



HUMAN TOGETHERNESS IN THE MIDST OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURES – PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

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ABSTRACT

The text offers a theological reflection on the relationship between democracy, autocracy, and contemporary social and cultural challenges. Christians are called to engage in overcoming global crises, including ecological and social ones, to promote justice and human dignity. The Church's mission, rooted in Christian love and justice, is crucial for strengthening democracy and addressing the crises of modern times.

Thinking about democracy and its current threats is a broad field that has hardly been explored in practical theological terms to date. One exception is the topic of 'democracy in the church', which plays an important role in the debates of the Catholic Church in Germany. On the one hand, this may be due to its seemingly outdated legal form: structurally, the church is a constitutional

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monarchy without a separation of powers. This is in great tension with democracy as a form of government, which has been successfully established against monarchist-autocratic power structures. Parallel to this, the Protestant church has developed here as a strong democratic bourgeois church against the Catholic aristocratic and peasant church, in which lay people are in charge and to whom the ordained are subordinate. With this example permanently in mind, many committed Catholic lay people, both voluntary and full-time, have been struggling with autocratic experiences in their own church environment since the Würzburg Synod (i.e. for almost half a century). The never-ending abuse scandals, which have only been revealed in small steps in dioceses and religious orders, have reached a breaking point. The Synodal Way, criticised by Rome in a similar way to the former Würzburg Synod, is fuelling the commitment of certain church circles towards democratisation within Catholicism. In the process, the well-known divisions between conservatives and innovators, which cut across all ecclesiastical levels, are becoming more pronounced.

The following article does not seek to enter directly into this field of debate, but rather to define the framework in far broader socio-cultural and socio-economic terms. The underlying thesis is as follows: The lives of Christians are inextricably interwoven into the cultural, social and economic structures of the world in which they live. Their contribution to cultural development in the sense of promoting democracy can therefore not only include internal church reforms, but must take into account the cultural circumstances and face up to the global challenges, which in the midst of current eco-social crises and catastrophic situations involve a high degree of responsibility for the future.

The argument is divided into three sections. In the first step, the inseparable relationship between democratic and autocratic social forms is placed in the historical context of eco-social structures, making it clear how they are integral to the living conditions of people both then and now. Democratic behaviour is therefore not merely a question of attitude. A second section takes a didactic-communication-theoretical approach and looks at which behaviours should be practised in order to lay the social-communicative foundation for democratic feelings and behaviour. The aim is to make it clear that democracy is not just a political process, but that it is closely linked to self- and social experiences in everyday life. However, these can and must also be practised there – both within and outside of church structures and fields of action. The concluding third section brings both lines of argument together and seeks to apply them to current German challenges.

Such a broad framework seems appropriate and necessary in view of the many detailed academic and cultural debates, especially for practical theological reflection. At the same time, such an approach requires a sketchy presentation that can often only be based on general knowledge. Nevertheless, it should be considered as an academic-practical contribution to the debate. For reasons of scope, the arguments are often based on these presentations that are only interrupted in phases by narratives.

■ SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS, POLITICAL STRUCTURES, AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THEM

DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY ARE ARCHETYPES OF SOCIAL COEXISTENCE

- ▶ People who live together (even if only in phases) discuss what needs to be done and come to consensual or compromise decisions. This applies to socialisation in the family as well as to communal interaction in circles of friends, groups, seminars, or parties. People want to be loved and belong. And this requires consensual solutions that take the interests of all those involved into account as far as possible. Justice and kindness are inseparable companions of a happy and peaceful coexistence. Pope Francis made this abundantly clear in *Fratelli Tutti*, not least from a personal and global perspective. He thus stands in the long and weighty tradition of Catholic social teaching.
- ▶ Democratic cooperation can lead to endless and fruitless debates when there are conflicts of interest and objectives. Leadership is needed to find constructive and satisfactory solutions. Leadership takes the pressure off because it makes decisions. This does not just apply to the confirmation of democratically arrived-at results. These must be made possible by management: on the one hand, through framework specifications that regulate cooperation, from timetables and break organisation to discussion and conflict behaviour and their rules. Much more fundamentally, leadership sets goals that bring a group together under the same theme and always lead them back to it, despite all the side trips and detours. This requires power and trust (=authority), which come from both the person and the group.

Leaders need self-assurance and self-confidence, expertise and common sense, a friendly approachability, frustration tolerance, and unquestioning respect for all others. However, even an ideal leader is at a loss if the group does not pull together, if obstructionists are too powerful, if general conditions create an irreconcilably bad atmosphere and if individuals are not prepared to make an independent and solidary contribution to the success of the common endeavour. Finally, leadership is usually also institutionally integrated into structures that formally authorise it: through office, social convention, or the formal decision of the group.

