ORTHODOXY OR HOW TO ASSESS THE QUALITY OF FAITH

SUMMARY
This article attempts to show that the performance of personal and communal Christian faith bears an intrinsic criterion by means of which its quality is to be assessed. This criterion is orthodoxy. In order to substantiate the thesis, a thought experiment will be conducted. In the first part, the experiment demonstrates as to why a purely private interpretation of faith is almost unbearable so that private faith seeks to expose itself to an external examination. Such exposure, as will further be argued, necessarily entails the introduction of a binary code, namely true vs. false or orthodox vs. heterodox. Continuing the thought experiment in the second part, the primary mode of the external examination will be presented as a communal practice of faith. In case this practice is disturbed, however, the examination mode changes from cooperation into a reasonable discourse about orthodoxy. Finally, it will be shown that the quest for orthodoxy cannot be restricted to the faith community alone but reaches beyond it and eventually proves to have a universal scope.

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust.¹

In these few lines, taken from the very beginning of A Theory of Justice, John Rawls apparently contends that practical and theoretical systems do have their own axiomatic criteria by means of which their quality is to be assessed. Such criteria belong to the internal logic of a system and can thus not be denied without spoiling the entire fabric. Note well, Rawls is not saying here that each social or intellectual system is actually just or true, since there are many which are obviously not. In fact, he only asserts that no such system can be viewed as justified if its originator or advocate does not – explicitly or implicitly – claim that it meets the standards of justice or truth. Once it can be proven that either the proponents of a practical or theoretical system do not make such claims or that these claims are demonstrably false, the system immediately ceases to be legitimized.

In this article, I want to show that a similar rationale applies to Christian faith. For if we understand Christian faith, among other things, as a system of convictions and beliefs to which the faithful attribute a high degree of theoretical, practical and existential significance, this system must also have an indispensable axiomatic criterion. This criterion, I will argue, is orthodoxy. As in Rawls’s case, this is not to say that each expression of Christian faith meets the standards of orthodoxy. On the contrary. But if the faithful explicitly abstain from making such claims, their faith turns out to be anything but not Christian. The claim to be orthodox, in other words, is a necessary implication of the claim to be a Christian.

To defend this thesis, in the first section, I will try to show that an individual believer cannot suffice with a monological or private articulation of her faith but has to expose it to an exterior examination. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that the necessity to open up one’s private belief system towards an external inquiry also entails the involvement of a binary code, that is, orthodox versus heterodox. The second section, then, is dedicated to the question of how the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of a particular belief system is to be determined. The faith community, I will argue, primarily employs a practical mode of reviewing the orthodoxy of beliefs. As soon as this mode reveals doubts about the orthodoxy of particular convictions, however, the faith community must turn to a discursive procedure by means of which orthodox convictions can be affirmed and heterodox beliefs can be ruled out. Moreover, I will focus on the public space beyond the faith community. Here, I want to elucidate that, under certain conditions, orthodox claims are not only addressed to the members of the faith community but to a wider public and can even have a universal scope. In this case, the examination procedure takes on the form of an apologetic communication.

**Breaking Open the Monologue**

From Augustine theology has inherited a crucial distinction, namely the distinction between the content which is believed (fides quae creditur) and the subjective act through which this content is affirmed (fides qua creditur). Augustine leaves no doubt that for him the former is shared by the entire faith community. In fact, he even holds that the fides quae is just one and thus not multiplied by the circumstance that it is differently adopted by a multitude of unequal believers. But Augustine’s view, to put it mildly, seems largely implausible. As the various controversies in which he himself was involved sufficiently show, even in his time the assumption of a uniform body of shared

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2 De Trin., XIII, 2.
convictions was rather an expression of wishful thinking than of fact-finding. And in our days, a minimum of hermeneutic consciousness can easily reveal that each believer construes the traditional creeds from his or her particular interpretative horizon, which is why the content of the fides quae is necessarily informed by the specific context within which the fides qua is performed. Today, we therefore have to reckon with a plurality of subjective constructions and the faith of the many is by no means one.

