



# Why More “Exodus” Is Needed in Church and Pastoral Care. Reflections on an Attitude-Forming Paradigm Shift

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**Abstract:** The relationship between secularity and religion/religiosity is a main topic of practical theology and ecclesiastical pastoral care. However, several research papers on religious studies show that the thesis that with disappearing institutionalized religiosity, plural and differentiated forms of religiosity increase is not convincing. In fact, the development shows that where people do not experience religion, it becomes irrelevant to them. This fact is an urgent question for the Church: With and from which basic attitude can and will she be able to encounter religious and secular people in such ways that the Christian gospel of human emancipation and redemption can become a reality in their lives? The Church can realize such a fundamental attitude in reference to the biblical Exodus and by generating a pastoral exodus.

**Keywords:** secularity, religiosity, pastoral care, Exodus

## 1. Cultural and Sociological Considerations: Revolutionary Compression of the Present

From a global or continental perspective, Paul Zulehner aptly characterizes our current world as “floundering” to an extreme degree (Zulehner 2023). We observe the various trouble spots of war and crisis of our time, the presence of racism and anti-Semitism, whether latent or open, as well as the recent emergence of fundamentalism and chauvinism, even in democratic societies. We note that pandemics such as COVID-19 are pushing the boundaries of scientific and technological knowledge that were previously believed to be solid. We see the constant fluctuation of our economic and work systems and, on occasion, the highly polarized discourse surrounding the changes in existing social, family, and gender patterns and gender roles; all of these scenarios are compressed into the fundamental sense of a floundering world. Zygmunt Bauman was right when writing about how this is transferred to the prevailing spirit among individuals: “We live under the conditions of *permanent revolution*. Revolution has become the *normal state of today’s society*” (Bauman 2003, 6).

Permanent revolution does indeed convey the prevailing spirit of our social and individual life contexts as the concise and formative spirit of our experience of the present time in a floundering world, namely in our resistance to the constant incomprehensibility, uncontrollability, unpredictability, and incalculability that

surround us “glocally” (Seibert 2017).<sup>1</sup> This resistance to the constant unmanageability of all the uncertainties that surround us is constantly fed by all the “risky freedoms” (Beck 2020a; 2020b) that our analog and digitally networked world offers us in its “glocal” contexts, its fluid constellations and its persistent ambivalence and ambiguity (Bauer 2018).

In the revolutionary nature of this prevailing spirit, the present is therefore not only compressed into the “now” of “done or not” or the “now” of “hit or miss” but also into the permanent obligation to justify the reference points for our thoughts and actions. We must locate these reference points and take responsibility for them in view of the uncertainties and ambivalence regarding our individual and sociogenetic identity processes and personality development.

We are not born with the ability to productively manage the challenges of this revolutionary compression of the present. Instead, we must repeatedly work through it, resisting the seductive, ideological power of the voices and forces, which – again, in Zygmunt Bauman’s words – feed their contexts of justification from a “lost/stolen/orphaned, and in any case, undead past” (Bauman 2018, 13). These voices and forces promise people relief with corresponding narratives and visions in the spirit of their undead “retrotopias” by eloquently guaranteeing them risk-free certainties and unambiguity that put an end to permanent uncertainties, ambivalence, and ambiguity; voices and forces that ultimately bring about nothing other than life-historical dead ends and the disgrace of civilization.

In view of our “floundering world” and the permanent presence of a “revolutionary compression of the present,” the question arises all the more acutely as to what significance religion and the Church (still) have or assume for people. This question is becoming all the more acute as the Church, in the force field of the gospel, wishes to provide people with guidance and the Christian faith as a compass for their lives, increasingly situated in differentiating social contexts and secular realities. Moving on from these cultural and sociological remarks, we now consider striking religious and scientific reflections on modernity, religion, and the Church.

