

Schelling and twentieth-century Catholic theology: the case of Walter Kasper

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the author is to provide an accurate analysis, new considerations and debates on the most important texts published by Card. Walter Kasper on Schelling and on the Tübingen School. The intention is to offer a new approach to Kasper's opus. The paper comprises two parts: (1) a section about Walter Kasper and his interpretation of Schelling's philosophy and (2) a shorter section dedicated to some of the most relevant theological developments of Kasper's theology which he reached in pursuing Schelling's questions.

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Walter Kasper; Schelling; contemporary theology; Karl Barth; German idealism

I. Introduction

In 1964, the young Walter Kasper (born in 1933) was granted by the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Tübingen the licence to teach dogmatic theology on the basis of a thesis on *Philosophie und Theologie der Geschichte in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Philosophy and Theology of History in Schelling's Late Philosophy). Kasper's interest in Schelling, himself a student at the Evangelisches Stift at Tübingen, thus originated in the context of his university studies in the school of J.R. Geiselman and developed in parallel with his theological education. For this reason, it is impossible to form a correct idea of Kasper and his whole theology unless one is willing to take into account this background, not least because he himself has always consciously and forcefully recognised this fact and seen in it his own centre of gravity. Kasper's work and thought were shaped in a lasting manner during his university years. In fact, his entire academic oeuvre has been nurtured from this fecund origin so much so that he became one of the most well-known names associated with the Catholic school at Tübingen to which he gave a new, creative impulse having himself been profoundly inspired by it. 'He always emphasised his own roots not only as a teacher of theology and a member of the teaching faculty of this institution, but also as bishop' and cardinal.¹

The principal intention of the present article is precisely this: to return to this beginning and elucidate these decisive years for Kasper in broad outline by way of a relecture and interpretation of his book on *The Absolute in History* and the particular manner in which he interpreted the so-called second Schelling, an author whom he approached in the wake of Walter Schulz and at practically the same time as Xavier

Tilliette. The analysis will subsequently move on into the more properly theological field.

The essay comprises two parts: (1) a section about Walter Kasper and his interpretation of Schelling's philosophy and (2) a shorter section dedicated to some of the most relevant theological developments of Kasper's theology which he reached in pursuing Schelling's questions.

II. Walter Kasper and the second Schelling

The interest of the young Kasper, who took as his basis of reference and discussion the philosophy of the second Schelling, follows by and large the path that was opened up by Johann Sebastian Drey. The latter had drawn the lines of a theology conceived as a positive science by adapting in an original manner a number of Schelling's ideas on the methodological and encyclopaedic plane.² It was 'a topic tied to Tübingen'³ where Kasper had learned 'to reflect more deeply on Schelling's thought'.⁴ As he himself writes in the Preface to his *The Absolute in History*, 'the impulse to theological research on German idealism occurred to me on the basis of my familiarity with the rich theological world of the Tübingen School of the nineteenth century, into which I was introduced during my studies by my esteemed teachers, Prof. Dr. J. R. Geiselman and Prof. Dr. F. X. Arnold'.⁵

The commitment and the goal that Kasper set for himself were exceptional since the literature on Schelling's Philosophy of Revelation and on his system of positive philosophy in general were, and are still, 'the object of contradictory judgments, mostly unfavourable'.⁶ Schelling himself, after all, in his lectures on the philosophy of revelation (Berlin 1841/42) quickly disappointed the expectations and hopes of those, above all theologians, who expected in his programme a synthesis of philosophy and religion. 'The success based on curiosity continued for some time. But the malicious campaigns of his opponents, [...] the growing exhaustion among the students, the anachronism of a philosophy that went against the currents of the time [...] put an end to this late glory'.⁷ For all this difficulty, the young Kasper took the task seriously and dedicated to the philosophy of the second Schelling 'a well-researched work leading to the recognition not only of his theological value but also of his contemporary perspective'.⁸ In particular, the thesis for his habilitation intends to respond to a dual task: (1) to offer a robust and close reconstruction of the text in the sense of historiographical faithfulness, but at the same time (2) elucidate the impulses, the stimuli and the orientations which theology received in the Catholic Tübingen School from Schelling's philosophy and which it can appropriate today for a renewal of theological method no longer content with the repetition of the traditional formulations of so-called baroque Scholasticism. In this way, the second Schelling came to be seen as a forerunner of the positive theology of our own time. In fact, Kasper approaches Schelling convinced that 'problems and systems are open to each other. The question we must ask ourselves is whether the particular presentation and the form of Schelling's thought can facilitate categories for the elucidation of aspects of Christianity which in the tradition expressed in a more scholastic manner have remained mostly obscured. This applies above all to the historicity of Christianity on which Schelling constantly insists. On this point, the possibility of an encounter with a biblically oriented theology could be greater than is generally admitted'.⁹

The extent to which Kasper accentuates common aspects that were dear to the Tübingen School can already be seen from the title of his work: *The Absolute in History* according to Schelling's late philosophy. It deals with a topic which 'accompanies Schelling's reflections throughout practically the entire arc of his development; it is essentially tied to the religious problematic with which the philosopher from Leonberg wrestled, in various ways, in all phases of his research. [...] A profound metaphysical thinker such as Schelling, entirely captivated by the problem of the relationship between the infinite and the finite, between Absolute being and becoming in human consciousness, could not avoid being constantly confronted with the topic of history, specifically history in metaphysical perspective (first) and (subsequently) in that of positive theology.'¹⁰

Kasper's research was conducted under the direction of L. Scheffczyk and presented to the local Faculty of Theology in the summer semester of 1964. In it, he took as his frame of reference and of critical engagement the question of how it is possible to advance further theological discourse after Schelling.¹¹ Occupying oneself with Schelling, according to Kasper, means in particular to encounter one of the last great attempts to thematise the Christological discourse to the point where it involves 'the fundamental problems of Christology. Schelling's philosophy is particularly suited to introduce to current fundamental problems in Christology, problems which can, with a grain of salt, be summarised under the motto "Hegel and his successors"'.¹²

How does the act of this engagement unfold in detail?

