

THEOLOGICAL ROUNDTABLE

AMERICANIZED CATHOLICISM? A GLANCE FROM THE UNITED STATES BACK TOWARD GERMANY*

Thomas Schärfl observes that many trends in the United States are adapted in Europe and especially in Germany, yet there remain categories that are incommensurable. What can appear to be an ideal pluralism in the United States can also be interpreted as “bubbles” that reveal a lack of interaction among various groups. Consumerism and individualism have an impact on even some US Catholic bishops, leading to actions that appear strange to a German observer, such as protesting President Obama’s invitation to speak at Notre Dame and teaming up politically with conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal Christians. German Catholics need to safeguard the relationship between religion and reason. Dennis Doyle agrees with Schärfl on the big picture but offers qualifications on specific points, noting especially the positive dimensions of Catholic interaction with Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Keywords: US Catholicism, European Catholicism, consumerism, church, culture

In many areas of life social developments in the United States have been a seismograph for trends that have later also been adapted in Europe and especially in Germany. At the same time—and this insight is not as trivial as it might sound—some categories and structures will remain ever incommensurable and cannot be transferred from one side of the Atlantic to the other.

This lack of transferability becomes visible above all when German politicians attempt to copy American elements in situations where they needed to be implemented along with a piece of American culture and history. For

* This article originally appeared as “Amerikanisierter Katholizismus? Ein Blick aus den USA zurück nach Deutschland,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 230 (July 2012): 459–71. It has been translated by Dennis M. Doyle (University of Dayton) with the help of Katherine Kornek (graduate assistant, University of Augsburg), and revised by Stefanie Knauss (Villanova University).

Thomas J. Schärfl is Professor of Philosophical Theology in the Faculty of Catholic Theology at the University of Augsburg, where he specializes in Analytic Theology. He is formerly Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of America and is currently a guest professor at the University of Dayton.

instance, one thinks of the rather spasmodic and ill-launched efforts to establish a type of Ivy League in the university scene in Germany. Such examples of incommensurability could surely be multiplied. Still, there has arisen of late a social situation in Germany in which the comparisons with developments in the United States appear worthwhile because one can study in detail in the American case what may come to pass in Germany in the not-too-distant future.

A Pluralistic Experiment

The United States, in the meantime, offers itself as a point of comparison as well as the model for what can be anticipated elsewhere even when it comes to religious and church-related developments. In a nutshell, the United States allows itself to be understood until now as an open-ended experiment in the development of a radically pluralistic society, which allows for a comparative assessment of the still-developing pluralism in Germany. For the underlying presupposition is the same in Germany as in the United States: open spaces for pluralization offer themselves within that collective social climate that one calls either post- or late modern, in which the framework of a clear-cut and connective metanarrative as a common reference point begins to fall apart. And then what would be impossible becomes possible if one could grant the passage of time its own logic of development: the simultaneity of what is really not simultaneous.

Only in this way can it be conceived that a social system such as the American one can sustain the coexistence of completely heterogeneous religious cultures. But how can such different cultures coexist with each other? The answer is that they do not have to coexist *with each other* at all; rather (as indicated by Peter Sloterdijk's instructive social phenomenology¹), they exist in different bubbles that are—if at all—only indirectly connected with each other. Such bubble formation makes radical pluralism actually viable. A society that forms such bubbles and exists in self-contained cavities, however, will find it impossible to practice what had been the ideal, especially of West Germany after the Second World War: the idea of *consensus* democracy. In the United States, in place of the greatest possible consensus of all social groups and powers, one finds the acceptance of a lowest common denominator that owes its binding quality to a nationalistic apotheosis of basic constitutional principles along with its metaphysical sublimation into a "civil religion" that brings together a consciously abstract belief in God

¹ See Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären I: Blasen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1998); also Sloterdijk, *Sphären III: Schäume* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2004).

(one thinks of what is printed on the dollar bill: “In God We Trust”) with an affirmation of certain values.

