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The *Munus Propheticum* of the Church: On a Controversial Reformed Heritage

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Abstract: To what extent can the Reformed heritage of the prophetic office sharpen the perception of the cultural witness of the church in secular Europe? The so-called *munus propheticum* as a heritage of the Swiss Reformation is the focus of this paper. In a first attempt, the Reformation origin of guardianship will be traced. A look at the debate on Swiss refugee policy during the war years shows how controversial church involvement was at that time. Using the example of the prophetic office, the sensitivity and fragility of the church's witness in secular society can be better understood and used for the theological discussion on the function of the public church. In a concluding reflection, arguments for and against its use are examined.

Keywords: prophetic office; reformed tradition; guardianship of church

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1. Introduction

The question that has inspired this article is whether the Reformed heritage of the prophetic office can sharpen the perception of the cultural witness of the church in secular Europe. In order not to lose one's bearings in the broad field to which this question leads, restrictions are necessary. Attention is focused on the so-called *munus propheticum* as a legacy of the Swiss Reformation. What started in Switzerland subsequently had an impressive impact in Protestant Europe. In a first attempt, the Reformation origin of the guardianship will be traced. In a bold leap across the centuries, the second step will be a concrete case study from recent Swiss history. The spotlight on the debate about refugee policy in the war years illustrates how the church and large sections of society understood the *munus propheticum* at the time, but also revealed tensions that were to intensify in the years to come. Church involvement was and is a cause for debate when it goes against the mainstream in ethical terms or when economic interests are affected. Especially bourgeois parties disapprove the instrumentalization of religion for politics. Using the example of the prophetic office, the sensitivity and fragility of the church's witness in secular society can be better understood and used for the theological discussion of the function of the public church. In a concluding reflection, arguments for and against its use are examined.

2. Preconditions

2.1. All We Need Is Hope

In secular Switzerland, issues of faith are considered a private, rather delicate and discreet matter. The crucial question of how to hold one's religion is also a delicate and discreet matter (Fechtner 2015). Those who publicly stand by their convictions and call themselves "devout Christians" belong to a minority (Stolz and Senn 2021). So it is rather unusual for a retired member of government to speak explicitly on matters of life and faith. All the more remarkable was an interview with former Federal Councilor Pascal Couchepin that appeared in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung at the end of August 2022. In the interview, the 80-year-old also expresses himself about religion:

> I am a devout, liberal Catholic. I don't go to church every week, but I go regularly. The other day I was debating with a former vicar general of a diocese about the

> great theological virtues: Faith, Mercy, Hope. Faith is less and less widespread in society. Bon, you have to accept that. Mercy is often commercialized and publicized today. The only Christian virtue that is still the same and that we also urgently need is hope. That in the worst of circumstances there is still a chance for improvement, for progress. Especially when we see what is going on in the world today (Couchepin, in Tribelhorn and Neuhaus 2022).

Two things are remarkable about this testimony: it is open-hearted, and it is reflective. Couchepin asks a crucial question: what can religion give a secular society that it cannot give itself? It is hope. For hope is something that is in principle unavailable. It makes a condition that no state can guarantee.

The formulation sheds light on a thesis on the relationship between state and church that is very often quoted in the German-speaking world. It is a dictum of the legal philosopher and constitutional and administrative lawyer Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde (1991, p. 75):

> The liberal, secular state lives on preconditions that it cannot guarantee itself. That is the great gamble it has taken, for the sake of freedom.

Böckenförde argues that the secularity of the state is a necessary postulate of a democratic society and thus also of religious freedom—a postulate that should also be obvious to devout Christians. For the state has emancipated itself from religion and, with the Universal Declaration of Human and Civic Rights in 1789 (Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen de 1789 set by French National Constituent Assembly), religion was relegated to an area of society that has since been reserved for private affairs.

The guaranteed positive or negative freedom of religion for the individual does not mean that the state could take over the function of religion, nor does the dictum declare the institutionalized form of religion superfluous. The institution of the church, even if not exclusively, can still be assigned the task of providing moral substance for the community qua its teachings. The contribution of religion is to strengthen the cohesive power of society. But it can only do this if its teachings are not enforced in conflict, which necessarily requires a neutral state. It is certainly not wrong to say that in the German-speaking world, despite all the differences and diverse accents, there is in principle a consensus on religious law. What is disputed, however, is how the churches contribute their testimony in a democratically constituted state, or more precisely, how they, as public-law corporations, can fulfill the role of guardians of Christian values in the sense of a cultural witness and thus contribute to the building and cultivation of the community of values.

2.2. Hope and Prophecy

Couchepin's illuminating reference to the three Christian cardinal virtues and the focus on hope (Couchepin, in Tribelhorn and Neuhaus 2022) highlights an aspect of cultural witness that will be further developed in this article as prophetic witness. Whereas faith and love can be more or less directly related to universal values, aiming at a more stable society, hope is particularly directed towards change. In the biblical context, change is linked to prophetic witness and hope is an uncomfortable virtue because it carries the sting of power criticism.

The American Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann deserves credit for drawing attention to the connection between hope and prophecy. In his challenging and enlightening treatments, Brueggemann traces the lines from the radical vision of Moses to the solidification of royal power in Solomon to the prophetic critique of that power with a new vision of freedom in the prophets. He highlights that the prophetic vision not only embraces the pain of the people but creates an energy and amazement based on the new thing that God is doing (cf. Brueggemann 2001). To what extent is this connection present in the current discourse on public theology?

