

Arguing in the Holy Spirit
Some Basics for a Christian Culture of Conflict
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Introduction

Is there an „arguing in the Holy Spirit“? I must admit: During the preparation for the paper, I sometimes considered to change the title. The reason: The surprisingly numerous terms which the bible uses for disputes are valued almost exclusively negative. An important exception is Gal 2:11:

„But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned“ (NRS)¹

The word *resistance* (antístemi) differs from the other terms for disputes in a subtle but crucial nuance: By *arguing* I'm fixed on the opponent. In contrast, *resistance* can also be achieved by a focus on God, – „in the Holy Spirit.“

However, the Bible does not stick to this difference with a consistent terminology. So it uses the word „antístemi“ also in a negative sense, and at one point, it speaks of „arguing“ even with a positive connotation, in a meaning which comes very close to an „arguing in the Holy Spirit“:

„So he [Saul/Paul] went in and out among them [the apostles] in Jerusalem, speaking boldly *in the name of the Lord*. He spoke and *argued* with the Hellenists; but they were attempting to kill him.“ (Apg 9:28f NRS)

And what about the phrase „arguing *in the Holy Spirit*“? Though this formulation is not explicitly biblical, there are similar phrases like speaking and proclaiming „in the Holy Spirit“. ² By that and also by biblical charisms, an uncovering of injustice may be achieved:

„But if all prophesy, an unbeliever or outsider who enters is *reproved* [or more exactly: *convicted*] by all and called to account by all.“ (1 Cor 14:24)

The Greek word for „reprove“ or „convict“ here is „élegcho“ which may also mean „rebuke“, for example in an important text regarding biblical conflict resolution:

„And if your brother sins, go and reprove (élegxon) him in private.“ (Mt 18:15 NAS)

The statement can be understood in a promising way, when it is read consistently in the sense of an „elegchein in the Holy Spirit“. „In the Holy Spirit“ means here that the conflict is held within a spirit-worked relation to Jesus Christ. So it will be kept free from every fixation on the opponent.

What this means, is shown clearly in the deadly conflict of Stephen with his opponents. Actually, the Bible does not directly say that Stephen resisted in the Holy Spirit. But his speech is framed by two statements, which highlight the fact that Stephen is really filled with the Spirit of God: Immediately prior to his long speech, it is said that the people, „saw that his face was like the face of an angel“ (Acts 6:15). And when the people became enraged due to his hard words, Stephen remained completely unaffected, because his eyes were fixed on Jesus Christ.

„But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.“ (Acts 7:55)

¹New Revised Standard Version Bible, 1989. Generally, bible texts will be quoted from this translation.

²Cf 1 Cor 12:3, 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Peter 1:12.

The result of his consistent orientation to God is that he was able to suffer martyrdom like Jesus: without any resentment (cf Acts 7,59 f)

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The quality of life and even the survival of a community depends on how it deals with conflicts. Insofar, „arguing in the Holy Spirit“ is a central issue for the conference theme „Holy Spirit and the Church“. Below, I will develop some basic principles of a Christian culture of conflict, especially from a biblical context.

1. The unifying and church-building work of the Holy Spirit

In his invitation to the conference, Jena Daniel Pluess described the relationship between ecclesiology and pneumatology as a tense one. This indisputable fact is contrasted by a more ideal correlation between Church and Holy Spirit both in the early church and in the Bible. According to this, it's the Holy Spirit who founds the church community. The tripartite creed assigns the church to its third part, which is about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is described as „Lord and Giver of Life,“ which, according to the biblical world view, also means the creator of a successful common living.

According to the Old Testament, salvation means *shalom*, which is a comprehensive peace of the people with God, with each other and with all creation. In the great vision of Ezekiel, it is God's Spirit who immerses into the dry bones and brings them to life. This means not primarily an individual resurrection, but the new constitution of God's people.

According to the New Testament, this reconstitution of the people of God is worked by the Holy Spirit; it is mediated by Jesus Christ's new gathering of God's people; it is symbolized by the reversal of the Babylonian confusion of tongues in the Lukan Pentecost; and it is fulfilled by the co-arranging of the many members to the one body of Christ, as is stated in 1 Cor 12. The Holy Spirit builds the Church by bringing different people with different gifts into a peaceful relationship of unity in diversity.

So the fruit of the of the Holy Spirit is essentially peace (Gal 5:22). This peace-making Holy Spirit is at the same time the spirit of Jesus Christ, who is „our peace“. Because

„in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us“ (Eph 2:14).

Consequently, peace and freedom from conflict belong to the biblical ideal of the early church. According to the testimony of the Acts, the community of believers was „continuing daily with one mind“ (Acts 2:46 NAS³) and „one heart and one soul“ (Acts 4:32 NRS). And according to Paul, „there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus“ (Gal 3:28). Accordingly, it is peace that is promised in almost every New Testament letter to the addressees.

2. The sobering other side: The Second Vatican Council and its consequences

But is this ideal livable at all? Before I respond to this question with biblical texts, I will take a look at the renewal of the Catholic Church, which was initiated fifty years ago with the Second Vatican Council. This council was guided by the Holy Spirit. This was already indicated by the famous prayer to the Holy Spirit by Pope John

³New American Standard Bible, 1995.