The Construction of Private Faith
Yet, we should not ridicule Augustine’s opinion all too quickly. For if we take it not as an assertion about facts but as an intuition about the intrinsic dynamic of subjective faith, he may have had a valuable insight. To explain this, I would like to carry out a kind of thought experiment. So, let us assume that a singular believer interprets that part of the Christian tradition she is acquainted with in a purely private or even solipsistic way. She has thus created her own views on, say, God, Creation, Christ, Redemption and the Last Things, and she has connected these views to a coherent and comprehensive narrative. Furthermore, this narrative shapes her personal identity which, according to Charles Taylor

(...) is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.

Our believer’s Christian narrative provides thus a framework of deeply enrooted convictions on which she builds her life, which give her firm hold and which make the whole of her existence meaningful. Of course, she cannot deny that the content of this faith is a composition of various practices, images, stories, theological reflections and doctrinal decisions that have been handed down to her by generations of other Christians. So, her faith will always bear the traces of an intersubjective historical process. Nonetheless, she keeps on taking it as her private narrative. For she is the one who has crafted this distinctive composition, and she is the one who has eventually adopted it as her identity-shaping narrative.

It is not difficult to apprehend why our believer is so keen on maintaining the solipsistic character of her faith. In a journal entry from 1 August 1835, Søren Kierkegaard wrote:

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The thing is to find a truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die. And what use would it be in this respect if I were to discover a so-called objective truth, or if I worked my way through the philosophers’ systems (...)? What use would it be to be able to propound the meaning of Christianity, to explain many separate facts, if it had no deeper meaning for myself and my life?⁶

Apparently, for Kierkegaard every truth – particularly the Christian truth – doesn’t have value insofar as it is objectively valid, but only insofar as he can endorse it as an idea which is worth to live and to die for. Translated into the Augustinian idiom, Kierkegaard seems to say that the fides quae is not of importance as long as he does not perform the fides qua, that is, as long as he cannot appropriate its content as ultimately meaningful for his own life. By the same token, our Christian believer has to maintain the private signature of her faith, because it shapes her identity through and through. If she was, in contrast, prepared to expose the content of her faith to external challenges in order to objectivize it, this would threaten the deepest layers of her existence. For once she accepted, for instance, to incur external questioning or critique of her constitutive beliefs, she would run the risk of losing her identity and completely getting lost in disorientation and anchorlessness. Hence, the reason to protect the solipsistic character of her faith is the awareness that what is most valuable to her is at the same time most vulnerable.

The Metaphysical Desire

This, however, is not the end of the story. In Totality and Infinity, Emmanuel Levinas provided an exhaustive phenomenology of such a monadic encapsulation and designated the pertinent ontological state as separation. Separation, he says, ‘is produced in the psychism of enjoyment, in egoism, in happiness, where the I identifies itself’, but then he reproachfully adds that in separation ‘the I is ignorant of the Other’.⁷ Against the backdrop of what has been said so far, we might wonder why ignorance of the Other is a problem at all. Isn’t it rather an advantage since it helps to secure the vulnerable identity of everyone, including our Christian believer? This may be the case. But Levinas also points out that even within the closed monad of a separated I there is an unavoidable metaphysical desire, which yearns for an absolute exteriority. Building on Descartes’s idea of the infinite, Levinas asserts that as long as the I remains within the state of separation, it cannot be sure that its talk is true. As the Cartesian I of the Meditationes, the separated I is permanently afflicted by

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doubts about the truth of its own speech since the only way to assure itself of it is a monologue. Even worse, in the state of separation the qualification true is, strictly speaking, not applicable at all, because untruth is no realistic possibility there. In an entirely encapsulated monologue which claims to be true, there is simply no place for any alternative. As the I, however, necessarily aspires to build its identity on a speech which is true, it develops a metaphysical desire for the Other, that is, for an exterior instance which can confirm its truth.

