The Pauline Understanding of Life in the Young Heidegger (1920–21)

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Abstract

In the years after the First World War many authors returned to the Apostle Paul to re-think the meaning of history in a time of crisis. In this period the problem of time represents a crucial topic of Heidegger's philosophy as well, through which he reconsiders the meaning of the Being of the whole metaphysical tradition. Heidegger already develops his reconsideration of temporality in his early Freiburg lectures on the phenomenology of religious life through the interpretation of Paul's epistles. The article focuses on the analysis of the category of temporality in these lectures, where the philosopher investigates the experience of conversion and the expectation of the parusia in the proto-Christian communities, within which the radically historical dimension of existence clearly emerges. This contribution aims to show that such phenomenological analysis of early Christian temporality emphasizes the disquieting nature of the evangelical message, which unsettles any fixed identity and transforms personal, communitarian history and social, opening it to the future.

Keywords

proto-Christianity – temporality – parusia – factual life experience – uncertainty – phenomenology of life

1 “Endzeitgeist” – The Spirit of the End Time

After the First World War and its total mobilization, Europe's social and global constellation was in need of a political reorganization capable of coming to terms with the downfall of a world, namely the monarchy, or rather the genealogical system of power. The spirit of the end time became a constant topic in literature, philosophy and post-historical journalism, which, after a short initial war euphoria, conjured up an atmosphere of decadence and decline. The apocalyptic feeling of the epoch was, for instance, expressed by Oswald Spengler in his book *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*) between 1918 and 1922; by Karl Kraus who wrote *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (*The Last Days of Mankind*) between 1915 and 1922; in Sigmund Freud's visions of demise in his opus *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and its Discontents*) (1929) which he wrote as a reaction to the catastrophe occurring within European culture; or in the dystopian visions of the novel *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. The previous dominance of the idealized horizon of reason and its progress was beginning to be replaced by apocalyptic interpretations of history. In addition, the feeling of something ending was accompanied by the distinct need for a new beginning. One might think of *Der Geist der Utopie* (*The Spirit of Utopia*), which was published by Ernst Bloch in 1918, or of the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* by Ludwig Wittgenstein. The *Tractatus* was written during the First World War, finished in 1918 and published in 1922. It has the structure of a narration in seven steps – seven propositions, from the definition of the world as such up to the calm of silence. It seems to correspond to a certain rereading of the *Genesis*, a post war new creation.

In those years different authors engaged with the Pauline epistles. Karl Barth wrote the first version of his book *Der Römerbrief* in 1919 and the second edition against the background of dialectic theology in 1922. Around the same time Rudolf Bultmann published various articles on the Pauline epistles putting a particular emphasis on the existential dimension of his theology. In the winter semester of 1920–21 Heidegger held his lectures on the *Phenomenology of Religious Life* at the University of Freiburg in which he already develops concepts central to his future philosophical perspective – especially his conception of time – based particularly on the Pauline epistles. One could thus claim that the intense recourse to Paul in the context of the spirit of the end time – which, interestingly enough, repeated itself after the end of the last great narrative of modernity with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (in Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Jacob Taubes, Gianni Vattimo, Slavoj Žižek amongst others) – represents an important sign of the times. In both cases – after the First World War and after the fall of the Berlin Wall – various intellectuals were

on the lookout for a new experience of time able to open up and shape future prospects and new visions of history.

In his reading of the Pauline epistles or, rather, in the basic determinations of early Christian religiosity, the young Heidegger came upon a new experience of temporality which even lead him to his consideration of the primordial phenomenon of life as well as to his hermeneutics of facticity. Why do the Pauline epistles – as well as Augustine's *Confessiones* to which Heidegger dedicates himself in his Freiburg lectures in the summer semester of 1921 – prove to be a suitable source for a new way of thinking in apocalyptic times of crisis?

In this article I will try to illustrate those Pauline motifs which opened up a new approach of the question of temporality to Heidegger and played a decisive role in his later phenomenological understanding of life. In this sense one could say that the central significance of temporality would not have emerged without the impulse from the early Christian experience of life and time. As Heidegger himself observed: "Without this theological background I should never have come upon the path of thinking."¹

2 Tendencies-to-Secure against the Historical (or: The Race against Time)

The Freiburg lectures which were published in 1993 represent a special opus within Heidegger's philosophy, for on no other occasion does he dedicate himself to the examination of the early Christian life experience with such passion and depth.² In the early Christian community Heidegger finds the roots of the real, factual life experience. It forms a theological line leading from Saint Paul to Augustine and Luther and up to Pascal and Kierkegaard. Through the passionate interpretations of early Christian texts – here I wish to focus on the letters to the Galatians and the Thessalonians – he aims at carving out a *genuine understanding of the human life experience*.

