Theology in a distant mirror

Toine van den Hoogen

'A Distant Mirror' is the brilliant story of the American historian Barbara Tuchman about the 'calamitous fourteenth century'. From this history I take the title of my essay about theology and about a theologian in the end of the twentieth century. But I don't want to write about the calamities of theology in the twentieth century. Perhaps one will once characterise the twentieth century as calamitous. But from a theological point of view I don't see serious reasons for that kind of negative evaluation. Although one has to recognize that most of the Christian and non-Christian theologies of this era have not yet contributed to a real theology of a worldwide religious plurality as a force of peace, justice and integrity of creation. But many religious men and women from different religious traditions, also theologians among them, dream of it, take it as a question of great importance, and many Christian theologians more and more try to organize their theological affairs with the intention of a real theology of religious plurality; a kind of fundamental reinterpretation of the classical 'theologia religionum'. Like Yves Congar characterised the 19th century theology as a theology in an age of the church, perhaps once it will be possible to characterise the 20th century theology as a theology in an age of religious plurality. Religious plurality could be considered not only as one of the themes of theology, one of the many subjects, nor one of the loci theologiae, a relatively new locus among the classical ones of scripture, tradition and reason. Perhaps religious plurality will be considered as the leading principle and main drive in the consciousness of (theological) knowledge ('Erkenntnisinteresse').

The dream of a theology of religious plurality is not without reasons raised here, in this book. We have taken the initiative of its edition because of the sixtieth birthday of Hermann Haring. Being one of the directors of Concilium, during eight years of sowing the dean of the faculty of theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (Holland), he often dreamed of a theology of religious plurality. Within
Preface

While the processes of secularization are continuing, there are more and more signs that the religious dimensions of human communication are recognized by a growing number of people as meaningful aspects of that communication. This process raises many complex questions. Historical, sociological and philosophical questions emerge. With this the perspective of theological questions is ever changing. Not only are the idea and the experience of 'binding' as a fundamental issue of religion shifting, but also the understanding of the 'object' of this binding is continuously changing. What is 'holy' is nowadays often understood without the traditional aspect of God's 'totality'. And the relationship of these shifts to what is regarded the great adage of modernity, namely 'man's autonomy', is extremely fascinating. In the meantime the concept of autonomy itself is fiercely debated.

Quite regularly religion is embraced as part of critique of the modern autonomous subject. Have the Enlightenment and the project of modernity become open to so many interpretations that they can no longer serve our thinking about the future of religion?

With this book we testify our gratitude to Hermann Haring on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday. We honour him as a very warm-hearted colleague, who has many virtues for the development of theology within the theological faculty of the Catholic University of Nijmegen and who continues with dignity its traditions as a primus inter pares in our midst.

The board of the Theological Faculty of the Catholic University has helped to edit this book with a substantial assistance. And fortunately we found some other important resources. But without the energetic efforts of Mr. Thomas Quartier it would never have been possible to achieve this project within such a narrow schedule.

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'A Distant Mirror' is the brilliant story of the american historian Barbara Tuchman about the 'calamitous fourteenth century'. From this history I take the title of my essay about theology and about a theologian in the end of the twentieth century. But I don't want to write about the calamities of theology in the twentieth century. Perhaps one will once characterise the twentieth century as calamitous. But from a theological point of view I don't see serious reasons for that kind of negative evaluation. Although one has to recognize that most of the christian and non-christian theologies of this era have not yet contributed to a real theology of a worldwide religious plurality as a force of peace, justice and integrity of creation. But many religious men en women from different religious traditions, also theologians among them, dream of it, take it as a question of great importance, and many christian theologians more and more trie to organize their theological affairs with the intention of a real theology of religious plurality; a kind of fundamental reinterpretation of the classical 'theologia religionum'. Like Yves Congar characterised the 19th century theology as a theology in an age of the church, perhaps once it will be possible to characterise the 20th century theology as a theology in an age of religious plurality. Religious plurality could be considered not only as one of the themes of theology, one of the many subjects, nor one of the loci theologiae, a relatively new locus among the classical ones of scripture, tradition and reason. Perhaps religious plurality will be considered as the leading principle and main drive in the consciousness of (theological) knowledge ('Erkenntnisinteresse').

