

Tradition and Normativity of History within an 'Economy of Salvation'

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"We believe in one God, ... Maker of Heaven and Earth ...; we look for ... the life of the world to come." With these words, Christians claim that history has its origin and aim in God who reveals himself within this very history. His self-Revelation culminates in the life, death and resurrection of "Jesus Christ ... begotten of the Father before all worlds." Also, Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is "Giver of life" throughout history.

A Christian approach to history and historicity thus cannot be separated from a trinitarian perception of reality as based on the Creed.¹ For a Christian approach, moreover, no identification between history and God is possible. In a paradoxical move, Vatican II's groundbreaking achievements with respect to the integration of "modern" historical thinking in theology² took place only shortly before the "postmodern" scepticism concerning our conceiving of history and historicity intervened. Our contemporaries consider – more than past generations, including the generation shaping Vatican II – the limits of any conception of 'history', and this in the various uses of this term up to the 'cosmological' dimension. This goes along, among other challenges concerning the historicity of faith, with "the end of the Christian master narrative"⁴ and the questioning of classical salvation-historical conceptions.⁵ If the question how to think of God after Auschwitz is the most dramatic expression of this shift,⁶ widespread

¹ The Creed being part of the liturgy, it is highly important to indicate the link established between the "Economy of Salvation" and the liturgy as it is done by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1066-1068).

² Bruno Forte, "Le prospettive della ricerca teologica," *Il Concilio Vaticano II: Ricezione e attualità alla luce del Giubileo*, ed. Rino Fisichella (Milan: San Paolo, 2000) 419-429, 423, considers Vatican II as a "Council of history."

³ Michael Quisinsky, "Philosophie et théologie: Quelques intuitions du Père Chenu revisitées par ses héritiers," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 92 (2008) 571-589, 582s.

⁴ Lieven Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition: An Essay on Christian Faith in a Postmodern Context*, Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs, 30 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 148.

⁵ Jürgen Werbick, *Den Glauben verantworten: Eine Fundamentaltheologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 2000) 350.

⁶ Helmut Hoping, "Die Lehraussagen des Konzils zur Selbstoffenbarung Gottes und zu seinem Handeln in der Geschichte," *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten*

every-day perplexity characterizes the mental and religious situation of our times and challenges our faith.

As Christians, we cannot deal with Tradition and the normativity of history outside of the Creed. As contemporaries of our time, we cannot do so without referring to the tools of reason that we share with our contemporaries. This calls for a twofold perspective out of faith and reason, taking history as serious as possible while going beyond any positivist vision of it. Christianity dealing with history means coarticulating the “viatoric”⁷ God and its presence in human History “without separation nor confusion.”⁸ The challenge is therefore both to refer single situations, events or expressions to a relational dynamic of God’s history with Humanity, and to express what they can tell us about these dynamics within the human history with God.⁹ The question arises which kind of epistemological “instrumentarium,”¹⁰ “rational tool,”¹¹ or, more modestly spoken, which “horizon of articulation”¹² could help us in reflecting and expressing what we paradoxically cannot and have to express, allowing us to consider what our perceiving of reality can tell us about the divine mystery and what this divine mystery can tell us about our human perception of reality – even if we will never come to an end in holding together the insights and propositions, questions and even tensions in this reciprocal process.¹³

Vatikanischen Konzil 5 (2006) 107-119, 108. Hereafter, *HTbK*.

⁷ Jürgen Werbick, *Gott verbindlich: Eine theologische Gotteslehre* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007) 289 (quoting Dorothea Sattler).

⁸ DH 302. See also Hans-Joachim Sander, “Das singuläre Geschichtshandeln Gottes – eine Frage der pluralen Topologie der Zeichen der Zeit,” *HTbK 5* (2006) 134-147, esp. p. 136; Magnus Striet, “Antimonistische Einsprüche im Namen des freien Gottes Jesu und des freien Menschen,” *Dogma und Denkform: Strittiges in der Grundlegung von Offenbarungsbegriff und Gottesgedanke*, ed. Klaus Müller, Ratio Fidei, 25 (Regensburg: Pustet) 111-127, 127 (with reference to Hans Urs von Balthasar).

⁹ Otto Hermann Pesch, *Katholische Dogmatik aus ökumenischer Erfahrung*. Vol. 1/1 and 1/2: *Die Geschichte der Menschen mit Gott* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2008); Vol. 2: *Die Geschichte Gottes mit den Menschen* (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2010).

¹⁰ Christoph Schwöbel, “‘Heilsgeschichte’: Zur Anatomie eines umstrittenen theologischen Konzepts,” *Heil und Geschichte: Die Geschichtsbezogenheit des Heils und das Problem der Heilsgeschichte in der biblischen Tradition und der theologischen Deutung*, ed. Jörg Frey, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009) 745-757, 755.

¹¹ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Une école de théologie: Le Saulchoir*. Avec les études de Giuseppe Alberigo, Étienne Fouilloux, Jean Ladrière et Jean-Pierre Jossua (Paris: Cerf, 1985) 148s.

¹² For this term see Jürgen Werbick, *Einführung in die Theologische Wissenschaftslehre* (Freiburg: Herder, 2010) 154-158.

¹³ Terrence W. Tilley, “Teaching Christology: History and Horizons,” *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice*, ed. Anne M. Clifford and Anthony J. Godzieba, College Theological Society Annual, 48 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2003) 265-276, 272s.