XXIII. before the beginning of the council,⁴ and it appears in many aspects of the proceeding and the contents of the council. It was intended as a council of peace. For the first time, there were no condemnations but an open hand for reconciliation to other denominations, religions and „all people of good will“. „Communion“ was a main principle of its ecclesiology. Church was understood „like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race“ (Lumen Gentium 1) and „a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit“ (LG4).

In extreme contrast to this Spirit-led work of peace and reconciliation was the historical impact of the council. There were controversy, polarization and even a schism. By the traditionalists, the openness to non-Catholics was assessed as a betrayal. On the other hand, liberal tendencies emerged, with the conviction that the emergence initiated by the council had not gone far enough. According to the „Spirit of the Council“, the church should abandon all authoritarian and patriarchal structures. These dynamics in turn confirmed the traditionalists, that the „Spirit of the Council“ was in fact a demonic one, who had led to a break-up with the tradition of the Church. So there was a growing polarization between progressive and conservative-reactionary forces in the Catholic Church.

Why was the effect of a council dedicated to the fruit of the Holy Spirit not peace, but forced strife? I will leave aside the complex conditions of an epoch of individualized late modernity and concentrate on the nature of the council. The council consistently avoided exclusion and – in fidelity to the promise of the Holy Spirit – gave a voice to many: first to people outside the catholic church. Its „model of graded membership of the Church“ was blamed by traditionalists for an identity crisis of the Church. If all people are ultimately assigned to the „catholic unity of the people of God“,⁵ where are the boundaries that make the church distinguishable from the world? How will it be still possible to *de-fine* the church?

The council gave also a voice to the ordinary Catholic people. It emphasized a „supernatural discernment in matters of faith“ of the people of God, grounded in a prophetic office of Christ, with the participation of the entire holy people of God. „The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief“⁶. Here, the text refers explicitly to two passages in the First Letter of John:

„But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge.“ (1 John 2:20)
„As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him.“ (1 John 2:27).

In the wake of the council, the body of the faithful really raised their voice, but far from a „universal agreement in matters of faith and morals“ which was stated by the council. Reacting to this, the last popes and many of the bishops acted increasingly restrictive. So it came to a polarization between the church hierarchy and parts of the church people as well as between different parts of the church. In public, the church developed an

⁴„Rinnova in questa nostra epoca i tuoi prodigi, quasi come con una nuova Pentecoste, e concedi alla Santa Chiesa che, perseverando concordemente e assiduamente con Maria, la Madre di Gesù, e guidata da San Pietro, estenda il regno del divin Salvatore, regno di verità e di giustizia, regno di amore e di pace. Amen“ (John XXIII., Apostolic Constitution *Humanae Salutis*, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/apost_constitutions/1961/documents/hf_j-xxiii_apc_19611225_humanae-salutis_it.html)

⁵„All men are called to be part of this catholic unity of the people of God which in promoting universal peace presages it. And there belong to or are related to it in various ways, the Catholic faithful, all who believe in Christ, and indeed the whole of mankind, for all men are called by the grace of God to salvation.“ (Lumen Gentium 13)

⁶Lumen Gentium 12.

appearance of unholiness and strife, in a maximum contrast to „the people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit“ (Lumen Gentium 4) and to „the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic“ (Lumen Gentium 8).

What had happened? Did the Catholic Church open the gates to dynamics which now threaten to tear her apart? Did she intend to build a tower without „estimating the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it“ (Luke 14:28), so that the popes would be right to row back to a more authoritarian style. Or did the church fail to go the way resolutely to its end, according to the surprising conclusion which Jesus drew of this parable: „So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions“ (Luke 14:33)?

Some theologians – not only from conservative and traditionalist factions – criticized that the council tended to a harmonizing theology of communion and thereby underestimated the potentials of conflict.⁷ Such potentials of conflict are already present in the New Testament. It is important to recognize and to understand them, in order to meet them with appropriate means.

3. Not peace but division: The conflictive other side of the New Testament

Controversy, conflict and division are main topics in the Bible. This applies especially to the New Testament and to the actions of Jesus. Although Jesus is known to be free from all sin, he provoked controversy wherever he went. This fact is described in the Gospels almost programmatically, especially in Luke. According to the prophecy of old Simeon, Jesus „is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed“ (Luke 2:34). And Jesus by himself explicitly announces that he has not come to bring peace but division:

„Do you think that I have come to bring *peace* to the earth? No, I tell you, but *rather division!* From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.“ (Lk 12:51-53; cf. Mt 10:34-36)

These texts are not limited to a temporary (e.g. Galilee) crisis, but remain central challenges for the period of the church up to the Second Coming of Christ. The book of Revelation testifies Jesus as the Lamb who is alone able to solve the seven seals of the apocalyptic scroll. When it opens the seals one after the other, the effect will be excessive violence.

Already the Old Testament states, that God not only collects people – which is essential to his salvific work – but also scatters them. This is a divine judgment which is carried out especially against the unjust and arrogant, as is stated programmatically in the account of the building of the Tower of Babel.⁸

In the New Testament, the Magnificat addresses a dispersive and splitting acting of God:

„He has shown strength with his arm; he has *scattered* the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly.“ (Luke 1:51-52)

This judging, which scatters and destroys community, is continued by Jesus, although he is destined to bring

⁷This criticism was not only put forward by Joseph Ratzinger, but also by the more liberal orientated Peter Hünermann.