As a result, both democracy and autocracy are needed for prosperous coexistence; they cannot be played off against each other. Where democratic elements are missing, those involved lose interest and are not prepared to get involved. “I don’t care” becomes the typical basic attitude. A lethargy in social and political issues characterises autocratic regimes. The only way to counter this is through harsh protest, which is punished with social and dictatorial rigour. Where there is a lack of autocratic elements, on the other hand, everything is talked about, nobody feels called upon to make decisions because they are always criticised and undermined from some quarter. Even Habermas’ idealised ethics of discourse, described somewhat mockingly, only results in the “good thing we talked about it.” Science and culture can only afford this as long as they can act according to the standard of *l’art pour l’art*: Debate for the sake of debate, with a great deal of critical awareness but without any practical consequences.

Let’s take a look at how democracy and autocracy have historically developed culturally in the face of socio-economic conditions.¹

DEMOCRACY AND AUTOCRACY IN SOCIAL ARCHETYPES: SUBSISTENCE AND RULE, TRADE AND MONEY ECONOMY

- ▶ At the beginning of culture, settlers build houses and cultivate the surrounding land as much as they need to live. They join forces with neighbours to settle common issues (hunting, protection against wild animals, bartering). If the habitat becomes too small, groups move away to start anew elsewhere. If there is a conflict with local neighbours, the stronger one takes over.

¹ See Jason Hickel, *Less is more. Why capitalism is destroying the planet and we are happier without growth*, Munich: Oekom 2022.

The basis is subsistence farming: everything that is needed comes from one's own labour, and people do not work more than necessary.

- ▶ If the living space becomes cramped, conflicts increase, and it becomes necessary to organise and specialise. Rulers gather people willing to go to war and thus relieve the burden on the farmers, who can go about their work in peace under their protection. However, they now have to earn more so that the warriors and their families can also make a living.
- ▶ Feudal rule guarantees peace and security for the farmers, builds roads, and regulates trade. This increases the quality of life through specialisation and exchange. At the same time, labour output increases. Monasteries implement Christianity, a regular daily routine, medicine and science, the calendar, and art. They joined forces with rulers, who became patrons, but at the same time expected labour and taxes from their subjects. The monetary economy expands trade and raises the standard of living, but at the same time limits subsistence: people can and must no longer produce everything they need to live.
- ▶ Rulers compete with their neighbours in terms of the strength of their armies and the splendour of their castles and palaces. They promoted international trade and the exchange of art and culture and brought outstanding architects, musicians, and writers to their court. The peasant population had to pay for all this, but was given a share of it by the church: churches as richly decorated palaces of God with art and music, where everyone was invited free of charge. In addition, the culture of almsgiving and the servant system ensured that everyone had enough to live on.

Progressive cultural development up to the Middle Ages thus leads to ever new structures and institutions that regulate coexistence for the common good. At the same time, structures of rule emerge that are experienced as both relieving and burdensome. The church plays a central and state-supporting role in all of this: it legitimises rule by the grace of God, promotes a good and peaceful life for its subjects and ensures a work ethic and sense of responsibility on both sides. "Living in the shadow of the church is good." At the same time, the clergy are always in danger of claiming a god-like social position for themselves due to their ordination authority to act *in persona Christi*. In contrast, religious orders develop spiritual rules of life that are also transferred to the secular clergy. However, their implementation always remains precarious.

WORLD ECONOMY – THE POWER OF MONEY AND EXPLOITATION,
AND: THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FEUDAL RULE – REFORMATION,
ENLIGHTENMENT, SOCIALISM AND THE NATION STATE