I. The Horizon of History and Tradition: Trinity and 'Economy of Salvation'

Exploring Vatican II's link between the Trinity and the Economy of Salvation,¹⁴ Karl Rahner formulates his famous trinitarian "Grundaxiom," horizon and challenge of every christian thinking and living: "Die 'ökonomische' Trinität ist die 'immanente' und umgekehrt,"¹⁵ presenting "die Trinität als Heilsmysterium für uns (in ihrer Wirklichkeit und nicht erst als Lehre)."¹⁶ In an almost performative way, Rahner's Axion helped in the very discussion of it¹⁷ to focus on the challenge of conceiving humanly of God who is "present to the time as trinitarian."¹⁸

But what exactly is meant by "Economy of Salvation"? The concept is composed of two elements. As to "Salvation," it designates the eschatological fulfillment by God who is Life in abundance and lets his Creation take part in this divine Live.¹⁹ The various conceptions of Salvation throughout history²⁰ reflect the difficulty of describing the designated cause itself. The divergent development in Eastern and Latin theology led in the latter one to a disconnection between World (and its History) and Salvation.²¹ As to "Economy" ("oikonomia"), it designates the divine plan of Salvation.²² After various uses throughout history, in

¹⁴ Karl Rahner, "Der dreifaltige Gott als transzendenter Urgrund der Heilsgeschichte," *Mysterium Salutis* 2 (1975) 317-401, 319: "Man kann wohl sagen, dass in der Theologie des II. Vatikanums die Trinität in einem heilsökonomischen Kontext vorkommt."

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 328. On this text, see Michael Hauber, *Unsaybar nahe: Eine Studie zur Entstehung und Bedeutung der Trinitätstheologie Karl Rahners*, Innsbrucker Theologische Studien, 82 (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2011) 76-80.116-118.138-140.245f.

¹⁶ Rahner, "Der dreifaltige Gott," 328. It should be noted that when Rahner's Grundaxiom itself speaks of "economic" and not of "salvation-economic," it's context is clearly dealing with Salvation.

¹⁷ Ralf Miggelbrink, *Ekstatische Gottesliebe im tätigen Weltbezug: Der Beitrag Karl Rahners zur zeitgenössischen Gotteslehre*, Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen, 5 (Altenberge: Oros, 1989) 336-369; Hans-Joachim Sander, *Einführung in die Gotteslehre* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006) 79, 93-96; Hauber, *Unsaybar nahe*, 220-225. It is also challenging to compare Rahner's and Balthasar's approaches; for the latter see e.g. Javier Prades López, "'Existen dos economías: una del Hijo y otra del Espíritu?' Reflexiones a partir de la Trilogía de H.U. von Balthasar," *Revista Española de Teología* 65 (2005) 515-548.

¹⁸ Werbick, *Gott verbindlich*, 283.

¹⁹ Markus Knapp, "Heil. IV. Systematisch-theologisch," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 4 (1995) 1262-1264. Hereafter, *LThK*.

²⁰ *Le salut chrétien: Unité et diversité des conceptions à travers l'histoire*, ed. Jean-Louis Leuba, Jésus et Jésus-Christ, 66 (Paris: Desclée, 1995).

²¹ Knapp, "Heil," 1263.

²² Eva-Maria Faber, "Ökonomie (I). I. Systematisch-theologisch," *LThK* 7 (1998) 1014-1015.

nineteenth-century-western theology, the then rediscovered concept was linked with that of "Salvation history,"²³ a term eventually worthy of its own consideration.²⁴ One cannot give a final definition of "Oikonomia," for the term expresses in rather different ways a multifaceted togetherness of divine and human aspects in a relational interdynamic.²⁵ Yves Congar's 1952 article for *Catholicisme* gives a dense explication which is insightful for the way catholic theologians dealt with it around Vatican II.²⁶ Three systematical aspects – which of course are linked with their historical becoming – can be noticed. First, Congar speaks of a restored "communion" between God and Humanity; secondly, he does so in referring to the close relationship between Incarnation and Salvation; and thirdly, he mentions grace and its dispensation as horizon of the oikonomia.

After all, as to the concept "Economy of Salvation," we seem to have an ambiguous term composed of two vague theological terms. If one could claim that this composition constitutes an unhistoric and narrowing use of the biblical and patristic signification of "oikonomia,"²⁷ the twentieth-century use of the concept shows that it is just the rather fluid use which could be its strength,²⁸ both with respect to the content and the method of theology, for it inaugurates and expresses a somewhat performative dynamic with respect to Christian living and thinking.²⁹ Congar,³⁰ his confrère Chenu (who analogically used the concept: "christianism is an economy of salvation"³¹) and other theologians in the 1960's referred to, and widened,

²³ Gerhard Richter, *Oikonomia: Der Gebrauch des Wortes Oikonomia im Neuen Testament, bei den Kirchenvätern und in der theologischen Literatur bis ins 20. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005) 665-725.

²⁴ Gianluigi Pasquale, *La teologia della storia della salvezza nel secolo XX* (Bologna: EDB 2002); Alfred Darlap, "Fundamentale Theologie der Heilsgeschichte," *Mysterium Salutis* 1 (1965) 3-156; Kurt Koch, "Heilsgeschichte. III. Systematisch-theologisch," *LThK* 4 (1995) 1341-1343.

²⁵ Florian Schuppe, *Die pastorale Herausforderung – Orthodoxes Leben zwischen Akribeia und Oikonomia: Theologische Grundlagen, Praxis und ökumenische Perspektiven*, Das Östliche Christentum, NF, 55 (Würzburg: Augustinus, 2006) 325s., 603ss.; Richter, *Oikonomia*, 2-5 et al.

²⁶ Yves Congar, "Économie (dans la théologie orientale)," *Catholicisme* 3 (1952) 1305-1307. The article is not only instructive for Congar's pioneering interest in eastern theology, but also because of the fact that other encyclopedias did not treat "Economy."

²⁷ Richter, *Oikonomia*, 2.

²⁸ Schuppe, *Herausforderung*, 606.

²⁹ This is underlined by the sacramental context of the use of the term in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

³⁰ Yves Congar, "Le Christ dans l'économie salutaire et dans nos traités dogmatiques," id. *Situation et tâches présentes de la théologie*, Cogitatio Fidei, 27 (Paris: Cerf 1967) 85-109.