But there is more to it. For if the Other was only an external instance to confirm the I’s own truth, the Other would still belong to the separated monad of the I and thus not approach it from an absolute exteriority. Therefore, the Other must him- or herself make known as someone who is located outside the monad. This place, according to Levinas, is the face of another human being. He writes: ‘The way in which the Other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me, we here name face.’\(^8\) However, once the I encounters the Other on the face of another, this Other cannot not only serve as an instance to confirm the I’s truth. Rather he or she appears to be a master who questions and corrects the monological truth. Moreover, the Other provides a new kind of truth which can never be generated by the I itself. ‘To approach the Other in conversation’, Levinas says, ‘is to welcome his expression (…). It is therefore to receive from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also means: to be taught.’\(^9\)

When applied to the scenario of our thought experiment, Levinas’s considerations on the metaphysical desire make clear as to why our Christian believer cannot suffice with her solipsistic faith: as long as she seals herself off from external instances, she is caught up in a monologue through which she may confirm her deepest convictions and so make her existence meaningful. But this meaning is without reference, it only echoes the believer’s own speech. The Christian narrative she tells herself is not anchored in whatever external reality but at best confirmed by monological consistency. Here, the ‘contract between word and world’, as George Steiner once put it, is broken.\(^10\) Accordingly, the truth on which she builds her identity does not correspond with something outside but remains purely self-referential and can therefore not rightly be called truth. Yes, our believer cannot even be sure that the permanent reiteration of her narrative – which is necessary to maintain her identity over time – is in

\(^8\) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50.
\(^9\) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 51.
fact a reiteration, since no one, as Ludwig Wittgenstein has pointed out, is capable of following a rule on his or her own.\footnote{L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford 1986\textsuperscript{2}; §202, see also §§243–258. Needless to mention that there is, of course, a huge difference between Steiner’s and Wittgenstein’s account. Whereas Steiner stresses the relation between language and reality, Wittgenstein questions explicitly that there is something beyond language. Both, however, agree with Levinas that language becomes only meaningful if it is performed as an intersubjective practice.} If thus the truth of our believer’s identity-shaping narrative is periled by the lack of an external reference and by the impotence to maintain its consistency over time, she cannot but develop a metaphysical desire for an exterior Other who will safeguard the contract between word and world and open up the cage of private language, so that she can eventually build her identity on a truth that deserves this designation.

As soon, however, as the Other effectively reveals him- or herself on a human face, he or she does not, as we have seen, merely fulfill a corroborative function but serves as a master and teacher who can criticize and correct the believer’s truth and even provide a hitherto unknown truth which cannot originate from the believer herself. At first sight, this, of course, seems to endanger her identity since it makes her vulnerable to the challenges of the Other. The Other, as it were, breaks up her monological speech by inscribing the *binary code of true and false* into it. And this entails that the believer’s truth might now be proven to be insufficient or even false. After all, this was exactly the reason why she initially sought to keep private her account of the Christian narrative. However, the encounter with the Other also creates a *novel and unimagined opportunity* in that it offers a transformed notion of truth, a truth which relentlessly faces the possibility of falsehood and so opens up the hope for a truth which eventually prevails over its opposite. Sure, in order to make use of this opportunity, our believer must be ready to alter her narrative and, as a consequence of this, even to alter her identity. But altering one’s identity is not losing it. On the contrary. The venture to undergo a transformational process is now motivated by the hope that one’s identity once can be based on a truth which is more reliable than its monological counterpart because it is cleansed of possible falsehoods.

And so, we may end up this section by concluding that the *fides quae* our believer affirms by performing the *fides qua* is either a purely solipsistic one; but in this case its alleged truth is, in fact, no truth at all since it does not face the possibility of untruth, which is why she is permanently driven by a unsatisfiable metaphysical desire for the Other. Or her construal of the *fides quae* is exposed to an exterior examination through the Other. In that case, she
runs the risk of losing her truth and her identity. At the same time, however, she is also offered a novel opportunity, namely the opportunity to gain a transformed truth and a transformed identity which are more reliable in that they have been discriminated from untruth. The alternative is thus to maintain her *doxa* in the Platonic sense of mere opinion, or to open herself up for *orthodoxy* in the sense that Augustine may have had in mind when he asserted that the *fides quae* is just one. In principle, both options are possible for a Christian believer, but Levinas’s considerations on the metaphysical desire clearly indicate which is the more promising – though riskier – one.