Kasper does not primarily intend in his book to offer a historical reconstruction nor is his main intent to restore Schelling's thought in its own, distinctive character. Instead he seeks to lay the foundations for a critical reconsideration of Hegel's theological heritage considering the second Schelling, in the wake above all of Walter Schulz' research, for all practical purposes 'the first major post-hegelian thinker'.¹³ Schulz incidentally was requested by the Faculty of Catholic Theology to write a report on Kasper's thesis. There were many reasons to enter into this academic engagement. In particular, 'the grand projects of systematic Christology that were attempted in this century since K. Barth and K. Rahner have been characterised, as is well known, by their manifestly idealist systematic point of departure. Hegel's influence is strongest among the most recent contributors, E. Jüngel, J. Moltmann, H. Küng, and H. Mühlen who, motivated by God's Incarnation, seek to understand "God's being in becoming", to say nothing of W. Pannenberg's project of universal history. It therefore seems that in contemporary Christology Hegel is omnipresent.'¹⁴

Kasper intended to reconsider the foundations of this school of thought by taking as the object of his analysis and his critical engagement Schelling who perfected and at the same time overcame Hegel's idealism¹⁵ insofar as the philosopher from Leonberg reconceived Hegel's philosophy as 'simply an episode', a 'misunderstanding' or even 'a misstep'.¹⁶ Even an author such as J. Habermas considered Schelling as the one philosopher who, more than any other, 'influence the internal criticism of Hegel of the Hegelian left. Also documented is Schelling's decisive influence on Kierkegaard, on Nietzsche (through Schopenhauer), and on S. Freud's psychoanalysis [...] In our own century, Schelling has exerted a decisive influence on K. Jaspers, G. Marcel and M. Heidegger, on N. Berdjaev, E. Bloch, P. Teilhard de Chardin, on P. Tillich and J.

Habermas. In his second phase, then, Schelling is the first, great post-hegelian author. [...] In his thought, he integrates both Hegel and his successors.¹⁷

Summing up his research, Kasper affirms as the most fundamental character of Schelling's philosophy the role that the problem of 'the origin of the finite in the Absolute' plays in it, as well as 'the solution of realising the infinite within time thus creating a passage from the finite to the infinite'.¹⁸ For this reason, Kasper sets up a confrontation between Schelling's 'Denkform, that is the formal structure of his thought',¹⁹ and that of Catholic theology. The result, which emerges as the argument develops, is this: that transcendental philosophy represents the presupposition of Schellingian thought and that the latter culminates in the metaphysical question of the correspondence and the unity of subject and object as well as, ultimately, 'the problem of the origin of the finite in the absolute. The objection, according to which there cannot be for us a passage from the infinite to the finite leads, ultimately, to the surprising solution of a realisation of the infinite in time thus creating a passage from the finite to the infinite. This solution, for all its shortcomings, displays already the structure of Schelling's thought which is carried through without modification from beginning to end. It is the intellectual model of the circle, of the mutual dependence of the finite and the infinite, the dialectic of the absolute and the finite I.'²⁰

This dialectic is resolved in history since 'history is the only form in which it is possible to speak of the infinite. History and historicity is the thought form peculiar to Schelling's idealism.'²¹ In the outcome of this dialectic and in its articulation, Schelling's critics have seen the failure of his philosophy because the Absolute remains, as it were, floating above the dialectical dynamic. This outcome however, according to Kasper, when carried to its rigorous, logical conclusion, reveals Schelling's option for the thought of freedom and, in consequence, the idea of an Absolute that freely reveals itself in the finite. In this way, an open dialectic is realised which does not end in a fixed result, as in Hegel, but which through its own, rigorous, logical cadence leads to a discourse of analogy that makes fruitful the remainder of Schelling's philosophy by setting up a confrontation between analogy and dialectic that highlights the fundamental points of convergence and divergence between the two thought forms. A distance, then, that has to be covered, but in Kasper's opinion this attempt leads to eventually establishes a convergence on certain points that are by no means marginal. In particular, he affirms that 'human beings can truly think in this dual movement in which they continuously transcend the finite towards the infinite while the infinite continuously realises itself in the finite. Such thought must be characterised as historical thought [...] in a never ending dialectic of past and future, freedom and necessity; in a freedom that is always constituted beyond its own self. The structure of the "Within – Beyond [Die Struktur des "In – Über", immanence – transcendence]" is then characterised either by analogy, by dialectic, or by historical thought. [...] Such thought again is profoundly historical.'²²

At the same time, being aware of the most fundamental character of Schelling's philosophy and of his most typical formulation, which is recurrent even in his second philosophy, namely, the identity of the identity and the identity dialectically mediating itself, it becomes possible to detect a real and fundamental difference 'regarding the doctrine of analogy which perceives analogy, not identity, as the proper relation between thought and being.'²³

Even in the late Schelling, 'the relative right of analogy, according to which there is only similarity, not identity, between thought and being in God and in the human spirit, is scarcely safeguarded.'²⁴ Therefore, even if taken in bonam partem, the Schellingian viewpoint can appear as a form of semirationalism.²⁵

In any event, notwithstanding the many problems and difficulties that exist regarding this and other aspects, the ties that connect Schelling with theology are many because he 'is fundamentally different from Hegel. The dialectic for Schelling is not a circular movement, albeit one that grows and strengthens, which has its goal, ultimately, before the Absolute.'²⁶