US Christianity with its mind-boggling multiplicity serves as a useful example of the radical pluralistic experiment, and this extreme diversification is also found in the much more narrow realm of the Catholic or Catholic-related forms of Christianity. The most bizarre examples would include the so-called Sedevacantists in Kansas, who have installed their own antipope; the Brotherhood of St. Joseph, which also claims for Saint Joseph an immaculate conception in order to be able to understand the Holy Family once and for all as a perfect image of the Trinity; and the pizza chain founder who has also founded in the marshes of Florida a private university advertising for students with its preconiliar liturgical standards along with a like-minded theology in the curriculum.

One can also find noteworthy phenomena in the other direction. For example, several universities affiliated with renowned religious orders strictly refuse any type of interference by the Roman magisterium (which is a legitimate position, since they are not bound by a concordat) and consciously define themselves, by their overall demeanor, as liberal. The most conspicuous example was the appearance of Barack Obama as the commencement speaker at the University of Notre Dame (founded and led by Catholics) at the close of the academic year—a move that other factions of the Catholic Church protested as outrageous.

In turn, for their part, the US bishops held discussions about whether one could deny Communion or issue a general excommunication to a Catholic politician who advocates a “pro-choice” legislative agenda. Also beyond this meeting place of politics and church politics one finds theological and spiritual developments of a type with which German theology and church life would not be familiar, because they imply a hypersensitive sharpening of Catholic identity with regard to issues in moral theology and ecclesiology, a revitalization of emphatically inner-directed forms of devotion, and many other things that we in Germany would associate with the *Kulturkampf* of the nineteenth century or with a revival of the 1950s.

The Broader Framework: *Homo sapiens consumans*

The previous reflections have begun with a few comments about pluralism and with a few anecdotal descriptions of present-day US Catholicism. Before US Catholicism as a reference will be brought back to the foreground, the focus will shift to a brief interim reflection articulating the particular challenge posed to religion and religions in the twenty-first century—a challenge whose outlines will become very clear once again when one observes the US

paradigm. This interim reflection will allow for a better prognosis of developments that could become very important for the Catholic Church in Germany as well.

In *Consuming Religion*, Vincent J. Miller (formerly a professor at Georgetown University, now at the University of Dayton) speaks of a *post-Fordian* consumer culture in which religion is now immersed.² Miller's starting point is the concept of a reflective history of capitalism, which he recounts not in the manner of Karl Marx's pejorative history of alienation but rather in a more neutral way as a *history of abstraction*: the *first* abstraction made possible by industrialization is the abstraction of the product from the producers (which Marx once called "the alienation of the workers from the product of their labor"). Things such as mass production and mass affordability, and therefore mass consumption, initially became possible through this first abstraction.

The *second* abstraction, which emerged like a key theme with the pioneer of automotive mass production, Henry Ford, addresses the working conditions of the workers. Through this consideration, in turn, the recognition of the needs of the workers and their economic relevance slowly became possible; the workers themselves became customers with needs that became important for the productivity of capitalism.

Finally, the *third* abstraction is the abstraction of the supply from the demands of the market and with that also from the needs of customers. It became evident where the market had to first create those needs that it prepared to fulfill.³ That we are truly controlled by these abstractions can hardly be denied. Thus the second abstraction has been at work when the roles of the private realm, the nuclear family or private happiness, have been established. It presupposes the emancipation from the places of work (the divorce of the realms of work and dwelling places) but also the limitation of work time and the humanization of working conditions. At the same time, however, it lives on the fruits of the first abstraction insofar as the former aristocratic-bourgeois privilege of privacy cannot be sustained apart from the mass production of goods accessible across a broad spectrum. On the third level of abstraction, the increase of profits and the consumption of goods are the real goals, such that it is no longer important to satisfy one's needs in any definitive way. The constant fabrication of needs and their continual satisfaction (which of course can be sustained only by the steady offering of new incentives) become ends in themselves on this third level of abstraction.

² Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion: Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2004).

³ *Ibid.*, 32–72.

What does this mean for religious matters as well as for the religions? The answer has a positive part and a negative part: The *abstraction of needs*, that is, the third level of abstraction, also implies an abstraction from purely material needs; in a post-Fordian consumer culture we no longer direct our primary attention only toward food, clothing, and housing. On this third level of abstraction, the immaterial—spiritual development, the relationship with the transcendent, whatever forms it may take—can become an item of true need. In this post-Fordian horizon, spiritual longing can neither be discredited by Marxists nor discounted by Fordists. Quite the opposite: because it has a needs-generating aspect, spiritual longing can also be evaluated according to an economic logic. The good news in this is that, in principle, religions can and must be present within a post-Fordian consumer culture.

