

Pro Veritate: A Case for a *Method of Concordance* in Theology¹

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Abstract

Given the many modern and post-modern fashions of reasoning, this contribution is a programmatic proposal for a new kind of thinking in the field of theology. It is deliberately called a “method of concordance,” and it relies in the first place on a semantic exploration and a conceptual analysis of the term ‘concordance’ itself. Hence making an appeal to the heart, this method aims at integrating all human capacities in the never-ending search for truth. With a view to do that, a firm confidence in the unfolding of reality and an enlargement of the concept of reason are regarded both as indispensable and wise. It is further argued that the proposal for a method of concordance can rely on efforts made in the history of thought, among others, by Anselm, Jaspers, and Baader. Next to these probably unexpected references, an appeal is also made to contemporary thinkers such as Hebblethwaite, Turner, Valadier, and Desmond. The article concludes with pointing to some methodological and epistemological consequences of a method of concordance, and thereby elucidates why speaking ‘for’ truth is to be preferred over speaking ‘about’ truth.

Keywords

truth, method of concordance, heart, theological epistemology

¹ This is not an article in the usual sense of the word, nor is it a scientific discussion of a complex problem. Rather, this contribution is an honest and a modest exercise in theological and philosophical thinking. It is a programmatic proposal, which certainly needs further elaboration through criticism and research. The text as it stands came into being in the context of postdoctoral seminars which were organised by the GOA-project *Orthodoxy: Process and Product* at the Faculteit Godgeleerdheid of the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. These seminars involved both systematic theologians and church historians. Some of the members of this research group invited me to develop my ideas on the central issue of the project: the question of (theological) truth. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of them for their ongoing encouragement and critique: Lieven Boeve, Dirk Claes, Yves De Maeseneer, Wim François, Mathijs Lamberigts, Johan Leemans, and Terrence Merrigan. I am also grateful to Reuben Hardie, who carefully corrected an earlier English version of the present text.

“Always be prepared to give an answer
to everyone who asks you to give
the reason for the hope that you have.”

1 Pe 3, 15

“Denn eine Religion, die der Vernunft
unbedenklich den Krieg ankündigt, wird es
auf die Dauer gegen sie nicht aushalten.”

Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*,
Preface to the first edition

Introduction: *de veritate*?

The immediate cause for this introduction is sought and found in the possibility of announcing the themes of many (theological) accounts of the question of truth by means of different prepositions. In Latin one usually chose the obligatory ablative after ‘de’, as a consequence of which numerous tractates bear the title *De veritate*, or else, they have become known as such. Among the illustrious thinkers from the West who ventured written reflections “about (the) truth” are Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Heidegger, to name but a few. By way of introduction it is worth referring to their works and to some homonymous texts of a few others.

In his concise tractate *De veritate*, drawn up in the form of a dialogue, Anselm tried to solve a problem which, according to his own assessment, he had not been able to sufficiently deal with in his chief work *Monologion*, namely the definition of truth. About two centuries later, Thomas Aquinas dedicated no less than twenty-nine probing *quaestiones disputatae* to the question of truth. These texts were intensively studied by Edith Stein, who moreover made the effort of translating them into German. As well as this, Thomas let the words *de veritate* also figure in the full title of the book which is commonly known as *Summa contra gentiles*, to which the words *seu de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores infidelium* must actually be added.

At the time of the Renaissance, the famous Dutch author and jurist Hugo Grotius closely joined in Thomas’ programme by explicitly qualifying the title of his work *De veritate* with *religionis Christianae*. When he published the book in 1627 as a prozaic rewriting of his poem *Bewys van den waren godsdiens* (or *Proof of the true religion*), he wanted to provide seamen with a guidebook, so that they be able to discuss religious affairs with Jews, Muslims, and pagans. Later, when Hugo Grotius was approached by the English nobleman Herbert Lord of Cherbury because of the latter’s own *De veritate*, the famous Dutch intellectual was overtly enthusiastic. He had the impression that they were on the same wavelength. The full

title of Herbert's tractate, which was published in 1627 in Paris and in 1633 in London, was *De veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso*.

A few centuries later, two philosophers of existence, who had been, moreover, friends for some time, directed their attention towards the question of truth, too. Both Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers no longer entitled important writings in Latin but in the vernacular, *Von der Wahrheit*. In Heidegger's case, it concerned a widely known essay, dated from 1930, in which inspiration is drawn from the Greek concept and etymological origin of *alètheia*. In Jaspers' case, it concerned an impressive monograph of no less than 1103 pages, written during the Second World War and published in 1947. It is, and not without reason, regarded as one of his main works, next to his three-volume *Philosophie*. The point here is that both thinkers – consciously or not – expressed with 'von' the same idea as the Latin preposition 'de'.

It needs to be stressed that, without any exception, and no matter how far one goes back in the history of ideas, all these thinkers, with a view to reflecting on truth, preferred the preposition 'de'/'von'/'about'. Yet, since for all of them it was an investigation into the deepest fabric of reality, one could have expected another preposition. As advocates of a case of the utmost importance, and in line with illustrious rhetoricians of Antiquity, they could have opted for 'pro': *pro veritate*. In doing so, they would not have given the impression that they were dealing with an issue free of obligations, next to other possible topics for study and reflection, and about which one could speak from a certain distance, in all neutrality and objectivity, as it were.