- ▶ Through war, missions and trade, more and more territories are integrated into the system of meritocracy. In the colonies, this often happens under duress. People are forcibly deprived of the land on which they practise subsistence farming. The commons, i.e. the general right to use wild land, was gradually restricted and became private property protected by rules and jurisdiction. Christianity supports rule by the grace of God and declares regulations to be divine law. In doing so, it creates orders that are good for people, regulate peaceful coexistence and limit the power of domination. With custom and morality, it establishes rules that are internalised so that external and internal rule go hand in hand and create peace.
- ▶ The struggle against feudal rule and thus against the church, which supported it, characterised the entire modern era in stages. During the Reformation, the bourgeoisie, which had become rich through trade, laid claim to self-determination and influence. The ideas of the Enlightenment, which culminated in the maxims of the French Revolution, emerged under the influence of ancient philosophy: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. However, just like American democratic rights, these only applied to free white men.
- ▶ The wealthy bourgeoisie develops capitalism: money is not only used to exchange goods that you do not produce yourself. Above all, it is used to acquire means of production that can produce goods on a massive scale. The armies of labourers required for this are recruited from the rural population among those who have no land of their own. In the cities, the petty-bourgeois family emerges, in which the men work in the factory or office and the women look after the household and children and care for the elderly. Exploitative labour conditions form the breeding ground for Marxism and the left-wing revolution of the working class. At the same time, a church infrastructure emerged in the Catholic Workers' Youth, the Kolping Society and the new large urban parishes, which transplanted the faith of the rural population into the city as a village parish structure.
- ▶ The idea of the nation state does the rest to end catholic and universal feudalism and replace it with a democratic order in the context of nation

states. It is based on the maxims: equality of all before the law; participation of all eligible voters in legislation; a spectrum of parties covering and representing the various interests; separation of powers between government, legislation and jurisdiction; civil institutions of control, information and citizen participation (media, education, associations and societies); a citizen's right to social security (healthcare, social and pension systems). In young democracies in particular, this system is undermined by corruption and protectionism.

The developments of the modern era lead to the economic and cultural emancipation of civil society from aristocratic and ecclesiastical hierarchies and institutions. An educated, self-confident middle class that had become rich through trade developed democratic participation structures into which the powerless and uneducated working class was integrated through Marxist protest and trade unions. While this initially only applied to wealthy white men, new social groups gradually emancipated themselves and demanded their visibility and their right to co-determination: People of colour, women, the 'disabled' ('people with special needs') and, more recently, queer people in particular. There are also debates about children's and animal rights. One problem is that the formerly inseparable interweaving of power and responsibility in hierarchical/autocratic structures, of rights and duties, is in danger of becoming unbalanced. Helmut Klages² has described this as a 'change in values', a cultural shift from "values of duty and acceptance to values of self-experience and self-development". According to this, rights are anchored in the personal dignity of the individual and cannot be waived. The extent to which someone is prepared to accept responsibility, on the other hand, is rooted in his/her personal ethos and cannot be demanded.

² Helmut Klages / Peter Kmierciak (eds.), *Wertwandel und gesellschaftlicher Wandel*, Frankfurt: Campus² 1981 (1979).

METAMORPHOSES – DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS WORK, BUT ARE NO LONGER FUNCTIONAL (ULRICH BECK); AND: RIGHT-WING POPULISM AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC EXTREMISM

- ▶ In his posthumously published work 'Metamorphosis'³, Ulrich Beck describes how the world itself is increasingly beyond description for science because its hypercomplexity has become neither manageable nor checkable. Applied to our topic, this means that democratic institutions, even if they function, can no longer fulfil their tasks.
- ▶ For citizens, this means in practice (or at least often gives the impression that it does): In a legal dispute, the winner is the one who has the money and the staying power to litigate through all instances, often for decades. The parties cover those interests that the representatives in the parliaments are aware of. As the enormous complexity of societies in legislation requires a high level of specialisation with a sound education, these are mostly older men from the upper middle class. Young and old people, women, migrants and people from the lower middle and lower classes often see little representation. The separation of powers is undermined by the fact that appointments to senior civil servant posts are made politically, which hinders their impartiality. The media, as a democratic supervisory body, traditionally have a left-wing political majority and remain so, even though the right is no longer in power across the board. Access to social benefits is limited due to the massive overburdening of all bureaucratic systems.
- ▶ This calls populists onto the scene. They thrive on tapping into diffuse fears and reinforcing insecurities with conspiracy theories. They suggest that they have a clear view and, unlike the 'elites', know where people's problems lie. They promise to solve all problems and make life easy, care-free and happy for their clientele (again). This is particularly appealing to people who feel unsettled by the current unrelenting crises and at the same time powerless against them; to people who find themselves in the midst of change processes that they do not feel up to; to people who do not want to go along with the changes that society communicates as necessary.
- ▶ Anti-democratic right-wing extremism dreams of the strong man who solves or eliminates all problems and ensures that people can live their

³ Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, Frank Jakubzik, *The Metamorphosis of the World*, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2017.

own lives undisturbed according to their own ideas. It basks in the glamour of powerful men. Left-wing extremism, on the other hand, dreams of the power of the grassroots and the street, which will naturally regulate everything in a prosperous way once all institutions have been removed. It assumes that one only has to dethrone the powerful and expropriate the money of the super-rich to solve all problems. Both camps are unaware of the complexity of today's global economy and are clueless about social dynamics. Their danger is that they can come to power through democratic processes and then gradually override them, for which there are unfortunately historical examples.