The bad news, however, is that the truth claims inherent in religion either disappear or else are only able to appear, so to speak, in a consumeristically distorted translation. Any cognitive claim of religion, therefore, is regulated by the needs of the market. The potential multiplicity of religions corresponds thus to an economic logic attempting to avoid a monopoly. Strategies for securing religious identities come to be understood as legitimate “branding” (similar to trendsetting and the establishment of a trademark).

These phenomena produce a number of consequences. *First*, interreligious discussions take on the form of the supervisory discussion of a cartel, seeking to avoid a monopoly as well as any form of competition that would bring about deterioration of its brand. These conversations aim both at the “protection” of the collective market and at the securing of a type of competition that could be distorted by an overemphasis on what “connects” and “unifies” them. *Second*, the survival of a concrete brand, or a religion, is conditioned by structures of needs that can be prognosticated only partially. Exaggerated innovation in the context of the market is damaging to a brand if these needs are no longer recognizable (especially in comparison with other products). A flexible marketing position along with high brand recognition is thus the better marketing strategy. *Third*, arguments from the perspectives of philosophy of religion and theology that try to articulate a logic beyond the economic one are no longer adequately understood in the public forum, which is inescapably saturated in consumerism. Claims of rationality and truth themselves appear as nothing more than a part of subtle economic “branding.”

The first thesis can be corroborated by the impression left behind by a glance at the ecumenical situation in the United States. One can discern that these conversations are not directed primarily at greater ecumenical unity, but rather at the securing of a quasi freedom of the religious market. Only in this way can it be explained that Lutherans in the United States

speak of a new ecumenical winter, whereas the new archbishop of Philadelphia is known for seeking a coordinated cooperation with the Evangelical Christian communities, even though dogmatically in this case there is a much more bitter pill to swallow than there would be with the Lutherans. Such conversations, however, are really a coalition for reasons of market politics with the goal of protecting oneself from the state's vision of a negatively defined concept of religious freedom: put simply, to be able to maintain the religious market as a market. In the name of the Affordable Care Act the Obama administration exerted pressure on employers, including Christian employers, to provide health insurance that includes access to contraceptives and even covers abortion. US Catholic bishops interpreted this legislation as constituting an attack on religious freedom, such that further moral and theological questions do not even need to be considered or given any further legitimation. The communal front of Christian denominations against "attacks" on religious freedom reveals a marketing strategy that has the protection of the "religious" market as its overriding goal.

The second of the points named above becomes relevant if we ask ourselves how and why people change their confessional affiliation. Surveys allow for the conclusion that up to 40 percent of US Christians change their affiliation at least once in their lifetime. Such changes reportedly occur only seldom as a result of doctrinal considerations; they much more frequently have to do with people feeling of a lack of spiritual bonding with their own churches. US Catholics who turn their backs on their denomination very often do this therefore not because of a problem with Catholic teaching or moral concepts. Many of them pitch camp in free churches—even though more morally rigorous and on many points less willing than the Catholic Church to compromise doctrinally—because they offer a stronger sense of belonging.

Religious convictions therefore become measured by their impact on the fulfillment of basic immaterial needs. If, for example, his newly articulated commitment to Jesus in a Pentecostal community causes a father to overcome his addiction to alcohol, or an unfaithful husband returns to the value of marital faithfulness, or a bankrupt businessman manages to start over again, then and only then do the soteriological claims of Christian beliefs in the form of a particular denomination become plausible. An "ethereally-theologically imported, virtually invisible" salvation (so to speak) rapidly loses its meaning in a needs-based culture. Faith must be visible, or even more: it must be tangible in order to be able to fulfill corresponding needs.

This touches on the third point. Whoever would like to insist that religion is more or must be more than the satisfaction of needs (e.g., if a person has

bad luck) will no longer be understood. It is a markedly open question as to how religion can establish a different logic and manner of thinking in this regard. Critics of capitalism caution that the post-Fordian logic of consumption for the sake of consumption must in the end produce more losers in the realm of consumption than winners—and that an option for the losers (in other words, an option for the poor) should be set over against this cold logic as a true alternative, through which religion could find its way back to its true mission.

