10. Engaging serenely. The environmental movement between indifference and burnout

"Aufschrei der Jugend" (meaning 'The Outcry of Young People'; official English title "Generation Fridays for Future") was the title of a very touching and at the same time provocative film by filmmaker Kathrin Pitterling about young people from Fridays for Future, which was shown on Bavarian television at the beginning of February 2021. The author accompanied prominent and unknown people from the movement for almost a year at close quarters and shows how diverse, but also how exhausting the protest work of the young people was in this boom phase. Coping with the tremendously challenging work of preparing and carrying out their demonstrations and strikes took the young people to the limits of their strength to a large extent. If it hadn't been for the coronavirus pandemic slowing down their activities from the outside, the students would probably have had to drastically reduce them themselves.

As mentioned in the foreword of this book, I was able to accompany many young people from Fridays for Future Upper Austria during this peak phase of the movement. Kathrin Pitterling's film allows me to relive this time very accurately. For as early as spring 2019, I asked myself and the young people what sources of strength could help them to sustain their highly altruistic commitment in the long term—including the setbacks and disappointments about the fact that politicians patted them on the back in a benevolent manner but largely let their demands bounce off them.

The more radically one is committed to environmental protection, the more one needs supportive spirituality—but also the more many committed people develop it. This is the core thesis of the religious scholar Bron Taylor (2020, 95–136). With the help of many prominent examples from the Anglo-Saxon world, he proves that secular and traditional religious forms of spirituality are finding each other and enriching each other through the concern to save planet Earth. A new form of ecumenism is emerging that reaches far beyond religions. He calls the secular forms of spirituality "naturalistic" and the religious ones "animistic", although he himself knows that these terms are very striking and simplistic. He is more concerned with what these approaches have in common, which he describes with the title "dark green religion". "Dark green religion" for

him is not a newly constituted religious community, but a loose, diverse and yet enormously supportive ground that the various forms of ecological spiritualities share—whether they are affiliated with a classical religion or not. This spirituality is "dark green" for Taylor because, in contrast to the ecologically as well as spiritually superficial "light green religion", it represents both strong ecology (strong sustainability) and strong spirituality—and can be found in all religions and world views.

Therefore, this chapter asks what Christian spirituality can contribute to such a "dark green religion". Some of this has already been mentioned in chapters 3 to 5 and in chapter 9. However, there is one aspect I would like to elaborate on at this point and thus give an answer to the question posed by the example of Fridays for Future about "burnout prevention": Is there a third way beyond the dogged fighting of some environmentalists and the globalised indifference of the self-satisfied majority of society, which Pope Francis rightly denounces? One that fills us inwardly despite failures and hostility? One that perhaps even allows contentment to grow instead of diminishing it?

10.1 A new understanding of (God-)trust

In the tradition of Christian spirituality, the maxim has been valid from time immemorial that man should strive for excellence, even if he knows for certain that he will not achieve it through his own efforts. It is probably expressed most pointedly in a formulation by Ignatius of Loyola: "Trust in God as if the success of things depended entirely on you, not on God; yet make every effort as if you would do nothing and God alone would do everything."[21] This formula was apparently so provocative that it was soon transformed into a softer, less pointed version (Karl-Heinz Crumbach 1969, 321–328, citing Hugo Rahner 1964, 230–232): "Trust in God as if you will do nothing, God alone will do everything; nevertheless, in doing so, apply all effort as if the success of things depended entirely on you, not on God."[22]

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21 In this wording in Gabriel Hevenesi 1705[1], 230–231: "Sic Deo fide, quasi rerum successus omnis a te, nihil a Deo penderet; ita tamen iis operam omnem admove, quasi tu nihil, Deus omnia solus sit facturus."

22 Thus, Gabriel Hevenesi 1714[2], 230–231: "Sic Deo fide, quasi tu nihil, Deus omnia solus sit facturus; ita tamen iis operam omnem admove, quasi rerum successus omnis a te, nihil a Deo penderet. "

Karl-Heinz Crumbach notes that in the second version of the formula, both trust in God and human action are increased immeasurably because both are separated from each other. In this way, the formula is unrealistic and undialectical. In the original version, on the other hand, the indissoluble connection between trust in God and one's own commitment is postulated at least theoretically ("as if"), according to Crumbach with Hugo Rahner. The acting human being should trust in God in such a way that trust in their own actions becomes resoundingly effective; and should act in such a way that they are completely free from any compulsion to succeed.