We thus find ourselves before a school of thought in which 'revelation is not a doctrine, but history. The historicity of man and the power of God who works in history stand in a reciprocal relationship to one another, in which the dialectic turns increasingly towards analogy, more specifically a dialogical one. For Schelling, Spirit signifies memory, repetition and, at the same time, the anticipation of future experience.' Therefore, Spirit or the Absolute enter into being understood as history, that is as 'the mediation of past and future with the present.'²⁷ In this way, 'the purpose of speculative theology would be identical with the objective of the kerygma: to recall to the mind and to anticipate.' Here emerges the possibility of a contribution, by way of Schelling's philosophy, to the solution of the hermeneutical problem, specifically to engage and resolve the problem of the relationship between biblical-historical and systematic thought because 'thought appropriated by a human being in a historical manner can only be, on the one hand, self-ascription of that which the history signified and, on the other, human self-realisation.'²⁸ A further fruit of Schelling's theories, and of no lesser significance, could be the possibility to refer to it 'in order to resolve certain aporias into which falls the Thomist conception of theology.'²⁹

In any event, a renewed consideration of Schelling's theories cannot be written as a 'simply gnosis and mysticism, as it has frequently happened. Schelling himself, with all necessary clarity, has distanced himself from Böhme [...] Schelling has been extremely clear in asserting that human beings cannot penetrate with their thoughts into the depths of the divine. The work of his old age, likewise, can hardly be defined as simply philosophy of religion of Christian philosophy'.³⁰

He rather, and most emphatically, forms part of 'the great tradition of sapiential thinkers which begins with the early Greeks and has found echoes not only in Jewish and Greek Gnosis as well as Neoplatonism, but also in the New Testament.'³¹ More important, however, is that Schelling has anticipated motifs which, 'beginning with Kierkegaard have played a major role in theology: freedom; decision; the failure of dialectic before the question of God; the failure of cultural optimism and of faith in progress; the foreboding of a nihilism emerging as a consequence of Hegel's philosophy; and, not least, the difference between the Absolute in which culminates philosophical dialectic and the Christian God.'³² On more properly theological territory, the merits of these motifs announce themselves above all in the problem of the relationship between the Absolute and the history, at the present time the most important problem of the theology.

This ultimately signifies the re-emergence of Christological discourse as the idea of the Incarnation of God in history.

In this project, Kasper comes close to the position not of H. Fuhrman but of X. Tilliette despite some points of dissent between them. Tilliette too was ‘intrigué par l’ouvrage récent et retentissement de Walter Schulz’³³ and established a novel connection with Schelling mainly because his late philosophy represents plainly ‘philosophie du christianisme [...] Elle est de pied en cap une christologie mais avec une méthode différente, en ce sens les puissances sont mises au repos, et que le développement – sur l’être et la vie du Christ – est fait d’exposés doctrinaux et de commentaires textuels, Schelling revêtant la robe du théologien.’³⁴ Even though it is impossible to subscribe to all of Schelling’s positions, it is indubitable that his late philosophy is ‘un traité De verbo Incarnato (flanqué d’une brève satanologie et d’une ecclésiologie succincte), a été l’objet de jugements contradictoires, en majorité défavorables. La remarquable monographie du Cardinal Walter Kasper l’a réhabilitée, peut-être avec un excès de générosité, car les vestiges de gnose y sont indéniable, même si on essaie toujours de prendre les formules en bonne part. Mgr Kasper a relevé les prémices d’une théologie dialogale, qui alors n’allait pas de soi. Il n’est pas bon d’être en avance sur son temps, et la théologie de Schelling n’a pas laissé d’empreintes reconnaissables, mais indirectement, par les colporteurs de nouvelles, elle a ensemencé l’Ecole catholique de Tubingue, Moehler, Drey, Kuhn et Staudenmaier.’³⁵ In any event, Kasper has written, according to Xavier Tilliette, ‘the best documented and thought through study on Schelling’s theology’.³⁶ Further, along the lines of the Christian concept of Christ understood as light of the world or as the firstborn of all creation, a motto was adopted first by Schelling, later by Blondel; Kasper, according to Tilliette, ‘a très bien su restituer une autonomie à cette christologie plus théologique que philosophique, et y déceler les ferments de nouveauté. Les préjugés pourtant n’ont pas disparu. Schelling a échoué parce qu’il devait échouer. E. Hirsch ne voyait qu’élucubrations dans la théologie schellinghienne. Déjà par son titre la thèse de Kasper était une discrète réplique à la dissertation de jeunesse de Jürgen Habermas, qui concluait à l’impasse d’une absoluité acculée à sacrifier l’historicité, Schelling mourant dans son erreur “comme un Faust aveuglé”.’³⁷

But what follows from this outline of Kasper’s account so far for the second Schelling and for the problem of the absolute in history?

It does not seem at this stage, despite points of convergence, that all the difficulties brought about by the appropriation of the philosophy of the second Schelling have really been overcome and, consequently, the task of understanding the correlation between theology, gnosis and philosophy in Schelling, the prelude of an actual engagement with Catholic theology, still seems elusive. This task, according to Kasper, cannot successfully be solved on the basis of concepts and approaches of traditional theology. In particular, it is necessary to be aware that ‘revelation cannot be entirely exhausted in one single human form of thought since its message is always greater and surpassing of all thought. Theology therefore has the task precisely of destructing every single thought form, of completing it and of overcoming it in another. For this reason, theology always has to think dialectically [...]; in this task it is important solely to ask oneself whether and how this dialectic preserves and overcomes in an authentic manner the intended objective described by the doctrine of analogy and which, as such, must not be abandoned. It is our intention here to abide by the dialectic in the form practiced by Schelling; this problem, as has been seen, leads on its own to the problem of history.’³⁸