In the United States, however, it is apparent that any possibility of return and reemergence is downright rocky: whoever in the name of religion puts forward the social question or demands a clear political or ecological engagement loses members and (one might say) market shares.⁴ The Catholic Church stood out in the 1950s in the United States as “liberal” precisely because, as the religion of the poor Irish, Italians, and Hispanics, it had insistently articulated the social question. Of this, however, there is not much remaining (above all because of the currently no longer selective liaison with the Republican Party). Instead, it becomes apparent that whoever can sharpen their competition profile through experiential elements such as liturgical aesthetics or spiritual comfort zones, or through orientation branding such as clear moral codes, remains still attractive in the play of the market powers.

An interesting example here is the way in which Pope John Paul II is often perceived in the United States. He appears as the symbol of a charismatically rooted belief, as a spiritual lighthouse, and as an undeviating supporter of a family values-oriented individual ethic. In this perspective, his equally uncompromising pronouncements on the social question and on global justice are, in contrast, very consciously suppressed because they would have a disturbing effect (for example, on the market value of the trademark “Catholicism”). As one can see in this example, the consumeristic logic brings with it a danger that is not to be underestimated: questions of religious truth become purely questions of identity, and questions of identity come to be interpreted as questions of market profile.

“Evangelical Catholics”

The (not uncontroversial) American Vatican and Catholicism expert John Allen, in his instructive book *The Future Church*, has identified three strategies by which Christian faith has responded to the challenges of modernity.⁵ He calls the first strategy theological-pastoral “liberalism,” which

⁴ See Miller’s example in *Consuming Religion*, 199–200.

⁵ John L. Allen Jr., *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 56–57.

recognizes the claims and cautions of modernity that force Christians toward a type of Enlightenment regarding religious beliefs—that is, toward a reinterpretation and reconstruction of their own religious convictions. However, alongside this path, which the church in Germany started decades ago in a popular movement, and which includes theologians and bishops, parishes and ecclesiastical fellowships alike, there are two alternative models that have begun to exert a decisive influence, as one can see in the case of the United States: these are the Evangelical and the Pentecostal forms of Christianity, whose analogous elements develop within the Catholic Church as well.

The first alternative to liberal Christianity, Evangelical Christianity, has its historical roots in pietistically colored renewal movements within Protestantism. This movement places an inordinately high value on the personal-spiritual and the morally righteous dimensions of the life of faith as well as on the recommitment of Christianity to a biblical foundation, in order to rank and, in this case, subordinate the relevance of the institutional church, hierarchy, and sacraments within this framework. In contrast to “liberalism,” Evangelical Christianity sees modernity as a challenge that one must confront first and foremost *antithetically* with a strengthened awareness of one’s own identity. Liberal theology and church practices appear as slow apostasy and as a first step down a slippery slope that will lead eventually to the secularization of religion.

Historically, Evangelical Christians have represented the backbone of the early civilization and history of immigration in the United States. However, with the beginning of industrialization, the seismic worldview-shattering abolition of slavery, the increasing urbanization above all on the West and East coasts of the United States, and, finally, with the establishment of highly intellectual Protestant educational institutions (such as Yale, Princeton, and other Ivy League universities), Evangelical Christianity has been pushed toward the agriculturally structured areas of the southwestern United States, where still to this day it flourishes.⁶

In terms of worldview, it should be taken into consideration that the Evangelical versions of Protestant denominations have carried with them and retain various pieces of their confessional heritage: from Puritan-Calvinist New England, the millennialism as well as a capitalist-friendly predestination ethic; from their Baptist roots, the antiestablishment, privatizing, and culture-critical tendencies; from Scottish Presbyterianism, the flat hierarchies along with the impulse toward the formation of their own

⁶ See in this regard José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 135–36.

orthodoxy; from the Methodist layer, an orientation toward an individual perfection in matters of faith, a pragmatically optimistic concept of freedom, and a universal missionary enthusiasm.⁷