As long as there is general prosperity, populists and extremists have little chance. This feeling of prosperity is not directly linked to the possession of goods. It depends on the benchmarks that are used. In functioning hierarchical systems (as they also exist today in democracies in business, politics, administration and in all areas of personal dependency: from medicine to care, from school to work), it is generally assumed that a higher position means more responsibility and is therefore better paid. Populists therefore generate narratives of exposure and conspiracy to 'debunk' this assumption. Under dictatorial conditions of widespread mass poverty, it is sufficient for personal satisfaction if one has a modest livelihood and one's social environment does not have more than oneself. Nationalists undermine this by claiming that one has a natural privilege over people of a different nationality, skin colour, gender or origin on the basis of nationality, race, gender or homeland. Both tendencies are exacerbated to the extent that people are dissatisfied with their lives, for whatever reason, or are overwhelmed by their circumstances. Dissatisfaction can be fuelled by feelings of inferiority and envy. In the face of a succession of global crises with no end in sight, everyone is more or less overwhelmed.

THE CHURCH AND DEMOCRACY; AND THE DEMOCRATIC RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

- ▶ Historically, the Catholic Church is closely tied to the monarchical form of government through the metaphor of the kingdom of God and the kingship of Jesus Christ. In the doctrine of the two kingdoms, it has implemented the separation of church and state ('Render unto Caesar the things that

are Caesar's...') on the one hand, and emphasised the mutual obligation of the secular and the ecclesiastical on the other. Internally, it is a constitutional monarchy without a strict separation of powers, although this only includes the clergy. This has caused increasing resentment among the people of the Church, which has existed in Germany since the Würzburg Synod (for the implementation of the Council 10 years later) and has been revitalised in the Synodal Way. It is fuelled by the abuse scandal and is latent due to the increasing dissatisfaction of those who support the church movement. This is particularly the case where there are problems with the personality or competence of the priests.

- ▶ With regard to the German State, the Church supports all democratic structures, the party system and all institutions of civil society and expects the faithful to play a responsible role in them. At the same time, with Caritas, it maintains an institution that essentially supports the welfare state. With various educational organisations at all levels and for all target groups, it promotes responsible people who are committed to the personal dignity of every human being. At the same time, it has recently been successfully criticised when it only recognises the classic personal statuses in its own personnel management. (Women and men in marriage or consecrated life)
- ▶ Since the Council, the Church no longer sees itself as an institution sent by God to administer the sacraments and ensure the salvation of its members. It sees itself as a “sign and instrument of the most intimate union [of God with all humanity]” (LG 1) And it recognises itself as the people of God, closely connected with all the joys and crises of humanity. (GS 1) It is therefore important to constantly see the ‘signs of the times’ anew and to be aware of them under the Gospel. Touched by this, we are called upon to turn round again and again and to take others with us. It is in this evangelisation that the mission of the Church becomes concrete.⁴
- ▶ The current signs of the times are determined by the major eco-social crises triggered and determined by the capitalist doctrine of permanent economic growth and the competition between political systems: Climate change and species extinction, proxy wars and mass migration, political popularisms and extremisms; plus digitalisation and hyper-bureaucracy,

⁴ Maria Widl, *Das Volk Gottes auf dem Weg durch die Postmoderne. A short pastoral theology*, Ostfildern: Grünewald 2018.

and in the ideological sphere, advancing secularisation and new spiritual search movements.

- ▶ Throughout his preaching, Pope Francis urges that the responsibility of the people of God must turn to these signs of the times; not as a *nice to have*, but as an obligation, the omission of which is a sin. He does this on behalf of those poor people who suffer most from the effects, even though they benefit least from the causes. The mission of the people of God lies in these signs of the times. It is the task of proclamation to read the Gospel into them comprehensively. And it is the duty of the laity to work with commitment and effectiveness in their everyday actions to solve the problems and alleviate their consequences. This question determines the relevance of the Church in modern cultures and among young people.

In all matters concerning the gathering and mission of the people of God, theology and church doctrine support the social and political involvement of the laity in culture and the state. In this they emphasise the ‘worldly character’ of the laity, which repeatedly meets with resistance among them, as it is associated with the idea that the decision-making authority within the church therefore lies solely with the clergy. On the other hand, it would be fatal if lay people spent all their time and energy working on the structures of the church and saw their Christian mission as being primarily fulfilled there. Such an attitude would be understandable due to the increasing secularity communicated by the mass media, which corresponds to a certain privacy of faith within the framework of the parishes.⁵ However, this is highly problematic for the Christian spirit of culture and for the relevance of the church within it.