The dream of a theology of religious plurality is not without reasons raised here, in this book. We have taken the initiative of its edition because of the sixtieth birthday of Hermann Häring. Being one of the directors of Concilium, during eight years of sowing the dean of the faculty of theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen (Holland), he often dreamed of a theology of religious plurality. Within
the years of his own theological development one can trace several steps towards such a theology.

In this article I raise up three mirrors which reflect several kinds of questions Hermann Häring is dealing with during his theological development till now: the mirror of history, the mirror of autonomy and the mirror of other (than Christian) religions. In this order they reflect more or less several successive stages of his theological existence (Barth) until his sixtieth birthday. Obviously there are overlappings. Doing so, I want to reconstruct especially how a modern Catholic theologian like he is, gradually discovers a way to a Christian theology of religious plurality. Looking at his case one can recognize how a Western man, Catholic, originally writing in a German style but later on more and more in a Dutch style, an academic theologian, finds his way to a theology of religious plurality, what kind of difficulties and problems he has to meet, what kind of challenges he has to take up and what kind of questions he has to answer. The growing of a new theological consciousness is a process that goes slowly. The theological existence depends on many influences.

1. The distant mirror of history.

Nine years ago, in 1988, in a cooperation between Nijmegen (H. Häring) and Tübingen (K.-J. Kuschel), a book was published, in honour of the sixtieth birthday of Hans Küng, about the history of theology as a history of conflicts. Häring writes together with Kuschel an 'Introduction'. He explains that the book deals with 24 persons, mostly theologians, in the history of theology, who testify that this history has an internal drama. They show that this history only really is developed in conflicts, conflicts between those who are looking for and longing for real truth, and those who represent institutional power of different varieties; conflicts within Christian churches between the ministry of the truth and the charism of the truth; conflicts between culture and religion, especially between different kinds of clericalism and those who are focused on liberation.
and on an independent way of thinking. Häring himself writes an essay about the dilemma of Athanasius (295 - 373), a dilemma between truth and power. Athanasius, 339 expelled from Alexandria, is an example of a conflict between a church threatened in the very heart of her belief within a strong culture surrounding her. It's a conflict “Athanasii contra mundum”. In his conclusion, Häring describes Athanasius as a theologian who started his combat being interested in real truth and ended it being interested in his rights. At the end of his essay Häring refers to a more recent conflict with analogue specifications. 1838 J. Görres writes his own “Athanasius” about the direction the german Catholicism has to opt for in the conflicts regarding the unity of the church and a beginning modernization of the western culture. Häring finishes his essay saying that within a church which suffers from an internal conflict between an institutionalized service of the truth and the risk of spiritual domination of people, the service of a biblical oriented theology is a fascinating one because of her comforting and challenging power.

This essay, illustrating the history of theology as the history of conflicts, fits in a first period of Häring’s theological development. Already in his dissertation he states the field of ecclesiology is in any case the most urgent field in theology, although perhaps not the most essential one. And from the very beginning he defines this field in a hermeneutical way. This field owes his urgency to the many socio-psychological conflicts it represents, to the many structural problems it poses, but most of all to the essential theological problems it involves. The relations between God and World, World and History, between Church and Salvation, Salvation and Ministry are like rays of light breaking in this prism. He understands these processes of 'breaking' as processes of re-interpretation, also he understands them in a hermeneutical way, which contains theoretical as well as practical dimensions. He is interested in Bultmann’s concern of the Geschichtlichkeit in the actus fidei. The Word of God is mediated by Geschichtlichkeit, has a relativity on behalf of its linguistic character. This is the contribution of Bultmann in the tradition of the so called Dialectical Theology, Häring argues. And he acknowledges an ‘ecclesiological shortage’ in Bultmann. His theology sets of with the
Word (not the Church) which creates faith. A discussion with catholic ecclesiology, he says, is important, he says, from this point of view. Therefore this dissertation explores the concept of church in order to find out how this bultmannian concept of a personal faith can be widened to an eschatological oriented, christological founded and practical validated concept of a church which nature is to serve the world.