III. For a renewal of theological method

In order to understand the results on which Kasper focuses, it is necessary here to investigate and define in its main outlines the concept of history which he adopts. It is possible to do so, if only in summary, on the basis of some articles and papers that were republished in the 1970s in the volume *Faith and History*, but which 'had been written separately on various occasions during the [previous] ten years'.³⁹ In this book, he speaks, from the outset, about theology in the horizon of history and defines history as 'a tensional unity of tradition and progress. In fact, true progress is possible only on the basis of the living power of tradition; but tradition can only be preserved as a living reality where it proves its truth in its encounter with the problems of modernity; in its openness to the future; and in its critical mode of discourse. This principle of a living faith founded on the canonical tradition (R.R. Geiselmann) was the fundamental impulse of the Catholic Tübingen School of the previous century (J.S. Drey, J.A. Möhler, J. B. Hirscher, F.A. Staudenmaier, J.E. Kuhn). During this same period, this impulse was warmly appropriated by the Roman School (G. Perrone, C. Passaglia, Cl. Schrader, J.B. Franzelin). Later, following the one-sidedness respectively of modernism and anti-modernism, the problem that was derived from it was suppressed and abandoned without a solution. Today, however, the problem of a living tradition has as much value and topicality as it did back then. Some recent pronouncements of the magisterium point in that direction.'⁴⁰

This subject was taken up again and developed further during those same years in Kasper's book *Dogma under the Word of God*, which was sent to the printer in 1965 together with the book on Schelling. In this book, Kasper takes notes of the fact that in our day Church and Christianity are no longer understood as *acies ordinata* because of the regnant 'radical pluralism and radical historicity'.⁴¹

This situation, starting in many ways from the Middle Ages, has had some problematical results as well as a number of consequences which persist to this day. In particular, 'it has led to a regrettable rupture between dogma, dogmatics, and theology on the one hand, and spirituality as well as the lived and desired holiness on the other. This painful division has led to substantial, inner degeneration of both parts.'⁴² It was the awareness of this crisis which spurred J. Drey to recover 'the synthesis of doctrine and life; of the magisterium and the pastoral office; of the spirit of science and the spirit of religiosity (Is. 11,2 LXX) which characterised the Patristic period' and consequently to propose 'a revision of the present state of theology by means of a new unity of mysticism and dialectic'.⁴³

a. The Tübingen School then and now

In the nineteenth century, the Catholic Tübingen School, as has been said, has marked out in a rigorously scientific and systematic manner the contours of a renewal of theology. More precisely, it has critically endorsed the rapprochement of historical scholarship and the already fairly developed vision of German idealism (Kant, Hegel, Schelling). In this way, according to Kasper, it initiated 'a new epoch in the history of the Spirit which has only now arrived at its full development. In other words, at the time of the great theologians of Tübingen there began a new theological Kairos which

only today and thanks to the renewal of the Council has reached its full maturity with the retrieval in the universal conscience of the Church of some essential proposals that were made back then.⁴⁴ It appears, nonetheless, that the heritage of the school in many of its aspects is no more present in today's theological and cultural debates. Its character is dated in various ways compared to today's positions and problems. Occupying oneself with it, therefore, means to restrict oneself, with the reserve required by the rules of discourse, to the insistence on learning purely for its own sake; it means to limit oneself to ideas and thoughts fixed in time and space at one point and which, therefore, no longer carry with them any novelty and ultimately no longer display any intellectual vigour. Taking a close look at the cultural situation then and comparing it with that of today, one consequently notices at first sight, according to Kasper, 'more differences than commonalities'.⁴⁵ For example, science (and technology) and scientific questions are more important today than any other subject. Furthermore, the idealistic systems (Hegel, Schelling) had a vast influence and led to the production and glorification of philosophical systems. Today, more than ever, one is sceptical. Overall, 'the differences between then and now are thus immense, and it could seem, in a first moment, that there could scarcely exist anything in common between the theology of that time and that of today, insofar as given that today's theology as much as the theology of the past enters into dialogue with its own time. One could practically have the impression that today's theology has moved to the opposite extreme.'⁴⁶

According to Kasper, even though these differences are evident and incontestable, however, one must not forget the fact that there is something crucial in common which connects the two centuries, the nineteenth and the twentieth. The extent of the importance of this common aspect can become clear if one pays close attention to the problem of history. This is no peripheral matter, but a structure of thought, a bundle of ideas and tendencies which affect central aspects of our lives so much so that one could say that 'history today is our greatest problem. The Tübingen theology of that period sought to establish this problem of historicity which at the time began to emerge. It understood itself as eminently historical theology, and this historical character has remained its distinctive sign by contrast to other theological currents.'⁴⁷ For Kasper, this orientation has not only retained its importance without alteration, but in various successions of historical and theological events has even become the paradigmatic example of an attitude that today has become 'fundamental for all theology'.⁴⁸ In his book *Vom Geist und Wesen des Katholizismus*, Drey wrote that 'Christianity as a divine and positive religion is a historical phenomenon, a given fact (Tatsache)'.⁴⁹ As such it cannot be reduced to barren, simple factuality or to a closed and distant notion of the past; at the same time, however, it is defined in contradistinction to attempts as in mystical exaltation, gnosis or idealism in the proper sense, which dissolve historical events into allegory and ideas thus transforming the positive faith into pure speculation.⁵⁰ More precisely, 'no given fact is momentary; it does not get extinguished, it does not disappear the moment it originated. Rather, it becomes integrated into a series and the interaction of its other parts; it grows; and it reduces or accelerates or changes its collective effect in smaller or wider circles. In this way, it obtains its own, particular history.'⁵¹

