CHAPTER FOUR

HUMANITY AND INHUMANITY IN THE LOVE OF NEIGHBOR

28 Theological Reservations against an Immanence of the Social

“The object of theology is the development of an entity that can neither be anthropologized nor politicized: God is nobody’s friend and nobody’s enemy.”¹ In this chapter, the Christian ethos of the love of neighbor will be interpreted as a contribution to an interdisciplinary approach to human sociality. This chapter thus adds yet another perspective to the interpretations and representations of human sociality that have been discussed in the previous chapters. At the same time, it is important to note that these theological reflections on humanity and sociality are not meant to present an internal discussion of the ethics and dogmatics of Christian theology that is isolated from the other perspectives. Rather, the same questions that guided the examination of the other two perspectives will be approached in the context of theological concepts. The key questions were: what understanding of human beings and human sociality is developed in the respective perspectives? To what extent does anthropology function as a regulator for the description of social structures and for a theory or modeling of human sociability? Can the dichotomy of humanity and society be undermined by a phenomenological description of the interpersonal encounter that demonstrates an excess of meaning when compared to the subject-based reconstruction of human sociality?

If the questions of this study are examined from the perspective of Protestant theology, the description of human beings cannot begin by simply presenting specific characteristics such as human nature or reason. According to theological anthropology, there are two reasons why these positive characteristics can no longer describe the human condition: first, theological anthropology works on the premise that

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¹ Blumenberg 2000, 348 (emphasis in the original; transl. M.S.).
humanity after the fall of Adam, lives in a condition of sinfulness; therefore, the human condition is determined by a corruption of their natural existence. Second, theological anthropology works on the premise that in God’s becoming human, a new foundation for human existence was established. Human beings are now able to see the difference, caused and initiated by God’s presence, between their old and new existence. This human self-differentiation becomes the hermeneutical key to a theological description of human beings. By making them aware of the corruption of their existence and offering a revision of this corruption, this ability to self-differentiate allows human beings to see what constitutes the humanity of their existence. Therefore, the theological perspective on human beings does not simply add another positive or negative description of human beings to those of the non-theological anthropologies. Rather, it always sees human existence as a state of tension which subjects the old existence to a critical revision in the light of the new existence. One task of theological anthropology is therefore to point out the immanent limits of anthropological discourse in the other perspectives, and to revise their descriptions of the phenomenon of interpersonal sociality from a theological perspective. Discussion of an old and a new human existence offers a vocabulary for the social-phenomenological distinction between various aspects of interpersonal sociality. This theological vocabulary enables us to keep the description of social phenomena open to the difference of human and inhuman sociality and to initiate a revision of the inhuman realities of life.

Based on these premises of the theological perspective, it follows that their contribution to the discussion of human existence and sociality would be underdetermined in terms of both methods and content, if its descriptions were to be reduced to another reconstruction of the factors ‘the human being’ and ‘society’ or any intermediate figures between the two. However, the method of the theological perspective is characterized by the discussion of human beings and their social life

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2 For example, the idea of sinfulness as the basic condition of human existence takes up a very central position in Pannenberg’s presentation of theological anthropology (see Pannenberg 2004, 80–153).

3 In his study on “Anthropology in Theological Perspective,” Pannenberg describes how anthropology took on a central position in 19th century Protestant theology, which in the 20th century gave way to a tendency of criticizing this so-called anthropocentrism. Here, he mainly thinks of Karl Barth’s theology (see ibid., 11–23).