During the later years of his theological career Haring continues to give weight to the linguistic character of the mediation of the Word of God. In an article about the famous question of the Kurzformel des Glaubens he stresses that the linguistic character of the mediation of the word of God includes to pay an extensive attention to the cultural settings of the church. Only in this way it is possible to avoid biblicism on the one hand, and ideological reinterpretation on the other. This is a responsibility of all christians, and especially of the theologians among them; but it is not the latter's prerogative. Neither the theology of a certain era can be ascribed having a prerogative in this point of view. Haring warns against a monoculture in theology, and advocates a pluralism in theological reflection that never is to surmount. This pluralism asks for a critical distinction of the Spirit and for an elaboration of a new communicative logic of faith. From the same point of view he agrees J. Ratzinger who speaks up for renewed attention paid to the oldest catechetical traditions in formulating the christian belief and he objects against Ratzinger as far as the latter ascribes a kind of a-historical authority at patristic theology and tries therefore to dominate other theological paradigms. A corresponding problem appears in Haring's article about the theology of John Paul II. In this theology the Church is not only a prism of the fundamental theological questions about God and World, Salvation and History. 'The Church is the experiential medium which can be analyzed phenomenologically and at the same time it offers a comprehensive integration of all christian truth. ... The doctrine of the Church becomes a hierarchology which is comfortably embedded in the phenomenology ... There is no room left, at decisive points, for positions which are critical and arguing on historical and socio-political grounds.' Haring's own theological
position is recognizable in an article he wrote in honour of the seventy-fifth birthday of Edward Schillebeeekx. Theology jumps up from three intrinsically connected springs: sounding the intelligibility of the divine mystery, reflecting on the history of Christian faith, analysing the human experience. In abstracto, so Häring, this idea of theology remained the same in Schillebeeck's theology. Nevertheless, in different ecclesiastical and social contexts it knew drastic modulations, 'breathtaking alterations', as Häring calls them. In his opinion its the best service theology can do to the Church.

History is a distant mirror. Sometimes its also a broken mirror. In the mental world of Hermann Häring, seen from in a theological perspective, the mirror breaks by what he calls, the fundamental inhumanity of (not only: in) history. In his book Die Macht des Bösen (1979) he analyses some fundamental aspects of the thinking of Augustine. To Häring's opinion Augustine is a mirror while he at the same time in the most detailed way thinks about our personal depth in history, while the power of evil is intrinsically connected with our personal freedom and its genesis, and about our cosmic width in history, while the power of evil can only be understood thoroughly enough as something that determines our total human world. Therefore this Habilitationsschrift deals not only with a theologian who remains important in the history of theology. Its deals also, like Häring writes, with a fundamental question in the field of the systematic theology, a question which puzzles him since his dissertation: can we speak about God in a new way in which we can communicate with people in our own culture. In the mirror of Augustine, he tries to analyse this problem. And he does so because the problem of speaking about the evil is recognized by everyone. 'Everyone knows it, but nobody knows where it comes from', is the first line in his book. Everyone knows it, not only theoretically and even not in the first place as a problem that puzzles us as intellectuals. It puzzles because the evil makes victims, involves perpetrators and carries away accomplices. The evil is a very effective and at the same time very inpenetrable 'phenomenon', when it is a phénoménon at all, 'something' that is a borderline that crosses all communication and therefore threatens our humanity. Its just from
this point of view that Häring faces the problem of evil. It deals with
out humanity, and especially with our communication as human
beings. We have to look for new models of communication, also in
our religious practises, to fight against the unconsiousness and impo­
tence which exists inside our hearts and minds.

The problem of evil crosses not only all human communication. It
also sets on fire our imagination and our concepts of God. The prob­
lem of evil is a problem of theodicy, traditionally as well as from a
systematic point of view. But Häring wants to avoid an important
misunderstanding. Theodicy don't focus the problem how to justify
the existence of God in confrontation with the existence of the evil.
He puts it the other way around. Theodicy focus the question how to
communicate about the problem of evil in confrontation with a chris­
tian faith in God. How can we face victims, perpetrators and ac­
complices in confrontation with our faith in the God who reveals
himself in Jesus Christ.