When the elder statesman Pascal Couchepin freely admits in an interview that "we urgently need hope", he speaks significantly in the first-person plural. He is not only expressing his private opinion but is claiming a collective. Who is this "we"? How does the

"we" expressed in the cultural witness of the church relate to the "we" of secular society? How do individual believers, and consequently the community of faith, understand the biblical instruction to "give an account of their hope at all times" (1 Pet 3:15)?

3. The Prophetical Office in the Swiss Reformation

3.1. The Prophetic Dimension of the Gospel

It would certainly be presumptuous to reduce the historical roots for this awareness to a movement at the beginning of the modern era known as the Reformation of the Church. What can be shown, however, is a massive strengthening and vehement emphasis on the prophetic dimension of the gospel in the Swiss Reformation and especially in Huldrych Zwingli, who, along with Jean Calvin and Martin Luther, was one of the great instigators of the Reformation. His emphasis will be highlighted by means of two of his writings, which speak about secular authority, the responsibility of the church, and the public witness of its ministers. On the one hand, we are talking about the treatise published in 1523 under the title "Divine and Human Justice" and, on the other hand, the morning sermon at the end of the second disputation in 1523, which Zwingli had printed at the insistence of the St. Gallen Reformer, Vadian, and which was published in 1524 under the title "The Shepherd". From both texts it becomes clear why the critique of power belongs to the signature of prophecy.

3.2. Divine Justice as a Yardstick

Already in the first years of the Reformation, Zwingli found himself caught between two fronts. On the one hand, the bishop accused him and the Zurich authorities of sedition; on the other hand, Zwingli's reforms were not radical enough for some of his friends, who shortly afterwards went their own way as "Anabaptists". Zwingli therefore saw it as his task to remind both groups that Christ is Lord of all areas of life. His goal was to lead both the traditionalists and the radicals with the guiding principle of divine justice on the path of reform as it is seen in the commandments, and especially in the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount. In agreement with Luther, Zwingli ([1523] 1995) also recognizes the use of the law, which leads to the knowledge of sin, but emphasizes "the desire of the believing soul to practise according to God's demand" (p. 169).

It is important to him that the basis of every social renewal is essentially the commandment of love, which is a matter of the heart, in contrast to the law, which is addressed to the outer person. Divine justice calls for love and expresses itself as a call that the inner being hears, but that he/she cannot fulfill. To recognize one's inability is the first step towards repentance. On the other hand, a person who, "in spite of all his powerlessness, meanness and corruption, pretends to be good on the outside" (ibid., p. 174) is a hypocrite. According to Zwingli, to experience grace means to admit one's inability, but not to despair of it. Rather, the Christian may hope, on the basis of divine forgiveness and in anticipation of divine providence, to receive the strength to align his/her life with the measure of divine justice.

One consequence of Zwingli's theology of sanctification can be seen in the fact that he considers it a right and duty of preachers to resist the misguided worldly authorities. This "right to resist", for which Zwingli refers to Acts 4:19 and 5:29, lays the foundation for Reformed social ethics (ibid., p. 192). An authority that prevents or forbids the proclamation of the gospel is an authority that no longer allows itself to be told anything in God's name and is therefore not legitimized to call itself a Christian authority. However, the judgment also applies to the church. The Word of God, in which divine justice appears, is a Word in the light of which even religiously dressed up hypocrisy is revealed. Therefore, a church that no longer takes its measure from God's Word may no longer call itself a Christian church. Zwingli draws the following conclusion from this: "Divine righteousness should be revealed and preached to all men without ceasing, and one should rather lose one's life than be dissuaded from preaching and proclaiming it, as Christ has often commanded" (ibid., pp. 182, 186).

His strong plea for the Christian witness makes it clear how important Zwingli considers the public proclamation of the gospel for a Christian community. It is in the interest of the state to be able to refer to an authority that legitimizes it to enforce external laws as an authority. The proclamation reminds both—church and state—of the divine power to which all those in power are responsible and of the limits of their own power vis-à-vis individual human beings. Neither ecclesiastical nor secular government is to dominate the human soul. "The human soul is known by none but God alone. So also no one can govern it but God alone" (ibid., p. 192).

Even the prophet, the organ that sees to the propagation of doctrine, has no such power, but is under a duty to remind others of the divine government under which all people are.

> Therefore no doctrine of government or authority serves better than the doctrine of Christ, for it teaches what is good, what is evil; and does not teach to be righteous outwardly alone, but leads the superior together with the subject to inward righteousness and greater perfection than human righteousness requires (ibid., p. 193).

The comparative leaves room for prudent consideration. There are ethical questions that are not answered unequivocally with a 'yes' and 'no,' because it is a matter of finding a healthy measure; for example, the question of how much credit should be allowed and when an interest economy becomes usury and thus harmful. Although the secular authorities should decide on this, they should also consult with the spiritual authorities. Zwingli uses this example to show that a word of power is needed, that it must be enforced and therefore the state is given the sword (ibid., p. 212f). But no state is above the law, and a state that permits usury abuses its secular guardianship. Zwingli's definition of the relationship between human and divine justice makes it imperative that, alongside the royal and priestly offices, the *munus propheticum*, as a spiritual guardian office, watches over the secular guardians. That is why God's Word is given to it and not to the state.

3.3. The Shepherds as Watchmen of the Watchmen

But how does a person come to speak God's Word? What or who gives him/her the right to act with such authority? The claim to divine authority necessitates a distinction that is ecclesiologically explosive. In fact, a legitimation problem of the prophetic critique of power manifests itself when it turns against the institution that calls to the office of preaching. Zwingli wrestles with this question in a passionate sermon. In his sermon, he first takes the idea of the good shepherd as his starting point, and then speaks out against the ecclesiastical and secular abuse of power by the bad shepherds.