The question of how Evangelical Christianity could win such an influence in the political arena as the voice of the New Christian Right in the Republican Party becomes quite interesting. A possible explanation could have something to do with the various political-social challenges that have for several decades threatened to tear US society apart.⁸ Since the 1960s there has been a growing sense of the failure of immigration, of the impossibility of winning the war against drugs and poverty, and of the corrosion of the bonds within the family as a result of the sexual revolution and women's liberation. Beyond that, since Vietnam the United States again and again has led armed conflicts that it has not won and could not win. In this situation Evangelical Christianity offers clear answers that, in a hypercomplex situation, have considerable complexity-reducing effects: a divinely sanctioned work ethic instead of a welfare state (applied directly to the black community and to Hispanics); a war against pornography, alcohol, and drugs; new and unambiguous role assignments for men and women; family values and "pro-life" initiatives; and the stylizing of wars in which the United States has engaged as conflicts of worldviews between the Christian realm of freedom and the realm of darkness, which of late has been identified with the Islamic governments in the Near East. In return, in the course of these political enchantments and appropriation, Evangelical Christianity has abandoned its specific pacifist and anticapitalist undercurrents.

The second major alternative (which of course can and has been mixed with Evangelical motifs) is Pentecostal Christianity. The images that come to mind are those of megachurches, televangelizers, and believers who pray with ecstatic emotion during their worship services. The distinctive style of this version of Christianity is expressed in the emphasis placed on personal immediacy, on the role of the Holy Spirit, who takes possession of one's own life, such that what the faith teaches and what it wants can be known directly in personal experience. Pentecostal Christianity underscores the enormous role of personal conversion and of religious experiences and thereby offers a very appealing answer to the twenty-first century's hunger for spiritual experience.⁹

John Allen offers the following as distinctive characteristics of Pentecostal Christianity's practices and image: a strong belief in the gifts of the Spirit

⁷ Casanova, *Public Religions*, 138–39.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 146–57.

⁹ Allen, *The Future Church*, 375–80.

(healing through prayer and speaking in tongues are the most notable examples); a literal interpretation of Scripture; an unshakable trust that prayers are answered; miracles and healings (in connection with a devaluation of sacraments or strict liturgical structures); a reliance on direct revelation from God in the form of private revelation; a belief in spirits and demons; an apocalyptic foundation (eschatology); an exclusivist character in relation to other denominations and religions (“solus Christus”); a strongly conservative moral code; an emphasis on collectivity; and, finally, a connection between conversion, faith, and economic prosperity.¹⁰

If one wanted to differentiate the liberal Christian path and its alternatives with a somewhat metaphorical designation, then the liberal path could be understood as a path of the eyes, because it attempts to perceive and assimilate modernity. The Evangelical path, on the contrary, recommends steeling one’s nerves against modernity and relying on one’s own powers and identity. Finally, the Pentecostal path sets over against a liberal Christianity—perceived as coldly rational and also therefore as lost—a spirit-filled, enflamed heart, and preaches the experience of immediate emotion as opposed to theological reflection.

The Turn to Tradition

Of these various responses to modernity one can now also identify particular Catholic incarnations or equivalents, which take their starting point in US Catholicism and which sooner or later will certainly shape world Catholicism. At first it appeared that with the Second Vatican Council, a liberal version of Catholicism had gained the victory. This victory, however, has been perceived by many in the meantime as Pyrrhic, along the way to a complete secularization. Now, one cannot say that liberal Christianity in the United States is threatened with extinction. It lives on in several intellectual realms—such as in distinguished theological faculties in renowned private universities—and above all in the pastoral praxis of those communities that would not survive without the strong engagement of the laity. In addition there are still numerous religious orders and communities that would understand themselves as liberal and are “inclined toward dissent,” as a report from a Vatican visitation laconically noted.

Recent studies show, however, that in the United States—and this is probably just an anticipation of a worldwide trend—seminarians as well as professors of theology are more and more traditionally oriented. Moreover, this neoconservatism in the Catholic milieu takes on an *Evangelical* flavor: since

¹⁰ Ibid., 381–82.

the interaction with present-day culture is experienced more and more as disintegrating, it is necessary to determine what is specifically Catholic.

