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Ihr IxTheo-Team

Ulrich Engel

Neoexistentialist & post-secular

Ten theses on the future of the religious life*

In Europe and the USA, religious men and women are bracing themselves against the disappearance of their ancient way of life. This fight is about time insofar as the collective overageing provokes the essentially more fundamental question of the timeliness of religious life at all: the “present” of religious orders. If I am interested in the temporal constitution of the *vita consecrata*, then I affiliate deliberately with other time theoreticians of the religious life: my teacher Johann Baptist Metz and his epochal little book *Zeit der Orden?* [Age of religious orders?]¹ And with the 40-years-younger Parisian sociologist Michael Hochschild and his “timetable for heaven-stormers” published in 2005 under the title *NeuZeit der Orden* [NewAge of religious orders].²

In its decree on the religious life *Perfectae caritatis*, the Second Vatican Council called for an “up-to-date” renewal of the religious life (PC 2). More fundamentally, for the Council Fathers gathered in Rome, it was about nothing less than Christian contemporaneity. Consequently, the talk of the signs of the times (cf. GS 1, 4, 11 and 46) forms the structural matrix of the most important Council document!

Half a century later, Christian contemporaneity is still the centre of discussion!³ However, the periods of ecclesially socialised actors (which mostly included religious) and the periods of secular actors in this society are becoming more and more irregular. Is the age of religious Christians really the same time as that of people in Berlin nightclubs, employment agencies in Frankfurt am Main or in the boutiques of Munich’s Maximilianstraße? Or rather do we have to deal with massively diachronic circumstances

* The introduction to the theses presented in Freising is a summary of my keynote address at the general assembly of the Deutsche Ordensobernkonzferenz [DOK – German Conference of Religious Superiors] on 11.6.2013 in Vallendar. The complete text of the address has already been published: Ulrich Engel, *Jetztzeit der Orden. Plädoyer für eine Vita consecrata situationalis unter postmodernen Bedingungen*, in: *Ordenskorrespondenz* 54 (2013), 339-352.

¹ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Zeit der Orden? Zur Mystik und Politik der Nachfolge*, Freiburg/Br. 1982, 5.

² Cf. Michael Hochschild, *NeuZeit der Orden. Kursbuch für Himmelsstürmer* (Glauben und Leben Bd. 26), Münster 2005.

³ Cf. Rainer Bucher, *Die Ordensgemeinschaften in der aktuellen Transformationskrise der katholischen Kirche*, in: *OrdensNachrichten* 51,6 (2012), 17-32, here 18.

here? In the asymmetries of our “fuzzy present”⁴, we can only live a contemporaneity oriented towards the standard of the Gospel more in the manner of the Pauline “hós me” (1 Cor 7.29f.) – committed to *both* the Apostle to the Gentiles *and* post-modern lateral thinkers such as *Gianni Vattimo* or *Giorgio Agamben* in equal measure⁵: laugh *as though* one were not laughing; cry *as though* one were not crying. Politically: be involved *as though* one were not powerless but as though one could “quickly save the world” by one’s actions (Tim Bendzko⁶). A religious life formatted in this neo-existentialist manner means – now in theological terms: live in the 21st century *as though* one would be at home in the Gospel – and *vice versa*.⁷

Such equally synchronous and diachronous “as though (not)” existences are not easy to live because the “complex layering of asymmetries”⁸ produces “experiences of irritation”⁹. Pre-modernity and modernity had formerly promised orientation in the age – in the shape of ascertainments of the deposit of tradition “backward” and in the shape of utopian plans “forward”. On the other hand, post-modernity makes it irrevocably clear that we are no longer the sovereign ‘masters’ of the age. The cultural experience of crisis in this period, according to the thesis by Hartmut Rosa, sociologist researching in Jena and contemporary diagnostician, includes the “simultaneous loss of a past that provides reference and of a future that provides meaning”¹⁰. We are living without a future in “post-history”¹¹. This means that no more resources of meaning can be developed for the present. This applies both to individual and to collective human existence because previously it was the link of past, present and future that provided meaning. And it was precisely in this mode of a historical-present-future link that the Council Fathers called for a renewal of the *vita consecrata* in 1965. Accordingly, it says in the decree on the