³¹ Marie-Dominique Chenu, "Les sacrements dans l'économie chrétienne [1952]," id., *La parole de Dieu*. Vol. 1: *La Foi dans l'intelligence*, Cogitatio Fidei, 10 (Paris: Cerf, 1964)

the concept.³² The contemporary and analogical use of it is legitimated by Vatican II.³³ Among others, Emmanuel Durand shows how at Vatican II, Salvation History were integrated into the dogmatic proposition.³⁴ If the dogmatic proposition gives us important insights into how to deal with the concept, it is itself an historical and ecclesiastical result of this very Salvation history and the “Economy of Salvation.” Thus, there cannot but be a kind of intrinsic connection between the Revelation and the Tradition living out of it, even if both are to be distinguished within a complex togetherness; the former is ‘at work’ in the latter which it orientates. While we have to distinguish between history and “Economy of Salvation,” this very economy aims at a conversion or transformation of historical subjects and continues to be ‘at work’ in history where the Church is “sacrament” (LG 1).³⁵

II. Some Observations on the Contemporary Use of the Concept ‘Economy of Salvation’

If theologians such as Christoph Theobald sketch some conditions for a prolongation of Vatican II’s renewal of the concept of “*oeconomia*,”³⁶ in contemporary systematic catholic theology, there is in general no extensive use of it.³⁷ It seems that the concept occurs when other

323-333, esp. 324s. See Michael Quisinsky, “‘Heilsökonomie’ bei Marie-Dominique Chenu OP: Kreative Rezeption ostkirchlicher Theologie im Vorfeld und Verlauf des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,” *Catholica* 59 (2005) 128-153.

³² Before Vatican II, see e.g. *Initiation théologique*. Vol. 4: *L’Économie du Salut* (Paris: Cerf, 1955); after Vatican II, see e.g. Ghislain Lafont, *Peut-on connaître Dieu en Jésus-Christ?*, *Cogitatio Fidei*, 44 (Paris: Cerf, 1969) 13s.

³³ Jesus Silvestre Arrieta, “Die heilsgeschichtliche Schau der Kirche auf dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil,” *Oikonomia. Heilsgeschichte als Thema der Theologie*. Oscar Cullmann zum 65. Geburtstag gewidmet, ed. Felix Christ (Hamburg: Reich, 1967) 322-341, esp. 325; Guy Vandavelde, *Expression de la cohérence du mystère de Dieu et du salut: La réciprocité dans la “Théologie” et l’“Économie”*. Préface de Léon-Etienne Duval, *Analecta Gregoriana*, 263 (Rome: EPUG, 1993).

³⁴ Emmanuel Durand, “Révélation trinitaire et histoire du salut selon Dei Verbum, nos 2-6: L’intégration de l’histoire dans l’énoncé dogmatique,” *Revue Thomiste* 110 (2010) 275-291. For the term “Economy (of Salvation)” see the same article, 275, 280, 284 and esp. p. 286.

³⁵ In line with n. 1, see also *Catechism for the Catholic Church* 776, 1092, and 1396-1398. For a protestant voice, see Schwöbel, “‘Heilsgeschichte,’” 747.

³⁶ Christoph Theobald, “*Dans les traces... de la constitution “Dei Verbum” du concile Vatican II: Bible, théologie et pratiques de lecture*, *Cogitatio Fidei*, 270 (Paris: Cerf, 2009) 134, 144.

³⁷ This judgement is based mainly on German-speaking theology. Of course, there exist important exceptions, e.g. Elizabeth T. Gropp, “Catherine Mowry Lacugna’s Contribution to a Relational Theology,” *Theology and Conversation: Towards a Relational*

theorems are not sufficient to express both the Divine and the human dimension of, and in, history and historicity.

As the following examples show, the concept seems to be primarily used in unexplored theological regions where this lack of clear definition turns into an advantage, for it allows one to express a general dimension rather than to give an interpretation of historical contexts and facts too quickly. According to Helmut Hoping, in the redaction history of *Dei Verbum*, it was the term “*oeconomia salutis*” that explained the term, “Salvation History.”³⁸ Peter Hünemann situates the Church as it is conceived of by LG within a trinitarian “Economy of Salvation.”³⁹ Commenting on *Ad Gentes*, he speaks of a “gnadenhafte Heilsökonomie, welche die gesamte Geschichte der Menschheit umfasst.”⁴⁰ Beyond these commentaries on Vatican II documents, Barbara Hallensleben, referring to Sergij Bulgakov, claims that by a “Sophia” in the horizon of “Economy of Salvation,” it is possible to articulate the faith in an economy-dominated world.⁴¹ Gregor Maria Hoff resorts to the concept within his “problem history” of Revelation and uses it to call Jesus Christ “sprachliche Heilsökonomie Gottes.”⁴² For being christological, the concept is not limited to Christianity but includes other languages for God instead of excluding them, giving place for religious pluralism within an “Economy of Salvation of a religious-theological difference.”⁴³ Hoff proposes to deal with this pluralism, which results from the intrinsic relational character of the truth as it is conceived of by Christians, in line with Melchior Cano’s *loci theologici*.⁴⁴ Claude Geffré uses the term in his

Theology, ed. Jacques Haers and Peter de Mey, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium*, 172 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003) 239-254.

³⁸ Helmut Hoping, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Dogmatischen Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung Dei Verbum,” *HThK* 3 (2005) 695-831, 777. Ironically, Catholic interest in Salvation History began when Protestant theology took leave of this term (Schwöbel, “‘Heilsgeschichte’,” 745).

³⁹ Peter Hünemann, “Der Text: Werden – Gestalt – Bedeutung: Eine hermeneutische Reflexion,” *HThK* 5 (2006) 1-101, 63.