The profile of the right shepherd consciously ties in with older pastoral theological writings (Shepherd of Hermas), but takes up motifs of the ethics of discipleship from the Devotio Moderna (Zwingli [1524] 1995, p. 259). In analogy to the argumentation in the treatise on divine justice, Zwingli takes Christ as the perfect model. In his speech, he demonstrates what a right man/woman of God should do: "Thus the shepherd must not lead his sheep into any pasture but that in which he himself has already been pastured before. That is, to the pasture of the knowledge of God and of trust in Him" (ibid., p. 260). The Reformer sees the greatest danger in the authenticity of the testimony. "Therefore the shepherd must be scrupulously careful not to break in deed what he teaches in word [. . .] In this, one must be very careful that the shepherd does not throw on a cloak instead of his true garment. He should not drape himself with caps and cowls, but be full of covetousness within, as is the custom with most monks and theologians today" (ibid., p. 262).

Sanctimony and hypocrisy are therefore disastrous because they undermine the credibility of the preacher when he/she unflinchingly attacks the outrages of others. For this is his task; for this he puts his life on the line when he stands against those who arrogate power to themselves but are avaricious and high-handed. For Zwingli, it is clear that

> [W]e are not to keep silent about the word, but to come out into the open without fear of those who can harm us [. . .] So we see quite clearly that the shepherd is obliged to stand up against all enemies in order to protect the sheep and also to lift them out of the mire of sin. If this were not necessary, there would be no need for a shepherd. As long as the sheep suffer no lack, they need no guardian. He becomes indispensable to them only in danger (ibid., p. 268).

However, it also becomes dangerous for the shepherd. "The great ones of the world are happy to tolerate the preaching of the truth as long as their arbitrary rule is not pilloried and they lose nothing in the process. But the shepherd teaches another thing here, namely, not to spare the king, the ruler, saying, 'You must obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29)" (ibid., p. 271). That is why he needs armor—his truthful testimony! (ibid., p. 279). Zwingli calls the incorruptible witness of truth and champion of divine justice a shepherd. Interestingly, he does not speak of the prophetic office, but makes it clear which biblical sources he is referring to: "What need is there of further prophetic passages to prove that the shepherd should oppose all evil? Read the prophets himself, and he will find nothing but the eternal struggle with the mighty and the iniquities of this world" (ibid., p. 278).

3.4. Success of the Successor

In the dramatic escalation of the conflict with the radical friends and the bishop, Zwingli did not have the time to meticulously systematize his impulsive speech and to distinguish more precisely between the pastoral office and prophetic role. It was left to his successor Heinrich Bullinger, both to preserve and to transform Zwingli's inheritance through the crises and upheaval from the 1530s to 1570.

The important role Bullinger played in the further dissemination of Zwingli's impulses is discussed by Peter Opitz, editor of the critical edition of Bullinger's Decades (Opitz 2008). Opitz contributed a major paper entitled "Das 'munus propheticum' bei Bullinger" (Opitz 2007). According to Opitz, the Reformer is particularly remembered for having "consolidated" and "institutionalized" the Reformation in Zurich, a process closely connected to his exercise of the prophetic office. In the "Karlstagsrede" of 1532, a speech delivered at the annual festival on 28 January commemorating Charlemagne's original endowment of the Grossmunster, Bullinger compared his function to the prophetical office as originally formulated by his predecessor Zwingli, namely as a "servant of the divine word" after the example of the Old Testament prophets. As such, it was his duty to announce first and foremost the great reconciliation (ibid., p. 501). For Bullinger, prophecy was at the same time a pedagogical task. In preparation for this, all candidates for ministry in Zurich were required to take a theological examination that included the rigorous testing of linguistic and other higher academic attainments. In addition, through exercise of the prophetical office the Reformed clergy became associates with the political authorities in governance of the populace.

In this context, it is not uninteresting to note how great Bullinger's influence was on the English Reformation. Torrance Kirby addressed a specific application of Bullinger's theology of the Magistracy in a monarchical setting in his treatment of "The Civil Magistrate and the 'cura religionis': Heinrich Bullinger's prophetical office and the English Reformation". Kirby concludes that Bullinger's distinctive role with respect to the Reformation of the Church of England is perhaps best described as "prophetical". There are several factors for this influence: the extensive correspondence and the presence of teachers of the Schola Tigurina in England. Kirby (2005, p. 115 f.) says:

> Indeed it is arguable that no other divine exercised a comparable degree of continuous influence over all of the principal stages of the English Reformation—from the Henrician and Edwardine reforms, through the crucible of the Marian exile, to the eventual implementation and consolidation of the Elizabethan religious settlement. At every stage Bullinger was engaged as a significant player, and in later years was frequently appealed to as an arbiter of internal disputes and even as a public apologist of the Church of England on the international stage.

> Bullinger lays a fair claim to being a theologian par excellence of the reformed Church of England. Throughout the forty-odd years of his support of the cause of religious reform in England, one recurrent theme of his discourse stands out among the rest, and that concerns the very pre-eminence of the civil magistrate's authority in what Bullinger refers to as 'cura religionis'. In short, the proposal put forward is that Heinrich Bullinger's distinctive contribution to the English Reformation was to be a prophet of the Royal Supremacy.