Which decisive aspect of this early Christian religiosity is of fundamental importance according to Heidegger? The first approach to this question is closely linked to the problem of facticity. Heidegger writes: "The concept 'factual' may not be interpreted from certain epistemological presuppositions, but can be made intelligible only from the concept of the 'historical'."³ The main problem of Heidegger's Freiburg lectures is the *question concerning the phenomenon of the historical*: The historical is a core phenomenon which

¹ Heidegger 1971, p. 10.

² Cf. Volpi 2003, p. 15.

³ Heidegger 2010, p. 7.

determines the self-understanding of philosophy as such and refers to the “whole active and passive pose of the human being toward the world,”⁴ i.e. to a temporal-historical event.

The facticity of life, which is “very peculiar,”⁵ shall become the “point of departure of the path to philosophy.”⁶ “It seems, however, as if philosophy is leading us out of factual life experience.”⁷ Regarding this Heidegger calls on philosophical thinking to bring about radical change (*Umwandlung*), which is in need of a new phenomenological methodology capable of deconstructing the predominance of the theoretical attitude (*Einstellung*).

The concept of factual life experience is fundamental. The designation of philosophy as cognitive, rational comportment says nothing at all; with this designation, one falls prey to the ideal of science, thus obscuring precisely the main difficulty.⁸

However, this means that with his new philosophical approach Heidegger radically criticizes the academic philosophy of his time as well as the objective temporality and historicity of the scientific culture and historical science – as Nietzsche already did before him in his *Unmodern Observations* (especially in *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, 1874).

In his early lectures Heidegger is searching for suitable vocabulary and a new methodology able to express the factual life experience. He is attempting the development of a new perspective, which he calls “original science” (*Urwissenschaft*) or “prescience” (*Vorwissenschaft*) (1919), “hermeneutics of facticity” (*Hermeneutik der Faktizität*) (1923), “existential analytics” (*existential Analytik*) (1927), “metaphysics of the Dasein” (*Metaphysik des Daseins*) (1929). From his perspective, Husserl’s concept of intentionality seems too theoretical and abstract.⁹ In this respect his main concern is to get rid of the biased nature of the historical and scientific cultural bliss in order to be able to perceive the actual meaning of the historical and factual life.

“The theory of the science of history”, as Heidegger writes, “is an entirely secondary problem within the problem of the historical itself.”¹⁰ By this he means that the scientific conception of history or epistemological analysis

4 Heidegger 2010, p. 8.

5 Heidegger 2010, p. 8.

6 Heidegger 2010, p. 8.

7 Heidegger 2010, p. 8.

8 Heidegger 2010, p. 7.

9 Cf. Von Herrmann 2000.

10 Heidegger 2010, p. 32.

express “Tendencies-to-Secure”¹¹ which necessarily forfeit the effectiveness of temporality and the historical. At the start of the lectures of the winter semester 1920–21 Heidegger reiterates his critique of scientific rationality on behalf of a *more primordial approach* to thinking capable of liberating philosophy from its scientific secularization. It is about the difference between theoretical-object-related and enacting-hermeneutical behavior in which living existence is emphasized. This is why first of all the phenomena of a potential phenomenology are to be kept strictly clear of objectifying descriptions. From Plato to Husserl Heidegger reconstructs the thread of the predominance of the formal-objective determinacy in philosophy in which he considers the enactment of thinking to have been neglected.

Heretofore, philosophers made an effort to degrade precisely factual life experience as a matter of secondary importance that could be taken for granted, despite that philosophy arises precisely from factual life experience and springs back into it in a reversal that is entirely essential.¹²

In this regard, Heidegger wishes to show that “through the explication of factual Dasein, the entire traditional system of categories will be blown up – so radically new will the categories of factual Dasein be.”¹³

Heidegger fights against the danger of detemporalization as a constant temptation in philosophy – but also theology – and especially within the human life experience: This dehistoricization or objectification of the historical in the prevalent model of scientificity suspends factual life with the result that a timeless “Entlebnis”¹⁴ becomes the paradigm of the theoretical. From a theological perspective, what is at stake is the gnostic (and neo-gnostic) axiom of “the timelessness of salvation and the hopelessness of time”,¹⁵ which attempts to shield any experience of meaning from the abysses and the unrest of history and its stories. According to Heidegger these tendencies toward the objective determination and regulation of lived life correspond to a veritable fight against the historical, i.e. they are to be understood as paths of *liberation from the inquietude* of the historical.

