

# Theologie in der Öffentlichkeit Theology in the Public Square

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# Contextuality and Intercontextuality in Public Theology

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## **The Paradigm of Public Theology – Origins and Development**

Dirk J. Smit

### **On the Origins and Development of Public Theology – Six Stories**

The question about the origins and development of public theology is not a simple one to respond to. What makes it especially difficult is the fact that public theology is so hard to define. What do we really mean by public theology? And do we talk only about the origins and development of the term, or also about the origins and development of some practice, even if the term itself is not being used to describe that practice? Must something be called public theology in order to be public theology?

Depending on one's decisions in this regard, it becomes possible to tell different stories about the origins and development of public theology. In these remarks, I try to remind ourselves of six such stories, six well-known responses to the question where public theology originated and how it developed since then.

After the six reminders, I shall briefly conclude with the question whether and, if indeed, in which way, it is justified and helpful to speak of public theology as a paradigm. For me, this is really the fascinating aspect of the theme.

#### *The dominant story: Theology in the Naked Public Square*

The dominant answer to the question about the origins and development of public theology is well-known. It is the story how the term was introduced in North American discussions by Martin Marty and then developed and popularized. This is the now classic story told by Harold Breitenberg Jr. when he asked "Will the real public theology please stand up?"<sup>1</sup> His first version of the story, published in 2003, was recently updated by Breitenberg himself, when he asked "What is public theology?" in essays in honor of Max Stackhouse.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Breitenberg Jr., To tell the truth: Will the real public theology please stand up?, in: *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 23, 2003, 55-96.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Breitenberg Jr., What is public theology?, in: D. K. Hainsworth/ S. R. Paeth (Eds.), *Public theology for a global society*, Grand Rapids, 2010, 3-17.

According to this dominant story, the origins of “real public theology” are to be found in the American discussions on civil religion, started by Robert Bellah in the late 1960s.<sup>3</sup> Bellah argued for “an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion” in America, that “exists alongside and rather clearly differentiated from the churches.” It was revealed through the experience of the American people, played a crucial role in the development of American institutions, provided a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, was shared by a great majority of Americans, irrespective of their own particular religious traditions and convictions, and it was expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that could be called the American civil religion, not antithetical to, but certainly not in any sense Christian.

As one particular form of such civil religion, Martin Marty, the Lutheran church historian from Chicago, then introduced the term “public theology” in 1974<sup>4</sup> and a few years later also the term “public church”<sup>5</sup>, to argue for a contribution to American public life from the side of the churches and theological traditions.

Reinhold Niebuhr, and soon afterwards also Martin Luther King Jr., would be seen as public theologians, as models of such a kind of public theology, reflecting on the behavior of the American people in the light of their particular faith tradition, in the light of biblical, historical and philosophical positions. In this way, Reinhold Niebuhr offered to the ensuing generation “a paradigm for a public theology” – to use the exact words of Marty from 1974. Of course, such “interpretation of American religious social behavior” could be both constructive and critical – as the examples of Niebuhr and King already showed.

According to this dominant story, it is only against the background of the characteristically American “wall of separation” between religion and political life and the resulting “naked public square” – in the words of Richard John Neuhaus – that the origins and development of the term public theology should be understood. American theologians from Christian traditions were challenged by the question how they could contribute to debates about public issues, primarily ethical issues, given the historical realities of American social life. Major figures, celebrated as public theologians, became their examples and their inspiration – some earlier figures, including Jonathan Edwards, Abraham Kuyper and Walter

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. N. Bellah/ P. E. Hammond, *Varieties of civil religion*, New York, 1980; R. N. Bellah, *Civil religion in America*, in: D. G. Jones/ R. E. Richey (Eds.), *American civil religion*, San Francisco, 1990 (reprint, original: New York, Harper & Row, 1974), 21-44 (originally *Daedalus* 96, 1967, 1-21); R. N. Bellah, *American civil religion in the 1970s*, in: *Ibid.*, 255-272; R. N. Bellah, *Broken Covenant. American civil religion in a time of trial*, Chicago, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> M. E. Marty, Reinhold Niebuhr: Public theology and the American experience, in: *JR* 54, 1974, 332-359.