⁸In Gen 11:4-9, the word „scatter“ (puwts) is repeated three times: „The whole earth“ wants to build „a tower with its top in the heavens“ and so to „let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be *scattered* abroad upon the face of the whole earth“ (v. 4). To thwart this plan, „the LORD *scattered* them abroad from there over the face of all the earth“ (v. 8), which is repeated in v. 9.

peace (Lk 1:79, 2:14), although he begins to gather the people of God with his proclamation of God's kingdom, although he died at the cross „to gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad“ (Jn 11:52) and although the first words after his resurrection were: „Peace be with you“ (Jn 20:19.21.26). It is the same with the people in succession of Jesus. Jesus swears them to peace⁹ and unanimity is a central characteristic of the early Church community according to the book of Acts. And yet, the early church which is said to be of „one heart and soul“, is stricken by deceit and a miracle of death penalty only few verses later.¹⁰

4. Two forms of peace

How do these two groups of texts fit together? – the triune God as a peacemaker on the one hand and as cause for judgment, division and distraction on the other hand?

A first helpful hint is that God never causes violence and division directly. This point is more evident in the New Testament than in the Old. When we structure the work of Jesus in different stages or „acts“, the relationship between gathering and dispersal will become more clear.¹¹

1. *Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*: Jesus' public ministry begins with his message of God's kingdom, which is accompanied by a symbolic new gathering of God's people. The initial impetus for this initial arise of the Kingdom of God is a *kairos* of grace, where people experience a cheering closeness to the true God. This experience sets them free for conversion, which means for a fundamental revision of their life on the basis of the new familiarity with God mediated by Jesus Christ.

2. *Words of judgment*: Though, the new possibility for a changed life implies costs and therefore may be refuted. Wherever people reject their *kairos*, they slip down to an increased alienation of God which will cause division and destruction. Jesus warns of these consequences in his words of judgment:

„Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen *gathers* her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‚Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.‘“ (Lk 13:34-35)

Scattering is not caused directly by God, but by people who have rejected their *kairos*:

„Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.“ (Lk 11:23 par Mt 12:30)

3. *Cross*: This „not gathering with Jesus“ amounts to a *counter-gathering*: Even disunited factions agree in their rejection of Jesus, as the bibles says about Herod and Pilate:

„That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.“ (Lk 23:12)

The book of Acts generalizes this dynamic:

⁹At the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:9.25) and at the Mission of the twelve (Mt 10:12f).

¹⁰Acts 5:1-11, regarding Ananias and Sapphira.

¹¹Cf. Raymund Schwager: Jesus in the Drama of Salvation. Toward a Biblical Doctrine of Redemption. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company 1999.

„The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have *gathered together against* the Lord and against his Messiah. For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, *gathered together against* your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.“ (Acts 4:26-28)

This counter-gathering is hopelessly doomed to collapse. It is permitted by God because He respects human free decision. But Jesus undermines it by his death at the cross, where He transformed the violence done to him into an act of loving devotion to the Divine Father. And for He is Son of God and mediator of all creation, every act of violence done to anybody is captured and transformed by Him.¹²

4. *Resurrection and Outpouring of the Holy Spirit*: By His resurrection and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, a *new gathering* is initiated, which also opens up a new chance of grace to the actors of the counter-gathering against Jesus.¹³

So, there exist two basic forms of gathering and two types of peace. This is also highlighted clearly by a saying of Jesus in John:

„Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you.“ (Jn 14:27 NAS)

A „peace, as the world gives“ is characterized by a union against others. People resort to such a logic of exclusion and scapegoating mainly in times of collective crises of identity and orientation, as Samuel Huntington puts it: „We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against.“¹⁴ This is the unifying logic of the „kingdom of this world“ (cf. Jn 8:23; 18:36) over which the devil proclaimed to be the Lord which – according to the temptation narratives – remained uncontradicted by Jesus (cf. Lk 4,6).

Hence it is understandable that Jesus did *not* switch from a message of salvation to a message of judgment because he was insulted by his rejection.¹⁵ Moreover he triggers disaster and destruction *just by* his salvific message and actions: The encounter with the truthful God dissolves the unifying ‚glue‘ of a „peace, as the world gives“. But at the same time, people who encounter Jesus get the chance to receive a true peace, grounded on the true and truthful God. But when they reject this chance, only the dissolving effects of the ministry of Jesus will remain. The result will be division. „From now on five in one household will be divided,

¹²Cf. W. Sandler, Die gesprengten Fesseln des Todes. Wie wir durch das Kreuz erlöst sind. Kevelaer: topos plus 2011; online: <http://theol.uibk.ac.at/itl/900.html>

¹³This dramatic transformation from a hopeless counter-gathering to a redeeming new gathering has been stressed especially by the Gospel of John: „But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‚You know nothing at all! You do not understand **that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed.**‘ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.“ (Jn 11.49-52) In its direct intention, this word certainly represented the logic of a counter-gathering. Nevertheless, the Gospel testifies it to be a prophetic word. This aims at the deeper meaning of an expulsion being transformed to a new collection which really prevents the people – and „all dispersed children of God“, as is said in the next verse – from being destroyed.

¹⁴Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. By Samuel P. Huntington. Simon & Schuster 1996, p. 26.

