until now, it has been viewed as one of the greatest achievements accomplished by twentieth century Catholic theology. However, when one investigates the roots of this theological reform in the Third Reich, one is forced to ask if it is radically contaminated by its own history. In his 1959 lecture, *What Does It Mean to Face Up to the Past? (Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?)*, Theodor W. Adorno demanded that anything that led to or supported Nazi-barbarism had to be removed from intellectual thought. He stressed that the “survival of National Socialism within democracy is potentially more dangerous than the outlasting of fascist tendencies against democracy.”¹⁷

How did theological topics that were supportive of National Socialism survive in Catholic theology after 1945? To answer this question one must focus on the ideas of “community” (*Gemeinschaft*) and “experience” (*Erlebnis*). These ideas are closely related to the concepts of nature and grace discussed previously.

Schmaus viewed community, nation, relation, and authority as the central ideas of the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*.¹⁸ The aim of National Socialism was to strengthen the *Volkgemeinschaft* by which all Germans would become united without conflicts. The Catholic Church, Schmaus

¹⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, „Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?“, in: Theodor W. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit: Vorträge und Gespräche mit Hellmut Becker*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach, Eighth edition (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 10-28, here 10 („Ich betrachte das Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus in der Demokratie als potentiell bedrohlicher denn das Nachleben faschistischer Tendenzen gegen die Demokratie.“).

¹⁸ Schmaus, *Begegnungen*, 22.

continued, affirmed the *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁹ It looked at every God-given community in the same way, because the church itself has existed as a community. Previously, the age of individualism and subjectivism regarded the Church primarily as an institution that distributed individual salvation. National Socialism overcame this era of individualism and replaced it with one emphasizing community. The Church taught that communal interest preceded self-interest. Authority and leadership formed community and, at the same time, obedience. Schmaus concluded that the Catholic person had to value the *Volksgemeinschaft* not only as a God-given form of community but as the product and destination of National Socialist ideology and politics. Schmaus argued that “the Catholic is fundamentally required to affirm community. That is why in his saying yes to the *Volksgemeinschaft* there is entirely no hesitation or doubt or caution. He speaks this not only as a German as one who has been formed by the same blood and earth and shares the same destiny and the same tasks as thousands and millions of upright Germans, but also as one who is bound by his faith. He sees in the *Volk* grown out of blood and soil, fate and duty, a work of divine providence.”²⁰

Similarly, Karl Adam attributed the creation of a *Volksgemeinschaft* to the work of the Holy Spirit, because the *Volksgemeinschaft* had closed the gap between nature and supernature, body and spirit, nation and church, laity and clergy.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., 26.

²⁰ Ibid., 28f. („Der Katholik ist von vorneherein hingerichtet auf die Bejahung der Gemeinschaft. Darum ist in seinem Ja zur Volksgemeinschaft gar nichts Zages oder Bedenkliches oder Abwartendes. Er spricht es nicht nur als Deutscher, als ein aus dem gleichen Blut und Boden Geformter, unter dem gleichen Schicksal und der gleichen Aufgabe wie Tausende und Millionen Stehender, sondern auch als ein durch seinen Glauben Verpflichteter. Er sieht in dem aus Blut und Boden, aus Schicksal und Aufgabe gewachsenen Volksganzen ein Werk der göttlichen Vorsehung.“).

²¹ In a letter to *Kolpingsblatt* Adam stressed the providential character of the “national” (i.e. National Socialist) movement. Parts of his letter were printed in *Kolpingsblatt*. A copy is available as a supplement to: Bischöfliches Ordinariat Berlin (Dompropst Bernhard Lichtenberg) to

Long before Hitler's seizure of power, community had been the central point of Adam's ecclesiology. In his famous book *The Spirit of Catholicism*, Adam explained the nature of the church as community.²² For him, the divine became reality in this community only as far as it was community. The mystery of the incarnation was already embodied in the church as an organic community. Therefore, Adam applied the ideology of community created in the Weimar Republic to his ecclesiology. This ideology expressed the discontent concerning democracy and the republican form of government and attacked the parliamentary system, liberalism and rationalism.²³ The Youth Movement with its romantic idea of community in the early 1900s and especially the experience of World War I, helped to shape this organic notion of community. Many considered the beginning of the "Great War" an extraordinary experience of community and especially mystified the communal experience of the soldiers fighting at the front. As social and political consensus faltered within the young German republic, the more people who were disenchanted with Weimar portrayed the front-line community as splendid. Many people in Germany refused to accept democracy and pluralism as a chance to live a better life. On the contrary, they considered them responsible for social and political conflicts and social disharmony. Therefore, such a diffuse term like "community" could develop into a counterpart to parliamentary democracy. It promised to be the solution to all problems by pretending