Applied to environmental protection, this would mean that devoted, untiring commitment to environmental protection is an expression of trust in God. On the other hand, anyone who resignedly withdraws in the conviction that man can do nothing anyway is an unbeliever who does not trust God's work in man, for he represents paralysing fatalism. At the same time, however, the second half-sentence of Ignatius' formula makes it clear that a dogged and cramped commitment does not correspond to the Christian faith. Rather, it is important to feel the inner freedom and serenity that does not depend on the success of one's own actions. Only the theological presupposition of a difference between human action and divine grace gives people the freedom they need to really commit themselves with all their might. Maximum commitment to climate protection would therefore be the only correct option for action even if it were foreseeable that the 1.5 or 2 degree target set in Paris would be missed.

10.2 Hope as letting something happen

Is there hope? Can we hope? This question was raised by the environmental organisation Greenpeace through a symbolic representation on the occasion of the 16th Conference of the parties (COP-16) to the UN Climate Convention in Cancún in 2010. A life ring about 20 metres in diameter was placed on the ocean beach in Mexico. Next to it, people lying on the beach formed the word "HOPE" with a thick question mark behind it. "The earth is in the greatest danger—can we still hope?" was the urgent and at the same time anxious question from Greenpeace. The question was initially addressed to the delegates at the Conference of the Parties. Strictly speaking, however, it is a spiritual, even religious question. If at all, only religions or spirituality can give an adequate answer. But can they? Can they give courage to the environmentally committed? So far, the es-

tablished religions have hardly been seen in this role by the environmental movement and have hardly seen themselves in it either.

In the face of immense environmental destruction, we live in a "crisis of hope" (Timothy Robinson 2020, 1). Especially in the USA, the human sciences now speak extensively of "eco-anxiety", "climate anxiety" and "environmental anxiety". However, there is sufficient evidence that this is a global phenomenon (Timothy Robinson 2020, 2). The paradox is that while social and health sciences have long been working on this and looking for help, theology does not yet seem to feel addressed by the challenge. Yet it would be the first addressee where hope is concerned. Therefore, I would like to offer some initial thoughts here.

First of all, in the context of the environmental crisis, religions can reinforce their age-old message that the happiness of the world is not feasible, not producible. In this sense, Markus Vogt writes: "Crises become theologically significant when they destroy false hopes and designs for the future and force people to [...] turn their hope to God. [...] Especially in the sustainability discourse, a level of fears and hopes is addressed that cannot be adequately answered by eco-social and economic management programmes, but only by referring to a dimension that transcends human 'doing' and being able to dispose of things." (Markus Vogt 2009, 75)

Accepting this realisation requires a good deal of humility. Humility is the grateful affirmation of the fact that we, as creatures, are taken from the earth, feed on it and return to the earth at the end of life (cf. chapter 9.2). Humility is the realisation that life is precious precisely because it will break. Humility is the realisation that human abilities and possibilities are limited, but that their use is nevertheless meaningful. Humility therefore does not mean disregarding or even denying the human potential to influence the world's climate and biodiversity, but recognising the gift-like character of a good future (Markus Vogt 2009, 75). Humans cannot "make" the future, but only humbly receive it—if they have done everything they can.

Theology therefore does not have the task of discrediting man's efforts to preserve Creation as presumption and arrogance. Rather, its task should be, in appreciation of the admirable commitment of the environmental movement like Pope Francis, to keep the "horizon of hopes and ideas of meaning that point beyond what is humanly, socially and technically possible, open to what is unavailable" (Markus Vogt 2009, 478). Hoping means letting something happen when one's own possibilities reach their limits.

