



On Lines, Intersections and Changes of Perspectives in Theology, Art and intercultural Encounters -

Inaugural Lecture by Professor Johannes Weth at FIT

"The communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Cor 13:14). Reflections on a Phenomenology and a Criteriology of the Experience of the Holy Spirit - or in other words: How Intercultural Theology and Practice can be Understood in a new way" - this was the truly challenging title of the inaugural lecture given by Professor Johannes Weth at University of Applied Sciences for Intercultural Theology Hermansburg (FIT). However, the theologian, who has been teaching at FIT since October 2022, first used his inaugural lecture to share personal intercultural experiences and explain how art on the one hand and theology on the other can enrich each other. And the qualified and ordained theologian should know, as he studied fine arts and painting at the Düsseldorf Art Academy alongside his theology studies.



At the beginning of his lecture, Weth explored the following question: "What makes intercultural communication successful?" His experiences at Himmelsfels, where he created an intercultural-ecumenical learning and living community together with others, made him and his fellow campaigners realize that misunderstandings should not be considered as a communication disaster, but should be allowed and understood as a starting point or even a helpful opportunity for a new, better understanding. According to Weth, the reduction to already familiar

lines and patterns leads us to "missing out on a world of productive interspaces, of reciprocal perspectives, of gaining new dimensions that only come into our own knowledge and life through the other person". In contrast, every friction, every experienced misunderstanding and tension can be considered an invitation to discover completely new lines, intersections and perspectives and to expand our own perception.

Lines and changes of perspective - they not only play a role in encounters, but also in art and theology, and so Weth described how theology and art have combined in his life: "The two worlds did not remain separate lines, but combine in me to form a field of intertwining perspectives. My theology unfolded in art, and in theology my art gained its great motifs and its counterpart in God."

But what can theology learn from art? Using several - sometimes astonishing - pictures, Weth showed how painting thrives on changes of perspective: "Good painting seeks and inspires the constant change of perspective, the changing focus of motifs, colors and forms." Weth believes that in painting, changes of perspective are not a problematic loss of distinctiveness, but rather the necessary overcoming of one-sidedness and monotony.

From this, he derives the following for intercultural theology: „Like an image, intercultural theology is necessarily ambiguous and diverse. And this is not its problem, but can be understood as its great potential. ... Intercultural theology is depending on a paradigm shift from one-line and one-directional thinking to multi-perspective and multi-focus thinking. It looks at God and the reality of our world from a multistable foundation of knowledge and perception and encourages their dialogue." According to Weth, theology and the Gospel represent a multistable, manifold or polyphonic reality that is dependent on such multi-stable perceptions. "In a pluralistic world, intercultural theology is the normal form of theology," says Weth.

And what about the Holy Spirit? Based on various aspects - such as terminology in the Bible, controversies in the churches about experience(s) of the Holy Spirit in different confessional perspectives - and with a view to pneumatology (the doctrine of the Holy Spirit), Weth showed that the Holy Spirit is also subject to different, changing perceptions and can therefore only be described in ambiguous, multi-layered and apparently controversial images. "Intercultural theology attempts to bring these controversial reflections into an Interrelation; it does not seek the harmony of views, but the vivid process of interdependence and interaction," explains Weth. This opens up the opportunity to discover completely new lines, intersections and perspectives in this academic field.

Professor Johannes Weth filled his inaugural lecture with challenging content, but at the same time managed to convey it in a gripping, clear and practical way. The 55 members of the audience were enthusiastic about the inspiring lecture, and the students at FIT can count themselves lucky to have such a highly committed teacher.

Professor Weth thoroughly deserved the gift presented by Rector Professor Andreas Kunz-Lübcke after the inaugural lecture.