3.5. Ambivalent Legacy

We can speak of a real export hit of the Zurich Reformation! However, the strong emphasis on prophecy also had an ambivalent effect that should not be ignored. The problem of legitimation has already been pointed out. Concentration and identification of the prophetic role with the office of preaching solved the problem that arose on the left wing of the Reformation but exacerbated the contradiction that was bound to arise through a magisterial Reformation. This can be seen well in Zwingli's ideal type of the shepherd. For the "shepherd" is called upon to fight against the corrupt system to which he himself belongs and on which he is financially dependent. It is the church that has granted the *venia predicandi* to priests and guarantees his livelihood. What does this mean for reform? There is a natural disparity between the prophet and the secular authorities, because only a magisterial reform can support the office and protect it from arbitrariness. The tension that follows from this can be seen in the paradox that the pastor in Zurich became the first civil servant. How credible are paid prophets? Are they free to criticize their employers?

A second problem arose from the fact that the conflict between the emerging confessions led to massive political discord. The potential for escalation of religious disputes was particularly explosive in the small-scale Confederation. As early as 1531, there were armed conflicts. Defeat on the battlefield in Kappel led to the early death of the Reformer, but above all to the fact that the reform-minded places had to make compromises at an early stage. In order to keep the peace in the confessional patchwork that resulted, the localities of the Confederation decided to prevent feuds by means of contractual arrangements, the so-called "land peace" (cf. Bächtold 2014). In the role of arbitrators, the secular authorities committed themselves to confessional neutrality. In a certain sense, Switzerland in the early modern period became a model for Europe and allowed the prophet's claim to oversee the guardianship of the state to appear in tension with the demand for religious neutrality. Would secular institutions and freelance "prophets"—intellectuals, journalists, and media workers—be better suited for this task than church employees?

Another problem arose from church discipline, which cast long shadows in both Zurich and Geneva and gave the church a reputation as a morally strict, old-fashioned, even anti-life and anti-pleasure institution. As guardians of morals, pastors were also responsible for ensuring that "their little sheep do not fall back into the mire [. . .] and lead a righteous life, so that they no longer live in death" (Zwingli [1524] 1995, p. 261).

Finally, the fact that one has the profession of a pastor is no guarantee of one's credibility and no substitute for personal witness. The ideal of the incorruptible contender for truth and justice inevitably shifted under the auspices of increasing deinstitutionalization from an office charisma back to a person charisma. The effect was reinforced by the fact that, parallel to the emergence of religiously neutral state power, the church developed into a formal organization. The reasons for this decoupling of confession and membership are the conflict over direction among the theological camps in the 19th century and the pluralization of orientations in the 20th century. The pluralization within the denomination made an organizational form necessary that could take into account the religious convictions of the members and respect them as mature subjects. All this led to the fact that the authority of a person to appear as an "official prophet" in the name of the church was increasingly questioned. One could also see it this way: The church does not have too few prophets who stand up for truth and justice. It has too many who contradict each other and accuse each other of false prophecy.

4. The Boat Is Full—Guardianship in the Time of World War II

4.1. Guardianship on Probation

We will return to these difficulties of how to deal with the high demand of the *munus propheticum* in a secular society and a plural church later. Let us first speak of the test case in which the office of the guardian has once again proven itself and demonstrated its suitability. It is certainly no coincidence that with the break after the First World War a situation arose in which the prophetic responsibility of pastors and church proclamation again became the subject of theological debate. The movements of religious–social and dialectical theology played a central role in this.

In the 1940s, Switzerland found itself in a highly precarious political situation. Threatened by Hitler's Germany, the government of the time sought a course between resistance and adaptation to escape the threat of German occupation. Thus, there was a lot at stake. To illustrate the explosive nature and relevance of cultural witness in this crisis situation, we will focus on a speech by Walter Lüthi—a personality who was not afraid to address uncomfortable truths.

The sermon in question can justifiably be described as one of the most memorable political sermons in recent Swiss history. Lüthi delivered it at the Landsgemeinde of the Young Church in Zurich on 30 August 1942 (Lüthi [1942] 2018). The open criticism of the Federal Council's refugee policy expressed in it was the public climax of a controversy that increasingly intensified in the course of the war years. The political dispute over direction, which was later to shape the debate over the legitimacy of public theology, had receded into the background during the war years. The issue at that time was the attitude of official Switzerland towards the refugees seeking protection. Lüthi found clear words for this. The fact that they were refused entry was described as "uncharitable", "hypocritical" and "ungrateful".

The harsh judgment could give the impression that the preacher found the prophetic role easy. The opposite was the case. Lüthi found it difficult. In a personal retrospective he recounts:

> On 30 August 1942, the Young Church held a country congregation in the Hallenstadion in Oerlikon, with six thousand participants. The intention was for young people to protest against the authorities closing the border. Federal Councillor von Steiger was to represent the authorities' point of view in the afternoon. And I was asked to give a biblical explanation of the opponents' point of view in the morning sermon. To publicly declare war on the supreme state government? And in this time of war? Impossible! Twice I had to say no. Then a delegation of the Young Church came and explained to me that this was a very serious confessional situation. To say no would be denial, betrayal of the Christian faith. I could not resist this argument and finally agreed. It was then probably the steepest pulpit staircase I climbed on 30 August 1942 in the Hallenstadion. Without a doubt, it was God who prevented my escape attempt in this case as well. The most important thing in my life (Lüthi 1983, pp. 168–73).

Of course, it was no coincidence that the young people asked Walter Lüthi, of all people, to preach a sermon. Lüthi, along with Paul Vogt, Gertrud Kurz, Eduard Thurneysen and Karl Barth, belonged to the circle of theologians who came together in the Swiss Protestant Aid Organization for the Confessing Church in Germany. With the growing need of the refugees, the focus changed. A network of helpers abroad tried to save the lives of persecuted Jewish people. Lüthi, who was the pastor of a parish in Basel in the early 1940s, experienced the consequences of the immigration ban against the Jewish refugees first-hand.