¹⁵This is the misrepresentation of Bertrand Russell, in: *Why I Am Not a Christian*.

three against two and two against three; ..." (Lk 12: 52). The same is in effect in a Eucharistic meal which neglects the very essence of the body of Christ:

„Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.“
(1 Cor 11.27-30)

Sickness and death are the individual effects of a weakening and a creeping destruction of the community caused by a dynamics of self-judgment. This results from the fact that the members of a church dissolve their untruthful dynamics of peace by attending mass, while they block the effect of true peace because they eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner.¹⁶

In the same way, the apocalyptic opening of the seven seals with its results of extreme violence can be explained. The sevenfold sealed apocalyptic scroll stands for the hidden truth of the dynamics of this world: i.e. what kind of ‚glue‘ it is that holds its parts together. The opening of the seals means that the hidden truth, released by the Crucified (the slaughtered lamb), immerses the world completely in all dimensions. This amounts to a judgment which is executed in no other way as by the fact that the world is exposed completely to God’s love and truth. That means that completely all of the ‚bad‘ unifying glue – which is due not to the Kingdom of God but to „this world“ – will dissolve mercilessly. By this, an unjust world will be driven into a tremendous disaster. As the book of revelation shows, this will not be a passive collapse but a gigantic rearing up of the fading forces and powers of this world. We get a slight idea of this when we think of the thousands billions of dollars which are pumped into a an ailing world finance system, only to prevent a complete crash.

5. Two basic forms of identity: A theological anthropology of conflict

What drives people to devote themselves to violent forms of peace? The question points to the roots of human violence and conflict which can be associated with original sin. In a nutshell, a theological anthropology of conflict can be outlined as follows:

1. *Creation*: Man is created as a dynamic image of God. He not only has but *is* a desire that comes to rest in God alone, as Augustine said. This salutary relation to God is mediated by other human beings. Where a person enjoys her relation to God, she attracts others to join in relating to God. The community-building effect of an authentic and salvific relation to God is strikingly described by an eschatological vision in the book of Zechariah:

„Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‚Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.‘“ (Zech 8:23)

2. *Sin*: Prior to all actual sin in the sense of individual moral responsibility, the bible understands sin as a condition of being alienated from God,¹⁷ with the effect of alienation from others, from creation, and from oneself. Thus, even people who are innocent in a moral sense of the word can be alienated from God, if the interpersonal mediation of the relationship with God was missing or perverted. A person who – culpably or innocently – has lost sight of the true God, is doomed to a directionless and disorientated desire. She desires

¹⁶Of course, this unworthiness does not regard to individual carelessness but to social ruthlessness, as the the context of 1 Cor 10-11 shows.

¹⁷Cf. „the sin of the world“ in Jn 1:29.

without knowing what she should desire. Because she is disorientated, a person desires spontaneously what other people (successfully) desire. This has been called „imitation of desire“ or „mimetic desire“ by the cultural theorist René Girard. As a result, conflict, rivalry, and violence are inevitable whenever human desire is directed spontaneously to limited goals – which means: to anything which is not God or which does not refer to God appropriately.

By using the term „scapegoat mechanism“, René Girard has shown that mimetic desire is destructive especially to primitive societies, which do not yet have institutional means (such as police, judiciary ...) to confine violence.¹⁸ Mimetic desire generates rivalry, and when this rivalry gets out of control, a society is driven to self-destruction. In such a crisis, peace talks – or even a social contract, as Hobbes and Rousseau had insinuated – are without any chance to succeed. The only means to escape self-destruction, is provided nearly automatically in the wake of the spreading mimetic desire and rivalry: The goal of mimetic desire has already shifted from acquisition to a mimesis of mutual hate. So, when one member of the community hits another with a very impressive blow, other members are tempted to imitate this blow and to participate with the aggression against one victim. In this way a unifying scapegoat mechanism will be generated which can solve the crisis of the community. In today's communities a similar logic applies in mobbing situations.

This mimetic theory can be developed to an ideal-typical distinction between two forms of human identity:

1. Thanks to a salvific relation to God, people experience to be accepted unconditionally, and by that to be sent to others and to share the love they have received. This means that they grow into a *positive related identity*, on an individual as well as on a communal level. In the sense of a „Where-are-you- from-identity“, they realize to *be* sons and daughters of God. They belong to God, who has called each of them by his name (cf. Isa 43:1). And in the sense of a „What-do-you-do-identity“, they realize to be sent to all people to testify and to share God's love.
2. Wherever people lose sight of the true God, their positive related identity will be driven into crisis (again on an individual as well as on a collective level). According to the scapegoat-mechanism, in such a crisis the substitute form of an excluding identity becomes possible. It works according to Huntington's pattern: „We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against.“ Excluding identity depends on defining others to be outside. In this way a communal identity can be established by a „peace minus one“ (e.g. all unanimously against a scapegoat) or in the way of a „halved peace“, which means, that one faction finds its communal identity by the opposition to a hostile faction. Both forms get caught into a crisis when the adversary is lost. So it is symptomatic to these types of community that they can never be universalized. This leads us to a theological criterion of true peace:

„A deep, true and lasting peace among people which is not based on sacrificing third persons and can exist without polarization onto enemies is very difficult or even exceeds human strength. If it nevertheless becomes reality, this is a clear sign that God Himself (the Holy Spirit) is acting in the people.“¹⁹

¹⁸Cf. René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, Stanford Univ Pr., ¹1987.

¹⁹Schwager Raymund, Niewiadomski Jozef, Research Group RGKW, *Dramatic Theology as a Research Program*: <http://www.uibk.ac.at/theol/leseraum/texte/835.html#ch9>. This is the hard core hypothesis of the Innsbruck research program on dramatic theology.