This unusual, not traditional way of approaching the theodicy we
have to keep in mind, when we trie to understand why Häring inves­
tigates some major parts of the theological inheritance of Augustine.
Nobody can deny the influence of Augustine, even in this respect.
Nobody can deny that even Augustine fails at the end in confronta­
tion with the problem of evil16. He fails because he wanted to de­
velop a total theodicy, an allembracing justification of Gods creation
and redemption17. But he failed not only in an intellectual respect,
while he leaves behind a theological tradition that is endangered by a
poisonous dualism. Haring takes the religious results of Augustine’s
intellectual efforts more seriously than the philosophical ones. He
analyses not only the ‘young’ Augustine of De Ordine (386) who
foughted against the Manichäans but also the grim author of De
peccatorum meritis (412) who struggled with the Pelagians. Espe­
cially through Augustines analysis of the human desire, he makes
himself incompetent to distinguish between victims, perpetrators and
accomplices. When the evil is No-Thing, conceived in a metaphysi­
cal way, it is defeated and - at the same moment - disposed of every
possibility of attacking it. The problem of this theological way of
Augustine, the great 'empiricist of the evil' who ended like he started, sees Häring in Augustines tragic dilemma that he, in an orthodox confession of Gods souvereign omnipotence, leaves also behind an imagination of a God who in this Augustinian way of theology lost his power of all-embracing communication. History becomes a distant mirror; a broken mirror too.

As I said, I raise up three mirrors. Seen in the first mirror of his theological life, Häring appeared to pay much attention to ecclesiological problems. The questions about the christian church were considered as the prism through which he as a theologian looked at fundamental questions about God and World, History and Salvation. In a next period another mirror appears, already indicated by questions leaved behind in his book on Augustine.

2. The distant mirror of autonomy

The evil is a historical reality. It plays an insidious role in human freedom. Therefore its power is often displaced in the history of the christian church, especially in the history of theology. Too often our desire for real truth has ended as fear for heresy, our desire for God has distorted in aversion against the (bodily) vitality of mankind, and the mission of the Church is fixed in a condemnation of the world. Häring considers these kinds of developments as projections of the Evil, projections because open and (self-)critical discussions (communication!) in such circumstances are no longer possible.

In a second period of his theological life, especially after he arrived in Nijmegen as professor for dogmatic theology, he is often occupied with questions about 'autonomy', not autonomy considered in an abstract-philosophical way, as the essential characteristic of a subject who is autonomous in his ability of moral and theoretical judgments, nor a subject who is autonomous in his ability to initiate history. Häring's real concern, his fascination I would almost say, is the concrete, (philosophical-)anthropological structure of the experience of
an autonomous subject, seen in the context of the western, male dominated world. His concern for human communication remains, but more and more he tries to analyse the anthropological structures which influences the way of communication. Affirming that there is an insidious role evil plays in human freedom, this point of view doesn't label him as a theologian who becomes terrified by the evil. On his own way, he develops something like a hermeneutic of suspicion, to be able to analyse what happens with us in our human communication, and therefore happens with our possibilities to mediate the Word of God. The mirror of autonomy is also a kind of prism in which - one could say - the rays of the divine mystery become visible in our human reality. In this section I will analyse how Härings analyses his own version of a hermeneutic of suspicion, suspicion against a too simple idea about communication, communication with each other and communication with God, too dangerous while handed over to ideology.