## **2. Reflections on Religious Science: From “believing without belonging” to “neither believing nor belonging”**

In the context of her book *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Davie 1994) Grace Davie’s phrase “believing without belonging” (Davie 1997) became a catchphrase for the connection between religion and secularization in late modernity. Davie’s research is

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<sup>1</sup> The neologism glocalization is formed from globalization and localization and aims to summarize the inner connection and the inseparable interrelationship between the two.

regarded as an important reference point and source of inspiration for the individualization thesis, according to which people remain religious to a certain extent, even without belonging to a religious/church community.<sup>2</sup> The predominance of this thesis has been well accepted not only in the UK but throughout Europe. It is particularly attractive to the Church and theological approaches that are critical of the strict view that modernity and religion are incompatible and that religion is coming to an end as a result of secularization processes. Essentially, Davie’s individualization thesis should be understood from the position it takes opposite to the secularization thesis and its distinction from what is known as market theory. The latter is primarily due to the religious studies focus on North American contexts, with Peter L. Berger as its most prominent representative (Pollack 2021, 39–61; Pollack and Müller 2022, 381–95).

According to Detlef Pollack and Gergely Rosta (2022, in particular 67–75), the secularization theory must be viewed and applied in a more differentiated way today. This is because secularization processes cannot be limited to only one scenario: The progressive stringency of a negative juxtaposition of modern society and religion. As Pollack and Rosta repeatedly point out, this is due to the possibility of different scenarios in the relationship between the social differentiation of modernity and religion. Regardless of this differentiated approach, however, it should be noted that the functional differentiation processes of (late) modern societies continue to lead to autonomous functional systems within our modern society that no longer require the legitimization or integration potential of religion or churches. This applies to civil society and social as well as individual contexts.

A striking counter-model to this form of secularization theory is the so-called market theory. It argues that the end of the monopoly position of religion or the Church due to social differentiation processes initially leads to a market situation and competition between religious interpretations and interpretative sovereignty. The resulting plurality of religious offerings can, but does not have to, lead to the end of religion. On the contrary, in view of the modern processes of differentiation and individualization, it is assumed that religiosity is growing. In this sense, the late Peter L. Berger states that “an individual can be *both* religious *and* secular” (Berger 2013, 3). For Berger, secular and religious (non-secular) discourses are therefore not mutually exclusive; neither one cancels the other out, nor is one subject to the other in the game of the (argumentative) power of the strongest. Instead, as Berger states: “A standard secular discourse coexists with a plurality of religious discourses, both in society and in consciousness” (Berger 2013, 5). Pollack, in particular, doubts that

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<sup>2</sup> In her 2015 study *A Persistent Paradox* (Davie 2015), which builds on the 1994 research, Davies sees her thesis confirmed once again, even if – except in urban cultures, due to migration and plural pastoral offerings – secularization is increasing rapidly.

Berger's statement can be considered a refutation of the secularization theory. We return to this subject below.

In European contexts, the individualization thesis associated with Grace Davie, in particular, has gained dominance. It stands for the approach that modernization processes do not lead to a decline in the social relevance of religion but rather to a change in its former social forms (such as religious communities and churches). The distinction between religion and Church(es) is crucial for the theory of individualization. It is argued that the consequences of secularization affect the decline of traditional forms of established churches and religious institutions but not of individual religiosity. Instead, the deinstitutionalization and loss of importance of churches and religious institutions due to secularization is accompanied by increased individual religiosity. This also goes hand in hand with the detachment of individuals from institutional guidelines, particularly with regard to their religious ideas and behavior. In individualization theory, the loss of significance of religion does not apply to the individual forms of religiosity but rather to its institutionalized forms; it can posit the characteristics of post-secular faith realities in "believing without belonging."<sup>3</sup>

Among the various approaches to addressing modernization, secularization, and religion, Detlef Pollack's secularization theory is particularly applicable to ecclesiastical and theological questions about secularization and religion, provided that they consider the internal interrelationship between the individual and communal character of believing and the significance of contingency for the related theological and ecclesiastical questions. Pollack's studies of religion do not endeavor to make a normative assessment of religious change. They are also critical of stringent statements about market theory and individualization theory. Instead, Pollack's research advocates a non-deterministic or goal-oriented understanding of modernization and secularization, according to which modernization inevitably leads to the end of religion(s). This non-deterministic approach thus makes it possible to keep a constant focus on the spatiotemporal scope and periodization of modernization and secularization processes, as well as on the contingent character of the spatiotemporal shaping of the world and life – with a fundamental openness to empirical correction (Pollack and Rosta 2022, 59–69, 541–42).