Perhaps, by analogy with the pleas of someone like Cicero, Anselm, Thomas, Grotius, Herbert, Heidegger, and Jaspers should have endeavoured to explore and defend truth under the mandate of the preposition 'pro', in the sense of 'for' (a person, or a personification) as well as in the sense of 'in favour of' (a case). For, undoubtedly, all agree that truth is inadequately conceived of as a merely theoretical affair. Therefore, in the universal search of truth, it is not only important to take into account one's personal involvement in the philosophical and theological efforts of thinking, but it is equally important to emphasise a practical concern: truth is not only to be found in reality, one also has to live after it.

Given the fact that many thinkers of the past set up their inquiry *into* truth primarily as an investigation *about* something, and given the fact that this methodology is inextricably connected with a certain disadvantage of objectification and distantiating, it is worth describing what such an inquiry *into* truth means as an investigation *for* something. The present proposal consists in the clarification of how people actually were, are, and will continue to be always and already

in truth, and how they are called, together *with* the ongoing development of truth itself, to strive for the completion of that same truth. In my view, from a philosophical and theological perspective, the most appropriate method for that seems to be *a method of concordance* or convergence.²

In this text, I will first explain the proper concept of ‘concordance’. On the basis of this clarification, I will develop the idea of (the desirability of) an enlargement of reason. Then, I will touch upon several examples from the history of thought, as to further explain what I aim at. This will lead to a consideration of the methodological and epistemological consequences, and a brief illustration of the relevance of this eminently interdisciplinary proposal for systematic theology. Finally, in the conclusion, all thematic lines will be drawn together, in order to do justice to the main title: *pro veritate!*

The Concept of Concordance

In its most general significance the English noun ‘concordance’ means something like ‘agreement’, ‘harmony’, or ‘correspondence’, just like the verb ‘to concord’ means ‘to be in agreement’, ‘to suit’, or ‘to correspond’, and like the adjective ‘concordant’ means ‘harmonious’ or ‘correspondent’. However, the etymology of the term reveals a more profound and more telling semantic level.

The word ‘concordance’ consists of three meaning-generating components which are to be derived from Latin roots. Each deserves to be scrutinised in greater detail. The first element is the prefix ‘con-’, which has to be seen in relation with the preposition ‘cum’ – which means ‘(together) with’. Also as ‘co-’, ‘col-’, and ‘cor-’, it appears in numerous words of European languages, and it denotes a connection, a link, a relationship. Second, there is the noun ‘cor’, the Latin word for ‘heart’. Many connotations and associations of this word are reflected in the use of the word in many languages, and in an endless number of expressions.³ First of all, ‘heart’ means the vital, blood pumping organ of living beings, and of the human being in particular. Therefore, it also refers to the most fundamental aspect of the human being, and even to the human being as a whole. The heart is that human capacity which is able to love, which can give and

² When speaking about method in theology, it is nearly impossible not to refer to Bernard Lonergan’s decisive study on the subject *Method in Theology* (London 1973²). I particularly like his idea that method is “a framework for collaborative creativity” rather than “a set of rules to be followed meticulously by a dolt” (p. xi). I moreover presume that much of what I say below is in line with Lonergan’s basic intuitions and position.

³ In this regard, the following collection of articles deserves attention, since it is published by a theologian and a cardiologist alike: Wilhelm Geerlings & Andreas Mügge (Eds.), *Das Herz. Organ und Metapher* (Paderborn 2006).

receive genuine love. Other important meanings of ‘cor’/‘the heart’ are the centre, the core, the inner, the medium, . . . Finally, the third component at issue is ‘-ance’, in which one hears the formation of a present participle (*participium praesens*): a grammatical sophistication which expresses that the action is still going on, in move, not yet accomplished. This means that ‘concordance’ does not evoke a situation or an achievement, but an evolution or an activity in full development. In brief, ‘concordance’ means ‘correspondence’, but not one that is realised once and for all, or one that only relies on rational grounds (that is, without taking into account – to cite Pascal – “les raisons du coeur”).⁴ Just like ‘love’, ‘concordance’ is rather a verb than a noun. . .

Yet, there exists, in English as well as in other languages, two terms which are akin to ‘concordance’, and it is worth pointing to the difference in meaning with the intended conceptual content of ‘concordance’. First, there is the word ‘concordat’, which stands for a treaty or an agreement in the juridical sphere. In particular, a concordat is a treaty between the Holy See and some instance of public authority, agreed upon with a view to clearly stipulating the mutual rights, duties, and competences. Essential for our purposes is the difference between the suffixes ‘-at’ and ‘-ance’. The liveliness, the flexibility, and the dynamism which are typical for *concordance*, almost completely lack in *concordat*. And on the basis of many historical examples, one can ask, without being ashamed, whether concordats have indeed been collegial approvals of the heart, rather than painfully negotiated agreements which were never averse from ideological struggles and the mere defence of strategic interests.