<sup>5</sup> M. E. Marty, *The public church*, New York, 1981.

Rauschenbusch, but also a generation of leading public theologians at the time, figures like Max Stackhouse, Robert Benne and Ronald Thiemann.

Of course, the detail of the story is overwhelming. One only has to read Breitenberg’s own careful descriptions and consult his informative footnotes to come under the impression of all the twists and turns of the story, yet, it remains one story, which he summarizes by claiming that there are three aspects to public theology. It is “theologically informed discourse,” it is “ethical in nature” and it is “available and open to all.” Public theology, according to this understanding, speaks from a particular tradition (and is therefore “theologically informed”) about “public issues, institutions and interactions” (of an ethical nature) in such a way that the argument “can be evaluated and judged by publicly available warrants and criteria.” Yet, influential as this story may be, it is still only one possible response to the question.

### *Theology as Public Discourse*

Almost at the same time that Marty coins the term public theology, in October 1974, his Chicago colleague David Tracy writes an essay with far-reaching influence in *The Christian Century* of March 1975, called “Theology as Public Discourse”<sup>6</sup>. This is, however, a totally different story. Again, he uses the word paradigm in his opening sentence. “Historians of science insist that the most important periods in any discipline are those witnessing to a real conflict of basic paradigms.”

Without mentioning Thomas Kuhn, he seems to be thinking of his use of paradigm in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Some years later, the theologians of Chicago and Tübingen would host their well-known joint conference on a new paradigm in theology – and some years later the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa would also host a major inter-disciplinary conference in Pretoria on “Paradigms and Progress in Theology”. This is clearly a different story – with both a different understanding of public theology as well as a different understanding of paradigm.

In such a period, Tracy says, “The central question becomes the very character of the discipline itself: What modes of argumentation, which methods, what warrants, backings, evidence can count for or against a public statement by a physicist, a historian, a philosopher, a theologian?” He counts himself amongst those, he says, who are haunted by the question “What is this discipline called theology? What makes it a discipline? What allows it to be a form of public discourse? What methods and modes of argumentation and evidence can legitimately be put forward in any discussion that labels itself ‘theological’?”

<sup>6</sup> D. Tracy, *Theology as public discourse*, in: *CCen* 92, 1975, 280-284.

This is obviously a radically different question and approach to the public nature of theology. Here, the very nature of theology as a discipline is at stake. It is not a question of contributing orientation to ethical issues in public life. The question is rather what allows theology as such to be a form of public discourse? For the previous ten years of his life, Tracy confesses, he had been "semi-obsessed" with this question. "I still believe," he writes, "that the question of an adequate paradigm for theology as a form of public discourse remains the most important item on the contemporary theological agenda."

He then explains how this contemporary theological agenda challenges fundamental theology, systematic theology and practical theology to become truly public discourses. Interestingly enough, he suggests that H. Richard Niebuhr and Jürgen Habermas may be helpful figures in pursuing this agenda. "More work in the line of H. Richard Niebuhr's still suggestive notion of a 'confessional' theology that authentically re-presents a particular community's vision of reality without rendering that vision merely private strikes me as the kind of direction to pursue," he says, and "I wish contemporary theologians of praxis would read more Jürgen Habermas and less Ernst Bloch." "The central insight," he explains, "which Habermas so clearly possesses [is] that authentic praxis [...] needs the emancipatory power of critical reason [and] of authentic conversation and non-manipulative (i.e. really public) communication."

The continuation of this second story about the origins and development of public theology is also well-known. One could regard Tracy's own theological biography as the gradual fulfillment of this programmatic essay.<sup>7</sup> Together with Don Browning, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and others he would indeed read more Habermas, and publish a volume of essays called *Habermas, modernity, and public theology*<sup>8</sup>, shortly after *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* eventually appeared in English<sup>9</sup>.