**From Doxa to Orthodoxy**

The question to be dealt with in this section is as to how the move from *doxa* to *orthodoxy* could palpably be pursued. Raising the question this way seems to suggest that Levinas’s account of the teaching that the I receives from the Other is in some respects insufficient for this purpose. And indeed, it is. Though it is true that Levinas, under the heading *metaphysical desire*, masterly expounds the deep discomfort that a separated I must feel as long as it remains within the boundaries of its own ontology, he nevertheless falls short of appropriately delineating the concept of *intersubjectivity*. After all, he portrays the bond between the I and the Other as a rigorously *asymmetrical* relation within which the Other always occupies a superior rank, whereas the I finds itself throughout in an inferior position. Furthermore, his account of intersubjectivity is to a large extent confined to a strictly *bilateral* relation. Even though Levinas later has introduced the concept of the *third party*, his asymmetrical understanding of personal bonds still prevents him from conceiving intersubjectivity rightly as an interconnection of basically equal relations. Accordingly, his account is extremely helpful to explain as to why an individual believer must have a vital interest to expose his or her faith to an intersubjective examination, but he is not capable of providing a sustainable conception of that intersubjectivity that carries out this examination.

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12 Plato, *Theaetetus*, 187a–e.
13 See, for instance, E. Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, Dordrecht 1991, 59, 117, where the I is depicted as a hostage. – For this reason, Paul Ricoeur rightly raises the question ‘whether to be heard and received, the injunction [of the Other] must not call for a response that compensates for the dissymmetry of the face-to-face encounter.’ (P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, Chicago 1992, 189).
15 Therefore, Catherine Keller, for instance, advocates ‘an ontological widening of the ethics of alterity, extending it beyond the I-thou or I-Other relation into a temporal field of interdepended subjects (…).’ (C. Keller, *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*, New York 2015, 224).
Advocating for a cogent account of intersubjectivity, however, is not to assert, as for instance Jürgen Habermas did, that a philosophy of consciousness should entirely be replaced with the philosophical paradigm of intersubjectivity.16 For if we did so, we would lose a decisive tool in order to clarify as to how a valid truth can be adopted. We must not assume, Kierkegaard rightly says, that if only the objective truth has been obtained, appropriation is an easy matter; it is automatically included as part of the bargain and *am Ende* [in the end] the individual is a matter of indifference.17

Particularly among German philosophers, Habermas’ plea for a complete paradigm shift to intersubjectivity has therefore successfully been contested by pointing at the irreducibility of subjectivity for a proper understanding of intersubjectivity.18 Applied to our context, the performance of the *fides qua*, for example, proves to be a purely individual act of freedom which by no means can be traced back to an intersubjective achievement. We have thus to necessarily presuppose the individual faculty of performing free acts through which a common understanding of the *fides quae* is appropriated. Subject to that reservation, however, Habermas’s communication theory can indeed provide a suitable explanation of how the move from *doxa* to *orthodoxy* is to be conducted.19

**Practice and Discourse**

At this point, we can take up our thought experiment and assume that our believer now has accepted the Other’s summons. So, she is prepared to expose her private construal of the *fides quae* to an external examination, because she links this with the hope to eventually gain a stabler truth on which she can reliably build her identity. This entails, as we have seen, accepting the applicability of the binary code of true and false. Her private construal of the *fides quae* bears thus a concomitant *truth claim* which, however, is addressed

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not only to a single Other, as Levinas might have thought, but to all the others who are able to examine the validity of the claim. Soon it will turn out that our believer as well as the others are involved in a communal practice which serves as the primary mode of the examination.