Methodologically, this perspective joins the current flowing from Schelling's Lectures on University Studies and anticipates in its essentials the distinction which emerges

later, originally in historiographical research, between history (Historie) and story (Geschichte) and intends to overcome the method of the dicta probantia. In this manner, we find ourselves before a school of thought for which all is included in the idea of history. This means, expressed in theological terminology, that the representatives of the Catholic Tübingen School strove strongly to emphasise the idea of the Kingdom of God as all-pervasive.⁵² Thus, history is intended not as a speculative construction a priori, but as a form of thought which, in its chief outcomes, for example in Staudenmaier, and in connection with the second Schelling ‘resolves in history the dialectical identity of the necessity of the idea and of freedom.’ It thus introduces the freedom of God as the principle of everything and teaches to discover within history ‘the revelation of the one God in Jesus Christ’.⁵³

Broadly speaking and summarising the fundamental points of convergence as well as the differences between today’s situation and that of the time of the Catholic Tübingen School, we can say, according to Kasper that

Drey, Möhler, Staudenmaier ... anticipated some aspects of historical-critical methods and their criteria which have nowadays on a grand scale entered into the normal practice of research in theology and beyond.

Today’s historical consciousness moves into the same fundamental direction as that of the second Schelling and of Staudenmaier albeit in a more radical and accentuated manner. It is a bequest, a knowledge that tends to become totalising; it seeks forcefully to impose itself as a *histoire totalitaire* (L. Fevre): we no longer think in terms of essence, nature or substance; on the contrary, we orient ourselves in the horizon of time and history. From this viewpoint, reality can no longer be speculatively postulated or constructed a priori by the subject, ‘but it can only arrive by experience as an event that is awaited and received.’⁵⁴

In the theological field, this insight translates into an appeal to the relevance and centrality of eschatology, which is no longer treated as a single and clearly delimited doctrinal locus or a single discipline, ‘but must shape the whole of theological thought [...] It necessitates theological thought that finds its realisation no longer in the horizon of nature and ideas, but in that of freedom and history.’⁵⁵ These positions, however, have led above all in the works of Albert Schweitzer and Karl Barth in various ways to the rejection of theology in an idealistic mould; they have consequently encouraged the adoption of only a few single aspects and isolated demands from among the programmatic intentions of the Tübingen School. Therefore, according to Kasper, the school’s conception of the coming of the Kingdom of God, which was its central idea, can today only be made an inheritance bearing fruit in the context of a form of thought which ‘realises itself no longer in the horizon of nature and of eternal ideas, but in that of history and of freedom’.⁵⁶

b. *The current situation*

‘At the point where the greatest distance between that time and ours comes to the fore, however, there appears also again a common awareness of problems. The historicity of everything is real. [...] It is impossible to retreat either into an absolutely ahistorical space or into the suprahistorical. One can only seek to prove that history does not imply pure relativism.’⁵⁷ This work can once again take as its exemplary point of reference the

methodological foundations of the Catholic Tübingen School and, more precisely, the developments which Kuhn and Staudenmaier gave to them in their mature period. It is thanks to their help, according to Kasper, that we can seek to resolve the bundle of problems and the tensions which exist today between historical and systematic method, that is between that which is positively and immediately given and the formal process through which these facts become part of the historiographical synthesis. This must find expression, for exactly that reason, not in one definitive synthesis but as a task to be realised time after time, ever anew, in order to avoid losing sight of, and ultimately damage or break, the ties with reality and the reference to experience. Necessary is therefore a renewal of theological method which not only avoids overturning the significance of synthesis, but which rather takes account of and renders accessible ‘the tension between history – and especially exegesis – and dogmatics. Dogmatics on its part has the duty to support this tension in itself by means of the duality of positive and speculative method, of a theology of existence and a theology of essence.’⁵⁸ The nature of this perspective, which we adopt in the present place, implies a return to Drey and to his methodological point of view which sought to overcome the distance between ‘merely historical facts and the self-explications within history of the effects of these facts, or, in the language of the theology of the time, its insertion into the organic context of the system (historically understood). Passing historically from the Old to the New Testament, from Scripture to the interpretation of Scripture in the early church, from kerygma to dogma, from the thought typical for antiquity and the Middle Ages to the one typical for modernity, from oriental to occidental theology, something akin to self-interpretation, self-demythologisation, and self-correction occurs of the original faith whose traces theology has to follow in order to arrive at an intimate comprehension of the faith.’⁵⁹

The most exciting consequence in this field, however, is that the intended theology due to its internal logic has difficulties to unify and to develop its work effectively and completely by its own design and to achieve in this way a definitive, scientific synthesis. It must always begin afresh; the problems continue to open up thus preventing it from filling up the distance between the two terms of the subject, in the final analysis between history or exegesis and dogmatics. The awareness of this problem in the context of the scientific and systematic construction of Catholic dogmatics is to be found in Drey already although with him the concepts of science and system are in need of fuller and clearer focus as they are not free from misunderstanding. And in fact, they have given rise to misleading interpretations. More precisely, Drey has spoken of his perspective as a kind of ‘positive, theological rationalism’, a scientific theology aimed at “‘constructing” faith by means of knowledge’.⁶⁰

It will be useful here to spend some effort on finding ways better to illustrate the most proper sense of these statements through an in-depth investigation in order to avoid changing the meaning of his text or offering a false idea of his position both of which has, in fact, not infrequently happened.