⁴⁰ Peter Hünemann, “Theologischer Kommentar zum Dekret über die Missionstätigkeit der Kirche *Ad gentes*,” *HThK* 4 (2005) 219-336, 261.

⁴¹ Barbara Hallensleben, “Ökonomie und Heilsökonomie: Sergij Bulgakov als Vordenker neuer ökumenischer Aufgaben,” *“Wachsam in Liebe”: Eine Festgabe zum 75. Geburtstag Seiner Seligkeit Patriarch Gregorios III.*, ed. Michael Schneider, *Koinonia-Oriens*, 54 (Kisslegg: Fe-Medienverlag, 2008) 131-145, esp. 140s.

⁴² Gregor Maria Hoff, *Offenbarungen Gottes: Eine theologische Problemgeschichte* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2007) 196.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 194-198, esp. 197 (“Heilsökonomie der religionstheologischen Differenz”).

⁴⁴ Hoff insists especially on Israel’s significance in the history of God’s Self-Revelation (*ibid.*, 197 note 366).

attempt to situate Christianity among the world religions and speaks of a “pluralité des économies du salut” to express God’s salvific presence in the history of the world and its religions.⁴⁵

III. Tradition – within the ‘Economy of Salvation’?

I. *How to Use the Concept ‘Economy of Salvation’*

If the contemporary use of “Economy of Salvation” transcends its biblical and patristic use, its ongoing transformation which goes along with its renewal is a result both of a certain content-openness of the concept and of its performing character. For if Jesus Christ who revealed God to us and if the Holy Ghost who is present in us were subject of an “Economy of Salvation,” this Economy is still in a certain way ongoing, even if – and if nothing else with the respect for the legacy of the Reformation and its esteem for the Scriptures – we have to distinguish this ongoing dynamic and its expressions, “without separation nor confusion,” from God’s biblically testified Self-Revelation. For the concept even in its biblical and patristic use designates a reality which concerns ourselves:⁴⁶ That God speaks also to us, that Jesus’ words and actions are models for our discipleship, and that this occurs in the fortitude of the Holy Spirit shows us that there is an intrinsic link between what *Dei Verbum* No. 2 calls “economy of Revelation”⁴⁷ and our ecclesial and personal faith.⁴⁸ The concept “Economy of Salvation” is therefore “charged”⁴⁹ with the Revelation whose history it designates and interprets. As such it expresses a relational dynamic between God and Humanity. Yet the ever new “forms of reappropriation”⁵⁰ of Revelation

⁴⁵ Claude Geffré, “La théologie des religions non chrétiennes vingt ans après Vatican II,” *Islamochristiana* 11 (1985) 115-133, 128s.; id., *De Babel à Pentecôte: Essais de théologie interreligieuse*, *Cogitatio Fidei*, 247 (Paris: Cerf, 2006) 51.

⁴⁶ Hauber, *Unsagbar nahe*, 87.

⁴⁷ For the christological foundation see Werner Löser, “‘Universale concretum’ als Grundgesetz der Oeconomia Revelationis,” *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie*, ed. Walter Kern, Hermann J. Pottmeyer and Max Seckler, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1985) 108-121.

⁴⁸ For the Trinitarian “impact sur nous” see Durand, “Révélation trinitaire,” 288. For the ecumenical impact see Pierre Duprey, “La théologie et le rapprochement entre les Églises catholique et orthodoxe,” *Théologie: Le service théologique dans l’Église* (Paris: Cerf, 1974) 37-50, 41.

⁴⁹ I take this expression in the sense it is used by Lieven Boeve, *God Interrupts History: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007) 48.

⁵⁰ Schwöbel, “Heilsgeschichte,” 749 speaks of “Aneignungsgestalten.”

throughout history are part of its aim. That is why we cannot conceive of Revelation without its relationship to the transmission of the faith, i.e. the Tradition. If there is an “Economy of Salvation” at work in the history of Revelation which leads to Tradition, then we are, in a specific way, also somehow a part of this complex relationship, “charging” it with our insights and experiences, doubts and questions and also with our historical knowledges (and the knowledge of their limits!). Thus, Tradition is a processus eventually transforming and converting itself and its expressions with respect to Revelation. This legitimates a historically nourished, systematically reflected, analogical use of the concept “Economy of Salvation” as a “horizon of articulation” rather than as a closed definition, embodying in our living and thinking the ongoing dynamic of Revelation it expresses. While this means a kind of interpretation of the Christian Revelation by ourselves, this interpretation reciprocally is preceded by an interpretation of ourselves by Revelation. If in these reinterpretations there might be a danger to get too human, they nevertheless can be a kind of reappropriation, by grace, of God’s Self-Revelation which is, in the Holy Spirit, our way, as Church, to live out of this very Revelation. So, in the wake of Vatican II, “Economy of Salvation” is a “horizon of articulation” for a needed “*Interpretatio temporis*”⁵¹ in both the widest and the most concrete sense of the term.