> There were some border guards living in the parish. One of them told how terrible it had been when he had had to turn back a Jewish grandmother with her grandchild at bayonet point at the border; how he heard her scream when she was caught over there by the German border guards (ibid., p. 172).

Indeed, the fear of being overrun by the Axis powers was very real. Nevertheless, more humanity would have been possible. The real scandal was the racist and anti-Semitic core of the measure. The closure of the borders, enacted on 13 August 1942, was directed against illegal refugees seeking asylum "solely on racial grounds". This decision was not made in ignorance of the persecution of the Jews! In mid-1942, people knew about mass executions in Eastern Europe.

A letter from a class of girls at the Kreuzlingen secondary school in the same year caused a sensation. Shaken up by reports in the regional press, they wrote a letter to Federal Councilor von Steiger and appealed to his compassion and Christian spirit. They were outraged that the refugees were being sent back into misery. Their call went unheard. In a personal letter, the magistrate sternly admonished the girls to remember their task as future mothers. In the household, they also had to divide up the supplies. Later, when they understood how precautionary the Federal Council was, they would blush with shame at their letter.

4.2. Two Speeches

The first sentence in Lüthi's ([1942] 2018, p. 157) sermon is remarkable in the light of these contexts: "There is now indeed something that separates us from the love of God, and that is our bad conscience". Lüthi cites the government's callous decision to send refugees to certain death as the reason. He knew the Justice Minister's speech defending the closure of the border that afternoon. He also knew the metaphor of the "lifeboat" that played a central role in the afternoon justification speech of the Federal Council. It was meant to justify the harsh decision with the dilemma in which those responsible found themselves. The crucial passage in the Federal Council's speech read:

> Anyone who has to command an already crowded small lifeboat with limited capacity and equally limited supplies, while thousands of victims of a shipping disaster are crying out to be rescued, must seem tough if he cannot take them all. And yet he is still human when he warns in good time against false hopes and at least tries to save those already taken in (quoted by Kocher 1996, p. 220).

The Minister of Justice had come with the aim of defending his policy. In his speech, he advised the young Christians present not to let themselves be worn down in the conflict between "mind and spirit" and warned against "stirring up sentiment against any state in any way in advance." (ibid.) The magistrate appealed to patriotic unity; the preacher warned against sacrificing everything for security: "We must not be surprised if lightning descends upon this ungrateful people [. . .] That is why we have a guilty conscience" (ibid.).

If one compares the "spirit" of the two speeches, it is obvious: two different "prophecies" clashed here (ibid.). The statesman said, "We have to protect ourselves—we won't make it otherwise". The preacher replied: "We have the duty to save persecuted people—we can do it!" (ibid.)

I wonder what prompted Lüthi to choose, of all things, one of the most powerful comfort texts in the New Testament to explain his point. He sensed the distress of his young listeners!

> All of you [. . .] who have travelled to this meeting with a weighted conscience, as the weary and the beaten, you may now see in the word we have read together the outstretched arm of the apostle. That arm points to Christ's cross. There is no other refuge and no other place of forgiveness. The love of Christ is strong enough to forgive the sin of unkindness, hypocrisy, and ingratitude (ibid., p. 158).

Lüthi made the radical nature of forgiveness strong—and thus the admonition to the authorities even more forceful when he unmasked the latter's speech as an "apology". He addressed the Federal Councilor directly: "Dear Federal Councillor, don't bother to soothe our conscience either! You would be doing our country a disservice." (ibid., p. 159)

The rhetorical highlight of the speech is the refutation of the lifeboat metaphor. Is the Federal Councilor right? Is the boat full? The comparison is cleverly chosen. It reminds an

audience with an affinity for the Bible of Noah's Ark. The message is clear: Switzerland cannot afford mercy (Häsler [1967] 2008). Lüthi counters with a comparison that resonates with biblical tones (cf. Mk 7:24–30).

> In the city of Basel alone, according to official statistics, more than 3000 still well-fed dogs are fed. I may well begrudge them their food. But as long as we in Switzerland are still prepared to share our bread and soup and meat ration with perhaps 100,000 dogs, and at the same time worry that a few tens of thousands, but also hundreds of thousands of refugees would no longer be sustainable for us, that is an attitude of high-grade unkindness (p. 158).

It is this brazen and drastic comparison that must make one feel guilty. A nation that can afford to feed 100,000 dogs and let people starve is being taught a biblical lesson. The message is clear: the boat is far from full . . .

4.3. Reactions and Reflections

The reactions to both speeches were very different. In the bourgeois Neue Zürcher Zeitung, the journalist praised von Steigers' "gripping words" and distanced himself from the "polemical tones" of individual speakers. (cf. Kocher 1996, p. 224) Lüthi was meant. The left-leaning National-Zeitung was different, praising Lüthi's sermon as "open and courageous." (ibid.) The image of the lifeboat would not do justice to the situation, as the authorities did not even treat the rescued well. Von Steiger had missed the "unique opportunity" to "place himself as a commander at the head of the offensive of mercy" emanating from the Young Church and the people (ibid.). The liberal press was particularly harsh and spiteful in its rebuke of Lüthi:

> Should such a functionary of the divine court really have appeared in Pastor Lüthi, it would have been more expedient to have him appear in greater proximity to Basel itself, for instance in Allschwil, instead of in Oerlikon. If, however, he is simply an ordinary, mortal man like others, then a fanciful religious rhetoric should not do him the injustice of dissolving him alive into the theatrical haze of a mythological figure of terror for propaganda purposes (ibid., p. 226).