The second term is actually a specific meaning of the word ‘concordance’ itself. For, one also regards as a concordance a – usually alphabetical – list of all words appearing in a certain book or oeuvre, along with the precise references of where exactly these words occur. There are e.g. concordances of the work of Shakespeare, which enable one to look up how many times and where the typical concept of ‘wit’ appears. But there also exists concordances of the Bible, both of the original texts and of various translations. In each case it concerns useful tools for philological and exegetical research, as well as for literary theory.

This specific meaning of ‘concordance’ possibly yields an interesting perspective for our case. Crucial to compiling a concordance is mapping out all relevant terms and concepts of a work, with an eye for the different contexts in which these words appear. As a result of such a quantitative and analytic labour, one aims at more qualitative and synthetic insights, and at the same time at tracks for

⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées. Texte établi par Louis Lafuma* (Paris 1962) nr. 423.

comparative conclusions. Something similar is strived after by a theological method of concordance on its search for truth. In a first step all aspects and places where truth can be found must be surveyed as painstakingly as possible, so that, in a second phase, they can be adapted for attempts to define and evaluate truth. In this sense our method of concordance obviously surpasses the task description and the scope of a concordance book: it explicitly aims at more than analysing and collecting material.

The oeuvre which a theological method of concordance ought to take as the basis for its activities is a masterly double work. It is a two-volume work, consisting of 'the book of books' (or: the Bible as standing for Christianity) and 'the book of nature' (or: reality as the totality of being and (its) history). A theological method of concordance will only be truly fruitful if it succeeds in discerning and comparing all parts and layers of significance of the book of books and the book of nature, to discover afterwards the vital connections between both. This means that the human being as a whole, symbolised by his/her heart ('cor'), together with all generations of people(s) and concretely embedded in a wide range of contexts as the totality of reality ('con-'), is actively and dynamically involved in the investigation of truth, which, because of the finite condition of humanity, is never accomplished ('-ance').

The appeal to the notion of an assent of the heart or concordance is, for that matter, not alien to the history of thought. Let me in this regard just draw attention to two works with almost the same title: (*De*) *Concordia*. This is of course not identical with *concordance*, but that does not really matter for the content of what I want to say.

The last book of the aforementioned Anselm of Canterbury was entitled *De Concordia*, and it is concerned with the compatibility of God's knowledge and grace on the one hand, and human freedom on the other. St Anselm does not take into consideration the possibility that there could be a fundamental contradiction. In the line of Augustine and a great deal of the Christian tradition hitherto, he argues that God is present in every human heart and, as a consequence, that He can be discovered there in full richness.

At the time of romanticism in Germany the youngest of the Schlegel brothers, Friedrich, who in 1808 converted to Catholicism, edited the journal *Concordia* for several years.⁵ Although it was stigmatised as a typically Catholic and (hence) merely conservative magazine, one could hold that the people behind it had good reasons

⁵ The journal appeared from the summer of 1820 until the summer of 1823 in six issues, and was regarded as the 'official' voice of later romanticism (in Vienna and Munich). Among the contributors were Friedrich Schlegel, Adam Müller, and Franz von Baader. See Ernst Behler, *Friedrich Schlegel, in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten dargestellt* (Reinbek bei Hamburg 1966), 131–135.

to strive for the reunion and the reintegration of what the French encyclopaedists had torn apart and, moreover, which they had opined to keep apart on principle grounds: politics, poetry, religion, philosophy, fine arts, . . .

Both from Anselm's reflections and from the project of Friedrich Schlegel's journal, an interesting and refreshing light can shine on what is understood here as a theologically fruitful method of concordance.

The Enlargement of Reason

It goes without saying that the program of a method of concordance in theological thinking needs to be profiled more precisely than has been the case up until now. Philosophically speaking, this program comes down to a 'broadening' of reason. It is only by means of such a broadening, which must also be a deepening, that the plurality of accesses to truth can be validated. This, of course, is closely connected with a meticulous examination of the human faculties. For a one-sided emphasis, a fascination for, or a limitation to one of the many faculties of human beings has always led to narrowing the very concept of truth. What does this mean concretely?

Fundamental to any definition of truth is a well-determined access to reality, together with a nuanced insight in the ways in which human beings are related to the reality within and around them. In one way or another, the human being is compelled to cope with his/her not-simply-coinciding with reality, at least if he/she does not want to sink into an abyssal void, or to be absorbed by a rhapsodic chaos of hallucinations and illusions. On the one hand, the original ontological tear which characterises the human condition, causes uneasiness and existential fear but, on the other hand, it enables human beings to establish culture, to speak, to think, and, probably at the deepest level of their existence, to be surprised.⁶ The very fact that language and understanding are possible, has to do with a fundamental and necessary distance between the human being and being as such, or with the difference between reality and consciousness. And the very fact that the question of truth can come up at all, is inextricably connected with that distinction.