2. *‘Economy of Salvation’ within Tradition*

While the “Economy of Salvation” generates and qualifies Tradition, Tradition helps us to apprehend what is meant by “Economy of Salvation.” Originally, the concept “*Oikonomia*” meant first of all a divine dispensation: it is God who enters into communion with human beings, it is God who becomes one of us, it is God who dispenses Grace to Men and Women. Yet, meanwhile, almost every single aspect mentioned underwent fundamental changes of comprehension and expression, and first of all the two basic notions ‘God’ and ‘Man’. This backwards movement interprets the very concept of “Economy of Salvation” in a renewed and renewing way. In such a historical-systematical dialogue, normativity is not so much a one-way road or a restrictive dimension of Christianity’s

⁵¹ Peter Hünemann, “Gottes Handeln in der Geschichte: Theologie als *Interpretatio temporis*,” *Freiheit Gottes und Freiheit der Menschen. Festschrift für Thomas Pröpfer*, ed. Michael Böhnke, Michael Bongardt, Georg Essen and Jürgen Werbeck (Regensburg: Pustet, 2006) 109-135.

dealing with history, but a reciprocal interpenetration of the perspectives of Christians of all Times, both integrating and opening new possibilities to live out “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6) which is Jesus Christ. In order to proceed to a constructive handling of the horizon of articulation “Economy of Salvation,” a closer look at Congar’s definition – with the help of the horizon of articulation, expressed in a human way – may help us to consider the Incarnation and Grace as divinely rooted.

a) Incarnation: God in Humanity

In a Christian approach to reality, Incarnation as Center of the “Economy of Salvation”⁵² becomes both a possibility and a challenge for our conceiving of history between Creation and Salvation.⁵³ God’s Self-Revelation becoming human among humans brought into a mutual relationship between the divine and the human “without separation nor confusion.” Vatican II exemplifies this in the definition of the Church as “*realitas complexa*,” where a divine and a human element are “coalescing” in a “no weak analogy” with the “mystery of the incarnate word” (LG 8). We have thus to consider the analogical character of any human dealing with the togetherness of divine and human dimensions. Because we are “Church *in* the modern world” (GS), any analogical dealing with reality must be able to both refer to the mystery of Christian truth, and to be on a level with the rationality of one’s contemporaries. Thus, *all* that is human and all that constitutes our living and thinking, therefore, is situated with respect to the relationship between God and Humanity. For Christians, Tradition and history are “charged” by a relational dynamic of Creation and Salvation, revealed by the Incarnation. In a multifaceted Incarnation-bound perspective on Tradition and history, the divine dimension is only analogically nameable in a human way, while the human dimension has, moreover, to comply with the questions, doubts and contingencies of human living and thinking. This

⁵² This leads to the question of the relationship between Incarnation, Cross and Resurrection. See e.g. André Scrima, “La résurrection comme centre de l’économie du salut,” *Resurrexit: Actes du symposium international sur la résurrection du Christ*, ed. Edouard Dhanis (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970) 546-553.

⁵³ Michael Quisinsky, “Inkarnation: Jesus Christus – Ermöglichung und Herausforderung christlichen Lebens und Denkens,” *Theologie aus dem Geist des Humanismus. Festschrift für Peter Walter*, ed. Hilary Mooney, Karlheinz Ruhstorfer and Viola Tenge-Wolf (Freiburg: Herder, 2012) 292-331.

makes it impossible to identify any aspect of human history as divine or to conceive of the world in an integralistic way, for human failure and inhumanity are too widespread throughout human history (including the human dimension of the history of the divine-human faith). The final word, therefore, will be God's, and not some human comprehension or theory.

Several incarnation-theological insights, inspired by Vatican II and its reception, can serve as a set of further criteria in order not to proceed to problematic monisms and dualisms. So we became aware of the "kenotic" character of Incarnation, opening wide horizons for our conceiving of God's Love,⁵⁴ and of the "recapitulating" aim of Incarnation, remembering that God achieves what he began himself.⁵⁵ A dynamic of mutual "interruptions"⁵⁶ between the divine and the human dimension of our personal and ecclesiastic faith impresses this very faith by a dynamic of enriching interpenetrations. The various mutual "interruptions" between faith and the contemporary world are "charged" by the Incarnation and thus with the "Economy of Salvation,"⁵⁷ which is therefore itself somehow constituted out of various "interruptions." For their "chargings," these "interruptions" occur as an expression of an eschatological dynamic. The incarnation-bound relationship between the divine and the human reminds us that every human aspect of history as such is still unaccomplished and risks becoming even inhuman. If a single tradition can express a step on the way between Creation and Salvation, as a historical fact, it never can be absolutised. Any temptation of an only-human understanding of truth would confine God in it, what would lead us to fundamental problems obscuring both God and Man. The horizon of articulation "Economy of Salvation" can, therefore, not be helpful to humanly express the mystery it designates if we are not aware of the presence of God and the effects of this Self-Revelation throughout history,

⁵⁴ See e.g. Bertram Stubenrauch, *Dialogisches Dogma: Der christliche Auftrag zur interreligiösen Begegnung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1995) esp. 26-30 and 41-46; Roman Siebenrock, "Kenotische Vernunft: Zur Bestimmung des sapientialen Charakters theologischer Rationalität," *Wozu Fundamentaltheologie? Zur Grundlegung der Theologie im Anspruch von Glaube und Vernunft*, ed. id. and Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern, Paderborner Theologische Studien, 52 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011) 93-112, 103.

⁵⁵ Ralf Miggelbrink, *Lebensfülle: Für die Wiederentdeckung einer theologischen Kategorie*, *Quaestiones disputatae*, 235 (Freiburg: Herder, 2009).

⁵⁶ See Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*; id., *God Interrupts History*.

⁵⁷ In line with Boeve, this is developed in Michael Quisinsky, "Can Tradition (Not) Change? Truth in the History between God and Humanity," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 86 (2010) 107-136, esp. 125.

the mystery of Creation and Salvation transcending our contingent insights and practices. But an Incarnation-bound analogy can neither be helpful if it makes any attempt to bypass human knowledge and insight, historical facts and psychological processes. It rather must honour the contingency and the contingencies in a radical way. In doing so, it can help us to open concrete living and thinking in an horizon of universality and to open this horizon of universality in concrete living and thinking. In an ongoing reciprocal dynamic, this pushes toward a Christian engagement which permits new insights for Christian reflection and reciprocity. If truth is conceived of as Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy, Incarnation-centered Christian living and thinking leads us into the mystery of Jesus Christ, and the mystery of Jesus Christ leads us to an ever renewed Christian living and thinking.