As a precursor of a real, non-ideological approach of freedom Härings studies the thinking of Erasmus of Rotterdam. (Here one can observe that the mirrors I raise up reflect each other too). Häring portrays Erasmus as a man who, with a relative independence from ecclesiastical pronouncements, looks for the power of rational arguments, oft unusual but a champion of an idea of freedom that leaves room for plurality in history and for plurality in kinds of knowledge. In this classical humanist a pious but independent churchman is united with a critical scholar. His humanism is originally Christian, developed as it was in the first place within his book *Enchiridion militis Christiani*. His idea of renaissance remains fundamentally open to communication. To Häring's opinion the reflections of Erasmus on the *liberum arbitrium* are still important in the context of our modern western culture and its growing individualism and its tendency to interiorisation. With Erasmus Häring stresses that people are free when they feel at home in a community, when they can live in a togetherness which everybody sets free in looking for his own identity. Such a community asks for a theoretical communication, a communication based on free arguments. And within such a community the Holy Scripture can be recognized as the lasting room for
Christian communication, within which every subject is a subject for debate. 'Thus a space of freedom is claimed for Christian theology which escapes both liberal reductionism and doctrinal rigidity'. Such a room is, in a human sense as well as in a religious sense, 'a power for peace'.

It's comprehensible that a theologian like Haring, who stresses the insidious role of the evil in human freedom, pays so much attention to an 'orthopactical' approach of freedom. Already in his booklet *Was bedeutet Himmel*(1980) he shows how the Christian religious language about 'Heaven' has to be understood as a field of symbols within which 'circles' of human experiences, and existential and theoretical questions about them, can be distinguished. So he distinguishes, speaking as a systematic theologian about The Heaven, the confrontation with death and questions about our hope; the confrontation with life and questions about our fulfillment; the confrontation with history and questions about a communal future, and - in all that circles - the confrontation with borders and questions about reality. The enumeration of the distinguished circles is proposed without any claim on completeness; nevertheless Haring tries to argue that they in their distinctiveness together give an outlook which our inevitably particular human experiences relate on each other and give a place in our universal existence. Because in his opinion also the semantic field of religious symbols has an intention to our universal existence.

One can ask how a Christian theologian can justify an 'ortho-practical' (Schillebeeckx) approach of (religiously interpreted) human orientation on freedom and peace and at the same time communicate to everyone out of the semantic structures of a particular religious tradition.

Haring's answer is found in some publications on christology. Arriving in Nijmegen, he 'found' the new directions in christology which were developed by E. Schillebeeckx and P. Schoonenberg. In his inauguration speech Haring reflected on it. In his opinion in the theology of both theologians the essential questions deal with a new relation between the story of Jesus and the confession of Jesus
Christ and a new relation between theological conceptions and human history. Häring argues in the approach of Schillebeeckx and Schoonenberg one finds a new ‘internal structure’ of christology. The analysis of the historical origin of christology and the reflection on its relevant criterium are intrinsically related. Every christology (even the most classical ones which have received an ecclesiastical authority) has the status of a later reedition (reinterpretation) of the original criterium and in the same time the status of a reflection which has to be retranslated to this origin which is its criterium and to this criterium which is present in its origin. Therefore every christology asks for a critical explanation of its hermeneutical implications. And - even more important - every christology asks for the explication of the concept of *metanoia* implicated in it. Only doing so a christology becomes an obligatory dimension for someone's spirituality, Häring argues. In every Jesus-theology a confession to Jesus Christ is already present and operative as a ‘prejudice’ (G. Ebeling). This ‘prejudice’ is its weakness. But its strength is to indicate what it means to confess that Jesus is God’s son.

A sensitive aspect of this approach of a hermeneutical and orthopractical orientated christology is the orientation on soteriology, especially the orientation on the confession of the redemption by Jesus’ suffering and death. Did Jesus Christ redeem us thanks to his suffering and death, or in spite of it? In his reflections on this question, Häring explains - in line with his essay *Ecce Homo* - how in a new approach of christology, which has to occupy with the classical function of a speculative christology, i.e. the identification of christian faith, this identification can be worked out. Like many others, Häring argues the suffering and death of Jesus are not redemptive in itself. Considered from a hermeneutical and orthopractical perspective Jesus’ death, even considered as a death for the others, is a provocation in the first place, a provocation which impels us to open all our theological theories, to prevent that we close prematurely the biblical symbolism. Secondly it impels us to a continuing reinterpretation of our concepts of a meaningful history. Thirdly it impels us to an imagination of the fulfillment of history which is never fulfilled and which can never ideologically misused by a thoughtless interpretation of death.
Reading essays like these about christology, one can discover how a christian theologian tries to explain that theology has its main task (its 'core business') in research which analyse the christian religious symbolism, in order to interprete it in a non-ideological way and to reconstruct new theories about it than are based on structures of our human experiences. These experiences have a particular dimension as well as a universal dimension in Härings point of view. Also the semantic field of christian religious symbols has an intention to our universal existence as well as an indissoluble historical (Geschichtlich) identification. Theology is the study of the mutual relations between these anthropological structures of our human experience and the historical (Geschichtliche) identification of christian faith in Jesus the Living One.