With regard to the nature of the access to reality, the history of thought has displayed an admirable creativity. In most

⁶ Plato famously saw no other "archè" (begin, principle) for philosophy than "to *thau-mazein*" (to be surprised) (*Theaetetus*, 155d). This fundamental intuition has found a beautiful and profound actualisation in a masterpiece written by a much too less known Dutch philosopher: Cornelis Verhoeven, *Inleiding tot de verwondering* (Budel 1990 [originally 1967]).

cases, however, philosophers have insisted on and made a case for a certain correspondence between contents of thought (mental states of affairs) and reality 'as it is' (being) – whatever these strange phrases may mean. This conviction is reflected in the sound old definition of truth as *adaequatio rei et intellectus* (or *adaequatio intellectus ad rem*), but no less in more recent variations of so-called correspondence theories.⁷

A fairly new problem emerged under the influence of the increasing importance of autonomous subjectivity since the rise of modern thought. It became less and less sure that there was a connection between thinking and being, and the symbolic occupation of the tension between both was not at all inclined to facilitate any bridging. Therefore truth was more conceived of as coherence between mental contents than correspondence of these contents with something outside it. Developments in linguistics, logic, and psychology significantly contributed to the continuous refinement of these attempts at the formation of truth theories.

However, in my view, it is not wise to put the question of the external referents of mental contents between brackets, let alone abandon it. However, the arguments in favour of this view are not in the first place theoretical in nature. It cannot be doubted that philosophers have the right and the duty to doubt the adequacy of various representations of reality, the precision with which one can speak about them in all kinds of languages and discourses, and the ever changing circumstances of which aspects of reality lighten in the human mind. But that does not mean that the life of people, in its tragedy and richness, can be nourished by such doubts (alone). The answers to the questions of many people cannot infinitely be postponed, in the sense of 'we don't know', 'we cannot know', and 'we will never know'. That might be the case theoretically, but it is not satisfying for our lives.

Hence, a lack of wisdom is shown by certain philosophers, who, all too easily, do away with the ontological impact and implications of the search for truth, or who repudiate it as impossible or irrelevant. At least the attempts to bridge the distance with between the human being and the encompassing reality, as well as the expectation that these attempts will not be ultimately fruitless, have to be kept and cherished. For, in reality as its home port, the human race has already realised more on the basis of a fundamental attitude of confidence, than by renounce, abdication, suspicion, or mistrust. Therefore, it is more a sign of fatigue and despondence than of genuine courage

⁷ A useful and interesting overview of past and present philosophical truth theories is given in Michael P. Lynch (Ed.), *The Nature of Truth. Classic and Contemporary Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA/London 2001). Besides its nice introductions, this volume also provides (translations of) groundbreaking primary texts.

and ingenuity when philosophical thinking throws itself back on the 'safe' precinct of the subject,⁸ after it has allegedly gone through some self-declared epistemological and linguistic turns.

Yet, for a short time, a critical consciousness has manifested itself, holding on to the idea that the history of Western thought is dominated by a certain kind of intellectualism or rationalism. More precisely, it is meant that, above all, reflexive and cognitive faculties have determined the agenda's of culture, society, and progress. Serious disadvantages would be inherently attached to this: a neglect of emotion, a mistrust towards desire, and a curtailment of the imagination. An intellectualistic or rationalistic culture would be keen on control, dominance, theory, and order, to the detriment of intuition, the concrete life praxis of people, the cosy chaos of the unknown and the unknowable, the spontaneity of feelings, and the unbridled variety of passions and affections.

Apart from the question whether this generalising analysis of the history of ideas is right, and whether there are no counter-indications which urge one to more nuance and prudence, the analysis deserves some consideration because of its critical importance. According to the critical consciousness alluded to – one could continue – this Western intellectualism has (had) serious repercussions for the attempts at describing and determining truth. Perhaps 'truth' itself, as a 'concept', is so much stained by the rationalism of Western civilisation, that one ought to give it up, or argue that it should be replaced by 'authenticity'. The right track through which truth can enter human consciousness, is then, no longer thinking, with its inevitable 'contemplative' gaze, and its nervous sensibility, but the inner calm of the mind, the impulsive intuition, deep emotionality, or the mystical addressability for transcendence.

This possible plea in favour of an alternative definition of truth via an alternative approach of reality is definitely meaningful, and can be supplemented by other pleas, approaches, and definitions, to which we will, however, not draw attention. It suffices to say that already this plea undoubtedly touches a tender spot, particularly in the time in which we live. On the other hand, it must be said that this plea fights against the wrong enemy. It is neither reason nor the intellect which needs to be fought against, as a consequence of which now their territories can be occupied by feeling, desire, hope, the will,

⁸ 'Safe' is put between brackets because it is by no means evident that the precinct of the subject is really safe; I fully realise that the deepest levels of human existence may not automatically disclose safeness and security (instead of, e.g., anxiety or distress); for a profound exploration of this one can consult the work of the Flemish philosopher Rudi Visker (mainly *Truth and Singularity* and *The Inhuman Condition*). However, what I want to stress here is that the exclusive attention for human subjectivity, as such, to the detriment of other 'levels' or 'areas' of being, is in the long run injurious, not least for human subjectivity itself.

or the imagination. For, a simple replacement of one human faculty by another one, and the assignment of corresponding privileges and authorities, would in the long run probably give rise to similar critical analyses of culture and civilisation.