b) Grace: God for Humanity

The communion between God and Humanity mentioned by Congar is a history of Grace. Obviously, there is a plurality of experiences and understandings of the effects of grace throughout history.⁵⁸ If Grace occurs in a dynamic of dispensation, it has by this very fact an eschatological dynamic, emanating from the fullness to which it tends. Thus, in terms of “Grace,” time and history (more correctly: “histories”) are part of created “nature” and therefore aim at a recapitulation which is both fulfillment and purification from sin.⁵⁹ Any theological dealing with the graceful divine-human relationship must be aware of divine sovereignty. But it also must be able to express human nature as we can perceive it. Nowadays, we see more than ever the fragility and uncertainty of the human condition, but also the dignity of human freedom. If we express the relationship between God and Man created in the image of God in terms of “Grace,” this term can be a synonym for God’s freedom: it is not possible to dispose of grace and thus, of an “Economy of Salvation” at the human’s command. But it also specifies the history between God and Humanity, insofar as God not only respects human nature – and by

⁵⁸ Stephan Goertz, “*Gratia supponit naturam: Theologische Lektüren, praktische Implikationen und interdisziplinäre Anschlussmöglichkeiten eines Axioms*,” “... und nichts Menschliches ist mir fremd”: *Theologische Grenzgänge*, ed. Ottmar John and Magnus Striet, *Ratio Fidei*, 41 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2010) 221-243.

⁵⁹ Michael Quisinsky, “Analogia pleromatis – in der Welt von heute: Inkarnations-theologische Perspektiven auf Neuzeit und Gegenwart,” *Theologie und Glaube* 102 (2012) 69-91.

that human Freedom – but enables it.⁶⁰ If there is a history between God and Humanity, Freedom of God and freedom of Man are interrelated. In a certain way, this interrelation occurs most densely in the human conscience, “rediscovered” by Vatican II.⁶¹ Human freedom thus is in a multi-relational interference both with respect to human history and God’s transcending presence in it.⁶² The plurality of faith experiences are an important element of our conceiving of the communion between God and Humanity, stimulating us to go on with our search of God which is part of its graceful presence in our lives. The horizon of articulation, “Economy of Salvation,” remembers that there is a unifying tie of this plurality even if this tie seems to be inaccessible to human capacities.⁶³ Reciprocally, this horizon of articulation indicates for our discernment the historical effects of experiences of Grace between Creation and Salvation.

3. *Tradition and Normativity of History as Our Historical Way to Deal with an ‘Economy of Salvation’ which Concerns Us*

a) Revelation: God with Humanity

Incarnation is the centre of God’s Self-Revelation. In Jesus Christ, God became human among humans and thus “spoke” (Heb 1:1) in history. Of course, we never have finished apprehending Jesus Christ, truth-in-person. Yet there also was a history of Revelation before Jesus Christ, even if no historically or theologically naive way of describing the biblical history is possible. If the Bible testifies to “various ways” by which God spoke at “various times” (Heb 1:1), it shows in the same time that also humans did speak of God’s Revelation “in various ways.” This leads us to a crucial question: what is the relationship between God’s “speaking” and the human “speaking” of it?⁶⁴ The Bible, moreover, has its own ways of

⁶⁰ Otto Hermann Pesch, *Frei sein aus Gnade: Theologische Anthropologie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1983); we cannot but refer to the discussion indebted to Thomas Pröpper – it may be sufficient to refer to *Freiheit Gottes und der Menschen* and, for the link between Trinity and Grace, to Thomas Pröpper, *Theologische Anthropologie*, vol. 2 (Freiburg: Herder, 2011) esp. 1345.

⁶¹ Eberhard Schockenhoff, *Wie gewiss ist das Gewissen? Eine ethische Orientierung* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003) 169.

⁶² Georg Essen, “Geschichtstheologie,” *LThK* 4 (1995) 564-568, esp. 567.

⁶³ On this Erwin Ender, *Heilsökonomie und Rechtfertigung: Eine Untersuchung über die Heilsfrage bei John Henry Newman* (Essen: Ludgerus, 1972).

⁶⁴ Theological notions such as Inspiration, God’s Action or Providence appear here on the agenda, necessitating horizons of answer which feel fit with our contemporary

dealing with history in general and the history of Salvation in particular. It also generated ways of dealing with history throughout Tradition. In a mutual interruption between Revelation and Tradition, this implies the search for a way to articulate and integrate, but also to criticize and improve our insights into historical facts and developments and our conceptions of the way in which biblical texts consider them as a step in the history between God and Humanity. For the biblical texts testify both in their diversity and togetherness of this history of the Revelation which both refers to, and differentiates itself from the History of Salvation. If we want to articulate our comprehension of Revelation within a “history of Mankind with God” and as a “history of God with Mankind,”⁶⁵ we need to think together “without separation nor confusion” God’s salvific will with human attempts to follow this will. Speaking of “Economy of Salvation” therefore does not want to reduce the inconceivable plurality of histories into one “big” History, but rather wants to open our view for a paradoxical but real togetherness of eschatologically unifying dynamics between God’s Self-Revelation and the inconceivable non-conclusiveness of the plural human testimonies of it.

b) Tradition: Humanity with God

Insofar as the “Economy of Salvation” englobes, determines, and makes dynamic the reality between Creation and Salvation, history as a part of this reality is “charged” with what this horizon tends toward. Tradition as normative history is thus both distinguished from, and linked to, this dynamizing horizon of articulation which refers to God through the single aspects of history and Tradition. Thus, these aspects are based on their inherent value, and which has to be established by methods that are not specific to theology, but are common tools of human reason in their respective contexts. Every aspect of Church history and of Christian living and thinking – and beyond – has therefore a theological interest whose scope is to determine in a dialogue with other theological disciplines and beyond.⁶⁶ In a more narrow sense, there exists a Tradition as normative interpretation of history, belonging to

understanding of the world, even if we also have to acknowledge that this understanding is incomplete and can be enriched by an “interruption” by the Bible.