According to Pollack's approach, the stringency of individualization theory, according to which the deinstitutionalization of religion leads to an increase in individual religiosity, cannot be made absolute (Pollack and Rosta 2022, 545–46). Instead, a "neither believing nor belonging" (Voas and Crockett 2005) can be observed, according to which the increase in individually determined and non-church religiosity does not lead to compensation for the loss of institutionalized religiosity. Jörg Stolz's "cohort secularization" (Stolz et al. 2022) concept shows that secularization grows as

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<sup>3</sup> In particular, various approaches to a "subjective theology" find a key hermeneutical concept in the basic approach of individualization theory.

each new generation (cohort) is less religious. Individual religiosity is, therefore, only one component and not the rule of prevailing secularization. This thesis is supported by Pollack’s latest publications on global contexts (Pollack and Rosta 2022, 83–502; Stolz et al. 2022, 7–32) and Stolz’s publications on Swiss conditions.

### 3. First Challenges

Cultural and religious sociological insights until now have shown that the question of the significance of religion or the Church for people in secular contexts inevitably leads to the question of whether they are confronted with forms of religious or church practice, and if so, which ones. For the Church, this repeatedly places the relationship between orthodoxy and orthopraxis at the center of self-efficacious self-criticism. It raises the question of the basic attitude deriving from which the Church may become a space for people’s experience or for what happens to them that enables the relevance of faith to become an event option within themselves and among others. Basic attitudes of lived religiosity sensitive to plurality and difference can be generated from this position – both individually and collectively.

For this reason, the need for differentiation in the Church’s perception and handling of religiosity and holistic<sup>4</sup> spirituality becomes apparent. Thus, not all holistic spirituality should be characterized as religious linearly and stringently because there are also holistic forms of spirituality without religious reference (Loiero 2021b, 119–43). The source of the distinction lies in the monotheistic understanding of *re-ligare*, i.e., binding oneself back to the revealing God. Thus, “*re-ligare*” can also occur on a structural level in spiritual acts, namely in the self-effective binding back (in the sense of a holistic anchoring) to a transcendent anchor point in one’s own life or to immanent places of experience such as nature, friends, family, etc. The difference between holistic spirituality without religiosity and religiosity with holistic spirituality lies in going beyond this structural level. To this effect, all religiously generated holistic spirituality is always preceded by its enabling moment, namely the offer of the experience of a self-revealing God as the anchor point of a basic spiritual attitude as a religious one.

In this Christian proprium of holistic spirituality as an enabled attitude of lived religiosity lies the real challenge for the Churches regarding whether and how they can give God a voice in secular contexts: As a God who does not want to be experienced as the God of the hereafter but rather of human experience<sup>5</sup> – not as a God

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<sup>4</sup> Holistic here refers to the inner interrelatedness and self-effective reciprocity of thinking and doing or doing and thinking.

<sup>5</sup> For the experiential dimension of the Christian proprium cf. Salvatore Loiero (2010).

who is absorbed by these experiences but rather as the “familiar unfamiliar” who repeatedly becomes the harshest critic of elitist proclamations of God that disempower or marginalize people.

Read in this way, the challenge of dealing with the question of the significance of religion or the Church in people’s lives in secular contexts lies in the question of the attitude from which and toward which people are able to experience God through the Church as the “familiar unfamiliar.” In relation to this attitude, I ascribe a key pastoral role to the theologoumenon of Exodus – both in terms of the attitude of individual religiosity and that of communal religiosity.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Exodus Existence – The Attitude of Believing Existence

“Nomadism” – in the sense of a “basic attitude of nomadism” – has probably become a compatible metaphor for late modern movements related to seeking because it is a type of identity generation and personality development that not only promises to survive *in* and *between* the uncertainties *and* certainties of revolutionary compression in the present but *also to live in a meaningful way*. Nomadism can and wishes to show that the ability to change can be productively combined with control and routine. This is because – metaphorically speaking – for nomadism, the certainties of the oases *and* the uncertainties of the desert, as the space between the oases (Bauman 2003, 39), inevitably belong together, i.e., both define and form the *one* “living space.” For nomadism, the focus of meaning generation is not solely on the oases, i.e., the certainties, but also includes the desert, i.e., the uncertainties. Accordingly, it is able to promote identity generation and personality development that aims to enable a productive approach to ambivalence and ambiguities – not in the sense of a mere risk-taking adventure, but in the sense of everyday coping that ranges from being risk-conscious to being risky. Read in this way, “nomadism” refers to a question of the attitude of believing existence, as compressed into the concept of “Exodus existence.”