Such a concept of a hermeneutical theology can be defined as a theology which is tracing tracks towards God (Schoonenberg). Looking back at a thirty-years debate about theology and secularization - 1963 J.A.T. Robinson wrote his famous Honest to God - tries to reconstruct this debate along three main lines theologians payed attention to in confrontation with modernization. Obviously, one could say now, he tries to give names to these lines which together are also parts of a new concept of theological reflection. The first line he names the line of the context. He indicates a lot of authors who have occupied themselves how we can look for God in a secularized context. Several kinds of concepts about God-talk are discussed, in a variety from Barth to Metz and Pohier, a pluriformity of new forms of critical positive and negative theology. The second line he names the line of the text. He discusses theologians which reflect on human language as the indispensable medium of the Christian message, beginning with the reflection on the logical sentence 'God exists' and ending with theories about qualities and about a systematic structure of religious symbols. At least he discusses a third line, which he names the line of authenticity. He refers to theologians who put the question if we can encounter God himself. Is there a point where he shows himself in a priviledged way? More and more modern theologians stress that according to the message of the
Scriptures God is to encounter on a privileged way in processes of historical liberation and emancipation of people which suffer from poverty and violence.

Härings point of view is that context, text and authenticity can be formulated as the three poles of theological reflection: its public dimension, its scientific dimension, and its religious dimension. Perhaps one could connect this conclusion with the conclusion in the preceding paragraph. Theology is the study of the mutual relations between the anthropological structures of our human experience and the historical (Geschichtliche) identification of christian faith in Jesus the Living One. This study has a public dimension, a scientific dimension, and a religious dimension.

In recent years Häring has emphasized, especially regarding the religious dimension of theology, that the other two dimensions, the public one and the scientific one, know a dynamism that differs from other kinds of philosophical knowledge. For important religious symbols which belong to the eschatological and christological message in the christian tradition, are part of a very specific, i.e. apocalyptic language. This language cannot be interpreted, without misleading presuppositions, as a language about history. A new kind of hermeneutic is necessary. Not even a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is apt for this goal. Theology needs a hermeneutic of despair, a hermeneutic that doesn't start from a set of intelligibles structures of our reality; rather a hermeneutic that starts from the historical experiences of victims of extreme violence and destruction, victims who cry that such a destruction must come to an end. In these texts of Häring we can see a revival of his older proposal of the theodicy. Theology has to speak in the name of the victims of historical violence and destruction, victims of a 'sjoah', and to confront their 'impossible experiences' and their endless cries with our christian faith in God. Only in this confrontation we can justify our belief in a God who creates the world and will fulfill his promises.

Nevertheless its a bit strange to oberserve that even in this recent texts about bizarre experiences of reality we can observe a plea for
theology as a study of the mutual relations between the anthropologi­cal structures of our human experience and the historical (Geschicht­liche) identification of christian faith in Jesus the Living One. Apoca­lyptic and eschatological language, Haring argues, is to understand out of elementary experiences, activated in linguistic symbols. He warns against a hermeneutic that orders this bizarre ‘impossible experiences’ within anthropological and theological (time) structures. He intervenes against all naivety in theological articulations of our christian hope. He intervenes even against a christocentrism that is accomplished too fast. But after all, after all these interventions, he continues to think theologically, in a service, like he says now, of a hope for justice, reconciliation and a new earth, a service that starts from experiences of solidarity and surpasses the limits of class, culture and religion.