First, however, we have to take a closer look at the nature of truth claims. Building on John Austin’s theory of speech acts, Habermas depicts the linguistic form of a truth claim as a combination of a locutionary act, that is, the propositional content of a sentence, and an illocutionary act which points at the action performed by uttering this sentence, namely asserting, contending or claiming that its propositional content is true. For this reason, the illocutionary act can be conceived of as a communicative offer to others in order to achieve understanding: ‘An attempt to reach understanding by means of a speech act succeeds if a speaker achieves, in the sense of Austin, his or her illocutionary aim.’ In our context this would mean that the believer has to put forward the propositional content of her fides quae by means of a speech act in order to reach consensus with others on the validity of this claim.

Yet, it is quite obvious that our believer cannot at once translate the entire content of her Christian narrative into propositional truth claims and offer them to others in order to reach their consent. At best, she is able to offer claims which pertain to particular parts of her fides quae. And even this, as we will see in a moment, happens only occasionally. For there is another more implicit mode by which the believer’s faith is continually exposed to the others’ examination. Recall that in the course of our thought experiment she has already given up her private faith, which is why she now is virtually related to others. Those others perform, just as she does, the fides quae and thereby adopt their particular interpretation of the fides quae. Hence, those others, too, build their personal identities on a specific account of the Christian narrative. And these identities do not only consist of different sets of beliefs or convictions but rather find their expression in actions and behaviors, so that our believer now turns out to be part of a communal practice which is constituted by the entanglement of all these actions and behaviors. To a large extent, therefore, such a practice is shaped by the different construals of the Christian narrative the individual believers cling to. It is just this communal practice which serves, so to speak,

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20 J. Austin, How to Do Things with Words, Oxford 1975.
21 See TCA I, 288–290. For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned here that Austin introduced a third type, namely the perlocutionary act which refers to the effect that speaker seeks to achieve on the side of the hearer. Furthermore, it deserves mentioning that Habermas distinguishes three types of validity claims among which truth claims are just one. The others are: rightness claims and sincerity or truthfulness claims.
22 TCA I, 293 [my translation, the English version does not render a translation of ‘Ein mit Hilfe eines Sprechaktes unternommener Verständigungsversuch gelingt, wenn ein Sprecher im Sinne Austins sein illokutionäres Ziel erreicht’ (German original version, 394)].
as the primary test case of our believer’s truths. For if she succeeds in smoothly participating in the practice, she can be sure that the beliefs and convictions which motivate her own behavior are for the most part accepted by the others. The cardinal, though implicit, mode of the examination of truth claims is thus a communal practice.

These considerations resemble the concept of the lifeworld which Habermas has introduced in his Theory of Communicative Action. According to him, ‘we can think of the lifeworld as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretative patterns.’ Hence, the participants of a communal practice share certain interpretative patterns and background convictions which make cooperation, that is, the ordered coordination of their actions, possible. As long as the practice continues largely undisturbed, the participants may sensibly conjecture that their background convictions do not considerably differ from each other. So, for Habermas, too, the practice is the crucial test case for the communality of beliefs.

Of more interest, however, are cases where the cooperation ceases, because precisely these cases indicate that the participants, in spite of their unspoken assumptions, do apparently not share the same life-worldly convictions. According to Habermas, such disagreements can pertain to three different dimensions of the lifeworld, namely the objective, the social or the intrapersonal world. For the sake of brevity, however, we can confine ourselves to the objective world, because only in this case genuine truth claims are at stake. If thus the cooperation among particular participants of the practice is disturbed, they have to explicitly articulate the pertinent background convictions and offer them to each other in the form of addressed speech acts. In other words, in case of disturbances, the participants have to translate their background convictions into sentences with a propositional content (locutionary act) and, at the same time, offer this content to the interlocutor while claiming that the proposition is true (illocutionary act). For Habermas, exactly this situation initiates the transition to a discursive form of examining truth claims which he calls communicative action.