When Tracy offers his influential distinctions on the three publics in which different theologians work – church, academy and society – and the three forms of public discourse that theologians therefore practice, with their respective sources, truth claims, and ways of argumentation, it represents a further episode in this story. It is obvious that Tracy, like the many public theologians that would follow his suggestions, is interested in much more than those who work with the domi-

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *D. Tracy, The analogical imagination*, London, 1981; *D. Tracy, Plurality and ambiguity*, San Francisco, 1987; *D. Tracy, Dialogue with the other*, Louvain, 1990; *D. Tracy, Theology, critical social theory, and the public realm*, in: D. S. Browning/ F. Schüssler Fiorenza (Eds.), *Habermas, modernity, and public theology*, New York, 1992, 19-42.

<sup>8</sup> *D. S. Browning and F. Schüssler Fiorenza (Eds.), Habermas, modernity, and public theology*, New York, 1992.

<sup>9</sup> *J. Habermas, The structural transformation of the public sphere*, Cambridge, 1989.

nant narrative of public theology. The ethical challenges indeed belong to the third public, one could perhaps say, but those who share Tracy's vision of all theology being public discourse, are obviously also interested in much more.

This is why he is explicitly followed in the use of these three publics by many, like Gavin D'Costa in his *Theology in the Public Square. Church, Academy and Nation*.<sup>10</sup> This is why many church theologians regard their own work as public theology. This is why many engaged in the study of science and religion regard their own work as public theology, including people like Wentzel van Huyssteen.

Tracy concludes his essay on a personal note, almost apologetic about "[t]he seeming ambitiousness, not to say arrogance" of his program for theology as public discourse. It is informed by two central beliefs, he says. The first is his belief "that the very subject matter of theology demands such ambitiousness." The second is his belief that theology today "demands a full commitment to the most fundamental of all contemporary methodological rules: the need for authentic and systematic collaboration." He does not mourn the end of the age of theological giants, he says, since "only a sustained collaborative effort can hope to produce the kind of public and communicative Christian theology needed." Therefore he concludes, "Until the owl of Minerva comes [...] let the conversation continue. They also serve who only stand and collaborate."

### 3 Theology and the Public Sphere

Completely independent from Marty and Tracy, one could tell the story of the origins and development of public theology also in the form of a third narrative. It is the story of "*öffentliche Theologie*" in the German-speaking world.

Perhaps Wolfgang Huber may serve as representative example, since he was one of the first to use and popularize the term, since he contributed together with others to a new paradigm in the sense of a new way of doing theology with a view to public life, and since he became, in recent years, a paradigm in the sense of a particular example of a public theologian, like Reinhold Niebuhr.

Already in 1972, which means two years before Marty's first use of the term, Huber completed his *Habilitationsschrift* called *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit*<sup>11</sup>. He was not the first to use this pair of terms, since Helmut Thielicke for example already wrote a book with the same title in 1947, but Huber's in-depth analyses, of both the historical background in the Christian tradition as well as different case studies from 20<sup>th</sup> century German history, most certainly contributed to a new understanding of the public role of church and theology.

<sup>10</sup> *G. D'Costa, Theology and the public square. Church, academy and nation*, Oxford, 2005.

<sup>11</sup> *W. Huber, Kirche und Öffentlichkeit*, Stuttgart, 1973.

It is again unnecessary to go into any detail. Over the years, Huber regularly argued for an “offene and öffentliche Kirche.” Both his ecclesiology and his ethics served an understanding of a public church which is actively, both constructively and critically, involved in public life. In many essays and books he articulated and practiced this form of public theology. He co-founded and edits a series of monographs called *Öffentliche Theologie*. His role as bishop has been described as “Öffentliche Theologie im Dienste der Kirche”.<sup>12</sup>

In short, both in his own person and in his work in church, scholarship and public life, Huber represents a form of public theology, today shared, practised and further clarified by many others and characteristic of the German context, of presuppositions of public life in Germany (often expressed in the so-called Böckenförde thesis), of historical developments in church-state relations in Germany, of the position of churches in contemporary German society. In crucial respects this story differs, regarding origins and developments, from the dominant one.