⁴ Christian Bauer, Christliche Zeitgenossenschaft? Pastoraltheologie in den Abenteuern der Spätmoderne [unveröffentlichte Antrittsvorlesung, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät der Universität Innsbruck, 22.5.2013]

⁵ Cf. Gianni Vattimo, Os mé. Zur Haltung des „als ob nicht“ bei Paulus und Heidegger. Aus dem Italienischen von Artur R. Bölderl, in: Florian Uhl / Artur R. Boelderl (Hrsg.), Zwischen Verzückung und Verzweiflung. Dimensionen religiöser Erfahrung (Schriften der Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Religionsphilosophie Bd. 2), Düsseldorf 2001, 169-182; Giorgio Agamben, Die Zeit, die bleibt. Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief. Aus dem Italienischen von Davide Giuriato, Frankfurt/M. 2006, 34-36.

⁶ Cf. Thomas Winkler, Radikal unentschieden. Tim Bendzko, Star der „jungen Mildens“, singt neue Lieder mit Locken und Gefühl und wundert sich in: Cicero. Magazin für politische Kultur 6/2013, 110-111.

⁷ Cf. also Bauer, Christliche Zeitgenossenschaft?, loc. cit.

⁸ Bucher, Die Ordensgemeinschaften in der aktuellen Transformationskrise der katholischen Kirche, loc. cit., 18.

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Hartmut Rosa, Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstruktur in der Moderne, Frankfurt/M. 2005, 424.

¹¹ Lutz Niethammer, Posthistoire. Ist die Geschichte zu Ende? Reinbek bei Hamburg 1989.

religious life: The “return to the sources of all Christian life and to the original spirit of the institutes” (PC 2) [= past] helps the Church “*today*” (PC 1) [= present], in future – here the *future* is used right at the end of *Perfectae caritatis* –, “that their number may daily increase and their salutary work be more effective” (PC 25) [= future].

If it is true that the connection of past, present and future has so far provided meaning, then the loss of past *and* future currently being verified will have dramatic consequences. As in William Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 5: “The time is out of joint”¹². Where the time is out of joint because the unit of past, present and future which gives meaning is lost, fear occurs – for two reasons: namely “fear of change *and* [fear] of inertia”¹³.

The *fear of change* reacts to a factually certifiable social acceleration of social processes. It is the “basic principle”¹⁴ of our age. The structural torpor which can also be observed at the same time is nothing other than an immunisation strategy with which we seek to protect ourselves – as individual subjects as well as societal information as a whole – from the processes of acceleration and their consequences. The result: “frantic standstill”¹⁵. This means that “nothing remains as it is without something essential changing.”¹⁶

At the level of subjective perception, the paradox of frantic standstill leads to an increase of short-term stimulating *events*. The typically post-modern problem is that these events remain episodic, i.e. they are no longer transformed into *experience*.

So, this is the time whose signs we have to read and interpret in the light of the Gospel. This is the time in which we are supposed to and, above all, want to renew our religious life up-to-date! What can we do? As a response and offer for discussion, I present ten theses on the future of the religious life. These are again due to a conciliar hermeneutic to the extent that the Church has said goodbye to its long-practised “view from nowhere”¹⁷ with its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes* and from now on can be found in the depths

¹² William Shakespeare, Hamlet. English-German study version. German prose version and notes by Norbert Greiner, Introduction and commentary by Wolfgang G. Müller, Tübingen 2006, 189: I, 5. See also the film by Christoph Rüter, *The Time is out of Joint / Die Zeit ist aus den Fugen*, WDR Cologne 1989-1991 on the work of Heiner Müller “Hamlet/Maschine” at the Deutsches Theater, East Berlin.