Due to his indebtedness to Critical Theory, Habermas is well aware of the manifold distortions that communicative action is normally subjected to; think of distortions by strategic interests, by power relations or by external disturbances. Nonetheless, Habermas is rightly convinced that ‘[r]eaching understanding is the inherent telos of human speech.’ Because of the simple

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23 TCA II, 124.
24 TCA I, 278; TCA II, 120.
25 TCA I, 287.
fact that they make truth claims, the participants in communicative action are thus obligated to sincerely strive for understanding, in spite of any possible distortion. Accordingly, the interlocutors must be interested in reaching a consensus about the validity or invalidity of their contested truth claims. By mutually providing arguments in support of their respective claims they have to rule out wrong propositions and search for assertions to which everyone can reasonably consent. Once generally acceptable propositions have been found, they can justifiably count as true, because there is no argument left to prove their invalidity. On the basis of such a consensus, moreover, the communal practice can be continued since now the participants agree anew upon convictions that guide their cooperation.

At this point, it becomes clear as to why Habermas sees the “‘lifeworld” as a complementary concept to “communicative action’”. Whereas the lifeworld forms the totality of shared background convictions which allow for an undisturbed continuation of a practice, communicative action only comes into operation in a situation in which this practice cannot be continued because particular background convictions – contrary to the original assumption of the participants – are obviously not shared. As soon as communicative action has been successful in that the participants have reached a consensus on previously contested truth claims, the propositional content of these claims shifts again to the background of the lifeworld. For Habermas, the lifeworld is thus an unthematic horizon within which a problematic situation can appear and require communicative action. In Habermas’s own words:

> [O]nly the context directly spoken to on a given occasion can fall into the whirl of problematization associated with communicative action; by contrast, the lifeworld always remains in the background. ‘It is the unquestioned ground of everything given in my experience, and the unquestionable frame in which all the problems I have to deal with are located.”

For the last time applying these findings to our thought experiment, the move from doxa to orthodoxy now should be comprehensible. After she has given up her private interpretation of the fides quae, our believer, as we have seen, can rightly be conceived of as participating in a communal practice of faith. Her actions and behaviors as a believer are thus intertwined with the actions and behaviors of the other faithful. As long as the common practice continues uninterrupted, our believer may reasonably assume that her faith is orthodox in the sense of being approved of by others. Her interpretation of the fides quae is then part of a lifeworld tacitly shared with the Christian community. As soon

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26 TCA II, 130.
as she encounters practical problems, however, she must take this as an indication of a possible lack of orthodoxy. Hence, certain parts of her faith are presumably not orthodox but mere *doxa*. In this situation, the practical mode changes from cooperation into communicative action. Our believer has thus to translate her pertinent convictions into propositional truth claims whose orthodoxy is examined by means of an intersubjective discourse. As soon as understanding or consensus has been reached, she may, for the time being, again assume that her faith is orthodox.

*The Faith Community and Beyond*

What has been unfolded hitherto might for some readers appear as a rather sober and technical account of the individual and communal as well as the theoretical and practical reality of Christian faith. This may be so. Yet, the purpose of the present paper was not to give an exhaustive summary of how and what Christians believe, but simply to show that (a) *individual Christian believers cannot limit themselves to a purely private construal of their faith as they have to pursue an intersubjective assessment of its quality*; and that (b) *orthodoxy is the decisive criterion to determine the individual and collective quality of faith*. Though it is true that, throughout the entire history of Christianity, the defense of orthodoxy and the renunciation of heterodoxy were always entangled with motives other than the sheer quest for a proper understanding of the *fides quae*,28 it is also true that orthodoxy constitutes the indispensable inherent standard of both personal and communal faith. As we have seen, this is not to say that each manifestation of Christian faith is in fact orthodox. But the presumption of orthodoxy is the essential feature of the community’s life; and once this assumption proves to be false, the community has to discursively re-establish the orthodoxy of its lifeworld. By the way, this also applies to a *theology* which reflects upon the life of Christians.