What is more, based on the growing and fascinating corpus of available literature, it is clear that other pluralist and secular democratic societies have their own stories to tell, related, but still different and particular – from Scotland to Scandinavia, from England to the Netherlands, from France to Australia. In each case the story of public theology has been a different one, based on the particular histories and the respective contexts.

It is accordingly not as if dominant ideas about public theology from the American experience gradually became known and accepted in these contexts as well. The truth is rather that all these societies have their own particular histories regarding the role of theology in public life, whether the term public theology was used, or not. In fact, this radical and complex contextuality is integral to the story of public theology.

This is why the Global Network for Public Theology was such a welcome initiative, why the *International Journal of Public Theology* with its diverse contributions from so many contexts makes such a helpful contribution, and why this International Conference discussing contextuality and inter-contextuality in public theology is so central to reflections on public theology.

### ✕ *Theology and Public Struggles*

This reminder (about the contextual nature of all public theology) however leads to yet another narrative. In many other contexts than such pluralist, secular and

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example W. Huber, *Die Kirchen und ihre Verflechtungen in die gesellschaftliche und politische Umwelt*, in: P. Bloth (Ed.), *Handbuch der praktischen Theologie*, Gütersloh, 1982, 677-684; W. Huber, *Kirche in der Zeitenwende*, Gütersloh, 1999; W. Huber, *Öffentlichkeit und Kirche*, in: M. Honecker et al. (Eds.), *Evangelisches Soziallexikon*, Neuausgabe, Stuttgart, 2001, 1165-1173.

democratic societies, the relationship between faith and public life was and sometimes remains a site of struggle. The relationship was often not as harmonious, rational and discursive as the earlier three stories may all suggest, but it was a contested relationship of power, conflict and struggle – struggles for liberation, freedom and freedoms; struggles for justice, dignity and rights; struggles for acknowledgement, equity and equality; struggles for peace and for overcoming oppression and violence.

Such struggles in the name of faith and supported by theology were and remain political in nature, economic, social, cultural. Often they were and remain struggles for power and for transformation – most probably transformation towards the kind of pluralist and secular, discursive and democratic societies in which the other forms of public theology could develop. Christine and Wolfgang Lienemann's collection of essays called *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit in Transformationsgesellschaften* is for example a helpful reminder of some of these stories.<sup>13</sup>

Again, the term public theology was not known and used in these struggles, but the issues at stake were most certainly the questions raised by public theology elsewhere, under more peaceful and democratic conditions. In these struggles, however, other names were preferred to describe the nature of the conflicts – liberation theologies, black theologies, feminist theologies, and many others.

In these names, much was at stake. In South Africa, for example, different names rapidly succeeded one another, when the former names were no longer useful – liberation, black, contextual, prophetic, kairós.

Are these theologies therefore also forms of public theology, because public theology is an umbrella term, an almost generic description of all contextual attempts to deal with the relationship between faith and public life, or is there too much at stake in the names, so that the use of public theology should be feared and avoided? Should the term public theology better be restricted to the more peaceful contexts of democratic discourses and therefore be seen as a technical term, only applicable in particular kinds of society and under specific conditions? In other words, do these stories of struggle form part of the story of the origins and development of public theology, or not?

It is not surprising that in many such situations of conflict the notion of public theology is regarded with skepticism, suspicion and outright rejection. Again in South Africa, Tinyiko Maluleke for example “question(s) whether public theology is the most potent vehicle for dealing with the (local South African) realities,” which he describes by saying: “Some of the angriest people on earth, at this time in history, are to be found on the southern tip of the African continent [...] This

<sup>13</sup> C. Lienemann-Perrin and W. Lienemann (Eds.), *Kirche und Öffentlichkeit in Transformationsgesellschaften*, Stuttgart, 2006.

anger explodes in all sorts of ways [...] Our language is violent and violence is our language [...] We are an angry people. This is an angry nation. Some of the angriest white as well as black people on earth live here. Some of the most violent people on earth are to be found here." For him, public theology is not able to deal with these realities – it is too innocent, too universal, too silent about power, too elusive, too integrationist, too postmodern (rather than postcolonial), too benign, metropolitan, romantic, civil. For him, "the very suggestion that everything must be called by one name is a subtle stigmatization of the local"<sup>14</sup>.