¹³ Rosa, *Beschleunigung*, loc. cit., 428 [Insertion in brackets: U.E.].

¹⁴ Ibid., 441: : „...*irreduzibles und tendenziell dominantes Grundprinzip*...“

¹⁵ Paul Virilio, *Rasender Stillstand*. Essay. Aus dem Französischen von Bernd Wilczek, Frankfurt/M. 42008.

¹⁶ Rosa, *Beschleunigung*, loc. cit., 436.

¹⁷ Rainer Bucher, *Die Jugendpastoral in der Transformationskrise der Kirche. Chancen und Risiken einer erzwungenen Neuorientierung*, in: *Erzdiözese München und Freising*, von Klaus Hofstetter (Hrsg.), „Halt an, wo läufst du hin?“ Die Rolle des Jugendseelsorgers/der Jugendseelsorgerin in Zeiten strukturellen Wandels. Dokumentation der Jahrestagung 2008 (Materialien Bd. 142) München 2009, 7-28, here 16.

of today's secular society. This at least is its ecclesiological claim. It is inculturating itself into the secularised, individualised and at the same time post-secular diaspora. The Graz pastoral theologian Rainer Bucher summarised this recognition as follows: "The secularisation thesis then formulates freedom *towards* the religious market. The individualisation thesis then holds to freedom *in* the market. (...). However, the thesis of post-secularism then states that this market still exists, that it seems to be quite stable and that it can be counted on further"¹⁸. The consequence of this, however, is that religion is no longer primarily or even exclusively socialised in Church forms. Religion continues to exist but it is organised in the present on an increasingly market basis. Church is subject to the laws of the market – whether it wants to be or not.¹⁹

If this is the case, then it requires a new ecclesiological arrangement of Church life concepts under market conditions. And religious orders cannot be excluded from this. Put more precisely: how can or should a religious practice of the Church as a whole and of the order in particular look when "the ultimate decision-making power is with the 'customers' and not with the 'providers'"²⁰?

Considered in light of the theology of grace, this should not necessarily be a problem, what God offers is without doubt free, for nothing. However, in terms of the Church's constitution, the dependence on the market situation presents broad problems because as a *religious community*, the Church is still a relatively powerful institution with influence and social presence. As a *pastoral community*, it is already a powerless place because it is dependent on God's grace.²¹ In a humble orientation to God's *kenosis* (cf. Phil 2), the Church and orders should not flee their weakness. If there is no longer the threat of misuse, questions of power must be asked and answered anew: in leadership and in community and especially in terms of people entrusted to us. Based on theological reasons, religious life following Jesus is a *weak existence*.²²

¹⁸ Idem., ...wenn nichts bleibt, wie es war, loc. cit., 33 [Insertions in brackets: UE].

¹⁹ Cf. Thomas Eggensperger, Individualisierung in der Moderne. Alternativentwurf zu einem Verständnis von Säkularisierung als Folge der Modernisierung, in: Thomas Dienberg / Thomas Eggensperger / Ulrich Engel (Hrsg.), Säkulare Frömmigkeit. Theologische Beiträge zu Säkularisierung und Individualisierung, Münster 2013, 105-117.

²⁰ Bucher, Ders., ...wenn nichts bleibt, wie es war, loc. cit., 23.

²¹ Cf. Hans-Joachim Sander, Nicht ausweichen. Die prekäre Lage der Kirche, Würzburg 2002, Würzburg 2002, 11-27.