Actually, there is nothing at all to be fought. But there has to be some kind of an enlargement of scope and focus. Reason can and should remain in its place, and play the first fiddle in the many attempts to disclose truth. But reason ought to play a mediating and integrating role, far more than it used to do in the past, giving evidence of the fact that it 'knows' and 'understands' what the other human faculties are capable of. It comes down to a collaboration of all faculties, which are all fundamentally and in principle qualified for being bearers of truth, under the leadership of reason. It might be feeling and intuition which indicate where traces of truth show themselves, but it is up to reason to decide whether one refuses to go and see it or not. It might be desire, hope, and the will which relentlessly strive after clarity and disclosure, but it is up to reason to determine the degree in which that happens. It might be the dream and the imagination which draft promising perspectives for the enlightening of truth, but it is up to reason to sift the wheat from the chaff. Finally, it is reason itself which, as a listening and viewing faculty, unites all voices of all faculties in itself, and which creatively unfolds the always-already-present truth in the direction of always-more truth.

In other words, reason is the instance which has to guard against granting an exclusive patent to one faculty, and against letting it declare its method or specificity the one and only true way. Besides this, only reason has the authority to declare and comprehend, to give chances and to make room, to take decisions and to guide, albeit not in the fashion of a tyrant. It is reason, deepened and broadened, not by way of competition but *in concordance with* everything the other faculties have at offer, which has to play the leading role on the never-ending journey to disclosing truth. Every aspect or trace of truth mediated via feeling, the will, hope, desire, and the imagination has to be acknowledged, known, and communicated by reason.

Examples from the History of Thought

In order to clarify the profile of a 'broadened reason' as the 'heart' of the method of concordance at issue, it is useful to point to some elements of the history of thought, from which this method can draw inspiration for its further development. These examples have not been selected because a theologically fruitful method of concordance automatically or completely agrees with it. But, to a certain degree, it 'corresponds' with them, in the sense that it shares some basic intuitions with them, or that there is a common concern. It is, moreover,

certainly not the case that the thinkers and the works mentioned constitute an exhaustive list. Such a pretension would not only betray the deepest significance and the hermeneutical elasticity of the method of concordance. Therefore, I will refer first to three examples from the history of thought, and in a next section add to these four examples taken from contemporary thinkers.

The first example is taken from the writings of Anselm of Canterbury, since he is one on whom the development of a theological method of concordance can safely rely and since it is instructive to bring to the fore a medieval constellation of ideas anyway. This highly interesting eleventh-century scholar raised the question, to which degree are, next to thinking, also the will, natural and unnatural actions of human beings, and the senses able to mediate or bear truth? His answer was univocally positive, since it seems that truth can never be equalled with propositional truth; truth must be broadly ramified in human life. Truth is also correctness and rectitude in a moral significance, and it is intimately interwoven with justice.⁹ It comes down to letting these aspects of truth flourish in accordance with the one and ultimate truth, in other words, to letting them concord with beauty and goodness. Furthermore, Anselm maintains that truth is present in the essence of all things, so that humanity must not invent it or create it from nothing. People only have to discover and find truth in whatever surrounds and has been given to them.

It is through this inclusive way of thinking that Anselm tries to do justice to the famous quotation from the gospel according to John: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (Jo 14, 6). For, he sees a connection between the truth in this quotation and God, and, in its turn, between God and the 'word' from the prologue of the same gospel. Sooner or later, Anselm argues, the truths concerning individual things have to give rise to the question of the one truth and (the one) God, which is not different from the truth of the Word. There is an incredible diversity of channels through which truth can be mediated, but there is only one divine truth – and that one is not merely descriptive and theoretical, but also orienting, motivating, and normative for the whole of our lives.

A second meaningful step towards a theological method of concordance can be read in a profound remark of Karl Jaspers concerning the plan and the idea behind Hegel's ambitious *Wissenschaft der Logik* (*Science of Logic*). This remark is to be found in the introduction of Jaspers' *Von der Wahrheit*, a book originally intended to be the first part of his own, though never completed, project of an encompassing *Philosophical Logic*. 'Logic' here does not mean 'formal logic', the specific branch within specialised philosophical

⁹ Anselm, *De Veritate*, Book XII: "incivem sese definiunt veritas et rectitudo et iustitia."

examinations of valid patterns and systems of reasoning. To the contrary, Jaspers understands 'logic' in a much broader sense; it is the alerting to and the clarification of truth in the human mind. Therefore, philosophical logic engrafts itself on a moment in the process of a knowing about reality, which becomes reflexive. According to Jaspers, logic must be all-encompassing, and from the hidden levels of existence it must bring to the surface the existing connections of being. Hence, as it were, logic and truth follow the same basic trajectory from opacity to transparency – which is, in addition, a trajectory similar to the one characterising the Christian revelation (already from an etymological perspective), but this is an observation from outside of Jaspers' sphere of interest.