Karl Adam, May 29, 1940, DAR N 67, Nr. 33. Referring to the whole context, see Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform*, 267-269.

²² Karl Adam, *Das Wesen des Katholizismus* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1924), 27-34.

²³ See Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform*, 93-107; Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (München: Nymphenburger, 1962), 315-316; Oliver Lepsius, *Die gegensatzaufhebende Begriffsbildung: Methodenentwicklungen in der Weimarer Republik und ihr Verhältnis zur Ideologisierung der Rechtswissenschaft unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (München: Beck, 1994), 49-69; *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Winfried Schulze and Gerhard Oexle (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1999).

to neutralize all contradictions on a superior level. Therefore, either a “natural” element was combined with a “spiritual” or a “real” element with a “normative” one. This concept of community drew the attention of theologians who supported the union of nature and grace, the relatedness of clergy and laity and the local and universal church. This concept allowed them to dismiss both neo-scholastic individualism concerning salvation and ecclesiological institutionalism. It also enabled theologians such as Adam and Schmaus to accept National Socialist ideology and to cooperate with the National Socialist regime.

The concept of “experience” was closely related to that of community, especially if one was referring to an original experience of founding a community. The ideology of community had its roots in the experience of World War I. Karl Adam himself was thrilled by it. Like many other intellectuals, he explained the beginning of the war in August 1914 as an overwhelming experience of unity and community among all Germans.²⁴ This community transcended all political, social or denominational separation. Adam’s letters written to his friend and former student Friedrich Heiler demonstrate that it was the war that led him to a new view of the church based on the idea of community and on the phenomenological experience of Catholicity.²⁵ Experience then became an epistemological tool to reject neo-scholasticism, which attempts to offer rational reasons for belief. Now, Adam proved faith with irrational reasons, i.e., experience.²⁶ This parallels

²⁴ See Karl Adam, „Der Kampf für deutsches Wesen: Vor den Zöglingen des k. bayr. Kadettenkorps,“ in *St. Michael: Ein Buch aus eherner Kriegszeit zur Erinnerung, Erbauung und Tröstung für die Katholiken deutscher Zunge*, ed. Johann Leicht (Würzburg: Deutscher Sankt-Michaels-Verlag, 1917), 370-372; Scherzberg, *Kirchenreform*, 158-187

²⁵ Karl Adam to Friedrich Heiler, May 6, 1920, in Annette Klement, *Versöhnung des Verschiedenen: Friedrich Heilers Ringen um die eine Kirche im Spiegel seiner Korrespondenz mit katholischen Theologen* (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1997), 187-188.

²⁶ Karl Adam, *Glaube und Glaubenswissenschaft im Katholizismus: Akademische Antrittsrede* (Rottenburg: W. Bader, 1920).

the insights of so-called modernist theologians. But there is also a significant difference. In Adam's approach, experience is not understood as religious sentiment or as religious individualism. Rather, it is an event that transcends individuality within a community characterized by authority and hierarchy. In Adam's view, faith was something irrational that burst open all rationality. It could only be practiced not theorized. The experience of faith was always communal, because its model was the communal experience gained by the disciples of Jesus at Pentecost that founded the church and its community.