⁶⁵ See the subtitles of Pesch, *Dogmatik*.

⁶⁶ Yet Dominik Burkard, “Das kritische Auge der Theologie: Aufgabe und Funktion von Kirchengeschichte,” *Theologie, wohin? Blicke von aussen und von innen*, ed. Erich Garhammer (Würzburg: Echter, 2011) 73-104, 97, states: “Obwohl das Faktum der

the self-understanding of the Christian faith in the Church. This living Tradition is an “ongoing process of recontextualisation”⁶⁷ of faith and insofar as it refers us to Revelation and Revelation to us, a respectful, but critical approach to Tradition is quite normal and healthy.⁶⁸ The deepest reason for normativity is the fidelity to the divine mystery that can only be expressed in various human ways. In this sense, Tradition both cannot change and can change, conversion becoming a synonym for change. Moreover, the very sense of “normativity” widens and becomes dynamic if we consider it as part of an “Economy of Salvation.” It holds us in a really “catholic” communion both with our contemporaries in this world and with our contemporaries in the world to come.

c) Criteria for Normativity within the Horizon of Articulation ‘Economy of Salvation’

Because of God’s identification with human brokenness at the Cross, any triumphalistic attitude is made impossible by the “Economy of Salvation,”⁶⁹ as well as any attempt to write a history with a big H.⁷⁰ These most obvious limits of the use of the concept of “Economy of Salvation” correspond to a warning of an ideological dealing with the “history of Salvation.”⁷¹ Within a Christian historical perspective, “charged” by the Incarnation as part of an “Economy of Salvation,” the worst ideologies indeed would be likewise to separate or confuse divine and human dimensions instead of dealing with them “without separation nor confusion.”

As to the nature of normativity which marks our dealing with history, there exists first a kind of negative normativity. Concrete history confronts us with the limits of every human speaking of God, even if the very horizon, “Economy of Salvation,” reminds us that God transcends the history in which he is present with us. A Christian worldview needs to understand the practical and theoretical spiritual doubts of our time, which are also an inherent warning against exaggerated claims of any

Geschichtlichkeit nie akzeptierter war, wird in den theologischen, nicht-kirchenhistorischen Disziplinen weniger denn je historisch gearbeitet.”

⁶⁷ Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, 26.

⁶⁸ Karl Lehmann, “Die dogmatische Denkform als hermeneutisches Problem: Prolegomena zu einer Kritik der dogmatischen Vernunft,” id., *Gegenwart des Glaubens* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1974) 35-53, esp. 44.

⁶⁹ Sander, *Gotteslehre*, 96.

⁷⁰ Theobald, “*Dans les traces...*”, 130.

⁷¹ Durand, “*Révélation trinitaire*,” 277.

concept. Of course, this calls to mind the fact that every human dealing with God is confronted with an important limit of any conceiving of history and historicity, reinforcing by this very fact Theodicy.⁷² For Christian living and thinking knowing its own limits, the long tradition of negative theology is, in a way, a correlative corrective of the concept “Economy of Salvation.”⁷³ Insofar as after Rahner, an “economic” theology is a trinitarian one and vice versa, it may be interesting to cross Ralf Miggelbrink’s plea for a “Trinitarische Pleromatik”⁷⁴ and Otto Hermann Pesch’s plea for a “Theologia Trinitatis negativa.”⁷⁵

There exists, secondly, a positive normativity as it is discovered in the “loci theologici.”⁷⁶ Going along with history, within the horizon of articulation that is an “Economy of Salvation,” such loci refer both to their foundation in divine Revelation and to their eschatological efforts which are their criterium.⁷⁷ Thus, our dealing with the normativity of history has a reciprocal structure: it can lead us into the center of the mystery of the “Economy of Salvation” in order to be enlightened *by* this very center. That is why in history, a kind of “supererogatory” normativity leads us beyond what was historically expressed up to now. For the Church is “ante et retro oculata.”⁷⁸ This is true both for its looking at both past and future history.⁷⁹ Considering Tradition in an ongoing dynamic of mutual “interruptions” with the world within the horizon of articulation, “Economy of Salvation” can vivify forgotten or inapprehensible, but important aspects of truth.⁸⁰ There are also new dimensions of

⁷² “Das Kreuz Jesu Christi ist die Anthropoziee Gottes – die Auferweckung Jesu Christi die Theoziee Gottes” (Schwöbel, “Heilsgeschichte,” 754).

⁷³ See, e.g., Alois Halbmayr and Gregor Maria Hoff (eds.), *Negative Theologie heute? Zum aktuellen Stellenwert einer umstrittenen Tradition*, Quaestiones disputatae, 226 (Freiburg: Herder, 2008); Andreas Benk, *Gott ist nicht gut und nicht gerecht: Zum Gottesbild der Gegenwart* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 2008).

⁷⁴ Miggelbrink, *Lebensfülle*, 239.

⁷⁵ Pesch, *Dogmatik*, 1/2, 678.

⁷⁶ Quisinsky, “Can Tradition (Not) Change,” esp. 112-116.

⁷⁷ See the debate between Josef Wohlmuth, “Eschato-Ästhetik – Eschato-Logik – Eschato-Praxis: Bruch der Totalität – Mysterium der Verwandlung,” *Zeit denken: Eschatologie im interdisziplinären Diskurs*, ed. Edmund Arens, Quaestiones disputatae, 234 (Freiburg: Herder, 2010) 193-221 and Edmund Arens, “Die Zeit, die kommt: Zu Josef Wohlmuths Eschatologie,” *ibid.*, 222-237.

⁷⁸ Yves Congar, “Au Concile, l’Église se regardera dans l’Évangile,” *Témoignage chrétien*, 28 juillet 1961, 9-10, 9, quoting Bernard of Clairvaux.