6. A principle for „arguing in the Holy Spirit“: Jesus’ critical solidarity with his opponents

The distinction between two kinds of peace and between two basic forms of identity makes it clear that a conduct can be demanded by the true God which may shatter peace. Though, the exemplary acting of Jesus shows that such subversion must never be led by hatred and violence. It is just the love of one’s enemies, which „will heap burning coals on their heads“ (Rom 12:20), because it exposes them to the dynamics of divine truth and love, and so drives them to repentance, – *or* to a process of self-judgment.

We can understand in a better way how to „argue in the Holy Spirit“ when we look at the behaviour of Jesus in his controversies and on his way to the cross. Just to put it in a systematic formula, this can be described as *a narrowing way of critical solidarity in between the ditches of aggression and resignation.*

Jesus acted in two ways regarding to men who rejected the kairos of a deeper encounter with God: On the one hand, he confronted them with the consequences of their actions, e.g. by warning them with judgment words. On the other hand, Jesus did not draw back from them, but went after them like the shepherd who follows the lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:4). Though, this solidary behaviour is not at all pleasant to the „lost sheep“ of Israel but rather exacerbated the unsettling effect of his criticism. So for stubborn sinners the path of critical solidarity is a path of maximum confrontation. – Figuratively speaking, this approach is limited by two ditches: the ditch of aggression with an unsolidary criticism and the ditch of resignation with an uncritical solidarity.

The maximum confrontation of a critical solidary behaviour leads others to correct their faults; otherwise it drives them into a harder resistance. In the latter case, the other will increasingly misunderstand the path of critical solidarity according to one of the two ditches: He or she will misunderstand every criticism as unsolidary, and she will misunderstand solidarity as uncritical confirmation. So the golden mean of a critical solidarity will narrow more and more – at least in the view of the other’s understanding – until communication is completely blocked. In the case of Jesus, this way leads to a deadly rejection of the person who is engaged for others. For Jesus the path of critical solidarity becomes more and more a way of the cross which ends in the dead end (a-poria) of the cross: At this crucial point, the Good Shepherd cannot see any more how to save his sheep and so to fulfill His divine message.

Jesus’ middle course of a critical solidarity is an inner consequence of His relationship to His Divine Father, mediated by the Holy Spirit. This relationship keeps him in a perfect positive-related identity: completely coming from the father – and completely sent to the people. The latter moment establishes the moment of His *solidarity*: Jesus would have betrayed His mission to the stubborn people if he had condemned them or if He had withdrawn from them. And the former moment establishes the *critical* acting of Jesus: He would have betrayed His fidelity to His Divine Father, if he had tolerated a behaviour which contradicts the divine love and truth. If Jesus would not have let himself be guided entirely by the Father through the Holy Spirit, he – as real human being – had no chance to keep the narrowing track of a critical solidarity. Although he remained completely obedient to His Divine Father, He came to the crucial point where He – as a real human being – could not foresee how his mission to save the scattered children of God, which covered His whole identity, could be fulfilled any more. Thus His scream at the cross: „My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?“ (Mt 27:46 par Mk 15:34). From the perspective of the cross, the transformation from an excluding to a positive related identity and from the peace of this world to the true peace is unforeseeable. This transformation is worked by a Yes to God, which Jesus persevered blindly and unconditionally. With this Yes Jesus transformed all the violence which He suffered into an action of loving self-dedication to His Father and, by that, redeemed not only his immediate aggressors but everyone.

7. A purifying orientation to Christ as a prerequisite for an „Arguing in the Holy Spirit“

The principle of critical solidarity is essential to Christian discipleship. But we cannot copy it in exact correspondence for our relation to the triune God is generally affected by sin. Even with my best intentions to follow Christ in sincerity, existing conflicts may also be due to „the log in my own eye“ (cf. Mt 7:4; Lk 6.41). Therefore, an adequate Christian arguing requires an ongoing self-cleansing, which links us anew and deeper with Christ, according to the Johannine parable of the vine:

„I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.“ (Jn 15.1-2)

Practically, such cleansing fulfilled by prayer, where ones view is exclusively directed to the Divine Father, in an attitude which was only made possible by our redeemer Jesus Christ. This way the spoiled relation to the true God can improve and we get increasingly free from any attitude of excluding identity.

This negative identity is at work not only where people are explicitly excluded, but generally in an all-pervading attitude of a „side-glance mentality“. We tend to calibrate our own position constantly by comparing it with other reference persons: either negatively by separation or by an idolatric self-identification with a model. In case of conflict, the „side-glance mentality“ can drive us into escalation: spontaneously we answer rejection with rejection. To be truly Christian, it is not enough to veil such a rivalry by decent manners. The release of Jesus' redemption is only possible by a genuine love of enemies. And this love of enemies can only be achieved when we look at the others with Jesus' eyes. Conflictive Situations can develop a tremendous suction to turn our gaze away from the God of Jesus Christ and fix it on the threatening or fascinating other. An escape of this wake is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is the context, from where the numerous biblical exhortations to unity and gentleness as well as a general condemnation of arguing and quarreling can be understood. The basic attitude to which the bible tries to move us, is a love which – unconditionally – „bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things“ (cf. 1 Cor 13:7) and which nevertheless „does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth“ (1 Cor 13:6). In the case that we find wrong and untruth in the other, this attitude of true love demands *criticism*, – though in the way of a *solidary* criticism.