In 1933, Adam used the concepts of experience and community to explain Hitler's seizure of power. He viewed Hitler as the "Son-of-the-People" who guided the German nation from inner conflict and turmoil to unity and community. Enthusiastically Adam described this experience: "Now it is he – Hitler – standing in front of us, who liberated the German genius, opened our eyes to see the one and only substantial through all political, economical, social, and denominational veils: our unity of blood, our German identity, the *homo Germanus*. We were once weary of the phrase German *Volkstum*, that had become meaningless, but now it has been given a new clear meaning. It so stirred and motivated the people that they gained a new purpose that they today destroy what they idolized only a day before. Across every lane and fence, closing every rift and gap, they shook hands and named each other comrades and brothers. It is overwhelming – this common experience of our national unity and our bonds of blood."²⁷

²⁷ Adam, *Deutsches Volkstum*, 42 („Und nunmehr steht er - Hitler - vor uns ... als der Befreier des deutschen Genius, der die Binden von unseren Augen nahm und uns durch alle politischen, wirtschaftlichen, gesellschaftlichen, konfessionellen Hüllen hindurch wieder das eine Wesenhafte sehen und lieben ließ: unsere bluthafte Einheit, unser deutsches Selbst, den homo Germanus. Das Wort vom deutschen Volkstum, schon bis zum Überdruß, bis zu schalen Leerheit verbraucht, wie bekam es nunmehr einen neuen hellen Klang. So aufwühlend und aufreißend sprang es die Menschen an, dass ihr Leben einen neuen Sinn gewann, dass sie heute zerstörten, was sie gestern noch anbeteten, dass sie über die Gassen und Zäune, über tausend Risse und Klüfte hinweg sich die Hand reichten und

National Socialism had not been characterized by its followers as an explicit ideology but as a movement descending from the offspring of life. Schmaus agreed with this opinion.²⁸ Neither reading nor theory made a person a faithful follower but only experience. Conviction also remained an intellectual act, but somehow always remained irrational. Theory and experience were intertwined. Schmaus believed the faithful could create a bridge between Catholic belief and this “National Socialist vitality.”²⁹ Schmaus wrote: “He [Catholic] realizes, that National Socialist ideology (*Weltanschauung*) brings the entire person into his own. It does not focus only on one part of the person – the intellect.”³⁰

Schmaus transferred these ideas to the process of faith. He believed, faith’s origin was hidden – certainly not in the depths of human nature, but in God. Faith too, he argued, could not be turned into pure rationality. The whole person always had to be committed to the process. Schmaus said this had to be regarded as an important convergence of Catholicism and National Socialism.

Other theologians in Germany and Austria, too, emphasized experience in their theological approaches. Oskar Schroeder, unofficial chairman of a group of theologians in the Rhineland who strove for theological and liturgical reforms, discussed the group’s theological point of view in a paper describing the identity of the group. The members of the group viewed themselves as pioneers in the way they surpassed the approaches of both neo-scholasticism and modernism. Their novel approach led them to interpret theology and revelation through the concepts of experience and community. The members of the group explicitly stressed the connection between their theological redirection and the Nazi seizure of power. Consequently, they

sich Kameraden und Brüder nannten. Es ist etwas Großes um dieses Massenerlebnis unserer volkshaften Einheit und bluthaften Verbundenheit.“).

²⁸ See Schmaus, *Begegnungen*, 44.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.* („Er sieht, wie in ihr wieder der ganze Mensch zu seinem Rechte kommt, nicht nur eine Seite des Menschen, der Verstand.“).

re-evaluated their interpretation of the Church's dogma. No longer did they assume dogma to be theorems defined by the Church. Schroeder wrote:

“This view of dogma depended on the influence of an epoch that is now fading away, which lacked a means for the prioritization of the totality in relation to the parts and for the living bonds of community. ... This view is now changed by the turn of an era and the experiences connected with it... . We understood that the development of dogma is essentially tied up with the growth of the Church as a community of faith.”³¹

Austrian theologians like Andreas Posch, church historian and Dean of the Theological Faculty at the University of Graz and Alois Closs, lecturer in Religious Studies at the same university, also focused on experience. They used the experience of national community (*völkische Gemeinschaft*) as an epistemological tool, for example, when they explained the German invasion of Austria and the subsequent *Anschluss* in March 1938 as a tremendous experience revealing God's providence. Both of them assured their students and readers that it had been the power and greatness of this experience that helped to change the minds of many Austrian clerics to favour the *Anschluss*. This point is evident when Posch wrote on March 31, 1938 in the *Grazer Volksblatt*: “The great events in world's history as we have recently experienced are providential in the Catholic's view. The individual must submit to the hand of God.”³² Only a few days after April 10, 1938 plebiscite

