Thomas Zeilinger:
Ethical Instruction via 'Anschauung'
An Appeal for media-apt Contributions of the Church to the Ethics of the Internet

Abstract:

The way the big churches in Germany traditionally address ethical issues is by discursive memoranda and pastoral letters. The article explores the possibilities of a complementary approach by symbolic presentation. It is suggested that the specifics of the Internet point as well towards that direction as the specific understanding of the educational process as seen in the Christian tradition. Thus the idea of an ethical orientation by exemplary models using the power of imagination is stressed. Some examples from different areas are given to illustrate the notion of a participatory and dialogical exploration of the ethical challenges the net has in store. Rather than defining answers before meeting the challenges, the paper suggests to explore new and appropriate answers by ways of mutual, interpretative practice in the new medium.

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"Memoranda": A Classical Contribution of the Church to Ethics

If in German-speaking areas the question of the church's contribution to an ethics of the internet is posed, one mainly looks to discursive contributions in the form of "official" church memoranda (so called "Denkschriften") and pastoral letters. The societal contribution to ethical issues by the churches is especially noticed where the church, through its representative deputies makes itself heard in public, and does this in a differentiated manner. In the realm of media-ethics a prominent example of this kind of contribution can be found in a joint declaration of the (catholic) German Conference of Bishops (DBK) and the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD): "Chances and Risks of the Media Society" for the year 1997.[79] The church (in this case especially note-worthy, the two large *Volkskirchen* together) enters the public discourse through its institutional public representtatives, in order to promote, through its own arguments, grounds and consid-erations, the process of societal reflection about developments of the media. In the specific tradi-tion of Memoranda of the Evangelical Church of Germany, a special study in the 1980's had pre-ceded the joint declaration of 1997: Even before the existence of the internet as we know it today, an EKD study in the year 1985 discussed the opportunities, dangers and challenges for respon-sible planning in the use of modern IT techniques with the title "The new Information and Communi-cation Techniques".[80] Since the mutual text of 1997 no memorandum, nor a pastoral letter from the Catholic side, appeared in the German speak-ing world as a public contribution by the church to the topic of the internet.

However, in the year 2002 in Rome the "Pontifical Council for Social Communications" published a communiqué "Ethics in the Internet", which ap-peared also in a German translation and was taken notice of in the German language areas.[81] At any rate, the impression that discourse and in turn the discursively developed criticism of discourse represent the primary places in which the church itself contributes to (media) ethics, can be seen as confirmed for media ethics and specifically for the ethics of the internet in the German language areas.

The Internet: Not a discursive, but a presentative Medium

The more the internet itself developed in a multi-media direction, its visual quality became and becomes more and more noticeable as reflection on its characteristics continue. Several characteris-tics of the internet were repeatedly emphasized in this regard: Its hypertext structure, its multimedia character which is enabled through (moving) pictures and sound as part of the net, as well as the far-reaching integration of other media right up to and including telephone and television via IP. The multidimensionality, which distinguishes the internet from a medial viewpoint, can hardly

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[79] Chancen und Risiken der Mediengesellschaft. Gemeinsame Texte der EKD und der DBK, Nr. 10, 1997 (online: www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/mediendenkschrift_1997_einleitung.html). Even as the internet does not yet appear as a subject in its own right in the document, the new medium is as much present as the word "internet" appears in the paper 18 times. The importance of the net is stressed in the introduc-tory reflections on recent developments of me-dia technology. Particularly the acceleration of the development and the changing framework the internet imposes upon other "classical" me-dia are noticed. The question of responsibility for the content is viewed as a new challenge in a network of linked computers (part 1.1.1.)

[80] Kirchenamt der EKD (ed.): Die neuen Informa-tions- und Kommunikationstechniken – Chancen, Gefahren, Aufgaben verantwortlicher Gestal-tung. Eine Studie der Kammer der EKD für So-ziale Verantwortung und der Kammer der EKD für Publizistische Arbeit, Gütersloher Verlags-haus: Gütersloh 1985.

[81] Ethics in Internet, (online: http://www.vatican.va/ ro-man_curia/pontifical_councils/pccs/documents/ rc_pc_pccs_doc_20020228_ethics-internet_en. html; German version: http://www.vatican.va/ roman_curia/ pontifi-cal_councils/pccs/documents/rc_pc_pccs_ doc_20020228_ethics-internet_ge.html. A dis-cussion of the subject followed in the Journal "Communicatio Socialis, Vol 35., 2002.

be encompassed discursively. The Darmstadt media pedagogue Franz Joseph Roell therefore asserts, that perception in the internet should be understood in a presentative, symbolic way which addresses dimensions of the subconscious.[82]

With this distinction, Roell refers back to the philosophical works of Susanne Langer. With Ernst Cassirer, Langer assumes that the ability to symbolize is basic for the humanity of men: In the use of symbols she recognizes the essential activity of the human spirit, which does not simply record sense data but always transforms them symbolically. According to Langer, this *symbolic transformation* finds its expression in presentative and in discursive symbols. *Discursive symbols* represent facts in a temporal sequence of grammatical structures and signs. This occurs in language as a prime example; whereas *presentative symbols* bring into our understanding what cannot be adequately expressed through language. They enable a holistic, intuitive comprehension (in a picture, in music, in rituals and in myths…), in them a "simultaneous, integral presentation" takes place.