Whereas many of the prejudices against Hegel's philosophy particularly apply to his threefold *Logic* (subdivided into the logic of being, the logic of essence, and the logic of concept), Jaspers makes a case for the deep sense featuring in Hegel's pursuit of truth. He particularly appreciates, and is even fascinated by, the way in which, for Hegel, logic and metaphysics are indissolubly interwoven. From this, theologically concordant thinking will have to draw the lesson that the mystery of being, against the horizon of which the divine mystery takes place, takes on some graspable form in the conscious and self-conscious life of the human mind. And that this is, at the same time, a limitation and an immeasurable richness, this is something of which a theological method of concordance must increasingly become aware, at least if it not only has an intra-Christian but a truly universal agenda.

Inspiration for a third reference from the history of thought can be drawn from the work of Franz von Baader. Via Baader, moreover, there are several possible entrances through which the speculative richness of a theological method of concordance can be deployed.¹⁰ But, let me here just briefly make use of a concept, which is in the first instance derived from the philosophy of nature and from metaphysics. I am fully aware of the fact that this concept demands further elaboration and reflection, and that it entails various possibilities for creative applications: 'permeability', 'penetrability', 'porosity'. Baader actually means by this a kind of 'being-in', which transgresses external or purely mechanical relations, and which is irreducible to a flat spiritualism. In Baader's eyes, the permeability of being means that different levels of being are intrinsically connected with one another, and they therefore cannot be accurately thought of as superimposed layers which have nothing in common with one

¹⁰ I realise that Baader's work remains almost completely unknown (and sometimes even suspicious) in contemporary theology and philosophy. Perhaps my *Revelation, Reason and Reality. Theological Encounters with Jaspers, Schelling and Baader* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA 2007) can do something about this deplorable lack of scholarly interest.

another. According to Baader, the order of being is not a tautly or rigidly organised hierarchy. In this way, it also becomes possible to conceive of conscious life as living *in* vegetative and animal life, and that the former permeates and therefore comprehends the latter. And it becomes possible, indeed, to think that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can be acknowledged, recognised, and known *in* the sublunary.

Of particular interest with a view to thinking theologically concordantly, is the manifest and equally deliberate refusal to conceive of absolutely separate areas or levels of being. According to Baader, nature does have to do with history, reason with faith, works with grace, God with the world, philosophy with theology, the letter with flesh, the soul with the body, immanence with transcendence, ethics with physics, and so forth. And insofar as this implies that critical objections must be levelled against the modern mentality of thought, Baader self-consciously makes up his mind to deliver them. Whereas the peculiarity of this mentality perhaps consists in ‘keeping things apart’, the point of a truly balanced sense of discernment rather lies in seeing how ‘things’, though being undeniably different, are nevertheless intrinsically connected. It goes without saying, however, that, for such an insight, intellectual means cannot only be launched, but that they must be complemented with other human faculties.

Examples from Contemporary Thought

In addition to this – indubitably preliminary – threefold impulse from the history of thought, it is, with a view to a theologically fruitful method of concordance, equally important to look for contemporary philosophical and theological starting points, as well as for starting points which transcend the differences between both these disciplines (or discourses). Let me just consider four possible ways, presented in an arbitrary sequence, in order to refrain from giving any preference or order of importance.

First, there is the philosophy of the “between”, or “metaxology,” as it is developed by William Desmond in, among other works, *Being and the Between* (1995), *Ethics and the Between* (2001), and *God and the Between* (2008). This subtle and profound philosophy is an appropriate conversation partner for a theologically concordant thinking.¹¹ For, a point of departure is sought in the complex and perplex situation-in-between of the human being in being, which in a next step leads to a strong and systematically outlined metaphysics. The many interrelations characterising the

¹¹ Desmond’s philosophy has been recently discussed in Thomas F.A. Kelly (Ed.), *Between System and Poetics. William Desmond and Philosophy after Dialectic* (Aldershot 2007).

fundamental ontological position of the human being are discussed in such a way that Desmond knows himself empowered to plea in favour of a convergence between religious and philosophical thinking. They are not the same, but they deal with the same reality: they operate concordantly.

Second, a theological method of concordance can turn to Brian Hebblethwaite, who has sharpened his apologetical programme in two recent publications (*Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* and *In Defence of Christianity*, both dating from 2005). In the framework of this apologetics, Hebblethwaite makes use of two notions which are crucial to an encompassing defence of the Christian faith claims; for he mentions (the desirability of) a “holistic metaphysics” and the “cumulation” of variegated evidences in favour of the Christian truth claims. With “holism,” however, Hebblethwaite does not at all make an appeal to an outdated, naive, or esoteric worldview. Rather, it concerns the idea that not a single aspect of reality may be excluded on the basis of principles, when the content and the plausibility of Christian faith are challenged. A similar idea is provoked by the terms “cumulation” and “a cumulative case (for Christianity).” It is only the pile-up of an endless series of different elements, brought up via a plurality of channels, that the one and only truth can be unfolded in all its glory. Christian faith may not be based on one argument or one single strategy of arguments. However, it is certainly not the case that rational argumentations are incapable of supporting and defending its appeals to truth and its intelligibility.