THE INDISPENSABLE STRENGTHS OF DEMOCRACY IN THE CRISIS, AND: HOPEFUL APPROACHES IN THE YOUNG GENERATION

- ▶ Politicians and democratic institutions are currently doing everything in their power to guide our cultures through the crises. They are clearly overstretched in this respect, which can be attributed to the over-complexity of

⁵ Maria Widl, How private is being a Christian? On Privatisation in Religion and the Church, in: Isidor Baumgartner / Christian Friesl / András Máté-Tóth (eds.), *Keeping Heaven Open. A Plea for Church Development in Europe*, Innsbruck: Tyrolia 1999, 39-49.

man-made systems. What science advises is often controversial. But even where there is substantial agreement, little can be done politically because the population does not sufficiently support it. It is up to all civil forces, including NGOs and above all the churches, to play a responsible role in tackling the problem⁶, instead of burdening the next generation with the entire misery (including the debts incurred now to bring peace).

- ▶ Autocracies are currently on the rise: politically and economically. They contribute nothing to the solution, but rather exacerbate the problems. In the face of critical enquiry, they conceal the truth, do not shy away from outright lies and disinformation and do everything they can to secure their own hold on power. People are deceived, exploited and mercilessly sacrificed to the system. This analysis explicitly applies not only to autocratic or dictatorial systems. It also explicitly applies to the global economy, which acts in a similar way, and which has long been beyond the control of international politics, which is ultimately characterised by nation states. It is cherishing more and more parts of the Almende for its own purposes and destroying more and more habitats through war, the extraction of raw materials and littering.
- ▶ Young people are increasingly rejecting the exploitative logic of the world of work with its ever-increasing demands for performance and increasing compression of time. They want to maintain a *work-life balance* and still have time for their families and themselves. During the pandemic, many have learnt to do some things themselves again, such as cooking, and are thus regaining some of their ability to subsist. For many educated young city dwellers, the car is no longer a status symbol and is absolutely dispensable. They are calling for more space for bicycles and the promotion of public transport, which would take the alms of air, peace and quiet and public living space out of the hands of car drivers. They go on pilgrimages to find themselves and their at least implicit relationship with God within the framework of church traditions, but without being appropriated for them. They are politically active in the context of diverse NGOs and thus claim a democratic participation that they do not receive within the political parties.

⁶ See Uwe Schneidewind, *The Great Transformation. An Introduction to the Art of Social Change*, Frankfurt: Fischer³ 2019 (2018).

- ▶ The future relevance of the church depends on standing alongside these young people without wanting to appropriate them for itself. We need to learn from their view of the warning signs of culture and enrich it with the competences that they – because they are young – cannot yet have. Then we need to recognise ourselves as beneficiaries of a cultural development that demands far more than the world can give us. We have to step back and turn back. And it is only when we do this in an obvious and insightful way that young people will trust our intentions and be happy when we support them with our opportunities. Anything else is transparent ingratiation that will quickly be exposed.

Democracies are by no means the best form of government. Monarchies, especially constitutional ones, can also be. In both forms of government, at least insofar as they are committed to modernity and human dignity, democratic and autocratic elements come together in a way that is at least potentially successful. The opposite is true of autocracies and dictatorships of all kinds, which base their power on lies, deceit, contempt for humanity, exploitation and violence. Unfortunately, all of these characteristics also apply to large parts of the globalised and industrialised economy, to which democracies owe their prosperity and attractiveness, in addition to nation-state dictatorships. Critical journalism, which is only possible in democracies, is constantly uncovering new aspects and details of the misery. Post-growth concepts take a critical look at the overall global economic system and its eco-social consequences and point out alternatives. Pope Francis classifies the problems in an astute and factually well-supported Christian way, which is also well received outside the Church and internationally; think of the response to *Laudato Si'* (LS) and *Fratelli Tutti*. The most recent letter on the occasion of COP28 in Dubai, *Laudate Deum*, sees the central evil in the 'technocratic paradigm', which only focusses on human feasibility and neglects or negates the perspective of the living, which stems from God's creation.