In this way the modernity-critical elements, which can be found in the so-called postliberal theology of the recent Lutheran tradition as well as in the so-called Radical Orthodoxy within the Anglican context,¹¹ are taken up theologically and adapted to Catholic thought. Among the newer Catholic theological currents one could list the key word *ressourcement*—different from the concept as it was first coined within the *nouvelle théologie*—now associated with the theological task of strengthening the return to the sources (and within the Catholic realm, that means, above all, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas). A second keyword would be a “postliberal” Catholic theology, which, in a mixture of traditional metaphysics and Romantic aesthetics, names Hans Urs von Balthasar as its figurehead, whereby of course it allows the avant-garde, modern side of Balthasar to fall under the table. In the debates over the reasonableness of faith, this type of theology takes the side of those who discredit autonomous reason, and thus unavoidably takes on a fideistic tendency.

It appears that the Evangelicals’ concern over their own identity has had a range of considerable consequences for Catholic theology and the Catholic Church. In the determination of the relationship between theology and the teaching office, the magisterium of the theologians comes decidedly under the control of the official magisterium. New developments are characterized not by an engagement with “external” philosophies, worldviews, and religions, but rather with internal searching of one’s own resources and the shaping of one’s identity under the banner of an ever-stronger demarcation from the *Zeitgeist*. Liturgy becomes an aesthetic battlefield where one secures one’s identity and sets oneself apart from contemporary trends. The Protestant *sola scriptura* is replaced by an orientation toward tradition and (episcopal and papal) teaching office. Moreover, the strongly anticlerical emphasis of Evangelical thought is replaced on the Catholic side by a neoclassical theology of office insofar as the priest is no longer seen as merely the presiding server and “officeholder” of the community, but rather is understood as the representative of Christ who is metaphysically united with Jesus and whose special rank is grounded in a spiritual elitism. An inescapable side effect of these developments is an increasing internal confessionalization of Catholicism.

One can also find Pentecostal elements modified into a Catholic version: the insistence on immediacy is likewise channeled into a theology of office, so

¹¹ See Thomas Schärtl, “Postliberale Theologie und die Standortbestimmung von Fundamentaltheologie,” *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 132 (2010): 47–64.

that the immediacy of Christ is mediated mainly through the priest, even to the point that it is most concretely experienced in the priest. To take one example, the Archdiocese of New York advertised on its homepage for priestly vocations (www.nypriest.com) with an indication that through the priest one is able to come into direct (physical) contact with Christ. One photograph shows a Catholic priest at a requiem liturgy for firefighters who had died on September 11, 2001. The casket was accompanied by uniformed soldiers, police, firefighters, and by a Catholic priest. “The World Needs Heroes” read the motto that ran across the homepage. A new spiritual elitism aligns itself here with the typical forms of American heroism and exceptionalism.

In the realm of pastoral work, moreover, one finds that “sacerdotal-magical” practices (considered rather archaic by historians of religions as well as psychologists of religion) take on a new life: the Catholic priest appears somewhat like a charismatic healer and exorcist, who is tasked in a new way with the liberation from sicknesses of the body and the soul as well as the driving out of evil spirits, and on whose blessing one’s everyday prosperity depends. One finds a Pentecostal coloring, moreover, in certain spiritual trends in the Catholic realm, which supplement or even replace the so-called communal liturgical forms (for example, the communal Liturgy of the Hours) through forms that are experience oriented and place the individual, so to speak, alone before God, and through practices that focus on inwardness, immediate experience, or are even designed to produce ecstasy.

The Value of the “Old” European Heritage

The American trends that have here been sketched out, above all with a view toward the Catholic Church, mostly likely will sound strange to European, especially German, ears. These tendencies, however, will also have an impact on a worldwide scale. The new type of American bishop—a glance toward the large dioceses, such as Chicago, New York, or Philadelphia, should suffice—is concerned with and focused on “identity.” The leaders of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops also mirror this style of thought, placing alongside all of their joviality and humanism a strong emphasis on securing their ecclesiological and moral theological stances, and in ecumenical relations never growing tired of stressing the *distinctively* Catholic.