⁷⁹ Karl Lehmann, “Bilan. Moi et le Père nous sommes un’: Un état de la christologie aujourd’hui,” *Jésus, le Christ et les christologies*, ed. Joseph Doré and Bernard Xibaut, *Jésus et Jésus-Christ*, 101 (Paris: Desclée, 2011) 507-535, 530.

⁸⁰ For some implications see Lehmann, “Denkform,” 51, Laurent Villemin, “L’herméneutique de Vatican II: Enjeux d’avenir,” *Vatican II et la théologie: Perspectives*

the truth of this very horizon of articulation to be explored, enriching the Tradition in an eschatological dynamic.

In a pluralistic world, Christian "Tradition" is only one (hi)story told among others. Furthermore, within our Churches, we realize that the "living Tradition" is all but a monolithic (hi)story, but challenges our unity as well as our testimony by a dynamic plurality of multifold "(hi)stories" and their implications. Whatever integrates the Christian faith as a human one from its "outside"⁸¹ – and this is a normal process of human life and human history wherever the Christian faith is in the minority – can constitute a discontinuity. But from within an "Economy of Salvation"-reflected worldview, this discontinuity is a human one which does not exclude a continuity of God's salvific will present in history between God and humanity, even if we still have to ask which are the effects of "temporality" and "historicity" of the Creation to the Creator. For Christian faith also needs to situate itself with respect to other religions, the horizon of articulation, "Economy of Salvation" reminds the Christian Tradition that its foundation, God's Self-Revelation, is intrinsically linked with at least one other world religion, i.e. Judaism (*Nostra Aetate* No. 4).⁸² As Vatican II considers the possibility of Salvation for non-Christians positively, it calls for an enlarged way of considering the universality of Salvation and its history.⁸³ Evidently, this does not make obsolete the unicity of Jesus Christ or the role of the Church as corpus Christi and thus as a historical testimony to God's salvific acting, but it also insists on the role of the Holy Spirit present in the whole of Creation. All this cannot but widen the very state of the question of the Christian conceiving of reality and history beyond its historical expressions. Within a reconsideration of the pluralism of

pour le XXI^e siècle, ed. Philippe Bordeyne and Laurent Villemin, *Cogitatio Fidei*, 254 (Paris: Cerf, 2006) 247-262, 256; Bernd Jochen Hilberath, "Alte und neue Herausforderungen angesichts der sich wandelnden Zeichen der Zeit," *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute*, ed. Peter Hünemann, Bernd Jochen Hilberath and Lieven Boeve (Freiburg: Herder, 2006) 594-609, 604.

⁸¹ See Hans-Joachim Sander, "Das Aussen des Glaubens – eine Autorität der Theologie: Das Differenzprinzip in den Loci Theologici des Melchior Cano," *Das Volk Gottes: Ein Ort der Befreiung*, ed. Hildegund Keul and Hans-Joachim Sander (Würzburg: Echter, 1998) 240-258; id., "Gott: Vom Beweisen zum Verorten," *Glaube in der Welt von heute: Theologie und Kirche nach dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*. Vol. 1: *Profilierung*, ed. Thomas Franz and Hanjo Sauer (Würzburg: Echter, 2006) 574-596.

⁸² Roman A. Siebenrock, "Theologischer Kommentar zur Erklärung über die Haltung der Kirche zu den nichtchristlichen Religionen," *HThK* 3 (2005) 591-693, 666.

⁸³ Id., "Die Wahrheit der Religionen und die Fülle der Selbstmitteilung Gottes in Jesus Christus," *HThK* 5 (2006) 120-133, 121-123.

religions (and their histories) in God's salvific plan, the horizon of articulation, "Economy of Salvation" may open up our Christian approach to God's presence among our neighbors (cf. Mk 12:31; Mt 22:39) and in our encounters with them.⁸⁴

As to the "Economy of Salvation," we should perhaps not tax the term itself too much, but rather bear in mind its intention which is neither to write a chronological "History of Salvation" nor to deny or bypass God's sovereignty and incomprehensibility. It is, rather, to express the challenge of any Christian dealing with history: how to conceive of reality as a reality between Creation and Salvation qualified by the Incarnation as God's Self-Revelation concerning us in mind and heart. The best thing we can do to conceive of the very horizon of this question is, without any doubt, to follow Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The horizon of articulation, "Economy of Salvation," without denying the impossibility of harmonizing the insights it can offer, reminds us not to lose sight of the unifying tie between the partial answers given by the various Christian "styles," i.e. the realisations of Christian living and thinking throughout history. In this sense, it can help us to identify the normative character of Tradition and history for our conceiving of God without attributing to them what can only be attributed to God. For every use of an instrument of articulation has its aim not in itself but in the eschatological fulfillment it tries to consider. In its very fragility, the horizon of articulation "Economy of Salvation" may help us to consider the mystery of faith as it is aimed in the various moments of Tradition. Vice versa, the various moments of Tradition may help us to consider reality within the mystery of faith. Our horizon of articulation is no "great narrative" but concretizes itself in innumerable "Christian open narratives"⁸⁵ which are "co-constitutive"⁸⁶ of the "Economy of Salvation." Expressing an eschatological dynamic, "Economy of Salvation" is eventually not so much a technically understood "horizon of articulation," as it is an ever concrete horizon of "faith, hope and love" (1 Cor 13:13).

⁸⁴ Christoph Theobald, *Le christianisme comme style: Une manière de faire de la théologie en postmodernité*. Vol. 1, Cogitatio Fidei, 260 (Paris: Cerf, 2007) 92 et al.

⁸⁵ Boeve, *Interrupting Tradition*, 101-146.

⁸⁶ Cf. Boeve, *God Interrupts History*, 177.