8. Conflict in the Early Church: Paul against Peter in the Antiochian crisis

There are many conflicts in the Bible which are likely to release a proper understanding of an „arguing in the Holy Spirit“. Here I will discuss only one conflict which was fundamental for the development of the Early Church and which the Bible describes in detail and from different perspectives: This is the „Council of Jerusalem“ and the so called „Antiochian crisis“. Controversial was the question whether Gentile Christians should be circumcised and observe the Jewish law. The book of Acts shows how grave the dispute was when it speaks about „no small dissension and debate“ (Acts 15:2). For Paul, the truth and unity of the gospel was at stake (cf. Gal 1:6-9), because the gospel opens a justification without depending on any previous achievement. His behaviour toward the Jerusalem „pillars“ and in particular to Peter includes strong solidarity as well as uncompromising criticism. Regarding to the former:

„... I laid before them ... the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.“ (Gal 2:2)

And regarding to the latter:

„But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned;“ (Gal 2:11)

The pattern of a critical solidarity, as developed above, allows an interpretation of the texts in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 without relativising either the one or the other statement and without any need to presume that Paul vacillated or alternated his position.

For an adequate assessment of the conflict, first it must be seen first that both sides take legitimate issues. Even the conduct of Peter in Gal 2:11-14 – his giving in to the circle around James by withdrawing from the table fellowship with Gentile Christians – is not simply disqualifying in the sense of an uncritical solidarity with Jewish Christians. Even Paul demands to consider the weak (cf. 1 Cor 8). Nevertheless Paul's opposition is justified. What is at stake in Antioch is not only some eating practice but the common table and thus the adequate considering of the body of Christ (1 Cor 11:29).

It is not reported, whether or how Paul prevailed against Peter in Antioch. But regarding the conflict in Jerusalem we have an instructive information from both relevant texts:

„The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles.“ (Acts 15:12)

The common looking to God and His salvific actions paves the way for a reconciliation where no faction remains as a loser. This leads to an agreement that goes deeper than just finding a suitable procedure (the sending of a delegation with an official letter). The book of Acts brings the matter to the challenging formula: „it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ...“ (Acts 15:28).

In times of polarization against official church this formula might be misconstrued as downright blasphemous usurpation of God's will by leading authorities. But it's just the other way round. What is meant by that formula, is a working of the Holy Spirit which has led the Jerusalem authorities to change their former opinion. Only because of this change they could decide in accordance with the Holy Spirit. The fact that the conflict resolution was guided by the Holy Spirit is also supported by the result which was full reconciliation. Earlier representatives from the more narrow Jewish-Christian position were sent to witness the open position to Antioch. And they supported their newly gained position really open-heartedly:

„Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them.“ (Acts 15.32-33)

9. The dramatics of biblical arguing: When God leads different people in opposite directions

Regarding conflicts among Christians, there exists a false conclusion which seems to be widespread: If it is true that I'm with God in a particular matter, then everyone who opposes me must be wrong.

A humorous counter-example to this false conclusion can be found in the book of Numbers with the protesting donkey who stands in the way of Balaam, even though God instructed Balaam to go to Balak. Though God had forbidden Balaam to go to Balak before (Num 22:12), Balaam asked again, and in Num 22:20 it is said: „That night God came to Balaam and said to him, ‚If the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them; but do only what I tell you to do.‘“ Contrary to this instruction, we can read two verses later: „God's anger was kindled because he [Balaam] was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the road as his adversary.

Does that mean that God is self-contradictory? This assumption follows if one reduces God's will to general laws independent from time, space and situation. In contrast, God is an acting God who accompanies man on his ways, even when he is wrong. So God can lead a person first in one direction and then in the opposite direction. This is the case in the Balaam narrative.

It seems that Balaam follows exactly the orders of the Lord, just as he is advised two times: „but do only what I tell you to do.“ (Num 22:20 cf. Num 22:35).

The epistle of Jude develops a more critical interpretation, as he warns against errant teachers, who „abandon themselves to Balaam’s error for the sake of gain“ (Jud 1:11). The epistle insinuates that Balaam had asked the Lord again because he was dazzled by the bribe. This interpretation does not contradict the previous but adds a new aspect: God changes his command because he takes into account the dazzled will of Balaam. Then the satire with the complaining donkey is meant to be a warning for Balaam: to follow really precisely the way which God will show him. Balaam has learned his lesson. He confesses his fault: „I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me“ (Num 22:34), which would allude also to his former stubbornness, when he asked the Lord again where he had already got a ban. In the following, Balaam fulfills exactly the order of God. So he blesses, where the king demands him to curse, without any side-glance on Balak who could refute his offered presents or even punish him to death.

* * *

Systematization can state several factors that prepare us for the insight that God can lead people in opposite directions.

1. *The local factor*: God may lead a person at one place in a certain direction and another person at another place in an opposite direction. For example, in view of certain grievances, God may call one person to prayer and another to political action. A biblical example of this very common case would be the (possible) difference in the appointments of Peter and John, as alluded in John 21:20-22.

2. *The temporal factor*: God can lead a person first into one and later into another direction. As we saw in the Ballam narrative, but of course there are more serious examples. The most dramatic one is certainly the Sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22). But especially memorable is the story of the exploring of Canaan by Israel at the beginning of the book Deuteronomy. God instructed the people to take the promised land to possession (Deut 1:20). But as they explored the land, they were caught in fear and rebelled against the will of the Lord (Deut 1:26). God became angry and determined that nobody of the people except Caleb and Joshua would see the Promised Land. The Israelites repented (Deut 1:41) and some of them decided that they would *now* fulfil the *former* instruction and fight against the Amorites. Mose warned them that this would again be stubbornness, but they did not listen to him and so suffered a hard defeat. This story shows impressively that there is a certain time, a *kairos* for the call of God, and that the call may change if the *kairos* is neglected.