²² Cf. John D. Caputo, The weakness of God. A Theology of the Event, Bloomington, IN 2006; Ulrich Engel, Religion and Violence. Plea for a "weak" theology in tempore belli, in: New Blackfriars 82 (2001), 558-560. Medard Kehl also comes to a similar conclusion, Kirche und Orden im Umbruch [Address at the symposium of the German province of Jesuits, Vierzehnheiligen, 30.3.2005], at: <http://www.sankt->

The Church as a whole and religious orders in particular are bound to design flexible social forms to solve pastoral challenges in a witty and imaginative way. However, if I am correct, our monastic transformation discussions are still quite far from this! The rule of thumb is therefore clear and irreversible: first (pastoral) content, then (religious) form! Such a reorientation of the Church's way of acting based on the event of the Council defines and qualifies pastoral care in a radically new manner: as a presently situated creative and action-related "confrontation of Gospel and existence"²³. The option for the poor prefers injured bodies²⁴ and precarious existences to whom – according to the Metz's "*Mystik der offenen Augen*"²⁵ ["mysticism of open eyes"] – we must give our special attention.

Present Christian action thinks and acts "out of the situation"²⁶ – and back into it. The existence of religious orders under post-modern omens would then be expressed as *vita consecrata situialis* – and no longer primarily as *vita consecrata institutionalis*. The ten Biblically inspired theses on Christian discipleship existence in the post-modern given below for discussion sketch out central challenges I see religious orders facing in our current age.

Thesis 1: Religious life under market conditions

"You were called to freedom (...)" (Gal 5:13)*

Today, religion neither socialises exclusively nor principally in ecclesial forms. "In the course of global implementation of a liberal, capitalist system of society, religious practices exist in the freedom of the individual"²⁷. As a result, Church and religious orders are subject more and more to the laws of the market. We religious are at the mercy of the decision-making power of our potential "customers" in our personal and community life as well as our apostolic practice. It is necessary to accept and then organise this situation.

georgen.de/kehl/kehl9.pdf [Accessed: 5.8.2013]. Kehl (ibid., 8) also refers to Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Pilger und Konvertiten. Religion in Bewegung. Aus dem Französischen von Dagmar Escudier (Religion in der Gesellschaft Bd. 17), Würzburg 2004.

²³ Bucher, Die Jugendpastoral in der Transformationskrise der Kirche, loc. cit., 18.

²⁴ Cf. Judith Butler, Gefährdetes Leben. Politische Essays. Aus dem Englischen von Karin Würdemann, Frankfurt/M. 2012. See also: Bernhard Kohl, Die Anerkennung des Verletzbaren. Eine heuristische Annäherung an die Menschenwürde, in: Theologie der Gegenwart 56 (2013), 162-172.

²⁵ Johann Baptist Metz, Mystik der offenen Augen. Wenn Spiritualität aufbricht, Freiburg/Br. 2011.

²⁶ Clodovis Boff, Mit den Füßen am Boden. Theologie aus dem Leben des Volkes, Düsseldorf 1986, 9.

²⁷ Bucher, Die Ordensgemeinschaften in der aktuellen Transformationskrise..., loc. cit., 21.

Thesis 2: Religious life in the “as though (not)” mode

“The time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as though they do not; those who mourn, as though they did not; those who are happy, as though they were not; those who buy something, as though it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as though not engrossed by them. For this world in its present form is passing away.” (1 Cor 7:29f.)

We are living in ‘post-history’. At the same time, we have lost the great utopias. We are stuck: jammed between a lost *past* on the one hand and the lack of a meaningful *future* on the other. The ‘frantic standstill’ is – from a contemporary diagnostic perspective – *the* cultural experience of crisis in our day. We will only find happiness in the ‘fuzzy present’: selective, situational and counted in small coins.

In the middle of the present blocked backwards and forwards, religious are cultivating an existence in the manner of the Pauline “hós me” (1 Cor 7:29f.). With this kind of plan for as though (not) life and discipleship, Christians in religious orders are committed to the Apostle to the Gentiles *and* post-modern lateral thinkers in equal measure. A religious life arranged in such a neo-existentialist manner means living in the 21st century *as though* one were at home in the Gospel – and *vice versa*.