It is obvious that for Maluleke, as for many others in contexts of struggle, public theology does *not* offer a new paradigm, whether for doing theology or for engagement in public life. The differences are seemingly too radical, the contexts too diverse.

### 67 *Theology and Public Life in a Global World*

Again, this is another important reminder of a further story, namely that, after all, we share a common world. Our radical differences and diverse contexts together still form part of one world, which we share, in spite of everything.

There is no doubt that a growing global awareness forms an integral part of the development of the story of public theology. Increasingly, the titles of books on public theology illustrate this very clearly. One only has to remember recent titles like *God and Globalization*<sup>15</sup>, *A world for all?*<sup>16</sup> and *Public theology for a global society*<sup>17</sup>. One nowadays regularly reads of global civil society and global public theology. To be sure, even if the origin of the story was in the cultural contexts of nation-states, of American civil religion or German democratic culture, it soon developed into a global story, sensitive to context and difference.

In a way, of course, this is not really a recent story. One only has to remember the work of Life and Work, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ecumenical Movement, to realize that the ecumenical church has always been taking differences in context and changes in social life over time very seriously in struggling with the relationship between faith and public life. Theological reflection in the circles of Life and Work demonstrated this developing awareness over many decades. As more churches from more continents and places joined, the awareness of the complexities of our own world also increased.

One theological slogan after the other was coined in successive attempts to capture the growing awareness and the ever-changing insights – responsible so-

ciety; churches in revolutionary situations; a decade of development and peace; liberation instead of development; justice, peace and participation; justice, peace and sustainability; justice, peace and the integrity of creation; a decade to overcome violence.<sup>18</sup>

Although the term public theology was not used, all these programs were ecumenical attempts to deal with the questions of public theology but under global conditions, taking the complexity of many contexts into account, contexts often ignored by those doing public theology in the more homogenous situations of particular nation-states.

Today, the ecumenical church, including the different confessional communions, is facing the realities of globalization. Together, they attempt to affirm what is beneficial in the new world order yet at the same time to name and deal with dangers of marginalization and exclusion, with challenges of economic injustice and ecological destruction. Increasingly, churches from North and South, with their different experiences of globalization, strive to face these questions together, jointly "dreaming a different world"<sup>19</sup>.

Does this decades long experience of "learning to speak" in public<sup>20</sup> also count as public theology, or not? Should these ecumenical efforts to deal with our global realities therefore also be seen as part of the paradigm of public theology, although the term is not really used in these circles – or are there fundamental differences between the stories of public theology and of ecumenical witness?

### 68 *Theology and the Public Return of the Religious*

Talking about the global world, one final story becomes important too. Integral to the new awareness is namely a growing awareness and acknowledgement of the public importance of religion. It is as if many people – from scholarship to public opinion – suddenly realize that religions and religious convictions play crucial roles in our common world.

It is becoming increasingly common to hear scholars acknowledge that the secularization thesis is no longer convincing, that the secular city has never really been so secular, that the secular age is not what it seemed, that we have to deal with de-secularization, that religion is back, that the gods have returned, yes, that God is back. For some, this is a new awareness. Some have in fact changed their minds. Some claim they have always known this to be so.

<sup>14</sup> T. S. Maluleke, The elusive public of public theology, in: JJPT 5, 2011, 79-89.

<sup>15</sup> M. L. Stackhouse (Ed.), *God and Globalization*, 4 volumes, Harrisburg/New York, 2000-2007.

<sup>16</sup> W. F. Storrar/ P. J. Casarell/ P. L. Metzger (Eds.), *A world for all? Global civil society in political theory and Trinitarian theology*, Grand Rapids, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> D. K. Hainsworth/ S. R. Poeth (Eds.), *Public theology for a global society*, Grand Rapids, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> M. Robra, *Ökumenische Sozialethik*, Gütersloh, 1994.