Jürgen Manemann has updated the concept of Exodus existence (Manemann 2021), according to which: “exile existence does not end with entering the promised land. The memory of the experience of the Exodus is, on the one hand, a foundation in a fathomless time, and on the other hand, that which repeatedly pulls the ground from under our feet and leads us into exile” (Manemann 2014, 352).

Inspired by the American philosopher Michael Walzer’s reading of the Exodus (Walzer 1988, 25), in and through the memory of the Exodus, “being there becomes being an Exodus” (Manemann 2021, 135), human existence is revealed as an Exodus existence. In the search for an attitude-forming generation of identity and personality

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<sup>6</sup> For the significance of the Exodus, see also Konrad Schmid (2023).

development, this does not particularly rely on “one-sided and final transformations” (Walzer 1988, 25). Instead, human existence exposes itself to the real possibilities of an Exodus existence, which understands both itself and the signs that make it possible as contingent and is experienced as free for the necessary interplay of movement and stability, of freedom and certainty, of routine and change and of the familiar and the unfamiliar (Bauman 2003, 39).

The meaning-generative and critical-productive thrusts of an Exodus existence lie in that for which the Canaan of the Bible has become a lasting symbol in the Exodus narrative: Namely for the right of humans, confirmed and guaranteed by God, to such life and faith options that they must never lose their basic attitude and empowerment to experience liberating release by subversively or openly degenerating into life and faith-historical Egypt (to remain in the biblical metaphors of the Exodus narrative).

To speak of an Exodus existence, therefore, means to speak of a faith-generating attitude that sees itself as a *contrasting project* to everything that Egypt stands for in the Exodus narrative:

- the conscious deformation of human self-esteem into the bondage of “learned helplessness” (Loiero 2014);
- the will-breaking subordination and immunizing submission to the normative power of the “might of the strongest”;
- the reality-resistant transfiguration and spiritual underpinning of unfreeing certainties of action and orientation, driven by the fear of losing bourgeois security mechanisms.

At the same time, an Exodus existence refers to a basic attitude of faith that sees itself as a *search project* for everything that Canaan stands for in the Exodus narrative:

- the stubbornness of a love of freedom and a thirst for freedom as an attitude-forming basis for life and faith;
- the stubbornness of theological self-esteem that promises all the assurances and the right to community-promoting self-development, free from incapacitating external control and outside expectations;
- for the “revolutionary conscience” (Walzer 1988, 125) of a hope that, in the face of cynicism and fatalism and of resignation and indifference, keeps alive the attitude-forming paradigm of an Exodus existence – in the decisions and deeds of a freedom that knows itself to be grounded in its invincibility beyond the grave.

It is this non-manipulable and non-corruptible paradigm of freedom that repeatedly subjects the basic attitude of an Exodus existence to self-criticism and criticism by others; it is a criticism that is not fueled by a messianic otherworld that is resistant to reality or even unfit for reality, but rather by the non-redemption of human liberation and freedom that retains the sensitivity to “suffer in the suffering of others and

to respect the prophecy of others' suffering" (Metz 1992, 80), as Johann Baptist Metz repeatedly reminds us.

It should be noted at this point that the terms used so far, including freedom/liberation/setting free, are to be understood theologically with Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx, i.e., in the quality of redemption and salvation. Therefore, all human endeavor toward emancipation in the sense of the endeavor for liberation must always be taken very seriously, albeit with the critical reservation that theological freedom or the theological potential for liberation is not absorbed by human emancipation but always transcends it or allows itself to be transcended into new freedoms.

The question of the attitude of an Exodus existence involves daring to take courageous steps, both individually and institutionally, toward liberation or the establishment of freedom with an Exodus quality. This has the aim of enabling a "standpoint of redemption" (Adorno 1997, 333–34), which does not arise in the sense of a world-distant or power-political messianism but in the sense of indomitable hope and active realization of the liberating reliability of the Exodus God. This God, or "Deus Humanissimus" (Schillebeeckx 1975, 594) – as Edward Schillebeeckx aptly describes the nature of God – allows the individual or institutional thwarting of the liberation of people in the potential of their *mutually liberating* humanity to be uncovered and to stand up against it.

The above leads us to turn to the attitude-forming significance of the Exodus for a basic pastoral attitude of the church in secular contexts, as will be elaborated below.