Thesis 3: Religious life with open eyes

“A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. (...) But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. (Lk 10:30-34)*

Religious life starts with something extremely simple. It begins with us opening our eyes.²⁸ The parable of the Good Samaritan tells of people who look away and particularly of one who looks closer, who notices the injured man. The will of God can be recognised

²⁸ In the following cf. Martha Zechmeister, Die Autorität der Leidenden [Vortrag bei der USIG-Vollversammlung, Rom, 3.-7.5.2013] at: <http://www.theologie-und-kirche.de/zechmeister-vortrag.pdf> [Accessed: 5.8.2013].

in what lies before our eyes here and now. In light of this, it is necessary to do what is most obvious: care.

The fact that this kind of ‘mysticism of open eyes’ is exceptionally political is shown by the incident in China made public recently by Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek: “Five years ago, an older woman fell as she was getting off a bus in Nanjing. We learn from newspaper reports that the 65-year-old broke her hip. At the location, a young man came to help her. We want to name him Peng Yu because that was his name. Peng Yu gave the older woman 200 RMB [exchange rate: 100 RMB = ca. 12.50 €], which could be used to buy 300 bus tickets, and took her to the hospital. He then stayed until her family arrived. The family sued the young man for 136.419 RMB. In fact, Nanjing Gulou district court pronounced the young man guilty and fined him 45.876 RMB. The court’s reasoning was that ‘according to common sense’, Peng Yu probably knocked the woman over as he left the bus first. The court also stated that he had confessed his guilt by staying with the woman at the hospital. A normal person would not have been as friendly as Peng Yu claimed himself to be.”²⁹

Thesis 4: Religious life in ambivalent power relations

“[... in one of the synagogues], and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.” (Lk 13:10-13)

Power is ambivalent. Power as *potestas* is based in principle on an asymmetry forasmuch as it seeks “to implement one’s own will within a social relationship even against resistance”³⁰. The second type of power, *auctoritas*, works differently: authority is based on a relationship of free and mutual recognition.

Religious exercise power in pastoral care and in community life together – and the latter not just in leadership roles. The relational and pastoral power that religious Christians practise with *auctoritas* aims for the de-potentiation of *asymmetric power relations*. This

²⁹ Michael Yuen, China and the Mist of Complicated Things, quoted by: Slavoj Žižek, Vom geistigen Tierreich. Über die Möglichkeit, Ereignisse ungeschehen zu machen. Aus dem Englischen von Nikolaus G. Schneider, in: Lettre International No. 100 (Spring 2013), 63-70, here 69f. [Insertion of brackets: U.E.].

³⁰ Max Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Grundriß der verstehenden Soziologie [1921/22], Tübingen 1972, 28.

is the absolute opposite of relationships of dependency and abuses of power. Religious are not concerned about maintaining power but use it in listening/obedience to the liberating message of Jesus for the *empowerment* of others – *ad intra* and *ad extra*! Our power therefore makes nobody small but empowers them to walk uprightly.

Thesis 5: Religious life in a secular society

“Being in very nature God, [he] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Phil 2:6-8)

All of the trends of secularisation observable today have been created in Christianity itself: “Secularisation as a positive reality means that the breakup of sacred structures of Christian society (...) should not be understood as the disappearance or demise of Christianity but as the perfect fulfilment of its truth, which (...) is *kenosis*, the condescension of God.”³¹ Secular phenomena therefore do not negate the Christian faith but are due to it. This link is theologically based in the self-debasement (Greek: *kenosis*) of God in Jesus Christ.

A *kenotic ecclesiology* follows from *kenotic Christology* to the extent that the divine self-abasement in the Epistle to the Philippians is linked to an ethical admonition to the community. It reflects ‘the theology of an uninfluential diaspora minority’³² whose members nevertheless had *experiences* of faith. This kind of *kenotic Church* knows the weakness of its position and place. The existence of religious orders under secular conditions faces up to the deprivation³³ of previous *potestas*, acknowledges the wounds and humiliations that accompany these experiences of loss and, thus prepared, inculturates itself into a society that has become (more) secular.