Lüthi's sermon had made a deep impression on the actual addressees, the young people. However, the reaction of the official church remained ambivalent. Some colleagues found the public attack on politics and the naming of the responsible Minister of Justice unseemly, even outrageous, while others defended the courageous speech. The praise and criticism reflected the theological currents. While the religious–social and dialectical theologians—notably Eduard Thurneysen—came to the defense of their comrade, the liberal-minded reacted indignantly.

Lüthi's speech was undoubtedly a political sermon, although not a classic pulpit speech. The stage was more polis than church, a public place and not a sacred space, a stadium where competitions were held. It made the speech situation outrageously tense for the speaker as well as for the audience. The preacher, as a theologian, turned against the government's policy and became political precisely because of that. The speech wanted to achieve something, not only to present things, but to change them. The juxtaposition of the two communities, the mixture of spheres and the resulting tension, brings the preacher into conflict. But he overcomes his resistance.

The decisive factor was the call that urged the preacher to take a stand, to obey his conscience and to exercise the office of watchman. Lüthi himself linked his willingness to take on this role with the Reformed heritage of the *munus propheticum*. Years later, in a small paper written in 1960, Lüthi justified his position with the primacy of the kingdom of God over all politics. One hears from his reflections a deep aversion to the Lutheran two-kingdom doctrine. In a church that stands wall to wall with the state,

> . . . there are resolutions, consultations, even pulpit speeches that resemble well-balanced communiqués, sermons that give everyone a little, no one everything, that hurt no one, but also do no one any good. In this way, the Word of God, this

> dangerousness, this ferment, this salt and dynamite power, can finally also be defused in the Protestant Church, in the Church of the Word, and secured by the church office (Lüthi 1960, p. 37).

Lüthi was known (and feared) by many as a preacher who did not mince his words. He was criticized for his statements after the war. Peter Vogelsanger, the pastor at Zurich's Fraumünster, showed little understanding for his colleague's testimony and remarked in a review:

> The way Lüthi chapters the 'Christian Occident' non-stop in the style of the zealous perfectionist [. . .], the assiduous canonisation of everything left-wing and the harsh condemnation about everything that is traditional and conformist in his eyes, the recurring secret and openly anti-militarist slashes—this and more than once takes away the taste for his sermons (1962, p. 645).

The harsh condemnation reveals something about the critic's mindset. Vogelsanger (1962) was close to the upper-middle-class milieu of Zurich. In his eyes, Lüthi was a "political theologian". The label "political" sheds light on the discourse situation in the 1960s and the contemporary historical location of the so-called "new political theology" after the Second World War, which set itself apart from the "old political theology" and, following the Frankfurt School among others, saw itself as an opposition to the bourgeois establishment that was critical of domination and society or "left-wing". The '68s additionally strengthened this political spin and twist. On the Catholic side, Johann Baptist Metz was a well-known representative of the political program (cf. Metz 1997). In the Protestant camp, Barth's students such as Helmut Gollwitzer, Jürgen Moltmann, and Dorothee Sölle, among others, advocated this line. Whether and how church representatives are allowed to express themselves in the pulpit on political or ethically controversial issues is a topic that is still controversial today, both within and outside the church (cf. Kunz 2018).

Of course, the question is whether a speech in *statu confessionis* is suitable as a lesson in public witness. Can rules be derived from an exceptional situation? Perhaps a negative one: the term "prophetic" would become meaningless if everything that someone in the pulpit knows to say against those in power were meant by it. "Prophetic" in the qualified sense is rather the testimony that recognizes the right kairos for contradiction. But this also means that this word in due time builds on a foundation of the "indissoluble relationship of catheder, pulpit and town hall" (Bethge 1956) and sees its goal in reorienting the action of the congregation in the polis towards the kingdom of God. Political preaching is prophetic when it is heard as a call to conversion. Lüthi's speech is a textbook example of this.

5. Criticism of the Guardianship

5.1. "A Prophetic Guardianship of the Church Lacks Theological Legitimacy"

It is one thing to classify the prophetic watchman's office historically and another to judge whether and how such a role can still be claimed by the church in the present. Is it legitimate to make this claim? Friedrich Wilhelm Graf is considered a vehement critic of this claim (cf. Graf 1988, 2006, 2007, 2011, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). He is one of the few university theologians who regularly publish their theological diagnoses of the present in the feature pages of national German-language newspapers (Pfleiderer 2016, p. 151). His critique of the guardianship is of interest because, on the one hand, it takes up the Reformed heritage and, on the other, strikes a nerve in the debate on the role of the public church. In his Munich habilitation lecture, Graf notes that prophecy has made a remarkable comeback in 20th century theology. It is evident, he says, from the fact that an ethical claim to authority and avant-garde is being made for the church vis-à-vis society. Graf (1988) counters this:

> The claim to prophetic competence, however, does not at all correspond to a clearly determinable theological content. At least for Lutheran ecclesiology, the following is true: a prophetic guardianship of the church lacks theological legitimacy (p. 89).

In the historical unfolding of the thesis, Graf shows how the idea of an ethical guardianship of the church developed from the dogmatic teaching of the prophetic office of Jesus Christ. If Christ is not only King and Priest, but also Prophet, one must speak of a threefold office of Christ. This insight, as Jean Calvin was the first to systematically formulate it in the Geneva Catechism, and later in the Institutio, and make it a principle of Christology, was to become fundamental for the Reformed doctrine of offices. Calvin, as well as Zwingli before him and Bullinger after him, affirmed the continuity of Christ's prophetic task in the church and referred to the Pauline doctrine of charisms (cf. Kraus 1968). God always raises up prophets and uses them where and as the needs of the time require.