Though it is this thesis that I wanted to argue for in this paper, still another remark has to be made. For the specific content of Christian faith simply does not allow for confining the orthodoxy claim to the faith community alone. After all, if it is true that Christians, in spite of their internal diversity, largely share the conviction that God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ disclosed God’s salvific will as pertaining to *each and every human being*,29 this message cannot be addressed to believers only. So, the orthodoxy claim reaches beyond the borders of the Christian faith community and has to be communicated to everyone. But how is this to be done?

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On the basis of Habermas’s communication theory, perhaps a model can be developed which seems to be promising. For if we take for granted that in modern societies believers and non-believers alike participate in communal practices, then these practices, too, must depend on a shared lifeworld.\textsuperscript{30} As long as their cooperation continues interruptedly, believers and non-believers may thus assume that their behavior is guided by more or less the same background convictions. As soon as disturbances occur – and that will surely happen, since their background convictions basically differ – these problems might possibly be related to the specific Christian views of the believers (or, by the same token, to the specific areligious convictions of the non-believers). Communicative action then will reveal whether this is indeed the case. If so, believers and non-believers have to mutually provide good reasons for their religious or non-religious views in order to reach a consensus.\textsuperscript{31}

From the believers’ point of view this implies to discursively defend the truths of their orthodox faith which are at stake in the given situation and to make them agreeable to the non-believers. Such engagement, I would argue, can rightly be called \textit{apologetic communication}, since it seeks to make acceptable parts of the Christian orthodoxy to others.\textsuperscript{32} Contrary to classical models of evangelization, however, apologetic communication necessarily presupposes an already proceeding practice in which believers and non-believers likewise are involved. So, it departs to a considerable degree from classical missiological approaches which conceive of evangelization as an encounter between different cultures.\textsuperscript{33} In apologetic communication, on the other hand, the motivation to talk about religious matters is not to impose one’s own truths immediately onto the other, but first of all to resolve problems which emerge out of a common practice.

It hardly needs mentioning that apologetic communication is by no means a one-way communication. Sure, from the believers’ perspective it is primarily about convincing the non-believers of orthodox claims. At the same time,

\textsuperscript{30} Of course, this model has to be extended by also taking into account the adherents of other religions. However, this would only complicate the scenario but not question the general applicability of the model. Thus, for the sake of simplicity, I confine myself to the opposition between Christian believers and non-believers.

\textsuperscript{31} At this point, it should be mentioned that Habermas himself is very skeptical about the translatability of religious beliefs into reasonable arguments. This has successfully been rebutted by K. Wenzel, ‘Gott in der Moderne: Grund und Ansatz einer Theologie der Säkularität’; in K. Wenzel, T. M. Schmidt (eds.), \textit{Moderne Religion? Theologische und religionsphilosophische Reaktionen auf Jürgen Habermas}, Freiburg 2009, 347–376.


however, non-believers also do have their truths, and these truths are often not less well-founded than religious ones. In many cases, the sincere search for a consensus will therefore initiate *mutual learning processes* by means of which both sides can improve their respective truths through cautiously altering them. Orthodox claims, in other words, are not only offered to the non-believers to pursue their consent but likewise benefit from their dissent. Consequently, Christians should not be afraid of entering into a discourse about orthodoxy beyond the faith community. For anxiety in this regard only bespeaks a prior fear that their truth might possibly not be as true as they pretend.

Finally, I have to admit that a consensus in these matters is nonetheless not very likely. But perhaps a common practice can even be continued when the participants know and accept from each other *that* and *why* they dissent on particular issues. Why should qualified knowledge about a dissent not also belong to a commonly shared lifeworld? And even if a consensus might be reached, this does not necessarily entail that non-believers now become believers. After all, from Kierkegaard we have learned that even an objectively validated truth cannot enforce its subjective appropriation. And from Augustin we have learned that the subjective appropriation of an orthodox *fides quae* is the free act of the *fides qua*.

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