According to Drey, ‘The task of scientific theology is to grasp the whole faith as a total fact of meaning. Such a theology is scientific, then, if it is able sufficiently to base its own affirmations on the inner agreement of the correlations. This inner agreement is given where there is a coherent architecture which one must be able to derive from one central idea. This central idea for Drey is that of the Kingdom of

God.⁶¹ This synthesis which theology builds has a regulative, critical function and does not rise to the level of the closed system because to 'bring to completion science proper will be a challenge that only succeeds following a length effort and may never succeed'.⁶² It is necessary to insist on this aspect because Drey does not intend promote and propose an absolute or final synthesis, *opus perfectum*, which needs only some cognitive work to be completed. His epistemic approach has the purpose to individuate the tools adapted to 'find the road that leads to Christianity's intrinsic truth cannot be grasped in a definitive manner'.⁶³ Once these principles have been applied consistently, however, they bring about an open system which leads to its final consequences on the road of history and of time. Such a system is not once and for all complete; it is therefore in need of a point of stability in order to avoid the conflict of interpreters, to steer clear off problematical attitudes and, ultimately, relativism. In other words, it needs a 'capacity to judge' from which stable and secure knowledge is gained. Without it, this interpretation or synthesis itself fails and the only result is cognitive chaos. Drey is fully aware of this difficulty and speaks of the task and the urgency of discerning what the proprium of Christianity is. In particular, he affirms that 'the Church is the true foundation of all theological knowledge. From the Church and through her, the theologian receives his empirically given material. In relation to her, all his concepts must assume their reality, otherwise they perish in speculation built on air and without any support'.⁶⁴

All these problems are present and pursued to their final consequences already by Kuhn who, together with Staudenmaier, manifests the Tübingen School at its most mature. As Drey in his *Catholic Dogmatics* had already done,⁶⁵ they hold that scientific and logical proof 'cannot have its worth in a manner that can immediately and absolutely be demonstrated'. Therefore, the theologian will be able to achieve his goal, that is to understand faith, only if it 'is given by a certain immediate sense for the truth and by a spiritual touch'.⁶⁶ The theologian is therefore in need of 'a direct bond of unity and communion' with the authority of the Church by means of which he himself is a living member who cannot ever cease being tied to her. This is the basis of necessity and urgency of the ecclesial character of theology.⁶⁷

Along this way, the relationship between the theologian and the Church becomes one of the three main dimensions of the Tübingen Catholic School which, according to Kasper, has made 'a decisive contribution to the renewal and the deepening of ecclesial conscience both in the nineteenth century and in ours. The strong emphasis on ecclesiality, on faith, and on theology is founded on the historical character of such a theology. J.S. Drey took inspiration from the fact that Christianity is bound in permanence to the historical person of Jesus Christ. This direct connection with Christ is possible, according to him, only because the original event had its objective continuity in the Church, in its liturgy and the entirety of its life'.⁶⁸ The task of the theologian, which is conducted and pursued in a scientific manner, is therefore in the service of the Church and discovers in her its place of concrete realisation. This interaction, nonetheless, is not carried out in a servile or uncritical manner⁶⁹ because even if 'it is true that dogmas express conclusive developments [...] this conclusive development moves ahead and with its apparently fixed data enters into new constellations'.⁷⁰

c. *The Catholic Tübingen School and Karl Barth*

As Kasper himself has pointed out the views of the Catholic Tübingen School gave rise to an intense and critical discussion above all by Karl Barth (and by his school) in his monumental *Church Dogmatics I/2*, specifically a long and dense paragraph (§ 20) dedicated to the authority of the Church. His critique, alongside that of A. Schweitzer, led to 'the end of theology in an idealistic paradigm'⁷¹ and therefore merits maximal attention in an argument seeking to retrieve the results of Drey and his successors since it forces us to re-examine 'our contemporary relation to that of Tübingen in the last century'.⁷²

Barth in particular recognised that the principal assumptions in which the thought of the Tübingen School was articulated deserve the greatest attention in its effect on the vicissitudes of German Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Their importance is owed to the fact that the school came together in the shadow of 'idealist-romanticist philosophy and theology of the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries [...] in which Neo-Protestantism reached and passed its peak. It sees that there is an inward relationship between Catholicism and this a-Catholic system, and it makes its aspirations its own. Enriched in this way, it finds that it can gather together theoretically the results of previous Catholic development and represent them with a new power to modern man.'⁷³

According to the Swiss theologians, its most important representative was, after Drey, Möhler, 'rightly honoured as the father of modern German Catholicism [...] According to Möhler's first great book, there corresponds to the unity of the spirit of the Church the unity of its body, to the mystico-spiritual and doctrinal inner unity, in which the individuality of the believer has its place, the outer unit, increasingly represented in the bishop as the unity of the congregation, in the unity of the episcopate [...] and finally in the unity of the Roman cathedra.'⁷⁴

This unity, Barth claims, is founded in an organicist way on the fact that 'as the human spirit is everywhere the same, so too Christ is one and His work one (Symbolik, p. 342). But the unity of Christ is transferred to the Church, because it is the community founded by Him.'⁷⁵ Following this logic, Möhler inevitably ends up identifying the Church and the revelation on which she has been founded, but in this way the authority of the Church becomes the ultimate point of reference insofar as he not only identifies Scripture and tradition but 'in his attempting to understand the whole divine dignity and authority ascribed to this complex only as a predicate of the Church, the present-day Church, as the living bearer of the apostolate, the representative of Jesus Christ. The Church it is into whose faith the Word of God has come and in whose faith it has actually gone forth. The Church has the Word; expounds it; is revelation in concreto [...]. The Church is Jesus Christ, speaking, ruling, acting, deciding to-day.'⁷⁶ According to Barth, however, who in this instance reports affirmatively a strongly critical judgement advanced against this line of argument by D. F. Strauss,⁷⁷ Möhler does not ask where 'that mouth which declares revelation, where that authority of the Church which is identical with the authority of the Word of God, has to be sought and heard in concreto' (ET: 565). Ultimately, Möhler limits himself to the presentation, side by side as it were, of the views of conciliarists and those of papal absolutists; but in this way two mutually opposed demands were made to coexist together in the Church both based on the same authority. In this manner, it remained unclear whether 'the Church [had] a