The kairos moment, however, reveals a problem. The prophetic gift of the Spirit cannot be clearly assigned to an office. The problem of proving legitimacy that this creates is solved in Reformed Orthodoxy by outsourcing it, by propagating a kind of "total prophecy of the church towards the world". Prophetic witness thus becomes a "matter for the congregation" (cf. Herlyn 1997). Every Christian, insofar as he/she participates in Christ's anointing, has a share in Christ's prophetic ministry, and this to the extent that he/she makes it his/her own through an active life—practical correspondence to Christ's ministry.

Graf traces this identification in the Reformed dogmatists and sees in it evidence of the pious practical pressure that is typical of sanctification theology (Graf 1988, p. 90). The shaping of the world according to the model of Christ is founded in this specifically Reformed version of Christology.

The *munus propheticum* Christi is therefore by no means just a special topic of theological dogmatics. The elective affinity between Reformed Protestantism and political democracy is shown here—a relationship that has been sustainably promoted by the specifically Reformed version of Christology.

> Every individual Christian is a representative of Christ's ministerial activity—this is the Christological place of origin of that egalitarian-democratic and political-activist basic attitude which has been characteristic of Reformed Protestantism up to the immediate present and which has become so momentous for the modern political culture of Western Europe (ibid., p. 91).

5.2. The Problem of Legitimacy

The extension of the prophetic role to the general priesthood of all believers has, in one particular respect, exacerbated the problem of legitimacy. By relating Christ's indirect prophecy neither to a particular office within the church nor to the church as a whole alone, but by obliging every individual Christian to prophetic witness for the sake of the exaltation of his/her Lord, a pluralism of individual prophetic figures is potentially generated. And this becomes problematic at the least when the church does not speak with one voice and the many prophets contradict each other.

Unlike the Reformed, Old Lutheran Orthodoxy does not know a Christologically based ethical mandate of the church. Luther speaks only of two offices, namely, the kingship and the priesthood of Christ. However, the triplex *munus Christi*, as Graf demonstrates on the basis of the development of dogma history, proved to be more effective. The idea that the exalted Christ also functions as a prophet through his church was increasingly taken up by Lutheran and Catholic theologians in the 19th century. Interestingly, according to Graf, it was precisely politically radical conservative theologians who paved the way for the ethicisation of Christ's *munus propheticum* into the prophetic guardianship of the church. They hoped that by acting as a moral authority, the church could strengthen its role in society and compensate for the increasing loss of power—that is Graf (1988, p. 93)'s suspicion. He believes that the development of the history of theology from the Old Reformed *munus propheticum* Christi to the modern prophetic guardianship of the church can be read as an expression of a specifically modern functionalization of Christological ideas. This is where Graf's critique comes in.

5.3. The Perversion of Christology

An argumentation that doubles Christology once again in ecclesiology, so that dogmatic predicates of Christ become ethical qualities of the church, threatens to pervert the inner meaning of Christology. For Graf (1988, p. 109), it is clear that "any direct correspondence of Christology and ecclesiology" produces a sovereignty that can no longer be limited theologically. If the sovereign titles of Christ are played over directly into church doctrine, the possibility of critical self-discernment disappears.

The critique is thus directed against the pathos and the presumption that goes hand in hand with the status of the prophetic, of having a monopoly on the interpretation of meaning as a church. Genuine prophetic criticism, according to Graf, would be exactly the opposite of this, namely, to show that sensitivity to the inner diversity of the world which is a prerequisite for ethical compromise and insofar also a condition for the church's capacity for democracy.

> Prophetic criticism, however, which equates itself with its theological presupposition, lacks this thorn of negativity and is uncritical in its centre; it makes itself immune to criticism through self-absolutisation. If the exalted Christ and the Church are identical as the subject of prophetic criticism, the beyond of prophetic criticism and this criticism itself coincide directly, [. . .], thus also not distinguishing between true and false prophecy. If the prophet alone is directly communicating to God, who should then be able to criticise him? (ibid., p. 98).

In the final analysis, Graf demands a renunciation of the claim to power that can be derived from the claim to the prophetic role. The character of the Christian faith can only be met through pious self-limitation because faith is only able to realize its high critical potential when it submits to its own conditions and learns to distinguish between the ultimate and the penultimate with regard to itself.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Limitation of the Self-Limitation

Graf's critical reflections point out the weaknesses of a theological figure of reasoning that were already evident in Huldrych Zwingli. However, his proposal to replace the prophetic guardianship with pious self-limitation and to declare the permanent difference between the church and Christ as the basis of a prophetic critique that is also able to remain critical of itself amounts to abandoning the idea of an ecclesial continuation of Christ's prophetic ministry altogether, or not limiting Christ's indirect prophecy to a prophetic activity of the church alone. The first option would be a radical interpretation of the pious self-limitation demanded by Graf, which would, however, be tantamount to an ecclesiological self-dissolution. The second option can be seen as a theological consequence of the demand for difference. It has the advantage that the secularization of society and the development towards a liberal rule of law are taken seriously. However, Graf's polemic lacks any approach to positively describe and theologically justify a guardianship that distances itself from the claim to represent divine government.

Günter Thomas' approach sheds further light here.

6.2. Kingship of Jesus Christ

Thomas (2011) makes a strong case for a "transformative hope", which he finds in the doctrine of the "kingship of Jesus Christ" (pp. 326–28). The tension characteristic of Western modernity between the universality of the kingdom of God and the particularity of the church, which as a religious community is no longer congruent with the political community and no longer shapes all areas of life in society, does not release the church from its responsibility to remind all people of the search for the kingdom of God. This is a search for determination that is oriented towards God's command and justice and, at the same time, is situation-specific, open to the future, ready to learn and, in principle, unfinished. If this remembrance is to produce a public resonance, it must shine forth in the

church in a parable-like fashion. What Zwingli expected of pastors must today be expected of communities that find themselves in a diaspora situation.