³¹ Gianni Vattimo, *Glauben – Philosophieren*. Aus dem Italienischen von Ch. Schultz, Stuttgart 1997, 44f. Cf. also idem / Richard Schröder / Ulrich Engel, *Christentum im Zeitalter der Interpretation*, hrsg. von. Thomas Eggenberger on behalf of Institut M.-Dominique Chenu – Espaces Berlin (Passagen Forum), Passagen Verlag Wien 2004.

³² Cf. Rainer Kampling, *Das Lied vom Weg Jesu, des Herrn. Eine Annäherung an Phil 2,6-11*, in: *Bibel und Kirche* 64 (2009), 18-22.

³³ Otfried Hofius, *Der Christushymnus 2,6-11. Untersuchungen zu Gestalt und Aussage eines urchristlichen Psalms* (WUNT Bd. 17) Göttingen ²1991, 54.

Thesis 6: Religious life in dependency

“The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, ‘If I have found favour in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.’” (Gen 18:1-3)

Foundations of religious orders have at various times reacted to different Church or sociopolitical circumstances: founders found *situations* and reacted to them. As a result, they are dependent on people. Bruno Cadoré OP, Master of Dominican Order since 2010, formulated it thus for the Order of Preachers: “The first decision by Dominic is not to found an order but to invite brothers to travel with him through the world as Jesus himself had done. The walking, the dependence on those whom one wishes to meet, the simplicity of life, are the modalities that the first of the Preachers chooses so that out of this simplicity by which hospitality is requested and friendship is offered, the resulting dialogue becomes an opportunity.”³⁴.

Religious life as hospitality is “being exposed”³⁵, is “surrendering passivity”³⁶. Our role is not to be the *host* but to be the guests, i.e. the one *receiving* hospitality. It therefore requires something along the lines of a “desire to understand the stranger”³⁷. Furthermore, the position of guest also forces us to take risks insofar as we are dependent on those we wish to meet. Precisely this attitude of exposing oneself to the other is the inner core of our vow of obedience – even *before* the content of the promise and action.

Thesis 7: Religious life of radical inculturation

“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that

³⁴ Bruno Cadoré, *Evangelium und Prophetie in der dominikanischen Tradition*. Aus dem Französischen von Michael Lauble [Address, Theological Faculty of the University of Freiburg/Switzerland, 1.12.2011] (Emphasis U.E.).

³⁵ Emmanuel Lévinas, *Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht*. Aus dem Französischen von Thomas Wiemer (Alber-Reihe Philosophie), Freiburg/Br. – München 1992, 313.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Karl Braun, Sahagún, Rodríguez oder: Das Bestellen des „Feldes“ aus franziskanischer Hermeneutik, in: Gisela Welz / Ramona Lenz (Hrsg.), *Von Alltagswelt bis Zwischenraum. Eine kleine kulturanthropologische Enzyklopädie*, Berlin 2005, 118-120, here 119.

they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.” (Jer 29:5-6)

Without doubt, religious orders are part of the wandering People of God (cf. LG 68). The essential self-image of the post-conciliar Church in this regard is that of the *Exodus*. They found themselves in a dynamic departure and exodus from the pre-conciliar *Pian* limbo into a modern future of the Church promised by God. This was no different in monasteries. However, they have only made “one side of Israel’s success story their own, (...) but not its descent (...) into the imposition of an existence as a minority among foreign cultures.”³⁸

Here, in terms of the theology and spirituality of religious orders, it is necessary to read the *entire* history because the wandering began with a catastrophic collapse experienced by the institutional structure of Israel. This corresponds analogously to the situation of religious orders today. Orientation offers the “magna carta of exile”³⁹. This letter by Jeremiah written to the exiles before 597 BC is not the start of a complaint. On the contrary. Ghettos or uprisings or flights are not mottos but radical rooting even at the risk of letting oneself be mistaken, and theological inculturation right to the limits of (monotheistic) orthodox (cf. Wis. 9:4 and *passim*).