3. *The interpersonal factor*: God can lead a person in a certain direction and then alter this guidance by the intervention of another person. This is possible by a prophetic call that can announce a *kairos* for something new. This need not mean that the former way would have been wrong. The previous example of Deut 1 also applies here, because Mose told the people that God had changed his mind due to the rebellion of the people which had created a new situation. An example of the Gospel can be found in Luke 22, 35-36:

„He [Jesus] said to them [to his disciples]: ‚When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?‘ They said, ‚No, not a thing‘. He said to them, ‚But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one.‘“

4. In the context of prophetic intervention, there an *institutional factor* which has to be considered. God’s will to gather people to a community includes that He allows people to install institutional forms for relief (cf. the appointment of judges by Mose in Ex 18:13-27). To a certain extent, institutional arrangements resemble a blind flight automatism. One can carry them out routinely and also delegate them. But sometimes this standard course must be readjusted manually. Within the variety of charisms, this is more the responsibility of prophets, while the setting and controlling of ordinary processes is part of the charism of leaders. (cf. 1 Cor

12:28, Rom 12.6.8)

5. There is also a *guilt factor* which varies all the pre-mentioned factors. For example, the question, whether it was God's will to appoint kings is answered in different ways within the Old Testament. The right answer will be: God accompanies the way of man, and he can write straight with crooked lines. Even when man makes wrong decisions, God is able to accompany his way and turn the bad to even greater blessings, as we have already seen with the Balaam narrative. And it is the same with the institution of Kingdom, which the people wanted to have, because – due to a side-glance mentality – it wanted to gain what neighbour peoples also had. So God walked with them and gave them what they wanted, first with some malice (1 Sam 8:5-9), but later wholeheartedly when God developed his way of salvation on the way of Kingdom, with David, Salomon and messianic promises.

6. Though, not every uncertainty in listening to God's will is due to fault. There is also an *uncertainty factor* which refers people to listen to others. A biblical example is the instruction of young Solomon by the High Priest Eli (cf. 1 Sam 3).

10. The dramatic understanding of the Church by St. Ignatius of Loyola

How far can a spirit-led opposition between different people go? Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Order of the Jesuits and an expert on the discernment of spirits, was confronted with this question. As founder of the order, he was firmly convinced of being led by God that the members of the Order should never accept any kind of worldly honour, and therefore they should never become a bishop or a cardinal. But there were very gifted men among the Jesuits, so that the pope and the emperor wanted them for higher positions. As the obedience to the pope was also a very central concern of Ignatius, he found himself in a dilemma.

When Emperor Charles V, supported by the pope, wanted to let his former viceroy and now Jesuit Francisco de Borja be elevated to Cardinal, Ignatius wrote a letter to Borja, where he reaffirmed his disapproval, but then developed the following subtle consideration:

„Therefore, I have felt, and now feel, that it is God's will that I oppose this move. Even though others might think otherwise and bestow this dignity on you, I do not see that there would be any contradiction, since the same Divine Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and move others to the contrary for still other reasons, and thus bring about the result desired by the emperor. May God our Lord always do what will be to His greater praise and glory.“²⁰

This assumption enables Ignatius to concede his opponents – and especially his superiors – , that they are also led by the Holy Spirit, even when he is deeply convinced of a contrary position. This concession does not exclude that he stands up for his cause decidedly. Still the conflict is bridged by the conviction *that it is the same divine spirit* who leads both adversaries.

This attitude keeps the contestants willing to learn, because they reckon that they *have* good reasons, but not *all* good reasons. They are humble as they don't think that they are in the possession of the full truth. But still they are no sceptics, because they are convinced that there *exists* full truth. They believe that the Holy Spirit has this full truth, and they long to achieve it by praying and also by dialogue. They expect that the Holy Spirit will lead them into the full truth, when they are open to achieve missing aspects from their adversaries. This makes them really open for dialogue. For dialogue can fail in two directions: on the one hand, when the

²⁰ St. Ignatius of Loyola to father Francisco de Borja, Rome 1552: <http://woodstock.georgetown.edu/ignatius/letter20.htm>

dialogue partners are not willing learn from each other; and on the other hand, when dialogue partners betray their own position which may be necessary to a more complete view.

Ignatius unfolded his dramatic understanding of church, obedience, conflict and truth in an epoch of Reformation and Counter-Reformation. It has a high ecumenical potential not only as a theology of dialogue in general, but also regarding a specific problem which led to the schism of the Reformation. This is the question how to connect conscience, truth and God's call with ecclesiastic obedience. Ignatius' insight that „*the same Divine Spirit could move me to this action for certain reasons and move others to the contrary for still other reasons*“ establishes a dramatic understanding of obedience.

I think I have made clear that this „principle of pneumatic contradiction“ does not mean that the Holy Spirit is self-contradictory. The contradiction does not root in God but in our limited view and in our limited possibilities to act in the right way. This is because we are not perfect and because we are sinners and entangled in structural sin which confines the possibilities of acting in narrow traces.