## 5. Exodus Pastoral Care – The Question of Pastoral Attitudes

We – or many of us – still believe in what the Exodus first taught us about the meaning and possibility of politics and its proper form ... first, that wherever you live is probably Egypt; second, that there is a better place, a more delightful world, a Promised Land; and third, that the way to this land is through the desert. We can only get there from here if we unite and march (Walzer 1988, 157).

The term "Exodus pastoral care" can be formed from Michael Walzer's summary of his reflections on an Exodus policy. It represents a fundamental pastoral attitude that follows the criteria of a consistently liberating interpretation of the Exodus: The indomitable resisting and rising against unfreedoms, the unquenchable hope for liberation, both the individual and communal struggle and coming together as a Church that continually sets people free – as *the* relevance potential for the church in secular social contexts.

The attitude-forming potential of Exodus pastoral care can be combined in a particular way with three options:



The first basic attitude-forming option lies in the Church's "post-exilic localization of God." This is prefigured and, so to speak, inscribed in the "ecclesiological genealogy" and is based on an "aggiornamento" of the Exodus event, as it is linked to the appearance and person of the Baptist in the New Testament and is essential for Jesus' proclamation and practice of the Kingdom of God. The special moment of this "Exodus aggiornamento" lies in the fact that it lays bare to Israel the complete untenability of the individual and institutional forms of its localization of God, in the sense of a creative return to its own Exodus existence. This is preserved in a morally inhibited, cult-like rubricated, and fear-driven correctness of faith which has betrayed or is betraying the uncontainable potential for liberation for which the Exodus was intended and which the God of the Exodus stands for a God who, in the words of Schillebeeckx: "in the face of what has been realised reveals himself again and again as 'the absolutely new'. We must allow God his freedom in our newness – just as he must respect our freedom in the salvation we realise in the world ... *God is new every moment*, always the source of new possibilities" (Schillebeeckx 1984, 50–51 [emphasis in original]; Loiero 2009).

Such localization of God can be referred to as post-exilic as it can be connected to the transcendent quality of a basis for life and faith that – transferred to today – can no longer be realized in the patterns of thought and action of a gentrified and bourgeois Church and pastoral forms that are only too susceptible to being more Egypt than Canaan. Instead, the transcendent quality of a post-exilic localization of God lives from and moves toward occurrences and enablement of the Church that, in the force field of mutual mindfulness and appreciation, set people free to experience the localization of God not as a loss of self and a compulsion to give oneself up, but as a gain of self (Korsch 1997, 259) and a release for self-giving.

In a post-exilic localization of God, an Exodus attitude of ecclesial pastoral care thus aims for an ecclesiological awareness of each person as the bearer of a unique relationship with God and of liberation and a genuine heir to all the promises of Canaan. This awareness will have a pastoral guiding effect, above all, on matters of the participatory and synodal form of the Church, namely, whether and how the dignity of baptism and confirmation has a *constitutive* and *not a constructed* meaning for an ecclesiological genesis in which justice for subjects and openness to the situation as well as plurality and diversity are not just well-meaning pastoral contingencies, but also their non-negotiable *conditio sine qua non*.

The post-exilic location of God in Exodus pastoral care thus pursues the learning processes and paths associated with a pastoral attitude that knows no discriminatory or marginalizing fears of contact or loss. Instead, it allows for different and yet equally important forms of enabling and events in the Church that are self-organizing and yet inconceivable without their community reference – ecclesiological learning processes and paths that should not be lost in legal rigor driven by fear and loss but

which, in the words of Johann Baptist Metz, trust their own evangelical “radicalism” (Metz 1984, 18).

The second attitude-forming option of Exodus pastoral care can be located in the ecclesiological footprint of the “defenseless superiority of God” (Schillebeeckx 1990, 170), using which Schillebeeckx seeks to interpret the omnipotence of God in the face of Jesus’ death on the cross and his supposed failure. This refers to an option that breaks the entire seductive idolatry of pastoral concepts of power and authority in the essence of a God who is and remains alien to the rationale of power and violence of human “do-it-to-them” forms of radicalism or unconditional “either-or” cultures. In other words, a God who, in holding fast and persevering in his unconditional love for humanity, prefers to follow the path of Jesus’ defenselessness on the cross rather than betraying the essence of his name as “Deus Humanissimus” by responding as “deus ex machina” with a radical, messianic act of power.