That is why the memory of the contestation and proving of the *munus propheticum* in the crisis period of the war years has relevance. What we may have taken for granted out of a certain inertia is in reality the constantly endangered foundation of democracy that has to be regained again and again. It would therefore be fatal if the church were to indulge in the pose of a permanent moral criticism of the state and see itself in a quasi-judicial position above every human order.

In contrast to Graf, who recognizes a root of this evil in the *munus propheticum*, Thomas sees the related model of the "kingship of Christ", which underlies the Barmen Declaration, as an opportunity to work through this tension in a productive and constructive way. If one considers the contemporary historical context of the pointed formula of the "kingship of Jesus Christ", the experience of the self-destruction of "reasonable" extra-religious humanity and political formation is contained in it.

6.3. Political Productive Delimitation of Divine Power

When Graf rightly insists on the self-limitation of ecclesiastical power, this also includes the insight into the necessity of a delimitation of divine power. Who, if not the church, should remind us of this? And where, if not in Christ, can a theology of hope be located? The decisive point of the dissolution of boundaries, however, is precisely not the problem of whether the church presumes to play Christ. The challenge of the church is to formulate its cultural witness in such a way as to strengthen the forces that give rise to a community of solidarity in contemporary society.

It is the same point that is found in Zwingli's social ethics, and it is the reason why the prophetic preacher Lüthi formulated reservations against the so-called "two kingdoms doctrine". I think it is the heart of the Reformed doctrine of the "kingship of Jesus Christ". The Christological designation sets an accent that can be more precisely defined as a shift. It consists, according to Thomas, "in the fact that the two modes of God's action are not treated by the distinctions God/Jesus Christ and sinful creation/reconciliation in Christ, but by the distinction reconciliation/redemption. Not God in general, but Christ is the bridge symbol that spans the distinction" (Thomas 2011, p. 329).

The consequence of this reconstruction is that both world and church are located in the not-yet-redeemed but already-reconciled world. In this reconciliation-theological view, state action can be expected and trusted to have a positive social form even in a secular society, without having to give up the epistemic lead of the church, that Christ reigns as the Risen Lord and that both state and church are qualified and moved by the coming kingdom of God.

This head start is rather the incentive to look for development possibilities in the direction of participation, social justice and reconciliation. What Günter Thomas says about the "kingship of Jesus Christ" applies to the doctrine of the guardianship of the church:

> [It] is not without weaknesses and undoubtedly contains its own dangers. However, due to the clear and extremely multi-faceted accentuation of a direction of development, it itself appears to be more capable of development for modern democracies and functionally differentiated societies—and thus to be the more convincing alternative compared to the 'two kingdoms doctrine' (ibid., p. 328).

7. Epilogue

There is still an awareness of this in the Western democracies: if the liberal, secularized state lives on preconditions that it cannot guarantee itself, it takes a great risk for the sake of freedom (Böckenförde 1991, p. 112). The fact that, in order to dare freedom, a reference to transcendence is needed in the constitution, to watch over it as a guardian, as it were, is an indication of this. Significantly, this last religious remnant of political self-determination is found as an invocation in the preamble and not in the articles of the constitution. But it is not written in stone. It is written in books that can be rewritten. In the canton of Lucerne,

some politicians are bothered by the word "God" in the cantonal constitution. In a motion, parliamentarians are demanding that the passage be replaced by a formulation in which a reference to God is to be dispensed with. What do they hope for? What are they hoping for?

If hope is the virtue that "we urgently need" (Couchepin, in Tribelhorn and Neuhaus 2022), the church must not remain silent but contradict the false prophets who think they can do without invoking God. It probably takes quite a lot of educational effort to make the Christian content of preambles comprehensible—a task that is worthwhile. In the words of a retired statesman: "Especially when we see what is going on in the world today" (ibid., 2022).

I must leave open here what it means for the doctrine of the three offices that the prophetic office of Christ is absorbed, as it were, by the royal office of Christ through its incorporation into the doctrine of the kingship of Christ. It would be necessary to examine more closely how the prophetic and the royal offices negotiate each other in the horizon of the kingship. Let me indicate at least one track on which I suspect an answer. I found it in the booklet Being Christian by Rowan Williams (2014). Williams sees it as a task of every Christian to model following Jesus in light of the three offices. By placing the prophetic office in the context of the priesthood of all believers, he also brings into focus the relationship to the kingly and prophetic office of Christ. What Williams has to say about this is not a conclusion to the discussion of cultural witness, but is illuminating enough to serve as a conclusion to this paper.

> So the baptized life is a life that gives us the resource and strength to ask awkward but necessary questions of one another and of our world. It is a life that looks towards reconciliation, building bridges, repairing shattered relationships. It is a life that looks towards justice and liberty, the liberty to work together to make human life in society some kind of reflection of the wisdom and order and justice of God. All these aspects of the baptized life need one another. If we were only called to be prophets, we would be in danger of being constantly shrill nay-sayers to one another and to the world. There is plenty of that in Christian history, and plenty of that in the Christian mentality today. And if we were only priestly, there would be a danger of never asking the difficult questions but moving on as rapidly as we could to reconciliation. [. . .]. And if we were only talking about royal freedom and justice, we would be in danger of constantly thinking in terms of control and problem-solving. But just as in Jesus these three things are inseparably bound up in his work and his words and his death, as in his life, so for us these are three facets of one life, not three isolated bits of a vocation (ibid., p. 16f.).

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