I would like to compare the Holy Spirit with a choreograph, who has to work with unwilling and incapable dancers on an unsuited stage. He stands behind each dancer and tries to introduce her into her part. But the first is not willing to move, the second is eager to follow but over-reacts completely. The third is handicapped and cannot move in the correct way. And to cap it all, the play is on a stage full of obstacles, so that there are only narrow traces where the dancers can move. As a result, the divine choreograph must lead his dancers along detours and in seemingly foolish directions. When he wants that two dancers meet, it may be that he must lead them apart for a certain time.

The metaphor of the unsuited stage applies to conditions of structural sin which blocks right decisions so that a dilemma results between different concerns which cannot be considered at the same time. So it may be necessary that one person or party supports a certain decision for certain reasons while another person or party must support the opposite for other reasons which cannot be brought into line with the others, as long as the situation of structural sin is not changed. In the following chapter I will give two concrete examples.

11. „Dissent in the Holy Spirit“ under the conditions of structural violence: Two historical examples

A tragic example was the resistance of Dutch bishops against the persecution of Jews by the Nazis. The Nazis proposed the Catholic Church to spare the Jews who were baptized as Catholics, when they would stop their protests. The bishops – led by the Archbishop of Utrecht, De Jong – did not accept and courageously condemned the crime of the Nazis in public. In revenge, the Nazis immediately deported all Jews who were baptized as Catholics, including Edith Stein and her sister Rosa who died in a concentration camp.

That persons die for the truth, is a common topos of martyrdom. A real dilemma results, when others will have to pay the price for a courageous defense of truth. This was the case under the rule of National Socialism, where bishops were safe to a certain extent because of their popularity, while ordinary Christians or even Jews had to pay for their courage.

This was a situation where different church representatives had to act not only in opposite ways, but even against each other. While certain leaders, such as Pope Pius XII held back from public statements and sought refuge in secret diplomacy, others protested not only against the regime but also against the silence of the church leaders. Some kept restrained in their public criticism to save lives, and others protested and risked the lives of themselves and others; though we are thankful today that they raised their voice. A real solution of the dilemma was only possible when the regime broke down.

A more recent example is the dispute about the so called pregnancy conflict counseling in Germany, which had come to its climax in 1998. The dilemma was created by a law which allowed pregnant women abortion under the condition that they previously attended a counseling center. This regulation was better than the

unconditional „Fristenlösung“ in Austria, where abortion was kept free of penalty within the first three months of pregnancy without any conditions of counseling. The obligatory visit of a counseling center gives the opportunity to offer non-violent alternatives to desperate mothers. But the German law presupposed that counseling centers issue an attendance certificate, which allowed the mothers to carry out an abortion. By this „abortion certificate“ as it was called by opponents, Christian institutions got involved into a system of legalized apportion, and this „obscured the clarity and decisiveness of the testimony of the Church against abortion“. With this argument, Pope John Paul II demanded from the German bishops to prohibit the issuance of attendance certificates. On the other hand such a ban paralyzed Christian pregnancy advice centers. A general refusal to hand out a certificate led to a boycott of these advice centers. And that meant that pregnant women would attend other centers which supported abortion practice. This shift raised the number of abortions significantly.

For this reason, Bishop Kamphaus of Limburg vehemently pleaded against a prohibition of the issuing of a certificate. There was an exchange of letters between the bishop and the pope, which was founded on understanding and respect for the position of the counterparty. Finally, the Pope decided obligatory and Bishop Kamphaus submitted to his decision without resigning under protest, to the disappointment of liberal factions in the Catholic Church.

Certainly, the termination of the conflict was not ideal. But at times the debate between Bishop Kamphaus and Pope John Paul II came close to a culture of conflict as developed in the previous chapters.

12. Some implications for Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements

I am no expert in the history of Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. So, in this final chapter I will give only few general ideas to stimulate a discussion. First, I think that with the issue of a Christian culture of conflict the awakenings and revivals in the Holy Spirit are at stake, which kindled the Pentecostal and charismatic movements and which renews them again and again. We have not the power to produce this fire but we have means to extinguish it. The bible warns us „not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God“ (Eph 4:30) and „not to quench the Spirit“ (1 Thess 5,19). Exactly this happens in conflict situations by an uncritical solidarity or by an unsolidary criticism. The latter occurs in mindless disputes, where the opponents get fixed on one another and lose sight of the one and unifying Christ. Here the Holy Spirit gets grieved and extinguished insofar as „elements of sanctification and of truth“²¹ of the opponents are oppressed and devalued. This happens very easily when a community splits. And a lot of divisions have occurred in Pentecostal churches and movements.

The other ditch, where Christian conflict culture may fail, is uncritical solidarity. This may happen when Christians try to associate with existing churches and Christian traditions. So they are in danger to neglect prophetic criticism and so to participate in suppressing truth and justice.

I think that this flaw concerns mainly movements of the charismatic renewal in catholic and protestant denominations.

A last point: The Holy Spirit is essentially polyphonic. He speaks by an arrangement of different voices, as he works by an arrangement of different charisms. Wherever certain voices are excluded, the danger of a loss of balance arises and decisions will be wrong. Here the problem is, that there are many (potential) Christians who don't have a voice, especially the poor and underprivileged. We need these people, perhaps more than they need us, to regain the balance of a powerful Christianity. Wherever Christians are ready for dialogue and reconciliation with all sides, conflicts are predetermined. But by these conflicts we will achieve truth and justice, *if* we have learned to argue „in the Holy Spirit“.

²¹2. Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 8.