However, I consider it highly perfidious and unfair to place the responsibility for a new economic and lifestyle style on the younger generation, who are aware of the crises and necessary transformations. It is unacceptable that the generations of prosperity in the second half of the 20th century and to this day should close their eyes to the fact that they owe this prosperity not to their creativity, but to the fact that they are still successfully closing their eyes to

the eco-social exploitation mechanisms that make it possible. And who are happy to finance 'business as usual' with debts that will also have to be paid by future generations. It is shameful that the church communities are by no means among the cultural pioneers in these questions of eco-social justice for the present and for future generations.

■ DEMOCRACY IN THE WORKING METHODS OF THE SEMINAR – AND AS A PEDAGOGY OF DEMOCRATIC BEHAVIOUR IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING THE CHURCH

Here are some basic considerations on what can promote democracy in our behaviour. They were initially intended as ways of understanding how the seminar works. In addition, much of this may also be valid for democracy in a socio-political sense.

TRUST

▸ Self-confidence: As a human being, I am created in the image of God, and therefore have my own dignity. This means that I have the right to my own opinion, even if it will never be perfect, nor morally, nor factually. I can and may always learn and also make mistakes.

▸ Trust in others: What applies to me applies to everyone else. We treat each other with respect and consideration. Everyone always wants the best; and we support each other in maximising the circle of those we have in mind with regard to the best.

▸ Criticism: Where people trust each other, they can and should also think critically and criticise. This is always done for the sake of the matter and the truth. The tone is friendly, and never leads to personal attacks. We help each other not to express and perceive factual criticism as personal criticism.

▸ This basic trust is humanly anchored in the basic trust of the baby and is based on the Christian view of man and trust in God. Cultivating and strengthening this trust again and again is the foremost task and greatest benefit of democratic processes.

MANAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

▸ **Leadership:** This is the autocratic level of cooperation. In democratic contexts, it is based on mutual trust and not on violent power. It uses power that it obtains from personal self-confidence and the trusting encouragement of the group. This authority is used to create a pleasant atmosphere in the group and to make the group's interaction productive.

▸ **Cooperation:** This is the democratic level of cooperation and is based on trust and commitment. This includes the willingness to contribute what is within one's own competence and capabilities. This includes the willingness to step forward when the management invites you to do so or when the group situation requires it; and also the willingness to step back and fit in the service of the cause and the group. In any case, the process is supported in an alert and committed manner; everyone shares responsibility, and contributes to its success.

▸ **Those affected must be involved:** Anyone who is affected by the community and the cause has the right and the duty to participate appropriately. This implies taking on different roles in different contexts and actively fulfilling them. The leadership role also changes frequently. It is the responsibility of the respective management to invite, encourage and also protect the acceptance of different roles. It is the responsibility of all those involved to offer to take on roles, depending on their own capabilities and expertise. Passivity and complacency are just as counterproductive as caution and fear, or intrusive interference at all times. However, if something is important and urgent for you, then please interrupt, even if it is not convenient. 'Interruptions have priority.'⁷

TRANSPARENCY AND INFORMATION

▸ **Transparency:** Any collaboration based on trust also has a factual level. This must be communicated so comprehensively that everyone can participate appropriately without being over- or under-challenged. This implies that the management must think carefully about what should be communicated to the participants, so that they are informed and can feel safe and free. At the same time, it is the central service of the leader to keep the reins in their hands and

⁷ Cf. the communication rules of Ruth Kohn's Theme-Centred Interaction (TCI).

not to hand them over to the group indiscriminately out of convenience. Participants have the right to request further information at any time and to be informed truthfully and comprehensively about everything that does not have to remain in the 'forum internum' for the protection of individuals.

▸ Information: Each topic has elements that the individual participants already know and bring with them, and others that are provided in the course of the joint work. In addition, all participants are required to acquire further information to the extent of their own abilities and to cultivate further thoughts. This results in a wealth of expertise, understanding and insight that constitutes the unrivalled objective strength of democratic processes.

▸ Options for action: Feeling well informed and integrated into a community that shares information, views and insights is the best basis for taking appropriate action. However, this is where the *mind-behaviour gap comes into play*: we often don't do what we know and should, even though we basically want to. The main reasons for this are habits, comfort and fear of failure. Our habits secure and make life easier; changing them requires an extra dose of motivation, and often also a project as part of a break from everyday life. Our comfort could be interpreted in Christian terms as a longing for paradise: We would actually like nothing more than for everything to run smoothly and happily, without effort. Unfortunately, apart from the happy moments of lightness given to us, on earth this is usually the temptation of a land of milk and honey, which always happens at the expense of others, so in the Christian sense it is exploitation and therefore sin. Fear of failure is part of being human; anyone who didn't have it would be overly arrogant and trapped in a delusion of divinity. At the same time, fear of failure is also an expression of a lack of trust in oneself and one's own abilities – which also represents protection – and in the group and God who support us.