11 Heidegger 2010, p. 31.

12 Heidegger 2010, p. 11.

13 Heidegger 2010, p. 36.

14 Heidegger 1987, p. 84. Cf. Klun 2016, pp. 45 et seq. One could translate this neologism as “de-experience”, since it is the undoing of the “Erlebnis” (experience). The Latin prefix “de-” is roughly equivalent to the German prefix “ent-”, which implies a negative reversal or decline of some sort. [translator's note]

15 Metz 2001, p. 11. In German: “der Zeitlosigkeit des Heils und der Heillosigkeit der Zeit”.

Heidegger names three paths that try to assert themselves against the historical, namely the platonic path which advocates a radical renunciation of the historical; the path of radical surrender to the historical as it is reflected in Spengler's thinking of decline which corresponds to a mere capitulation in the face of the historical; and lastly Heidegger names the path of compromise between both extremes referring to the philosophies of Neo-Kantianism as well as the perspectives of Dilthey and Simmel in which history is to be understood as an increasing realization of values, "which, however, can never be *fully* actualized."¹⁶ The main problem of all these philosophies is the reassuring defense mechanism towards the motion of the historical: "For us the question is whether these tendencies-to-secure correspond at all to the disturbing motive itself."¹⁷ Objectifying thought tries to abstract from temporal events, to make them the stable object of reflection and to secure them as the object of historical science.

That which is disturbed, the reality of life, the human existence in its concern about its own security, is not taken in itself; rather it is regarded as object and as object it is placed within the historical objective reality. [...] We must avoid taking the phenomenon of the historical from the *science* of history.¹⁸

Even though the historical indeed determines our culture, it troubles it insofar as it is neither a predicate nor an object which could be fixated or objectified but much rather a phenomenon we encounter in life. However, if life tries to resist the historical in order to safeguard itself, the historical represents a burden, an obstacle and insecurity.

Yet factual life is characterized by an essential *worry* since life or living is originally a verb.¹⁹ "Thus time does not join in to life, rather life *is* time, it is life temporalizing itself."²⁰ The sloping tendency of the factual life experience threatens "to slip into the objective"²¹ and Heidegger's new methodology has the aim of wresting the phenomena from this tendency. But how is it possible to think of the understanding of this life experience strictly philosophically and to simultaneously preserve it in its constant passing and flowing – in its

¹⁶ Heidegger 2010, p. 30.

¹⁷ Heidegger 2010, p. 32.

¹⁸ Heidegger 2010, p. 34.

¹⁹ In German: "Zeitwort", which means "temporal word". [translator's note]

²⁰ Klun 2016, p. 38. In German: "Die Zeit kommt also nicht zum Leben hinzu, das Leben *ist* vielmehr die Zeit, es ist ein sich zeitigendes Leben."

²¹ Heidegger 2010, p. 44.

motion? How precisely is factual life experience to be understood? How can such an understanding be developed without slipping into the relativism of life philosophies *à la* Simmel or into irrationalism?

3 Paulus and His Experience of Time

The consideration of the originary experience of life must not lead one to misjudge its actual motion (*kinesis tou biou*), its lability and tendency to decay. This motion and volatility of factual life, i.e. its basic tendencies to pass and “ruinane” (to decay)²² describes the fluidity of existence which resists any attempt to stop it or capture it within a system. This movement is about the salvation or loss of life, i.e. about its authenticity or non-authenticity and not about a mere mode of cognition. It is about a way of thinking which is ready to let itself be captured by the very concreteness of lived experience, i.e. about an understanding the categories of which belong to life itself. This is why this interpretation needs to be of hermeneutic nature in order to avoid both a purely logical and theoretical approach as well as the irrational “intoxication” of experience. This new philosophical perspective is not supposed to correspond to an epistemological de-living (*Ent-Leben*), it is rather to be understood as “accompanying the authentic”.²³ Phenomenology is not a form of knowledge but a factual way of life: salvation and redemption. The question of the “liveliness” of life is at its centre. This factual and authentic life experience lies beyond the confrontation of the rational and the irrational. It is not a state in the form of an abstract and objective generality but rather a life which accomplishes itself in time as a historical event and which represents the young Heidegger’s starting point.