3. The distant mirror of other religions

1993 Haring writes an essay about the presupposed turn to an anthropological approach in western thinking. Its an essay about Augustines influence on western anthropology. In a context within which much questions raise about a new inculturation of christian theology in a world of religions - Haring contributes to a volume of Concilium, focused on Reincarnation or Resurrection? - Haring once again pays attention to Augustine while Augustine has lived and worked in a context which was characterized by vivid processes of inculturation of christianity in an overwhelming different culture, an ocean of all kinds of religious practises and imaginations of redemption within which christian faith was (still) a little and a little bit strange island. In those days christianity appeared to the educated people in a distant mirror. Nowadays, from a perspective of a christianity that became a culturally dominant religion in a western world that economically still dominates the other regio’s of the globe, rather the worlds of the other religions appear to many western men in a distant mirror. But although this mirror is distant, many of its images are fascinating too, e.g. the imagination of the reincarnation; perhaps because many western people try to understand reincarna-
tion in a way that affirms the antropocentrism they are accustomed to. Moreover more and more western religious men and women, getting involved in a religious ‘quest’ to ‘older’ strata of their existence, are overwhelmed by millards of religious people who obviously belong to traditions which their quest - if any! - deeply root in some kind of wisdom which promises a way to the mystery of live.

Is it possible for christian theology, so deeply rooted in western culture, to develop a new inculturation in the world of religions? Its a question that fascinates Häring in a third period of his theological live. Its a question to which I will try to come close raising up a third mirror, the mirror of the other religions.

In his essay on Augustine, just mentioned, Häring wants to reconstruct the main dimensions of the Augustinian religious antropology and he will show why the imagination of reincarnation wasn’t be accepted in the christian religious anthropology. The real wisdom as the christian theologian who Augustine became, understood it, is a wisdom which the ego separates from the other dimensions of reality. It individualizes the soul and considers this individualized soul as the only important end of the inwardly way of the ego. Only this way liberates us from the evil (of inherited sin). He understands the real wisdom, included in the christian way, as the recognition of the imprisoned, by desire imprisoned human freedom. This wisdom demoralizes a man and neutralizes our responsability in history, Häring argues. In Augustines point of view, also reincarnation is never been a possible solution for this problem of a real history. The death is the transition to a new live and only God creates and recreates our live.

Perhaps Augustine is not an inspirator for a real dialogue between christianity and other religions. For such a dialogue, we have, according to Häring, to relearn the Forgotten. Certainly we need inspirators. Häring looks for them rather in the history of theological reflections on modernization. For this determines the context of the dialogue of our interpretation of christianity and our interpretation other religions29. In a Western-European context such a dialogue will
be possible, Häring argues, when the participants consider their participation as a challenge to their own fundamental, intellectual and collective experience of freedom, and as a challenge of their own personal, new feeling for the holy. So a real dialogue in our context will include an critical option towards processes of social change in our society. The osmotic power of religion can only be recovered by integration of such a critical option and by integration of the desacralisation of our cultural structures. This is, according to Häring, a very important element of a genuine religious dialogue in our society between people who come from different religious traditions. Otherwise such a dialogue will suffer of a sceptical anti-intellectualism. But when this kind of anti-intellectualism is avoided, within such a dialogue it becomes possible to go back to kernel-points of everyones religious symbolic world, theoretically and practically as well. In Häring's point of view a real and effective, i.e. communication and authenticity promoting dialogue is a dialogue which doesn't reduce religious inspiration and behavior to a kind of nineteenth-century belief in human progresson, but a dialogue which is a theological, liturgical and practical quest for God. In a christian perspective this is a quest for the Forgotten One, the One who reveals himself in Jezus' kenosis (Fil. 2, 6-11). The creed of this christian perspective has a triadic structure. It's a faith in God who reveals himself in the three names of Father, Son and Spirit. Even this triadic Creed offers new perspectives on an inter-religious dialogue, Häring argues. And his argument repeats the theological approach he pleaded for in earlier publications: the triadic way of naming God has to be understood as a field of symbols within which 'circles' of human experiences, and existential and theoretical questions about them, can be distinguished. God is invoked as Father, which expresses the radical depth of our human basic trust, like this trust is understood in judeo-christian traditions on God as the ineffable Thou. God is experienced as Spirit, which expresses an experience of a freedom which is every day new (Hartshorne), a freedom which can only be experienced when we drink from our own wells (Guttiérrez) and which breaks down all kind of dividing borders. And God is experienced in Jesus, which identifies the even indicated experiences of God and which appeals to a metanoia and a
discipleship of equals. This identification creates clarity in the field of symbols of God. It has a dangerous power too, i.e. the danger of a mystifying, a-historical exclusiveness of the (Christian) symbols of God.