Thrid, one can take an outstandingly interesting principle from the work of the French Jesuit and philosopher of religion Paul Valadier. This principle attempts to describe what the core of Christianity actually consists of. While making a case for a renewed alliance between faith and reason (*Un Christianisme d'avenir. Pour une nouvelle alliance entre raison et foi*, 1999), Valadier sees that the content of the Christian religion can never be univocally determined. Christianity is never only transcendence without immanence, never only a strange God without at the same time a reliable and confidence-breathing God, never only action without prayer, never only the New Testament without the Old, never only the individual but always the community too, never the bible without the tradition, never the hereafter without this earthly existence, and so forth. This pluriform tension, which is, besides, brilliantly formulated in the title of his book *La condition chrétienne. Du monde sans en être* (2003), brings Valadier to the bright idea of speaking and thinking about the *proprium christianum* in terms of “jamais l'un sans l'autre” (“never the one without the other”). At first sight, this seems to be a merely formal hermeneutical key, but, upon closer analysis, it is a fundamental and telling model, on which all contents of Christian faith can be engrafted. It is a principle of interpretation which guarantees that no single

absolutism will ever gain the upper hand, and that justice is done to the existential situation of the human being, as understood between the past and what is to come. With regard to our issue Valadier's key implies that a theological method of concordance permanently works on well-balanced standpoints and perspectives, which are at odds with every possible exaggeration in the direction of, still, the one without the other.

Fourth, reference should be made to the famous British scholar and specialist of medieval philosophy, theology, and the mystics, Denys Turner. In a recent and thought-provoking monograph, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (2004), he seeks a way out of the many false dilemma's concerning faith and reason. With a view to overcoming every misunderstanding, Turner relies on a specific interpretation of Thomas Aquinas and the First Vatican Council. In the wake of his great master and example, Turner argues that faith and reason do not contradict one another, and neither do the natural and supernatural. Interesting for a theological method of concordance is the idea that, notwithstanding several waves of modern and postmodern hesitance, it is important to hold on to the rational demonstrability of God's existence. This idea does not mean that one can think of a once and for all valid reasoning which proves the existence of God. But it does mean that reason, as it is working both within and without the circles of faith, can point to reasons on the basis of which one does not have to repudiate the existence of God as illusionary, merely hypothetical, or – worse – as bare nonsense. According to Turner, faith itself in any case demands a firm belief in the unexpected, also non-discursive capacities of intelligence. It is then that one can ascertain how the same apophatic and cataphatic moments are operative in faith as well as reason, and how both participate in a mystery infinitely higher than themselves, but that is not of the kind that they can say nothing about it.

Methodological and Epistemological Consequences

In the last section, I have hopefully painted a broad image of the possibilities and the inspiration sources of the intended theologically fruitful method of concordance in its search for truth. Anyhow, it was the intention to hear different, and perhaps also surprising, voices, as well as voices of which one does not expect to sing together in one choir.

For that matter, metaphors borrowed from the theory of music are of great help to elucidating the methodological and epistemological consequences of the approach for which a theologically concordant thinking opts. It is, for instance, not the intention to let all choir voices sing the same melody, like it is the case in (pre-modern)

Gregorian chants. The harmony at which theological concordance aims, is more complex and certainly polyphonic. Furthermore, both with regard to its rhythm and its melody, it does not sound at any moment perfectly harmonious. There will occur dissonances in the execution of the pieces written by the composer of the method of concordance. He or she weaves different melodious lines through one another, without ever making a cacophony of it.

Stated in not-metaphorical language: a theologically fruitful method of concordance is intrinsically plural but not internally divided. It is one, and indivisible, but at the same time subdivisible, since the delivery of material about which it reflects and which it tries to map, is endlessly diverse. It is a method in the sense that outlines a way (*hodos*) along which an ever more profound implantation in truth is facilitated. By means of several tentacles it encroaches itself onto the reality in which, of which, through which, and for which it lives, and in that very sense it attempts to be (and to remain) relevant of the human being in the totality of his/her person.

Hence, its methodical astuteness consists more in the fact that it actually does not stand out in some form of methodological specificity, that is, that it does not claim a particular method to be its own, next to or without concomitancy with others. It does not stipulate stringent prescripts, or principles of scrutiny, of which the coherence must be settled beforehand, in such a way that the contents it subsequently yields, are automatically valid and meet all requirements. But, it does stand firm on its feet, so that it is not easily thrown into confusion, matter which fluctuation or variation in being.¹² Its theological solidity and flexibility hence consist in the fact that it, as a method, stands open for the radically new of the Christian God, who, upon closer acquaintance, does not stand at odds with our human condition. It brings about the methodical conscience that God surprises but does not confound the human being, that he calls but does not shout an incomprehensible language, that he appeals and interpellates, but that he, in the final analysis, is not foreign to our deepest desires and expectations.