³¹ Oskar Schroeder, Rundbrief (undated), in *Der Rheinische Reformkreis* Vol. I., 137-158, here 140. The circular letter was distributed during the meeting on December 30, 1942 („Diese Betrachtungsweise der Dogmen stand unter dem Einfluss des nun abklingenden Ich-Zeitalters, das kein Organ besaß für den Vorrang des Ganzen vor den Teilen, für die lebendigen übergreifenden Zusammenhänge der Gemeinschaft, ... Dies ist nun durch die Zeitenwende und das damit in Zusammenhang stehende Erlebnis anders geworden.... Es ging uns auf, dass die Entstehung des Dogmas notwendig mit dem Werden der Kirche als einer Glaubensgemeinschaft zusammenhing.“).

³² Andreas Posch, „Vertrauen und Treue,“ *Grazer Volksblatt* (March 31, 1938), printed in Magnus Harald Anton Hofmüller, *Steirische Priester*

that concerned the Anschluss, Closs compared the Austrian situation to Christ's resurrection. Devoted to the dynasty of Habsburg, the Austrian clerics had always preferred *Grossdeutschland* (Austria as a part of the German *Reich*) and the monarchy. The events surrounding the *Anschluss* convinced Closs that Catholics would not be able to remain indifferent to Hitler's work of creating unity and strengthening the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Closs stated,

“Only if he (the Austrian priest) safeguarded the tremendous fervour with which the enthusiasm for the modest and exceptionally gifted son of our country almost effortlessly brings about this miracle of spiritual fusion, then he could do nothing other than to be himself carried along.”³³

Using experience and community as theological key words Adam and Schmaus rejected the neo-scholastic view of the church as an institution responsible for the mediation of grace. Similarly, they did not appreciate rationality as a way to know God and to reflect on belief. Compared to neo-scholasticism both theologians' point of view was anti-rational. It is this antirational approach connected with National Socialist ideology that gave rise to a particularistic theology affirming totalitarianism and racism.

Neo-scholastic theologians on the other hand appreciated rationality and natural rights. Potentially their point of view was a universalistic one. Nevertheless, many of them did not resist authoritarian and fascist movements. Rather, they

befürworten den Nationalsozialismus und den Anschluss an das Deutsche Reich Adolf Hitlers (Diplomarbeit: University of Graz, 1997), XXI, here XXI („Und dann ist der Katholik immer geneigt, im großen Geschehen der Weltgeschichte, wie wir es jetzt erlebt haben, das Walten der Vorsehung anzuerkennen, der sich der einzelne fügen muß.“).

³³ Alois Closs, „Pflüget ein Neues!“, in *Grazer Volksblatt* (April, 14, 1938), printed in Hofmüller, *Steirische Priester XXV-XXIX*, here XXVII („Vollends, wenn er nun die unerhörte Glut gewahrt, mit der die Begeisterung für den schlichten und begnadeten Sohn unserer Heimat dieses Wunder der seelischen Verschmelzung fast mühelos zu bewirken vermochte, so wird er nicht anders können, als sich ganz mitreißen zu lassen.“).

openly expressed their agreement. This is valid especially for the neo-scholastic, conservative theologians in France. The modern theologians, in particular, Henri de Lubac, reflected on nature and grace in a manner similar to Adam and Schmaus. However, Lubac did not support the Nazis but participated in spiritual resistance against the Vichy-Regime and the German occupation.³⁴ Neo-scholastic theologians on the other hand justified their support of the chauvinistic, anti-Semitic and pre-fascist *action française* through the separation of nature and grace. They agreed in particular with the traditionalist elements in the political program of the Vichy collaborationists.³⁵

In Germany too, conservative theologians were enemies of democracy. For a time, they supported the anti-liberal and traditionalist Nazi laws and decrees. But conservative and modern theologians agreed with National Socialism for *different* reasons. Conservatives appreciated the antiliberal and antimodernist character of certain parts of National Socialist politics. On the contrary, the reformers among the theologians viewed the Nazis as powerful innovators of the society. They tried to use this creative potential to speed up reforms in Church and theology. The more the Nazis persecuted and terrorized Church members and institutions the more conservative theologians withdrew their sympathies with the regime. In the struggle with the Nazis at least some of them were able to realize the universalistic potential of neo-scholastic rationality and natural right. For the first time in the history of the Church, the authorities of the Church affirmed human rights. Nevertheless, this position did not succeed completely.