Considering the reality that Evangelical and Pentecostal elements historically have been miles apart from Catholicism, one might emphatically pose the question as to how it is that these elements can have gained entry *into* the Catholic Church. A first response lies in what was described above

as the *market logic* in the realm of religion and church. A spiritualized version of the structure of needs has created an undertow that lends weight to these elements.

For Roman Catholicism, the pontificate of John Paul II represented something like the threshold of an era. This pope allowed something like an Evangelical and Pentecostal branching out of Catholicism, perhaps even originated it: on the one hand, through his spiritual charisma, by which his office and his personal testimony of faith grew indivisibly together; on the other hand, through the papal “star” cult, which perhaps he did not want but still did nothing to discourage, a cult that made the pope himself a source of faith for those who wanted to quench their spiritual thirst with the highest possible degree of concrete and real immediacy; and finally through his proactive encouragement of the relatively young, passionate, spiritual priest and lay movements and through the politics of securing Catholic identity, which he pursued with theological intentions.

These things simply have not been continued by Pope Benedict XVI; he called for a broader range of things Catholic, although it certainly cannot be ruled out that his return to traditional elements could also be assessed according to the market logic described above as a new initiative for a differentiating “branding” of things Catholic. And although Benedict XVI differed from John Paul II on so many things—his noteworthy refusal of a papal star cult, his placing of moral theology on the back burner in favor of the return to the dogmatic core kerygma of Christianity in his encyclicals, his conscious support for the long-standing religious orders in conjunction with the placing of conditions of probation onto new spiritual movements, his distrust of experience-oriented liturgical forms (even and especially when it came to papal masses)—it could be that it was precisely Benedict’s fundamental skepticism concerning modernity that did not allow him to form a coalition with liberal forces of no matter which persuasion.

The face of the Catholic Church will be changed through its incorporation and development of Evangelical and Pentecostal characteristics. And this also can be learned from the American scene: precisely by integrating Evangelical impulses, more and more bishops follow an alarming in-group/out-group logic that in the end places all dissent *outside* the door: “Whoever is not with us *in all things* is against us.” Politically, the Catholic Church (which in the United States has come a long way from being a suspicious underdog to now being a socially respectable denomination¹²) thus becomes a kind of party, which, amid the diversity of voices in the public sphere, deploys a simplistic, clear profile and can be defined through its focus on a few core moral

¹² Casanova, *Public Religions*, 167–207.

themes (such as anti-abortion and anti-same-sex marriage). The Catholic breadth and depth become lost within these developments.

Now some might appreciate these identity markers because they appear to go together with the supposed intensification of faith, inwardness, and morality. Yet even on this point one can learn something from the United States: until now it has appeared that even the Evangelical and Pentecostal branches or denominations have not been successful in forging for people a lifelong bond with Christianity. In most cases, the binding effect extends only as long as a phase of life and can fade away at the start of the next biographical chapter.

The question here arises as to whether European Christianity does not have something of *abiding* value to say to world Christianity, and whether it has something with which to counter the Americanizing of Catholicism. It might be nice to be able to have recourse to the intrinsic value of the Enlightenment or of liberal theology. However, in view of the vegetative state in which Christianity in central Europe (think Holland, France, Scandinavia, or even Germany) finds itself, such a value could be communicated only with great difficulty.

In place of useless appeals it would be better to soberly consider two points that can be taken as the abiding heritage of European Christianity. First, there can only be a guard against fundamentalism when religion and reason are brought together in a *good* relationship. Anti-intellectualist currents can have disastrous consequences for society—up to the point that religious convictions are used for totalitarian ends without being able to free themselves by their own power of reflection. Second, history and historicity represent necessary modes of thinking. Historical thinking can clarify how the attempted revitalization of the premodern through Evangelical Catholic tendencies will never really bring back the premodern, but rather remains only a specific *variation* of modernity.

This becomes noticeable especially in the way in which the critics of modernity presume that same idea of freedom as a right to freedom that they gleefully demonize, along with modernity itself. Such a stance ratifies indirectly, at least in part, the questions as well as the claims of modernity, questions and claims that even the critics of modernity are not able to dispose of without revealing a self-contradiction on a practical level.

THOMAS SCHÄRTL
University of Augsburg