Here, perhaps the flattering external perception of religious orders is justified due to the clever *Herder Korrespondenz* editor Ulrich Ruh.⁴⁰ The *experimental, scandalous* and *anarchical* potential attested to us religious by Ruh (despite all limits to our real options analysed soberly by him) should then be reformulated in terms of the Old Testament experiences of exile and diaspora as radical inculturation into the here and now – right up to the point of being confused with our contemporaries.

Thesis 8: Religious life as pastoral task orientation

“Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.” (Mt 6:34)

³⁸ Rolf Zerfaß, *Das Volk Gottes auf dem Weg in die Minderheit? Zur pastoralen Aktualität einer zentralen Erfahrung Israels*, in: *Katechetische Blätter* 1 (2000), 42-52, here 43; cf. idem, *Exodus – Exil – Diaspora. Glaubensgemeinschaften in der Fremde*, in: *Wort und Antwort* 42 (2001), 65-69.

³⁹ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, *Israel in der Diaspora*, in: Günter Riße / Clemens A. Kathke (Hrsg.), *Diaspora: Zeugnis von Christen für Christen. 150 Jahre Bonifatiuswerk der deutschen Katholiken*, Paderborn 1999, 205-216., here loc. cit., 211.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ulrich Ruh, *Stunde der Orden?*, in: *Herder Korrespondenz* 67 (2013), 217-219, esp. 219.

As a religious community, the Church is *still* a relatively powerful institution with influence and social presence. As a pastoral community, it is already a powerless place because it is dependent on God's grace. The Church's change of location that the Council Fathers undertook 50 years ago redefines and requalifies pastoral care ever since: as a creative and action-related dialectic of existence and Gospel.

As a consequence of this change of location, Bucher's request should be taken to heart: 'Away from social form orientation towards pastoral task orientation!' The usual Catholic line of thought must be turned upside down. Church, and with it religious orders are bound to think of and organise new and above all flexible social forms to solve pastoral challenges and tasks faced here and now in a creative manner. This is the adventure of a new "quotidianism of Christian discipleship"⁴¹. Grasping and living this daily here and now is not easy. It can fail.

Thesis 9: Religious life with injured bodies

"So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man." (Gen 32:24f.)

In terms of an ethic of the vulnerability, all acknowledgement of the other has to be recognised when the other's life is in jeopardy. This also applies in view of the recognition of the fact that we as people are in principle mutually dependent on each other. Religious (for example in the *Jesuit Refugee Service*) are therefore building in a world in which people are protected from violence – aware of the fact that the risks of vulnerability can never completely be eradicated. Risk to life and rescue, injury and survival remain intertwined with each other. Jacob is blessed and marked throughout his life. This double sign of blessing and injury is inscribed into the bodies of religious.

Thesis 10: Religious life of gratuity

"[Jesus] said to her: Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mk 5:34)

⁴¹ Christian Bauer, *Draußen zuhause? Ausblicke des Zweiten Vatikanums* [Paper presented to the meeting of Dominicans of the Province of Teutonia – Germany, Mayence, 2.1.2013].

“The proclamation of Jesus is free!”⁴² For religious men and women, this costlessness, this fundamental *gratuity*⁴³ of the Gospel of goodness announced by Jesus is the measure of their existence. As a result, they refuse to surrender to all recruiting or mission attempts motivated by pastoral tactics. As religious, we prove ourselves solely in the authenticity with which we live and proclaim Jesus’ gospel of gratuity.

⁴² Christoph Theobald, *Evangelium und Kirche in der Postmoderne. Eine fundamentaltheologische Ortsbestimmung*, in: *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 130 (2008), 153-167, here 158.

⁴³ “Gratuity” is a translation of the Italian *gratuità* which means gratuitousness, being free of charge, groundlessness, costing nothing.