The writings and addresses of both Pius XI and Pius XII emphasized the rights and duties of all human beings. The popes argued that these rights were to be found in the natural

³⁴ See Joseph A. Komonchak, "Theology and Culture at Mid-Century: The Example of Henri de Lubac," *Theological Studies*, 51 (1990), 579-602, here 597-599; Herbert Vorgrimler, "Henri de Lubac," in *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Herbert Vorgrimler and Robert Vander Gucht, Vol. III (Freiburg: Herder 1970), 199-214, here 206f.

³⁵ See Komonchak, *Theology and Culture*, 601-602.

right and must not be touched by the state or any other authority. Consequently, in his address on December 24, 1939, Pius XII condemned the German aggression against Poland when he stated that this action was “compatible neither with international law nor with natural right nor with the most elementary humanitarian feelings, and how far it had come with the sense of justice under the pressure of purely utilitarian considerations.”³⁶ In his address on Christmas 1944, Pope Pius XII became the first pope to praise democracy in the history of the church.³⁷ In 1941, the Fulda Bishops’ Conference, which included all of the bishops of the German Reich, installed a committee called the Committee for Concerns of Religious Orders (*Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten*). The committee was requested to discuss how best to respond to the escalating Nazi terror against the church, especially against religious communities. It was one of the most important circles of resistance within the German Catholic church.³⁸ In autumn of 1941, the members of this committee presented a draft of a pastoral letter to the bishops. Appealing to the God-given human rights, this pastoral letter criticized the Nazi use of terror.³⁹ Many bishops agreed that the argument against

³⁶ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 32 (1940), 5-13, here: 8, (“...abbiamo dovuto purtroppo assistere a una serie di atti inconciliabili sia colle prescrizioni del diritto internazionale positivo, che coi principi del diritto naturale e cogli stessi più elementari sentimenti di umanità, atti i quali mostrano in quale caotico circolo vizioso si avvolge il senso giuridico sviato da pure considerazioni utilitarie. In questa categoria rientrano: la premeditata aggressione contro un piccolo, laborioso e pacifico popolo, col pretesto di una minaccia nè esistente nè voluta e nemmeno possibile; ...”).

³⁷ See Pius XII, Radio speech, December 24, 1944, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 37 (1945), Vol. 12, 10-23, esp. 11-17.

³⁸ See Antonia Leugers, *Gegen eine Mauer bischöflichen Schweigens: Der Ausschuss für Ordensangelegenheiten und seine Widerstandskonzeption 1941 bis 1945* (Frankfurt/Main: Knecht, 1996).

³⁹ See „Entwurf eines gemeinsamen Hirtenwortes (Fulda, 15. November 1941),“ in *Akten Kardinal Michael von Faulhabers*, compiled by Ludwig Volk, Vol. II 1935-1945 (Mainz: Grünewald, 1989), 827-835, esp. 832-834; „Gründe für die Notwendigkeit des Hirtenwortes (Fulda, 15. November 1941),“ in *Akten*, 837-838.

the persecution of the church by the Nazis should include the question of human rights. Cardinal Michael Faulhaber of the archdiocese of Munich and Freising also offered his support to this point when he stated: "A bishop is not only obligated to attend to the religious and ecclesiastical rights of the *Volks-gemeinschaft*, but also to the God-given human rights. If the human rights are not respected civilization will collapse."⁴⁰ However, other bishops refused to include any discussion on human rights. Thus, the divided bishops' conference failed to deliver a clear common statement on Nazi injustice and violence.⁴¹

Catholic priests and theologians affirming National Socialist ideology rejected the universalistic approach of neo-scholastic theology. A rejection of National Socialism ultimately correlated to a universalistic view in ethics and dogmatics. This connection is supported further through several examples: First, blessed Bernhard Lichtenberg from the diocese of Berlin never was a protagonist of a new approach in theology and still found the ability to criticize Adam's approach to German ethics.⁴² In his research Kevin Spicer recognized that Catholic priests joined the Nazi party for different reasons. But all of them were alienated from their faith tradition.⁴³ They no

⁴⁰ Pastoral letter, March 22, 1942, in Johann Neuhäusler, *Kreuz und Hakenkreuz: Der Kampf des Nationalsozialismus gegen die katholische Kirche und der kirchliche Widerstand*, Vol. II, Second edition (München: Katholische Kirche Bayerns, 1946), 147, („Ein Bischof hat aber nicht nur für die religiösen kirchlichen Rechte in der Volksgemeinschaft einzutreten, sondern auch für die gottverliehenen Menschenrechte. Ohne Achtung für diese Menschenrechte muss die ganze Kultur zusammenbrechen.“).