If Christian theologians try to avoid such an ideological consired exclusiveness, Haring argues, no other way remains than to flee forward. On the one hand theology becomes a genealogy of the linguistic expressions of religious (i.e. Christian) experiences. From this point of view every expression of the truth remains contingent. From this point of view no claim on an absolute truth is possible. On the other hand theology becomes a systematic reflection on the claim for truth which is implied in religious symbols. Results of this reflection ought to be meaningful not only for interpreting and understanding of Christianity, but of other (non-Christian) religions too31.

As a western theologian, Haring knows other religions especially from their appearance in his own culture. Although he is aware of the hidden eurocentrism even in our culture-criticism, even a theology appealing to Habermas' communicative social theory implies a concept of rationality and a concept of culture that have their roots in the genealogy and systems of the western culture. Härings is aware there is no theology otherwise than a culturally embedded theology. Like there are no other religions than inculturated religions. Its perhaps for that reason Haring pays special attention to questions about the possible contribution the interreligious dialogue can develop towards social integration in the western culture32. He is interested in the possible strategies (Habermas) which are implied in and mediated through the linguistic traditions of a religious tradition, strategies which can be measured - he agrees with Küng - to universal, and in the same time very concrete standards of humanity. A theologian has to analyse such linguistic traditions with an ‘interreligious hermeneutic’.

Perhaps one can consider such a interreligious hermeneutic as a essential part of the genealogy and the systematic reflection on religious symbols just indicated. Haring distinguishes two possible theo-
ries to develop such a ‘interreligious hermeneutic’. On the one hand Paul Knitter presents a ‘non-normative theocentric christology’. His plea for a worldwide interreligious theology is shared by Häring. But according to Häring the shortage of Knitter’s theory is the lack of hermeneutics. Appealing to traditions of christian symbolism, he confines his analysis to psychological remarks. So Harings presents another approach. An interreligious hermeneutic especially asks for a theory of the interrelation between the two points of view of perception of reality, the point of view of an insider and that of an outsider. A real dialogue is only possible when both points of view are exchanged. Of course every participant in an interreligious dialogue has a historical concreteness, is involved already in his own traditions, has his own interests and takes part of a contextual mediated world of religious symbols. But in this approach of exchange particularity is not only considered from a historical and psycho-sociological points of view. Particularity is considered especially from a gnoseological point of view, a gnoseology that implies historical and psycho-sociological dimensions. Also universality is approached not as the result of an abstraction, but as a mutual recognition of a personal attachment to concrete traditions.

In this approach of the interreligious dialogue not only the position of a participant and the influence on its perception is important. Another distinction has to be made, not only regarding the participants position but also regarding the communicative dimensions of the linguistic mediated religious traditions. One has to distinguish the locutionary dimension and the illocutionary dimension of this traditions. In the first dimension a religious tradition reveals her own identity, a lure of her own, a claim on universal value implied in characteristic dynamics of the own religious symbols and practises. In the second dimension a religious tradition can be implied in a interreligious dialogue. In such a dialogue religious men and women continue to belong to their own traditions, but in the same time they start to thrive and to florish in another tradition, perhaps they are ‘coming out’ in another tradition; another tradition germinates in them too. Once in the roman catacombs Christ was imagined as Hermes. Once in the Islamic Toledo grew up a real interreligious toler-
ance between muslim and christians. Recently in modern Israël is developed among christian Palestines a jewish theology of liberation.\footnote{33}

\section*{Notes}

5. O.c. 5.;
6. O.c. 16.
8. Cfr. A.c., [60].
11. A.c. 249.
15. O.c. 9.
16. O.c. 278.
17. O.c. 275.
18. O.c. 279.
21. A.c. 35.