However, against the tendencies-to-secure of his time, Heidegger turns to early Christian experience. In this sense, the new phenomenological methodology of the young Heidegger is undoubtedly influenced by religion. He tries to expose the actual historical, which has become lifeless through its metaphysical and dogmatic systematization, in the context of the early Christian life experience and especially the basic definition of early Christian religiosity. Which elements of the Christian religious experience are that decisive according to Heidegger that he understands them to be the fundamental phenomenon of every true philosophy of religion? Heidegger’s basic religious-philosophical thesis is: “We initially consider the apostolic proclamation of

22 Cf. Heidegger 2001, p. 98.

23 Cf. Volpi 2003, p. 23. In German: “Einhergehen mit dem Eigentlichen”.

Paul. If it represents a basic phenomenon, from out of it must be won a relation to the total religious basic phenomenon.”²⁴ Christianity embodies a formal aspect of factual life which Heidegger calls “formal indication”²⁵ and which expresses an emblematic authenticity because it can become philosophically significant for any authentic existence.

At first Heidegger claims that, against all liberating and safeguarding shielding and tendencies-to-secure, early Christian religiosity is fundamentally *historical*. Heidegger formulates its two basic determinations very distinctly with the following words:

1. Primordial Christian religiosity is in factual life experience. Postscript: It is such experience itself.
2. Factual life experience is historical. Postscript Christian experience lives time itself (‘to live’ understood as *verbum transitivum*).²⁶

These two elements show the explicit juncture of early Christianity, factual life experience and the topic of temporality. The specific temporal nature of the early community is decisive: For the first time Heidegger speaks explicitly about “time itself”, which will constitute the phenomenological nucleus of *Being and Time* (1927). In this sense, through the analysis of the Pauline epistles Heidegger starts his “temporalization programme” regarding Occidental ontology and his critique of the metaphysics of presence. Heidegger does not focus on the historical-critical or exegetical reconstruction of the objective historical context of the emergence of the early Christian community. His focus lies on a phenomenological understanding of the early Christian life experience which goes beyond the epistemological exclusion of time and history.

I now wish to focus on two motifs which characterize the historical and factual nature of the Christian life experience, which Heidegger analyzes in his Freiburg lectures, and which can be found in the Pauline epistles to the Thessalonians in particular. In doing so I will explore the question as to how Christian religiosity lives “temporality as such”.²⁷

The first motif is the phenomenon of *proclamation* and the closely related *having-become* (*Geworden-Sein*) of the Thessalonians. The context in which the new temporal experience is realized is the Pauline proclamation which through its vibrant and driving force reached the Thessalonians in very concrete aspects and transformed their life. “The factual life experience of the Christians

24 Heidegger 2010, p. 57.

25 Heidegger 2010, p. 63.

26 Heidegger 2010, p. 57.

27 Heidegger 2010, p. 55.

is historically determined insofar as it always begins with the proclamation.”²⁸ Heidegger does not primarily examine the semantic content, i.e. the objective content of the Apostle’s proclamation,²⁹ but rather the processual and historical significance of its admission on the part of the community. He emphasizes the *having-become* of the community, i.e. the transformation process, the disruption generated by the admission of the proclamation. This having-become, i.e. the new existence of the believers, does not concern the past or the present, but the movement between them which determines its present being. It is about a specific form of *brokenness* which Paul himself has experienced beforehand. This brokenness puts Christians in front of a new conscience of their historical communal and self-world (*Mit- und Selbstwelt*) which is expressed in the Epistle to the Philippians in a great way: “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” (Phil 3:13) This corresponds to the originally *historical understanding* of his Dasein: “Self-certainty of the situation [*Stellung*] in his own life – break in his existence [...]. From out of this, he performs his feat as apostle, and as human being.”³⁰

Paulus and the communities which accept his proclamation are linked to each other in their having-become. However, this having-become can neither be defined through the establishment of descriptive content-related differences with regards to non-believers nor through “an arcane knowledge of the mysteries” supposed to be concealed from the non-believers. This is why there is no objective “model” of Christian life:³¹ “The significances of life remain,” Heidegger writes, “but a new comportment arises.”³² This means that the significance of Christian life depends on the context of its enactment and cannot be transposed into a theory or a specific construction. At the same time, this having-become is an ever new *becoming* inasmuch as it does not entail a new identity or stability but rather an inner mobility and insecurity. The Thessalonians are urged to *repeat* the proclamation again and again and to experience it as inner force. In this sense the existence of the believers is “radically historical”, since it comes about again and again in the enactment of faith. In all its originality early Christian facticity does not gain any particularity.