<sup>19</sup> A. A. Boesak/ L. Hansen (Eds.), *Globalisation: The Politics of Empire, Justice and the Life of the Earth* (Beyers Naudé Centre Series, 4), Stellenbosch, 2008, 173-184; A. A. Boesak/ J. Weusmann/ C. Amjad-Ali (Eds.), *Dreaming a different world*, Stellenbosch, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> K. Clements, *Learning to speak. The church's voice in public affairs*, Edinburgh, 1995.

For most people, it is not necessarily good news. The presence of religion and religions in public life has always been ambivalent and ambiguous, full of potential for both the constructive and the destructive. Some fear a possible clash of civilizations and some simply fear the presence of "public religions," in the words of José Casanova, who also speaks about "Europe's fear of religion."<sup>21</sup>

Although the origin and development of the term public theology did not really involve this awareness and focus, there is no denial that the original contexts – for example America's civil religion or Germany's leading culture, whether secular or Christian or both – are challenged, if not to say threatened, by the explicit presence and public claims of a plurality of particular religious traditions and communities.

In other words, although the term public theology may not originally have had these associations for those who coined and used the expression, there can be little doubt that in the minds of many people today, when they hear of public theology, they will immediately think of the challenges involved in the public presence and public claims of public religions. In our global world today, religion is (again) part and parcel of the global public life and public theology will also have to take this seriously.

This was underscored by Will Storrar, the leading figure when the Global Network for Public Theology was envisioned and founded, when he wrote about the volume *Public theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, the *Festschrift* for Duncan Forrester which he himself edited, that "through the fate of its own timing," namely the fact that it had been prepared days before 9/11, it was already outdated in this specific respect. It did not take this new reality into account.

"[T]his timing means that the book maps public theology at the very end of the pre-9/11 world; it focuses on the contested western intellectual and political legacy of modernity, while recognizing the growing importance of economic globalization [...]. [T]he volume does not offer any substantial Christian theological engagement with [...] the inter-religious dimension of global public affairs that have received so much attention from politicians, policymakers and scholars in the years since 2001. Such inter-religious thinking on public affairs must now constitute an essential component in doing public theology in the twenty-first century"<sup>22</sup>.

### On Public Theology as Paradigm – Concluding Questions

So, is public theology about faith traditions addressing issues of an ethical nature in the naked public square in such a way that everyone can understand the argumentation – or is public theology about a whole new way of doing theology,

<sup>21</sup> J. Casanova, *Europas Angst vor der Religion* (translated by R. Schieder), Berlin, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> W. F. Storrar, *The oscillating public sphere*, in: *IJPT* 3, 2009, 245-250.

addressing diverse publics through critical rational discourses that they share? Has public theology only developed within discursive and democratic public spheres – or is public theology also possible and legitimate in contexts of struggle? Is it possible for public theology to develop in such a way that it can address the challenges of the globalizing world – and will it also prove able to address the realities and claims of public religions?

And in the light of these different stories, is it helpful to speak of public theology as a paradigm, and if so, in what sense? Paradigm can after all have different meanings. In remembering these stories, we already heard the word used in widely different meanings.

Perhaps it is helpful to contrast two opposing views of paradigm. On the one hand, there is the way in which the notion was popularly understood after Thomas Kuhn's work on paradigm shifts (Kuhn in fact used both views himself, but this was the one that became associated with him and very popular). According to this view, a paradigm is understood as the state of "normal science" at a particular point in time. It may perhaps again change at a later stage, through new scientific revolutions, but for the time being this is the way science works and is supposed to work. In this sense, paradigm is a normative notion, this is the state of the art, for now, the rules to be followed, the method to use, the best practice known and available.