10.3 Hope as refraining from success

Now, in Judaism and Christianity in particular, there is a long tradition of looking first or exclusively at the object of hope, that is, what is hoped for. Judeo-Christian expectations of salvation in the context of a linearly progressive model of history (Timothy Robinson 2020, 5) have been handed down through Paul, Aurelius Augustine and Thomas Aquinas and have even rubbed off on secular visions of the future such as those of Karl Marx or Ernst Bloch as well as on modern theologies of hope such as those of Jürgen Moltmann. But as soon as expectations of the future come first, whether on this side or the other side, man-made or God-given (Timothy Robinson 2020, 6), thinking becomes caught in the paradigm of success: Either they come true, in which case they are "successful", or they do not come true, in which case it was all for nothing. Acting under this premise is heteronomous and dependent on success.

Such a hope, misunderstood as the sense of optimism for the future or consolation for the hereafter, is rightly rejected by ancient Greece. It is considered the last and worst vice from Pandora's jar (Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 47–105). In modern terms, it could be described with Michael Nelson's (2016) formulation as a pure placebo that pre-programs disappointment and encourages fatalistic passivity. Jonathan Franzen (2019) also considers it paternalistic because it obscures the truth and treats people like children to be put off. Moreover, such hope is ineffective because it has never achieved anything sustainable in the entire history of mankind. Finally, it does not open up any real prospects.

Modernity is characterised by the idea of success to an extent that probably no previous epoch has experienced. This has to do with the overwhelming dominance of economic thinking, but also with the exaggerated self-confidence that man has everything, and above all his personal happiness, in his own hands. This is precisely what Pope Francis means by the "technocratic paradigm" (LS 106–114). That failure under this paradigm leads to burnout is not surprising. In view of these developments, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber coined the following sentence as early as 1951: "Success is not one of the names of God." (Eugene Kogon/Karl Thieme 1951, 195–196). Belief in God and the paradigm of success are mutually exclusive.

But what can take the place of thinking in terms of success? What understanding of hope would be immune to the justified criticism of result orientation? Mind you, every human being needs visions of the future that give direction to his or her actions. But he needs much more and, first

of all, inner independence from their arrival. Timothy Robinson therefore suggests "embracing hopelessness" as a virtue (!). "To embrace hopelessness ... means to accept that we are in the midst of an utterly disorienting, overwhelming, and intractable crisis and that the conditions that threaten life and well-being on Earth are going to get worse. To release a false sense of hope that things are going to get fixed—by political will, technology, or an 'Omni-God'—provides clarity and a more realistic set of expectations." (Timothy Robinson 2020, 7) Roy Scranton puts it even more provocatively when he argues that we must acknowledge the death of contemporary civilisation that has already occurred: "The greatest challenge we face is a philosophical one: understanding that this civilization is already dead." (Roy Scranton 2015, 23)

In an enlightened sense, then, hoping must mean desisting from any success—the success of human programmes and activities as well as the success of any divine intervention whatsoever. This is a theological necessity, not just a historical or pragmatic one! God cannot be pressed into a linear scheme of success—he is beyond the categories of success and failure. He is no good as a substitute for when humanity reaches the limits of its possibilities.

10.4 Hope as the certainty that something has meaning

But what does hoping mean then? Are we allowed to hope; indeed should we still hope at all? Or should we leave hope in Pandora's jar, as the ancient Greeks said? In a great way, this is discussed in an answer given by Václav Havel in 1987 to a question from journalist Karel Hvížďala: "Do you see a glimmer of hope anywhere in the eighties?" Václav Havel replies: "First of all, I suppose I should say that I understand hope, which I think about quite often (especially in particularly hopeless situations, such as prison), primarily, originally and mainly as a state of mind, not a state of the world. Hope is something we either have within us or we don't, it is a dimension of our soul and is not dependent in its essence on any observation of the world or assessment of situations. Hope is not prognostication. It is orientation of the spirit, orientation of the heart that transcends the immediate lived world and is anchored somewhere in the distance, beyond its borders. As a mere derivative of something local, of some movement in the world or its favourable signals, it simply does not seem explainable to me. So I sense its deepest roots somewhere in transcendence, just like the roots of human responsibility, without be-