■ CURRENT CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRACY AND THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH'S RESPONSIBILITY IN THEM

What does all this mean for the current issues, exemplified in Germany by explosive areas in which nationalism, populism and extremism are becoming particularly visible as challenges to us Christians?

RIGHT-WING POPULISM: THE AFD

The *Alternative for Germany (AfD)*, a right-wing populist party, is being monitored by the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, because it has shown itself to be anti-democratic in many respects. It also has a neo-Nazi scene, that is working on a violent overthrow. It has a broad voter base beyond ideologues and protest voters, and currently appears to be the second strongest party behind the CDU/CSU according to the German trend. It is particularly well represented in the states of the former GDR, as well as in middle-class Catholic circles. Families and parishes are divided over them. How should we deal with them?

The German Bishops' Conference has published an excellent factual guide.⁸ In it, the concept of populism is first differentiated from the theology of the people of God. It then looks at those subject areas that are particularly controversial: Migration, Islam, gender and homeland. Practical pastoral suggestions are given: strengthen those involved, facilitate dialogue, discern spirits, learn to deal with negative emotions. The book concludes with a colourful bouquet of successful church-institutional practical examples.

BEING ON THE RIGHT SIDE

The strength and difficulty of all disputes in the areas mentioned above seems to me to be that published opinion clearly knows where to stand: namely against the right. On the part of the Church, people are willing to show a certain amount of understanding, for the personal hardships of those who sympathise with the AfD. They are aware of the ideologically hardened who should not be given a platform and from whom they strictly distance themselves. And they are courting those concerned people who are not coping so well with the circumstances. The maxim is equal dignity and the same right to self-development under happy living conditions for all people, including migrants, people of other faiths, non-heterosexuals and emancipated women.

▮ I would never want to question the basic maxim, neither personally nor by theological means. But as is so often the case, the devil seems to me to be in the detail:

⁸ Dem Populismus widerstehen. Arbeitshilfe zum kirchlichen Umgang mit rechtspopulistischen Tendenzen. (AH 305), Bonn 2019. Not available in English.

▸ A clear demarcation against inhuman ideologies: of course. But can I at the same time ostracise, marginalise and treat like lepers those people who represent them? Or even just come too close to them? Have they thereby forfeited their right to human dignity? Does this only apply to those we see on our side?

▸ Flight and migration: As Christians, we are, of course obliged to help all people in need. The major migration movements, driven by war, persecution, ecological and humanitarian disasters or simply a lack of prospects, have long since ceased to affect individual or small groups. They are movements on the scale of mass migrations. These are likely to increase rather than decrease in the foreseeable future. The vast majority end up in their own neighbourhoods, or in countries that are themselves affected by great poverty. Only comparatively few make it to the rich Western world. Every aid organisation is aware of the fact that it is the little people who donate the most because they know what poverty means and have the impression that they are comparatively well off. The rich, on the other hand, seem so helpless without their wealth that they cling to it mercilessly. We will not only have to learn to give away a little of our abundance, but to really share, whereas we currently live from exploitation. Do Christians have the courage to discuss this issue in this way? Are we prepared to share our lives fully with those who are arriving here in droves and who, far away from the neighbourhoods and living environments of the affluent, are particularly demanding of those who are already overly challenged in our culture?

▸ Islam: Of course, we practice cultivated dialogue with modern cultured representatives of Islam. That is a good thing. But at the same time, Islamist riots and Islamist terror cannot be dismissed out of hand. For most Muslims, Islam does not describe their religious beliefs, but their cultural identity. And this is closely interwoven with the socialisation they have received. Those who learn from an early age in a country at civil war that men are born to fight and solve their problems with violence; those who know from an early age as girls that they are always subordinate to men and are defencelessly exposed to their love and violence; those who have acquired their education not at school but at the rubbish dump, where children sift through our affluent rubbish for metals that they can sell to contribute to the meagre survival of the family; who ultimately arrives here happily as an 'unaccompanied minor', i.e. as a young man, after traumatising weeks of travel and has nothing to do for months among his peers in collective accommodation, the only cultural security is the mobile phone contact with his family of origin in his

home country, who tell him not to let himself be misled by the temptations of the West... The easiest and best way to integrate is for academics, and their children to start studying here. They can fit in well with our bourgeoisie. The others end up in the low-wage sector at best and are often shamefully exploited there. Does that help them identify with our culture?