⁴¹ See Leugers, *Gegen eine Mauer*, 241-274.

⁴² See Bernhard Lichtenberg to Karl Adam, November 4, 1940 and November 30, 1940, DAR N 67, No. 33; Kevin Spicer C.S.C., "Last Years of a Resister in the Diocese of Berlin: Bernhard Lichtenberg's Conflict with Karl Adam and his Fateful Imprisonment," *Church History* 70 (2001), 248-270.

⁴³ Kevin Spicer C.S.C., *Choosing Between God and Satan: The German Catholic Clergy of Berlin and the Third Reich*, phil. Diss., Ann Arbor 2000, 278-319.

longer viewed their church and its traditions as the sole way to salvation. Rather, they transferred their hopes of redemption to Hitler and the National Socialist party. Lastly, in 1937, Karl Rahner, at this time a young neo-scholastic theologian, reviewed a book concerning empirical research on race and religion. The author rejected the racially ethnic (*völkisch-religiös*) point of view that religion could be derived from race. Rahner valued the author's research and his methodological decisions, but he assumed that a philosophical enquiry would have led to the same result. Rahner founded his systematical argument on the so-called natural cognition of God (*Natürliche Gotteserkenntnis*), which stated that all human beings without exception were able to know God through the natural power of reason. There could not be a difference created by one's race. Therefore, Rahner argued: "If the human being is capable of metaphysics which allows him to transcend the immanent including his individual and racial conditions (without annihilating them) and make him know absolute truth and the absolute, personal and world transcendent God - as a human being - religion in principle cannot depend on race."⁴⁴

It is very important to uncover the past history of Catholic systematic theology concerning both reform theology and neo-scholasticism. Stereotypical classifications such as "progressive" or "conservative," "left" or "right," must be avoided. They are not helpful to understand the problems. Reform theologians embraced National Socialism's particularism and racism. However, Cardinal Faulhaber who upheld the

⁴⁴ Karl Rahner, Review of Christel Matthias Schröder, *Rasse und Religion: Eine rassen- und religionswissenschaftliche Untersuchung* (München: Reinhardt, 1937), *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 61 (1937) 282-287, here 286 („... wenn dem Menschen eine Metaphysik möglich ist, in der er seine Welt, und so auch seine subjektive und rassische Bedingtheit [ohne sie auszulöschen] übersteigt, ja immer auch schon als "Mensch" überstiegen hat hin auf eine absolute Wahrheit und auf einen absoluten, persönlichen und weltüberlegenen Gott, dann ist die Frage nach einer eindeutigen Abhängigkeit der Religion von der Rasse grundsätzlich schon negativ entschieden.“).

monarchy and authority and rejected democracy, also spoke out in favour of including statements on God-given human rights. Nazi terror is the reason that the church has realized the universalistic potential of neo-scholastic theology, even if it has not been very effective.

Coming to terms with the mistakes of the past does not necessarily mean rejecting “experience” or “community” as theological terms and approaches. A radical change in theology, such as dialectic theology, will not solely solve the problem. Relapse would be inevitable. It is necessary to be sceptical if someone chooses to use experience as an epistemological tool, particularly if someone approaches experience solely for ideological interpretation. Criteria must be named to measure the development of Catholic theology during the twentieth century. These criteria might include a universalistic approach in anthropology and ethics and the attention to the human rights and the defence of an individual’s rights. Experience has to be reflected only in connection with a critique of ideology. One must also remember, that discussion centering on community in the church must not forget that ecclesiastical community must not be defined by ethnic, racial or other criteria separating humankind. Instead the church is always a church for others in its service to those in need.