mouth by which it could speak with authority, infallible, ultimate, absolute authority, and possessing which it could preserve its identity with the living Jesus Christ'.⁷⁸ For Barth, on the contrary, the authority in the Church 'is restricted to an indirect and relative and formal authority'⁷⁹ and as such finds itself under Scripture which is 'ground and limit of the Church' which it constitutes and on which it confers authority.⁸⁰ This debate harks back to the problem of the primacy of the word of God and the importance the latter takes on in Church Dogmatics in which Barth 'polemicises against the Catholic position because he, together with the whole Protestant tradition, subordinates the Church to the Bible'.⁸¹

d. *Walter Kasper and Karl Barth's criticism*

In his books that were sent to print during the 1960s – and thus in immediate continuity with his studies on Schelling, Kasper is constantly under the urge to counter the criticisms of Barth and his school. More precisely, he highlights that the disagreement between Barth's theory and that of Drey and Möhler is focused on the problem of the 'ecclesiological mediation of unity and continuity of the Christ event' which has led to 'a most violent criticism of the Tübingen theologians'.⁸² In order to respond to his criticisms it is necessary, according to Kasper, correctly to grasp the essential features of the argument of the Tübingen theologians. In full accordance with their Catholic background, he affirmed, they felt it incumbent on themselves to develop an organicist vision of the Church, understood as *Corpus Christi mysterium* drawing for this on Romanticism and on German idealism. In particular, 'one might object that in their conception Christ was dissolved, so to say, into the Church; that the superiority of Christ over the Church was not maintained; and that the qualitative uniqueness and the lasting normativity of the Christ event was no longer taken seriously. The Church does here no longer have a critical interlocutor; it merely draws on its own, intrinsic selfknowledge. This, ultimately, implies a theological idealism which in an extreme form was to appear in modernism'.⁸³

To this criticism, according to Kasper, Vatican II has given a response by emphasising the image of the Church as the people of God which nonetheless *in statu viae* is an entity which 'always has to renew herself in penitence; which does not stand above but below the word of God [...]. The Church always remains bound by the initial event through which she was constituted, for which she relies on the concrete witness of Scripture, and by her eschatological goal towards which she is directed'.⁸⁴ Nonetheless, we must not forget that this emphasis on the idea of the Church as the people of God happened a long time after the Catholic Tübingen School and hence its pertinent aspects could not have played a role for those theologians. At any event, even in those years the theologians from Tübingen, according to Kasper, 'clearly recognised the limits of this form of thought and came remarkably close to our contemporary understanding'.⁸⁵ While it is the case that they appropriated the idea of an organism, they received it from German idealism (above all Schelling) and not from Darwin who wrote many years later. They therefore understood it not in a biological, naturalist sense, but in a spiritual one. In general, then, the representatives of that school were not satisfied with the mere appropriation and application of some conceptual tools of German idealism; they felt the necessity to examine the limits and difficulties of their

organicist vision and the main problems that are closely connected with it. Möhler, for example, in his critical dialogue with Baur⁸⁶ found himself using a very different, namely classical, concept of history and to see tradition as 'a constant movement as well as a return to its insuperable beginning in Jesus Christ who laid the foundation to the faith of the Church. Möhler does not want in this context to renounce the dialectic of progressive development in favour of a one-sided, a historical positivism; rather, this progressive dialectic for him leads to a correct and living understanding of the faith albeit not its content.'⁸⁷

In this way, the Tübingen School dealing, for example, with the relationship between Scripture and tradition, stresses the sovereignty of the word of God over all forms of human testimony setting it even above that of the Church, which is to say that Scripture must simply remain *norma normans* of all other proclamation. In its wake therefore, according to Kasper, is possible a renewal not only of theological method but above all of the fundamental principles of dogmatics in light of its ultimate foundation which is constituted by Scripture. Along those lines, at the second Vatican Council, in particular in its dogmatic constitution *Dei Verbum*, the growing awareness of the necessity of renewal led to the recognition of the task to give an increasingly more precise definition of the relationship between dogma (decisions, doctrinal formulations of the Church) and the gospel or the word of God. Exemplary in this sense is a text by Kasper with the indicative title *Dogma under the word of God* published in 1965 at the height of the conciliar climate. The book proposes to clarify the character of the normative norm of the word of God and in this manner to demonstrate that dogma 'is the result of a historical experience of the Church in its relationship with the gospel, an experience which has come to full realisation in Scripture, in a concrete situation of proclamation and the community of the Church internally'.⁸⁸ In this manner, Kasper wishes to solve the task of developing the essential outline of a theological account that shows at the same time that dogmas have to be interpreted not as empty and dead formulae but as 'testimonies of the good news, the gospel, which even today enables hope and the future'.⁸⁹

IV. Conclusion

All of Walter Kasper's later research is ultimately already contained in the seed of this original position. Beginning from his first writings, he has developed further the fundamental stimuli of the Catholic Tübingen School for which the engagement with the philosophy of the second Schelling played a fundamental role. Not by coincidence did Drey, the school's founder, take Schelling as his point of reference for his concept of a theology intended as a positive science transforming in an original manner some of Schelling's methodological and encyclopaedic ideas.