28 Heidegger 2010, p. 83.

29 “In Pauline gospel, the proper *object of the proclamation is already Jesus himself as Messiah*. Cf. 1 Cor. 15:1–11.” Heidegger 2010, p. 83.

30 Heidegger 2010, p. 51.

31 Cf. Deibl 2013, pp. 84–88.

32 Heidegger 2010, p. 83.

Despite its absoluteness with regards to its enactment, nothing changes concerning worldly facticity.³³

A Christian is not unworldly and there is no catalogue of Christian experience which can prescribe assignments and orders to the believers. This *primacy of enactment* beyond the objective content (which Heidegger calls “formal indication”) means that authenticity or non-authenticity do not concern the *What* (the accumulation of objective characterizations or contents) but the *How*, i.e. the mode of interaction with the world. Christian faith does not express a particular or extraordinary identity differing from the others. With regards to worldly facticity everything remains as before since it is not for the things or relations to change but for their respective enactment. Beyond this, Heidegger shows in his interpretation of the texts that this having-become includes a particular knowledge, i.e. an acute awareness of this becoming. It is not about a knowledge of exterior events, defined doctrines or epistemological objects, but a *knowledge with regards to oneself, one’s own self-world*, communal world and environment which are not ascertainable objectively by way of an experiential psychology or theory.³⁴ The Thessalonians therefore have the possibility to experience an “operational time” – to use Agamben’s expression³⁵ – between past and present in which the believing subject first understands the *time which it itself is*.

Heidegger speaks about the “anguish of life”³⁶ in order to express the “concerned” aspect of life. According to Heidegger the authenticity of Christian life consists in the fact that faith does not correspond to the consolidation of a fixed state (or a standstill!) but to the *concern with regards to itself*. This is why faith introduces a new insecurity and *sorrow* into existence which is closely linked to the being-present of God. Heidegger writes regarding Saint Paul: “The extraordinary in his life plays no role for him. Only when he is weak, when he

33 Heidegger 2010, p. 84. This passage is about the dialectics of authenticity and inauthenticity which will become important in *Being and Time*. The fundamental determination of the authentic does not mean “something which floats above falling everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon” (Heidegger 1962, p. 224). Heidegger therefore speaks of the appropriation of the inauthentic as a decisive characteristic of human existence. The mode of Christian life is actually not determined by its worldly conditions and its content but by the way in which those are lived and appropriated.

34 Cf. Stagi 2007, pp. 162–165.

35 Agamben 2005, p. 65. The operational time is a temporal dimension within time, i.e. a messianic time which dispels and changes chronological time. It represents a fracture in linear time which is to be understood as its interruption and simultaneous accomplishment (just as the Sabbath is to the rest of the week).

36 Heidegger 2010, p. 66.

withstands the anguish of his life, can he enter into a close connection with God.”³⁷ Weakness and sorrow generate the paradoxical broken continuity of life: Withstanding does not mean a “mystical absorption and special exertion” but a form of “‘having’ life itself, which belongs with the enactment of life”³⁸ and which increases the anguish.

The situation in which Paul and the Thessalonians find themselves is simultaneously defined as the *joy* “of the Holy Ghost” and the *sorrow* connected to the having-become (cf. 1 Thess 1:6). This expresses the paradoxical complexity of factual life which refers to the being-present of God. “It is about an *absolute turning-around*, more precisely about a turning-*toward* God and a turning-*away* from idol-images.”³⁹ This turning-toward reveals the being-present of God which has “a basic relationship to the transformation of life.”⁴⁰ At this point one could say that in this conversion God reveals himself in sorrow even though he cannot be captured as an object of speculation. Regarding this the turning-away from the idol-images can be understood as the rejection of any attempt at turning God into an object or at turning faith into a stabilizing, identity-conveying support. On the contrary, faith generates a particular distress (*thlipsis*) which is reflected in Paul’s situation and which “belongs to the life of the Christian himself.”⁴¹ In this context Heidegger develops a theological thought which connects God to the sorrow of life. “The acceptance (*dexesthai*) is an entering-oneself-into anguish. This distress is a fundamental characteristic, it is an absolute concern in the horizon of the *parousia*, of the second coming at the end of time.”⁴² In this sense, the turning-toward God represents a placing-within the anguish of life which is at the core of the proclamation. To this effect Heidegger claims that “knowledge of one’s own having-become is the starting point and the origin of theology.”⁴³ What is at stake is thinking and above all the experience of a new disquieting tension which reinforces the *deficiency* of something elusive.