ing able—unlike Christians, for example—to say anything more concrete about this transcendence. This conviction of mine—actually it is more than conviction, it is inner experience—is not changed by the degree to which this or that person admits or denies anchoring of his hope: the most convinced materialist and atheist can have more of this inner, genuine hope anchored in transcendence (in my—not their—opinion!) than ten metaphysicians put together. The measure of hope in this deep and strong sense is not the measure of our pleasure in the good run of things and our will to invest in enterprises that will visibly lead to early success, but rather the measure of our ability to strive for something because it is good, and not just because it is guaranteed to succeed. The less favourable the situation in which we prove our hope, the deeper that hope. Hope is not optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something has meaning—regardless of how it turns out. So I think that the deepest and most important hope, the only one that is able to keep us on the surface despite everything, to keep us doing good deeds, and the only real source of the greatness of the human spirit and its endeavour, we take from 'elsewhere'. And it is this hope above all that gives us the strength to live and to try again and again, no matter how hopeless the external conditions may be. So, I had to say that first. And now to what you probably mainly wanted to hear, namely the 'state of the world' and the quantity and types of hopeful signs in it." (Václav Havel 1987, 219–221)

Hope is "the certainty that something has meaning—regardless of how it turns out". This certainty, according to Havel, grows from a deep inner source, which he describes as "transcendence", however one may imagine it. To hope, then, is to hold on to the conviction of the meaningfulness and goodness of one's own actions. This meaningfulness is far above the categories of success and failure. One's own actions are not understood as a means to the end of some success, but as a value in themselves. "A re-imagined hope [...] will see virtuous action on behalf of the Earth and its inhabitants as a good in itself rather than as a means to an end." (Timothy Robinson 2020, 9). Being convinced of the meaningfulness and goodness of one's own actions is the actual paradigm of spiritual thinking. Vaclav Havel came to this realisation during years of political imprisonment. Even two years after Mikhail Gorbachev took office and two years before the fall of the Iron Curtain, he does not speculate on the end of communism. Rather, he is sustained by a hope that is autonomous, independent of the outcome of certain events: deep inside he feels the certainty that what he does is right and that what he thinks is good. Even if his speech

and action had no effect, they would have meaning (cf. Jonathan Franzen 2019).

In an impressive way, Karl Rahner developed a theology of hope based on these considerations as early as 1967, i.e. in the midst of a global phase of highest euphoria and greatest optimism, which corrects our classical misunderstanding of hope as optimism for the future or consolation for the hereafter, inspired by the Augustinian interpretation of the Pauline Epistles. Rahner starts with what for him "heaven", redeemed reality, means. Heaven is the reception, the receiving of God by a human being, who completely lets go of themselves. This reception takes place in two dimensions: In faith, God is accepted as the final, abiding mystery that man will never see through. In love, God is accepted as love that turns to man without reason, incomprehensibly, purely as a gift.

However, this receiving of God in faith and love has a dynamic of "going from oneself", as Rahner says, insofar as what is unavailable is accepted and man, in this acceptance, acknowledges that he cannot have God at his disposal. This dynamic of "going from oneself" towards the unavailability of God is precisely what we call hope. Hope is the "radical engagement with the absolute unavailability" of God (Karl Rahner 1967, 570). It takes place in earthly life in encounters with that which is provisional or uncontrollable. Seen in this way, hope is the acceptance of life as a venture (German Wagnis) and its outcome as an inaccessible mystery.

10.5 Epilogue: Bound in the bag of life

Those who take their responsibility for Creation seriously do not get involved because they assume that their efforts will be successful. That would be naïve and would most likely end in deep frustration. Those who take their responsibility for Creation seriously are committed despite the realistic possibility that destruction will continue. This book has shown which steps have to be taken. It is about being able to stand up straight before oneself and before God.

Hope, then, is not directed towards the future, but towards the present; not towards tomorrow, but towards today; not towards later, but towards now: Now hopeful people sense that the hour has struck; today they are doing what they can; in the present they are taking a small, seemingly insignificant step instead of waiting for the opportunity to take the great leap that will not come for eternity. From such hope grows a power that can change the world.

So, I conclude with the metaphor that serves as the leitmotif of this book. Man as the "image of God" (Gen. 1:26) is like a shepherd to whom God entrusts his flock in faithful hands. When he returns from his wanderings over the many pastures, he will have to give an account for each of the animals. For each, even the smallest, supposedly most useless creature of this earth is "bound up in the bag of life" (1 Sam. 25:29).