This visual-holistic symbolization must be considered more appropriate for the symbolization process than the acoustic-analytical one through language. The presentative symbol translates a complex message immediately into a complex sign, whereas in linguistic communication the complex message must be split into a sequence of its various elements: "Visual forms – lines, colors, proportions, etc. – are just as capable of *articulation*, i.e. of complex combination, as words. But the laws that govern this sort of articulation are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language. The most radical difference is that *visual forms are not discursive*. They do not present their constituents successively, but simul-

taneously, so the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision."[83]

The *image* in this view becomes a paradigm of the presentative-holistic symbol, which encompasses a wealth of meaning, and significance which cannot be matched in its ambiguity and complexity by discursive-conceptual language.

Langer's reflections appear indeed suitable to illuminate a characteristic trait of the medium: The internet presents a great deal more simultaneously rather than allowing it to be grasped in a discursive sequence. This view would therefore suggest that we look for contributions to the ethical formation of the net in the mode of *Anschauung* (through "presentational forms" rather than in that of discursivity.[84]

The Church: An Educational Institution

For such preference of *Anschauung* over discursivity, the church can find grounds in its own tradition. If and where it remembers this tradition, it could certainly draft ethical contributions in the direction of a more pronounced image-oriented education.

In modern Protestant theology, it was Friedrich D.E. Schleiermacher who espoused the importance of feeling and experience for the theory and practice of religion. Schleiermacher distinguished two basic kinds of action, symbolization and organization. In his systematics he outlines four spheres of sociallization in a matrix composed of the kinds of actions of symbolization and organization on the one hand, and the respective characteristics of action as universal (identical) or individu-

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[82] Röll, Franz J: Pädagogik der Navigation, 91. Röll ibid. 45 differentiates between a model of communication as a network and a model of communication as a tree or a pyramid. By that he also draws on the media theorist Vilém Flusser, who stresses a discrimination between discursive and dialogical structures of communication.

[83] Langer, Susanne K.: Philosophy in a New Key, p.93. (chapter "discursive and presentational forms).

[84] As there is no appropriate English translation which offers the rich meaning of the German term *Anschauung,* I stick to the German term throughout the paper. Besides the rather obvious meaning of "*view"* in the sense of seeing or looking at (cf. "what you see is what you get" as the surface-matrix of graphical PC-interfaces!) you may rightly so bear in mind the more philosophical notions of "perception", particularly sensual and intuitive aspects of perception.

al on the other. Science comes into being through identical symbolization, the state, the law and economy through identical organization, art and religion through individual symbolization and the sphere of free sociability through individual organization. The action of the church, as symbolizing action, deals not only with 'consciousness' but always also with "feelings" and "experience".[85]

Following Schleiermacher, the practical theologian Reiner Preul from the city of Kiel suggests to look for the specific contribution of the church in its function as an educational institution.   Preul selects the expression "in order to include the church in a group of institutions, which address the consciousness, the emotions and the experiences of human beings and thus in some way contribute to their education. These are the educational institutions (from kindergarten to the school and the university and academy of sciences), of the arts of every genre, and the public media."[86] Insofar as educational institutions according to Preul not only develop and train, but also portray and present, i.e. bring into expression and representation, the "three-dimensional consciousness" of world consciousness, self consciousness and God consciousness, he also meets the obvious natural objection that an understanding of the church as an educational institution would narrow the understanding of the church to its didactic aspect. "Our own definition of the church as an educational institution lifts the church above the function of the school: It is not only a matter of education and formation of the Christian self- understanding, but also of its expression, activation, representation, and shaping."[87]

A symbolic-presentative access to education, as well as and especially to education in ethics, is certainly not only indicated from the medium "Internet" but also from the self- understanding of the church. In other words: If the media ethics of the church would only base itself on individual processes of consciousness of a discursive nature, it would fall behind not only the "new" medium internet, but at the same time also behind its "old" content, the gospel.