The ecclesiological footprint of the “defenseless superiority of God” thus aims to keep hope alive in the power of the potential for repentance and reconciliation. It allows people to come together in spaces that open up the future, in which they confront each other with the radical nature of sin but also with the real option of reconciliation – as “people seeking and pronouncing judgment” and as “people seeking and pronouncing grace” (Fuchs 2000, 14) at the same time.

Anyone who affirms Exodus pastoral care from the “defenseless superiority of God” as attitude-forming will need to be aware, as argued by Walzer, that the paths to the promised land are not a messianic final battle. Instead, they are a long series of decisions, relapses, and constant reforms (Walzer 1988, 155) beyond power asymmetries, which require a culture of debate that allows us to struggle for the truth of the human-liberating gospel and to uncover its perversions. In other words, these paths must never ignore the real possibilities of hope for conversion and reconciliation. It is precisely in the context of our floundering world and the permanent revolutionary intensification of the present that the Church could rediscover her relevance to civil society as a performative sign of hope (Hoff 2022). However, the Church must first realize the possibility of this hope *ad intra* – and not just limited to the pastoral care of confession and repentance or prison chaplaincy, but as a fundamental characteristic of a Christian attitude (Loiero 2021a).

A third attitude-forming option of Exodus pastoral care is concealed in the role-reversal undertaking of theological hospitality, as developed by Rolf Gärtner as a model for parish pastoral care (Gärtner 2011). Gärtner shows how the post-exilic reflection, interpretation, and transformation of hospitality developed so that, in terms of the history of theology and philosophy, the divisive understanding of self and other could be overcome in favor of a unifying understanding of otherness. Under the sign of being different, the undertaking of hospitality thus implements an interactive event involving role reversal between host and guest. To put it another way: In the event of hospitality, a performative space opens up in which host and

guest experience each other mutually and self-effectively as recipients and givers – just as we Italians know from our word *ospite*, which we usually use for both the host and the guest.

It is the performative event of this self-effective exchange of roles that I find inspiring in the context of Exodus pastoral care for the Church that is reconnecting with the original concept of the “parish as a place of and for strangers,” albeit involving the aspect of being different. It is transformed into a place of and for the people who encounter each other in their dignity and the right to be different. They are challenged to overcome all hierarchical and role patterns that lead to a tolerated or even promoted “culture of perpetrators” (Loiero 2012) – in Church and society – in a mutual exchange of roles between the giver and the receiver.

An Exodus attitude of hospitality thus calls for the learning of pastoral leadership attitude, which permits justice to be established in relation to resources and responsibility (Bauman 2019, 180–81) and which does not grant to any group or individual in the Church the paternalistic habitus of claiming the permanent right, without exception, to be the “hosting person” and reducing all others to a purely receiving guest status. Learning the attitude of hospitality requires the corresponding professionalization and competence acquisition processes for pastoral care and pastoral workers with basic intercultural sensitivities.

This intercultural dimension can, therefore, not only be narrowed to the questions of the hospitality and role reversal paradigm around migration and the integration of communities and missions who speak other languages within overall pastoral change processes. Instead, basic intercultural sensitivity should be understood as an essential competence that generally allows us to think and act in the three dimensions of plurality- and diversity-sensitive pastoral care, as these should provide pastoral guidance for finding and defining the location of the Church. These dimensions are the self-effective interplay and interaction of one’s own spaces, the spaces of “others” and the spaces of the in-between (intermediate spaces). Only in the self-effective interplay and interaction of these three spatial dimensions will a truly participatory and synodal ecclesiology be possible, which consistently rethinks community formation from the perspective of individuals and subjects (and not from the perspective of fitting individuals and subjects into predetermined community constellations), so that no one has to feel ignored, excluded, or colonized.

## **6. Exodus Pastoral Care as a Paradigm Shift That Shapes Attitudes and Provides Stability**

A state of being experienced as an “Exodus being,” human existence as Exodus existence, and pastoral care as Exodus pastoral care is the basic attitude of being practically

and factually caught up with this paradigm shift goes hand in hand with an urgency that can be recognized with Schillebeeckx in the “radical no” (Schillebeeckx 1990, 27). People express it, in particular, in the contexts of a floundering world and revolutionary compression in the present due to the most diverse “negative contrastive experiences” in Church and society. These contrastive experiences make it unmistakably clear that the reality of the Church and society as people experience it is unacceptable and full of contradictions. According to Schillebeeckx, this “radical no” is always accompanied by an “openness to a different situation ... to the unknown and to something better,” which “certainly has a claim on our yes” (1983, 49).