Kasper published a major work on Schelling and positioned himself in the intellectual stream flowing from the Tübingen School. This loyalty he expressed and defined in an exemplary way on 19 October 1997 on the occasion of a solemn commemoration for Johann S. Drey by way of stock-taking, as it were, and by offering a summary of what he himself in various contexts had published. He wrote as follows: 'Church and theology have developed further after Drey. In spite of that, or perhaps better because of it, it is possible to consider the task which Drey assigned to theology as a signpost even today. Literally every single day we have all the motivation for rethinking anew the mutual

affinity of the three noted principles of theology, its ecclesiastical and scientific character and its connection with practice. [...] Johann Sebastian Drey's theology is an invitation and an encouragement to think theologically in a way deeply anchored in the tradition of the Church but at the same time in touch with the currents of the time, able to show perspectives that point to the future and guide us there. It considers tradition not as a hardened and ossified entity but as living and lived proclamation which can ultimately give that which comes from life. It is accountable to reason above all; it promotes life and opens up the future. These things are still often lacking with us today, but we have urgent need of them.⁹⁰

This is an important insight, of fundamental character, which makes it necessary to take into consideration and adequately to clarify, more than has been done previously, the significance and importance which the study of Schelling has in Kasper's theology, from the time of his academic study. The intent of this brief study has been to demonstrate and specify the principal traits of this dimension of his research, in order to be able to grasp the discursive structure underlying the immense work of Kasper.

Notes

1. Seckler, "Kein Abschied," 750.
2. Ibid., 48.
3. Kasper, *Al cuore della fede*, 42.
4. Ibid., 43.
5. Kasper, *L'Assoluto nella storia*, 1.
6. Tilliette, *Attualità di Schelling*, 90. On the responses of theologians to Schelling's summons at Berlin; and see: Schelling, *Philosophie der Offenbarung 1841/42*, 20 ff.
7. Tilliette, *Attualità di Schelling*, 16.
8. Ibid., 90.
9. Kasper, *L'Assoluto nella storia*, 68.
10. Bausola, "Prefazione," IX.
11. Kasper, *L'Assoluto nella storia*, 504.
12. Kasper, "Crisi e nuovo inizio," 55–56.
13. Ibid., 60.
14. Ibid., 56–57.
15. Kasper, *Al cuore della fede*, 43; and Kasper, "Crisi e nuovo inizio", 58.
16. Kasper, "Crisi e nuovo inizio," 58.
17. Ibid., 58.
18. Kasper, *L'Assoluto nella storia*, 490.
19. Ibid., 489.
20. Ibid., 490.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 491–492.
23. Ibid., 495.
24. Ibid., 496.
25. Ibid., 497.
26. Ibid., 496.
27. Ibid., 497.
28. Ibid., 497–498.
29. Ibid., 498.
30. Ibid., 500.

31. Ibid., 500.
32. Kasper, *L'Assoluto nella storia*, 54.
33. Tilliette, "Dans mes propres affaires," 12.
34. Tilliette, *Une introduction à Schelling*, 122.
35. Ibid., 126.
36. Tilliette, *I filosofi davanti a Cristo*, 177.
37. Tilliette, *Une introduction à Schelling*, 129.
38. Ibid., 493.
39. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 7.
40. Ibid., 8–9.
41. Kasper, *Il dogma sotto la parola*, 12.
42. Ibid., 13.
43. Ibid., 14.
44. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 17.
45. Ibid., 19.
46. Ibid., 20.
47. Ibid., 22 .
48. Ibid., 23.
49. Ibid. Cf. Drey, *Vom Geist und Wesen des Christenthums*, 453: «Das Christenthum als eine positive göttliche Religion ist eine zeitliche Erscheinung, eine Thatsache».
50. Drey, in Seckler, *Johann Sebastian Drey*, 459.
51. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 24; and Cfr. Drey, *Vom Geist und Wesen*, 453.
52. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 25.
53. Ibid., 26.
54. Ibid., 27.
55. Ibid., 29.
56. Ibid., 28.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid., 29.
59. Ibid.
60. Seckler, *Johann Sebastian Drey und die Theologie*, 440.
61. Ibid., 441.
62. Drey, Kurze Einleitung, par. 323, reprinted in Seckler, *Theologie, Kirche, Katholizismus*, 369.
63. Seckler, *Glaubenswissenschaft und Glaube*, 442.
64. Drey, Kurze Einleitung, par. 54, reprinted in Seckler, *Theologie, Kirche, Katholizismus*, 185.
65. Kuhn, *Katholische Dogmatik*, 215–216.
66. Ibid., 216.
67. Ibid.
68. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 30.
69. Seckler, *Johann Sebastian Drey und die Theologie*, 443.
70. Ibid., 442.
71. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 28.
72. Ibid.
73. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 624 [English Text = ET: *Church Dogmatics I/2*, trans. G. T. Thomson and H. Knight, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1956, 560].
74. Ibid., 624. ET: 561.
75. Ibid. ET: Ibid.
76. Ibid., 628. ET: 564–5.
77. On D. F. Strauss and the theology see above all: Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth -Century Germany*, 73–110.
78. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, 629. ET: 566.
79. Ibid., 598. ET: 538.

80. Ibid., 600. ET: 539.
81. Gherardini, *La parola di Dio*, 18.
82. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 31.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid., 31–32.
86. On this topic see: Baur, *Erwiederung auf Herrn Dr. Möhler's neueste Polemik gegen die protestantische Lehre und Kirche*; and Möhler, *Neue Untersuchungen der Lehrgegensätze zwischen den Katholiken und Protestanten. Eine Vertheidigung meiner Symbolik gegen die Schrift des Herrn Professors Dr. Baur in Tübingen*. The most remarkable, and best documented, book for understanding Baur's (1792–1860) views and the German Theology in the XIX Century, is Zachhuber, *Theology as Science in Nineteenth – Century in Germany*. From F. C. Baur to Ernst Troeltsch.
87. Kasper, *Fede e storia*, 34.
88. Kasper, *Evangelium und Dogma*, 41.
89. Ibid., 42.
90. Kasper, “Johann S. Drey,” 203–206.

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