Anschauung as Participatory Exploration in Dialogue

Undoubtedly discursive criticism is necessary from time to time. And yet "Doing the Just" becomes an essential part of ethics in the internet as well: It is essential to explore the possibilities of the net in order to actively shape communication in the net in the freedom of the children of God and the Shalom of God.[88] This requires an experience oriented mediation in a "common, interpretative practice" such as the German Lutheran Theologian Joachim Track asked for in his "Sprachkritische Untersuchungen zum christlichen Reden von Gott".[89] A Christian ethics cannot be about a general recognition of already fixed claims to validity, rather it matters here to *give voice together* to *mutual experiences in mutual practice.*

Of course, the way of mutual, interpretive practice is not per se without discursive elements. However, it differs from the usual understanding of imparting general contents that are fixed in advance which then only have to be grasped individually. Rather, from an ethical viewpoint we are dealing here with a specific moment of the ethical way of understanding. The German ethicist H.G. Ulrich called it the *explorative and investigative search for the coming of the new creation.*[90] This search is nothing but the mutual interpretative practice as a teaching and learning situation of ethical education. It is executed always at the

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[85] An extensive presentation of Schleiermachers ideas on the different spheres and realms of human actions is given by Reiner Preul in his "church-theory": Preul, Reiner: Kirchentheorie, 143ff.

[86] Preul, Reiner: Kirchentheorie, 141 (my own translation). Again the German term "Bildung" offers a broader range of meaning than the word "education", as it involves formative aspects, which I try to illustrate by using "instruction" instead of "education" in the title of this paper.

[87] Preul, Reiner: Kirchentheorie, 152. (again my own translation).

[88] From philosophical grounds Rafael Capurros plea for a concept of "Vernetzung als Lebenskunst" bears important similiarities to the ideas presented here from a Christian perspective. (see: Capurro, Rafael: Ethik im Netz, 50ff.).

[89] Track, Joachim: Sprachkritische Untersuchungen, 323.

[90] Ulrich, Hans G.: Wie Geschöpfe leben, 76.

level of mutual imagination and intuitive perception (*Anschauung*) as well. Without this imaginative and presentative moment the possibilities of ethical practice in the net remain hidden.

Now it is one thing to propose such contributions to the participative and dialogical exploration of the possibilities of the internet. This consideration gains special interest through the fact that it cannot only be elaborated as a theoretical postulate, but that such "*Anschauung*" oriented contributions, in my opinion, may certainly be also met in practice.

Three Examples of Participatory and Dialogical Intervention

In Dialogue with the Suppliers: "Future Conference: Quality Criteria for Children's Programs in the Internet"

In the year 2004, the Theologians Johanna Haberer and Roland Rosenstock together with the Media Work of the Evangelical Church in Germany and the Commission for Youth Media Protection in Munich, launched a "*future conference quality criteria for children's programs in the internet*". Every year since that time has been devoted to the dialogue among the church, youth media protection and the suppliers of children's websites in the net. The conference series offers a platform by picking the theme of *quality* of internet offers for children to sensitize those involved in their production and control to ethical themes. A look at the choice of themes of the conferences in the years 2004 to 2006 serves to illustrate this: In all three conferences, the ethical aspect announced itself in various ways already in the title: "Remain a child – become a Customer?" (2004) – "Who bears the Responsibility?" (2005) – "Children and the Internet in Europe: other Countries – other Customs" (2006). In the content of the contributions, besides legal aspects, practical examples, reports of experiences of the examinations and comparative research overviews, there were also explicit ethical questions for discussion: for example, the themes "Communication of Values", "Perspectives of Responsibility", "Code of Con-

duct", "Tension between Media Control and Individual Responsibility".[91]

With the *Future Workshop quality criteria for children's programs in the Net"* , the combination of church and theological science has succeeded in establishing a dialogue forum where in discourse with suppliers, via the cue word *quality,* ethical questions about the production and use of internet offers for children can be competently brought forward as a theme.

A Quality Seal in the Internet: The "Erfurt Netcode"

Also aimed in a special way at the suppliers of web pages for children is an initiative which came into being already in 2002 through suggestions of the Catholic as well as the Evangelical Church, the Land Thuringia and the city at the "children's media location", Erfurt. The charitable organization "Erfurter Netcode e.V. promotes the improvement of the quality of children's web sites in the net through their specially created quality seal.

To accomplish this, the organization has developed standards for awarding a quality seal according to which web site suppliers can be certified. The seal has been awarded for the fourth time in May of 2007, nineteen children's web pages are listed on the web site.

