

Greetings

of the dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Ruhr-University Bochum
at the beginning of the conference

On the crossroads of modernity.

New perspectives on religion, culture and society since 1750

24-25 June 2019, Bochum

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

as dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology here in our Ruhr University Bochum
I am honored to welcome you at the beginning of this conference “on the
crossroads of modernity”.

As a New Testament scholar I am aware of the specific task of any crossroad. As
a New Testament scholar I am aware as well of the task of modernity. When
Jesus, according to Luke, did his inaugural speech in the synagogue of Nazareth
he quoted the prophet Isaiah with the promise of healing words and liberating
service, and Jesus gave his interpretation in the shortest sermon of the world:
“Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears”.

This keynote of Jesus is a plea for creative reception, and it is a plea for an
aggiornamento in every time and at every place as well. It is the word of God
which calls faith. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that the Gospel is present
today because it was revealed by the prophets and will be open future.

Together with “faith” and “reason” this “today” is part of the research- and
teaching-program of our faculty. *Glauben – Denken – Heute: Believing. Thinking.
Today.* My free translation for this conference: Faith and reason meet on the
crossroads of modernity.

You know that in our German system both Catholic and Protestant Theology do
belong to big (and sometimes great) State Universities. Here in Bochum we have
the privilege of a sister faculty with a lot of friends from the protestant tradition.
We are Catholics – and we do our teaching and researching in the context of a
State University with twenty faculties and more than 40.000 students. We are
full members of this scientific community, and we teach and research with the
license of our bishop. As Pope Francis said in *Veritatis gaudium* we are pioneers
of a new world of Catholic Theology in the modern world of today and
tomorrow.

Both, academic partnership and ecclesial responsibility give us the chance for
substantial discussion, critical discourse and vivid disclosure at the crossroads
of modernity. We here in Bochum are the first university institution in Germany

whose status as full faculty with all academic and canonical rights is defined without reference to the formation of forthcoming priests. It is a new contract between the Holy See and the federal state of Nordrhein-Westfalia which guaranties this new structure. This is a breakthrough. We miss our priesthood candidates from Essen. But we are sure that this region and this time needs strong Catholic theology. We are grateful to the Vatican Congregation for Education, to the German Bishop Conference, to the Bishop of Essen, to the government with the Prime minister of Nordrhein-Westfalia and to the president of this university for making possible such a new constellation which changes juridical conditions in order to hold and renew the power of Catholic Theology today.

This conference here in Bochum is one of the indicators of the chances we have. As dean I am a little bit proud of our Chair of Church History of the Medieval Ages and Modernity. Wim Damberg who cannot be with at this hour, pressed his stamp on it. So, as active partners we do belong to the network of scholars who deal with contemporary history. Since half a year with Florian Bock we have a young colleague with us who contributes with his own projects and ideas to this field of research: It is a collaboration with the dioceses of Essen which allowed us to found this new chair. For us as a faculty it is a signal that we will be interested and engaged sustainably in the research of religion, Christianity and Catholicism in modernity.

Thanks to CCSCE for accepting the invitation to Bochum. Thanks to KADOC of the KU Leuven for the cooperation in organizing this conference. Thanks to Wim and Florian and their team for being hosts here in Shanghai-Bochum. Have a good time “deep in the west” as we say here from our region. And how long and good the keynotes may be – remember, if there will be any fulfillment, it will have been in your ears.

Thomas Söding