37 Heidegger 2010, p. 70.

38 Heidegger 2010, p. 70.

39 Heidegger 2010, p. 66.

40 Heidegger 2010, p. 66.

41 Heidegger 2010, p. 67.

42 Heidegger 2010, p. 67.

43 Heidegger 2010, p. 66.

4 The Expectation of the Parousia

First of all, this deprivation is linked to the temporal core of the Pauline proclamation, namely the *primacy of the future*, which shows in the *expectation of the Parousia*. In his interpretation of the Pauline proclamation, Heidegger focuses on how time is fundamentally structured by *memory* and *expectation* which he understands to be the prelude to historical consciousness and the historical life experience. It is about a new understanding of time which was neither shaped by the Greek-Mediterranean world nor by the Near Eastern cultural space and in which the reference to the future interrupts the chronological and linear arrow of time. Heidegger wishes to develop a conception of time which is radically generated out of the factual life experience and contingency and which rejects any life draining objectification. It is the return of the Messiah, who has already arrived once, which is expected. This is why this return transforms the traditional conception of time insofar as it links a past event (Incarnation) to a future event which determines the present. All temporal ecstasies are connected in the messianic time. But what exactly is the parousia? Heidegger emphasizes that Paul does not answer this question “in worldly reasoning”.

The entire question for Paul is not a cognitive question. He does not say, “at this or that time the Lord will come again”; he also does not say, “I do not know when he will come again” – rather he says: “You know exactly ...” This knowledge must be of one’s own, for Paul refers the Thessalonians back to themselves and to the knowledge that they have as those who have become.⁴⁴

Life in the time of the Messiah is expectance which cannot be defined according to any fixable content. With the category of the parousia Heidegger finds the decisive element for the overcoming of the chronological and positive objectivity of progressing time. The parousia does not correspond to a future event within the horizon of linear time.

The certainty of the Thessalonians overcomes any other certainty, even though it remains undetermined, since it is not possible to grasp the *When* and *What* of the parousia. It is constitutive of Christian life (or also for the authentic experience of temporality) not to know the day or the hour of the parousia (or not to claim knowing it) and to thus be placed in a radical experience of time between the anguish of the present and the hope for the future. Paul tells the Thessalonians:

⁴⁴ Heidegger 2010, p. 72.

But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them [...] (1 Thess 5:1–3).

It is those who are attached to this world who seek freedom and security in factual life.

They cannot save themselves, because they do not have themselves, because they have forgotten their own self, because they do not have themselves in the clarity of authentic knowledge. Thus they cannot grab hold of and save themselves.⁴⁵

Faith does not aim at becoming attached to the world and seeks neither freedom nor security but it is to be understood as the quest for authentic existence, which becomes pivotal in *Being and Time*. Backstops and footholds are not expressions of the manifestation of the divine: On the contrary, anguish and weakness become the authentic place where the redemptive revelation can be heard.⁴⁶ And Christian faith and hope become the actual life experiences making it possible to endure the distress of a life without fixed identity and worldly support with joy and sorrow. In this sense the expectation of the parousia must not transform into a permanent possession. Nor must the “today” of the spirit enacting *the How* transform into a *When*, i.e. to a moment situated on a chronological timeline.

These new attitudes have a special relation to the experience of time. “The sense of facticity determines itself in this direction as temporality.”⁴⁷ Through the expectation of the parousia time has “become short” and this generates distress. The Christian lives in the “only-yet” which increases their sorrow. This sorrow is not simply fear but a form of life which neither knows nor encounters any support or foothold. The new temporality depends entirely on the relation to God. “The compressed temporality is constitutive for Christian religiosity: an ‘only-yet,’ there is no time for postponement.”⁴⁸

45 Heidegger 2010, p. 72.

46 Cf. Fischer 2013, pp. 358–360.

47 Heidegger 2010, p. 85.

48 Heidegger 2010, p. 85.

5 The Restlessness of Christian Life

All signs of security, safeguarding and self-isolation are rendered inoperative which means that the believing *Dasein* will never feel at home. It is a matter of the uncanny in life which is situated at the point of contact between the present and the future and which simultaneously structures and unsettles Christian existence. The second epistle to the Thessalonians also can be read as precisely personifying such fixations, decisions and uncritical identifications in the figure of the Antichrist inasmuch as they offer safeguards which distance man from the radical openness of the future.