It is of course interesting that Kuhn himself did not think that paradigm theory is therefore applicable to social sciences, precisely because of a plurality of legitimate methods that always exist alongside one another and compete with or complement one another. Still, this seems to be the way that Tracy thought about theology and the need for a new paradigm, and this may also be the way that many others think about public theology. For the time being and for the present context, public theology is the new paradigm, the new methodology, to be preferred above other forms of say civil religion, social ethics, or political theology.

If this is what we mean, then the purpose of our inter-contextual conference should be to look for commonalities that characterize this new approach, to attempt to describe what public theology is really about, so that "the real public theology can stand up" from all the different contexts.

On the other hand, there is the contrasting way in which say Foucault used paradigm (the second view also used by Kuhn himself) in rejection of any notion of "normal science" and the state of the art or the order of things. For him, paradigm is precisely not the general rule, but the particular, the specific, the concrete example. In his recent essay called "Was ist ein Paradigma?," Giorgio Agamben comments on this move by Foucault, deliberately away from Kuhn: "Worum es

ihm ging, war die Verlegung des Paradigmas aus der Epistemologie in die Politik<sup>23</sup>.

Perhaps this is what Marty meant when he called Reinhold Niebuhr a paradigm – one specific example of how things could be done – like Martin Luther King Jr., Wolfgang Huber, and in our case Beyers Naudé, Desmond Tutu, Allan Boesak, Tiyiko Maluleke? They serve as inspiring examples of what could be done – under their particular circumstances and in their particular contexts?

Then, the purpose of a conference on inter-contextuality would precisely *not* be to look for common features, for universal rules that can be deduced by way of comparison, for a shared method that would characterize the new normal science, but the opposite. Then the purpose could only be to see and appreciate the particular contexts in their specificity, even in their strangeness.

Agamben explains this function of a paradigm by combining Aristotle and Kant: "Aristoteles unterscheidet das Vorgehen durch Paradigmata der Induktion und der Deduktion [...] Während die Induktion also vom Partikularen zum Universalen fortschreitet und die Deduktion vom Universalen zum Partikularen, ist das, was das Paradigma definiert, eine dritte und paradoxe Art der Bewegung, das Fortschreiten vom Partikularen zum Partikularen [...] Das paradoxe Verhältnis des Paradigmas zum Allgemeinen hat wohl nie wieder eine so kraftvolle Formulierung erfahren wie die, die Kant ihr in der Kritik der Urteilskraft gegeben hat [...] und zwar in die Form eines Beispiels, dessen Regel anzugeben unmöglich ist [...] Das heißt, daß wir, wenn wir die Denkschritte des Aristoteles und die Kants in eins lesen, sagen können, daß das Paradigma eine Bewegung bezeichnet, die von einer Singularität zur anderen geht und die, ohne sich selbst untreu zu werden, jeden einzelnen Fall in das Exemplar einer allgemeinen Regel verwandelt, die a priori zu formulieren unmöglich bleibt"<sup>24</sup>.

According to this view, we only learn from paradigms when we move from one particular paradigm to the next particular paradigm. They are concrete and instructive examples of something that can precisely *not* be captured in general rules, whether before or after. We learn from them precisely because we see them in their singularity.

Is this perhaps what Will Storrar is suggesting with his recent contributions on doing public theology as "the naming of parts," as "gathering fragments," as "joining pearls on a string"<sup>25</sup>? Put in terms of the theme of our Conference that would mean, moving from one context to the other, learning from their irreducible historicity and particularity. Put in terms of the theme of my remarks that would

mean, there is no common origin and there is no gradual development because there is no real public theology that could stand up, no new normal and normative discipline of public theology, there are only historical moments of public theology, instructive and inspiring precisely in their uniqueness. Then Tracy's words are indeed applicable, "Until the owl of Minerva comes [...] let the conversation continue. They also serve who only stand and collaborate."

<sup>23</sup> G. Agamben, *Signatura rerum. Zur Methode*, Frankfurt am Main, 2009, 17.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-26, (my italics).

<sup>25</sup> W. F. Storrar, The naming of parts: Doing public theology in a global era, in: *IJPT* 5, 2011, 23-43.