The evangelical theologian Roland Rosenstock, who has involved himself in this organization, points in his statement on the occasion of the presentation of the netcode to the diverging approach, which the initiative chose in comparison to, say, the US American development of an independent, strictly separated and state controlled "children's internet" (www.kids.us):   "The Erfurt net code wants to carry on a broad ethical debate with suppliers and users about the contents and format of children's sites in the internet that are to be produced. Here the thinking is not guided by the idea of a ban for the "target group children" – as is the basic character of the US project – instead it envisions that children would

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[91] The first of meanwhile three „Zukunftswerk-stätten" took place in April 2004 in Munich, the second one in April 2005 (see: www.tv-ev.de/themen 2780.html, the third one in May 2006 (see www.ekd.de/jugend/pm91_2006_ jugendme dienschutz.htm.

be introduced to a responsible use of the net in a transparent and playful manner."[92]

Computer media pedagogy: "Man at the Computer" – Josefstal

Already in 1984 the pedagogue Wolfgang Schindler from the study centre for evangelical youth work in Josefstal (Bavaria) began to "use" computers pedagogically reflected for extracurricular education, under the heading "Man at the Computer" (MaC). Schindler saw from the beginning that much more was involved here than just the instrumental use of a new medium PC for media-independent contents, that rather the medium itself was standing in an intense connection to its contents.

In 1984 he wrote with great foresight that for youth work with the computer, it would become important "to make resources available for young people, to create a trading centre for ideas. If to this is added a modem, i.e. a telephone connection for the computer, the utilization of a quasi unlimited information supply becomes possible. What could arise from this would be a network that far surpasses the current possibilities of the telephone and letter mail."[93]

Twenty years later in an "interim assessment" of computer media pedagogy, he sees the technical development of digital, online linked media capable of editing as proof of the possibilities which today are available to reform pedagogy, to change from a (passive) culture of being-taught to an (active) culture of appropriation. "Computer media pedagogy is rooted in an emancipatory conception of educational and youth work. It basically aims at

the realization of this alternative culture of learning and action, which since the wide availability of home computers – and later the internet – is being practiced by a growing group of former pioneers."[94]

"Spontaneity, self determination, and participation" can be realized , according to the Josefstal computer media pedagogy, in a computer supported "learning community" which "demands of the learners a high degree of responsibility for their actions and – wherever possible – instead of preset goals favours a mutual development of these, in order to increase in this way the ability of self-organization at a group level."[95]

Ethical Instruction via Anschauung: An Opportunity for the Internet and for the Church

Before the background of the examples from practice the way of ethical education qua *Anschauung* appears as a promising complement to a purely discursive understanding of the contribution of the church to an ethic of the internet. With its media pedagogical initiatives, but also with the manner of its self-representation in the net, the church – in the mode of *Anschauung* – makes important contributions to the ethical education in the net as well as to the ethical formation of the net. The church itself should consider these contributions more important than it has done up to now. The "classical" social ethical way of ethical instruction through reflection and analytical contribution to the discourse requires a complementary completion through presentative symbolization in the form of exemplary models (i.e. necessarily daring in their explorative and exemplary nature) and hence ask to be exposed to proof by way of *mutual, interpretative practice*.

As the preceding examples show, the interest is here not so much about a fixed framework of answers. In view of a new medium it seems necessary – as well as possible – to search for the

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[92] Statement of Roland Rosenstock online: www.erfurter-netcode.de/erfurter_netcode_rosen-stock.pdf, (my own translation). All information on the initiative available online: www.erfurter-netcode.de.

[93] Schindler, Wolfgang: Computer in der Jugendarbeit, in: deutsche jugend, 3/1984, pp. 131-138; quoted from "Computermedienpädagogik - eine Zwischenbilanz", in: deutsche jugend 7+8/2005,, pp. 24-36; online available unter www.josefstal.de/mac/days/2004/buch/wolfgang_schindler_cmp.pdf. The whole project online: www.josefstal.de /mac/ index.htm.

[94] Ibid; online available unter www.josefstal.de/mac/days/2004/buch/wolfgang_schindler_cmp.pdf.

[95] Reinmann-Rotmeier, Gabi in: Schindler, Wolfgang et al. (eds.): Bildung in virtuellen Welten, 288 ff.

right questions and to look for courage to expose one's own ethical intuitions to examination and proof. The readiness for this can only happen in a joint and interdisciplinary approach through the venture of specific practice. Of course, such a way of ethical investigations in the net will be exemplary and not exhaustive. In this respect, the way of such model-like *Anschauung* takes two things seriously: We cannot escape a definite perspective to which we are committed in a specific way. At the same time, we also have to accept the insight into the particularity of our perspective. Following that insight contributions to the civil societal discourse about the ethics of the net will also become possible, which do not content themselves with the lowest common denominator of generalizable norms, but in their turn, – hopefully – create dwellings of humanity in the public space of the net – as insular as they may be for the time to come.

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