This is why all things and states are freed from their closure through a shift such that their immanence is broken and opened. Only through this small shift can we be Christians in this world.

Simultaneously, the enactment of Christian life is determined by a “not”. Neither a determined content nor an undetermined “not” can adequately grasp the enactment of life. It is not about a form of skepticism or nihilism which refuses everything or considers it indifferently but about the time of *sobriety* and *vigilance*. Following Saint Paul Heidegger thinks about a form of hope which does not expect anything in particular but which entirely determines and constitutes the present. It is necessary that we remain *vigilant* and *sober*, and capable of analyzing different situations (*dokimazein*). It is not a matter of returning to mythology but about human beings, their attitude and behavior. According to Heidegger, the Antichrist does not correspond to a mythological figure or an objective fact, but he is realized through the behavior of the Thessalonians.

The motif of vigilance and attention is very important for Saint Paul as well as for Heidegger. The figure of the supervisor, the warden (of being) is and will be very important for Heidegger's question of being (even though in his later works all references to biblical texts disappear). One could say that here the *parousia* plays the role in the constitution of the *Dasein* that Being-towards-death plays in *Being and Time*. Both do not correspond to any empirical experience or end point of existence, and both evade any possible chronological and objective determination. Both prevent the subject from being understood as an absolute subject or final instance and from being fully reflected in or from fully identifying with something.

Heidegger shows in this context that the early Christian experience lives the restlessness of life as such and that the self-world acquires a new significance in Christianity, as is expressed in Augustine's *cor inquietum* and philosophically continued until Descartes. From this perspective Christianity is inserted in a history of subjectivity. In the early Christian community

Heidegger finds the root of any authentic factual life experience, and thus Christianity has an absolute originality with regards to historicity and the temporality of the living spirit.

To the “anti-Christian” and “objectifying” thinking apparent in the immediate identification of religious manifestations, which lose themselves in an object, Heidegger opposes the *thlipsis*, i.e. distress, the “weakness of existence”, which is the only authentic way to expect the parousia. The history of theology, moral theology and also frequently mysticism is pervaded by objectifying thinking and is therefore still under the rule of the Antichrist: The wide river of dogmatics has unfolded as objectifying metaphysics, as onto-theology by forgetting the sense of enactment constitutive for faith (the *How*) to the benefit of an increasing accumulation of descriptive contents (the *What*).

“Christian life is not straightforward, but is rather broken up.”⁴⁹ In this sense, life cannot be understood as harmonious, purposive progress in the course of which all wishes and tendencies of the *Dasein* are realized. This corresponds to the ideal of pagan and platonic (but not modern) life which tries to overcome any fragmentation. There is no linear grasp of history as it is proclaimed by the ideology of progress. The meaning of history cannot be conclusively established but it has to be gained time and time again. In this sense, God cannot be considered as “foothold” in the Christian experience. “The Christian does not find in God a ‘foothold’. That is blasphemy! God is never a ‘foothold’.”⁵⁰ This is why Christian life after the bend or conversion cannot aim at security or peace but at the authentic temporality of self-conduct. And therefore Christian life lives in the fragments of a broken temporality which is the sign of its peculiarity. This could also open new future horizons in our broken Europe – not only in the Europe from after the Second World War but also in the contemporary European context which is increasingly shaped by new radicalism and fundamentalism.

Biography

Isabella Guanzini is Professor of Fundamental Theology at the Catholic Private University of Linz. She studied Philosophy and Theology in Milan and received doctoral degrees in Fundamental Theology at the University of Vienna (2012) and in Humanistic Studies in Milan (2013). She was a lecturer in Introduction in Contemporary Philosophy and in Philosophical Theology at the Department of Religious Studies in Crema, in Philosophy at the Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale in Milan and in Aesthetics at the Università Cattolica del Sacro

⁴⁹ Heidegger 2010, p. 86.

⁵⁰ Heidegger 2010, p. 87.

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