The epistemological specificity of a theological concordance must also be formulated aporetically, namely as a specificity which consists in the refusal to claim any particularity, but at the same time enables all particularities and every particular viewpoint to develop and unfold themselves. A theologically concordant epistemology does not enforce or impose a separate field of knowledge, which it regards as its own, and which it guards and protects against illegitimate intrusions. For this very reason, it is in a certain sense

¹² This very idea brings the proposal of a method of concordance in a close relationship to Guarino's balanced defence of a philosophical and theological realism. Cf. Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York/London 2005).

ardently anti-Schleiermacherian. For, Schleiermacher wanted to reserve a specific province in the human mind, freed from disturbing metaphysical and ethical preoccupations.¹³ Even if this proposal were possible, it would at least be inappropriate, as it asks for so many and so far-reaching nuances, that it would have to abandon its original ideal of purity as an unrealistic fantasy. For, it is precisely through ethics and metaphysics that religion can make its message felt. It is never in spite of, or in a wide circle around knowledge and praxis, that Christianity, and *a fortiori* a theologically concordant epistemology, communicates its content.

Therefore, it is of paramount importance that a theological method of concordance thoroughly thinks about thinking, and that it intimately knows knowledge. Thinking about thinking and knowing knowing presupposes, however, that there are more and other kinds of thinking and knowing than is usually assumed. Thinking about thinking, about its abilities and limits, goes along with a process of self-consciousness. In the act of thinking as such, there must be an in-built reflexivity, which permits thinking as thinking to function in all freedom, and, beyond the limits of thinking itself, to point to that which is not thinkable anymore. This last move must not be conceived of as a leap into the void, or as a blind surrender to the irrational; it just means thinking is only thinking through not-thinking. The true shape of knowing implies something similar. What is known and how it is known, are two aspects of a reflexive process, which from inside refers to the other of knowing, which, because of its otherness, is not yet an anti-knowing. Through 'con-' fanning out in all directions, a theological method of concordance must be able to, within and from these multiple anchors of self-consciousness, set out the beacons for an exploration of reality as encompassing as possible, like it is recorded in the book of books and the book of nature.

Taking into account everything hitherto explained, it is perhaps prudent to situate the symbolic centre of all mental activities not in the brains but in the heart (*cor*). Just like the heart provides all limbs and organs with fresh blood and oxygen, so it probably likewise provides intelligence, reason, imagination, desire, passion, hope, will etc. with everything necessary for life. If all human capacities succeed in following the rhythm of the heart, thereby caring for their mutual solidarity (as a kind of consanguinity) as the most precious of what most intimately moves them, then they will, in a truly concordant way, disclose truth.

¹³ Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher, *On Religion. Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, tr. Richard Crouter (Cambridge 1996), 17.

Systematic-Theological Relevance

As a matter of fact, I can be fairly short about the systematic-theological relevance of all these reflections. As far as theology is concerned, along with the sacred virtues of faith, hope, and love to which yields innumerable possibilities of expression, one must be aware that love, in the end, theology always prevails. And the anchor point of this love in the human being is not in the first place intelligence but the heart: 'cor'. Furthermore, on closer inspection, the 'con-' of the method of concordance is not different from the 'syn-' of system, systematic, and synthesis.

In any case, systematic theology is the thought of interconnect-edness within the broad, in fact all-encompassing domain covered by theological reflections, much more than it is a separate discipline within theology as a whole, with, for instance, an emphatically methodological identity, a particular field of research, or a thematic specificity with regard to the content of Christian faith – something to which systematic theology is all too frequently narrowed, and not only by not-systematicians. Systematic theology regards it at its task to keep on pondering over the coherence of Christian doctrine, in order to lay bare and explain its inherent truth. That this is not a static or boring preoccupation, but a passionate activity of which human beings will never speak the last word ('-ance'), seems evident to me.

In sum, the practice of systematic theology proceeds to a domain which lies in the subtle middle between gift (*Gabe*) and task (*Aufgabe*), being called and to call, revelation and tradition, experience and interpretation, in bygone days and at any time, already and not yet, *a posteriori* and *a priori*, given, giving, and to give. . . . What has been said to the heart of people ('cor') in an immense multiplicity of ways ('con-'), this good, beautiful, and true message must be carried on creatively ('-ance').

Conclusion: *pro veritate!*

This account *pro veritate* started with a reference to the Latin preposition *de*, in the place of which I proposed *pro* as a more appropriate alternative for what theology is up to in its talk *about* truth and search *for* truth. I immediately presented a determinate method, which I called *a theological method of concordance*. After I examined what precisely 'concordance' means (etymologically, semantically, and philosophically), and where in thinking possible avenues leading towards further developing and refining this method can be found, I dwelt on a few consequences and implications of this approach, and I did so in several important areas of research and reflection.

Finally, to conclude, it would seem that beginning with a reflection on a preposition was after all not so mad; and perhaps, at the end of this text, neither is a leap back into Latin. For the Latin word for preposition is *praepositio*, which makes one suppose that something is needed (or presupposed) before one takes any position. What is needed *for* truth, indeed, what is needed *before* truth, is not in the first place a cross section of the intellectual baggage of the human being to subsequently legitimise what he/she can rightfully maintain versus what he/she cannot hold, but a kind of basic trust in the unfolding of the truth itself. *Propositional truth* is only possible on the basis of an almost inextricable tangle of *prepositional truth*. However, thanks to a theological method of concordance, it must be possible to unravel this tangle, in order to subsequently embroider on it, in correspondence with the reading of that fascinating and masterly double work of the 'book of books' and 'the book of nature'.

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