## 7. Further Challenges

In the “post-exilic localization of God” of the Church, in the reference back to the “defenseless superiority of God” and in the “role reversal undertaking of theological hospitality,” an attitude-forming and supportive paradigm shift in secular contexts proves to be possible and developable. This can certainly confront the trend of culture’s religious emptiness or religion-free cultures critically and productively. The intended paradigm shift subjects the Church to the judgment of negative contrastive experiences and the radical veto of people inside and outside the Church – without having theologically sophisticated or sanctimoniously banal phrases ready as a quick answer. Instead, what is intended is a paradigm shift that allows the Church to find a new, self-effective stability in the “yes-claim” of the theological will and potential for liberation of her Exodus God. This is a “yes” whose credibility essentially depends on the courage of pastoral leaders to abandon all the supposed certainties of bourgeois pastoral and pastoral care concepts. It is not just for the moment, in the sense of a church-political survival strategy, but as attitude-forming new learning paths to the finding and determining of the place of the Church, which have a systemic-strategic *and at the same time* systemic-flexible character (and include corresponding professionalization and competence orientation processes of pastoral workers, Church leadership, and team development).

This liberation requires not only faith in the indomitable liberation potential of the Exodus God but also the boldness to take the first step to recognize and realize this liberation potential with corresponding options for a Christian religiousness. In this “first step,” which has to be taken repeatedly, a pastorally guiding Exodus attitude finds its support again and again, as well as its corrective. Inspired by the Exodus event, such an attitude recognizes, above all, that without constantly taking the first step anew, there can be no Canaan, especially not in the newly differentiated expanses of secular and religious social contexts.

## Conclusions

The cultural and religious studies considerations outlined above present a particular challenge for an attitude-forming paradigm shift in the Church and pastoral work. It makes a significant difference whether such a paradigm shift is addressed and communicated in religious contexts and those related to religion or in contexts entirely unrelated to religion. Any approaches and strategies presenting practical solutions to such a paradigm shift must, therefore, be just as plural and multi-layered as the present late-modern period itself.

One, if not *the* decisive question is whether and how the Church (*ad intra* and *ad extra*) can bring people together so they can enter into conversation through their religiously and secularly motivated narratives – as they seek a merging of horizons to manage their lives and their experience of “joy and hope, grief and fear” along the way (GS 1).

The character of this merging of horizons does not level out and cancel out the plurality and diversity of paths of life and faith. First and foremost, it appreciates them and is decisive for the credibility of the Church whose pastoral work proves the reality it stands for – namely, that of the “Deus Humanissimus,” who always wishes to be experienced as a God who liberates people, thus expressing the innermost core of the “pastoral care” of Jesus.

The liberation option and dynamic of this “Deus Humanissimus” is and remains the Exodus event, which has always been and now continues to offer the potential for liberation for those who wished and still wish to be freed from the dead ends of bourgeois saturation and the disgrace of civilization – particularly those caused by faith. Finding the pivotal moment and self-effective moving force for the Church and pastoral work in the *aggiornamento* of this Exodus event is proving to present a new challenge because the liberation of people by God is and remains an eschatological factor.

In late-modern plural contexts, the Church no longer has a monopoly on interpreting what freedom potential means for people. However, if she accepts the paradigm of Exodus liberation as a pivotal moment and self-effective moving force for herself and her pastoral work, she will be able to develop a discursive capacity that enables the various narratives of experiences of liberation to merge horizons, as indicated above.

The Church’s central act of *koinonia* (communion/community) should increase in significance in an ecclesiological sense in such a way that the Church, establishing and moderating human and ecclesial communion, becomes a genuine “mediating factor” that “mediates and unifies the many different parts [...] and vice versa. The opposite of the unity expressed by communion is not the many, outside of it, but rather within it; the unity of the many who remain [...] However, communion always denotes the mediation of identity and difference – that which is distinct, different or

alien is brought together in unity through participation in a commonality, without differences being dissolved” (Greshake 1992, 95).

Creating human and ecclesial community in and with people who have been set free and claiming this where this has been denied to people should indeed always be the first stage of the Exodus character of Church and pastoral work, as she no longer recognizes or permits master-servant relationships – either for believers or for secular people.

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