- Homosexuality and queerness: According to current church law, everyone has the right to access the sacraments, regardless of sexual orientation. For all, sexuality may only be practised within marriage. Since *Humanae vitae*, there has been a critical debate on this within the Church and the issue of the Church's sexual morality has long been a theoretical bone of contention, but in practice hardly anyone is guided by it, even among convinced believers. On the other hand, the couple relationship is constitutive for our culture: There are hardly any leisure activities that can be attended without a partner, unless in a group. Whether it's a holiday, a visit to a restaurant, a cultural event or sport, anyone who arrives without a social environment feels lost. This social compulsion to be in a couple is in tension with the high number of singles in our culture. Added to this is the great longing of all age groups and the declared life goal of young people to live in a happy family. So people look for someone with whom they can currently live well, and they stay together as long as it is good. If the relationship becomes troublesome due to emotional tensions or simply because one of them changes jobs and you therefore live too far apart, you change partners. Lifelong partnerships, on the other hand, seem like a prison that can only be endured in ideal circumstances. – The new trend towards queerness, especially among very young people, seems to me to be a way of self-discovery, that is culturally in vogue at the moment. If I can categorise myself in the 36 forms of sexual orientation, I know, and can say who I am. The church's pastoral care of vocations, on the other hand, is not a visible cultural alternative. How to deal with this area of tension, which affects everyone and is also extremely precarious for the church?
- Emancipation of women: It is an inescapable achievement of modern cultures that women have a right to their own path in life, which must not be determined by the family of origin or by a partner – at least in theory. Having a profession of their own choosing, earning their own money that they can dispose of, leaving the house every day well dressed and styled, being seen in public – all this is not only possible for most women, it is normal.

In terms of education, girls are now, far ahead of boys. Those who have a good education also want to fulfil their potential and perhaps even make a career out of it. However, this requires a total commitment that is hardly compatible with family and children. Despite all the childcare options outside the home, if a child falls ill, it is ultimately the mother who stays at home. When it comes to housework, men, largely make themselves scarce. When it comes to separation, it is largely the women who are the single parents with a triple burden, because they need a wage income to make ends meet. Starting a family therefore remains a huge life risk for women, which does not affect men to the same extent by far. For this reason, many couples prefer to stick to the model of the family as a couple with a dog. We are currently experiencing a massive labour shortage as a result of the low birth rate. And the church also continues to pass on its tradition, almost exclusively through children brought up in the faith. – Finally, the social room for manoeuvre that women have achieved despite everything still lies ahead of men. They are under massive social pressure of expectation and convention, which women have left behind. Men are not allowed to wear women's clothes; they have to be successful in order not to look like losers; they have to fulfil multiple role expectations ... Even the equality debates in the church seem to fall far short in the face of all this.

Democracies thrive on the fact that all people, regardless of their perspective on a topic or on life as a whole, are allowed to be seen, and are taken seriously and favourably. However, this in no way means arbitrariness. It means the need to reflect on one's own point of view as well as possible, to recognise the perspectives of others as such, but at the same time to stand up for one's own perspective. Today's world requires us to be tolerant of plurality and competent in heterogeneity. This means being able to deal with the fact that points of view can be so irreconcilable that there is no compromise. In view of this, striving for justice is the only possible option. From a Christian perspective, however, this is not merely a balancing of interests, between those involved in a discourse. It is necessary to give equal consideration to the right to life of other people in the country, in the world, and in future generations – especially the poor and exploited. This will only be possible if we recognise and promote the right to life of all creation in all its species and manifestations, instead of trampling it underfoot, and mercilessly subjecting it to our own calculations. All this will only

be possible in the long term if all people of good will, explicitly or implicitly, recognise and share the morality of the threefold Christian love. The churches are called upon to abandon their focus on the collection paradigm and once again shape their mission with courage, hope and trust in God in the midst of cultures. In this way, they contribute to promoting humanity, and strengthening democracies. Ultimately – to put it very classically – all this for the glory of God.

**Ludzkie współistnienie w kontekście struktur społeczno-ekonomicznych
- refleksja teologiczno-praktyczna**

Abstrakt

Tekst stanowi refleksję teologiczną nad relacją między demokracją, autokracją a współczesnymi wyzwaniami społecznymi i kulturowymi. Chrześcijanie powinni angażować się w przewyżnianie globalnych kryzysów, m.in. ekologicznych i społecznych, aby promować sprawiedliwość i godność ludzką. Misja Kościoła, oparta na chrześcijańskiej miłości i sprawiedliwości, jest kluczowa dla wzmacniania demokracji i reagowania na kryzysy współczesności.