

Capps lecture – Professor Jurgen Moltmann – April 27th, 2005

Control is Good – Trust is Better: Freedom and Security in a “Free World”

I. “Trust is good – control is better” (Lenin)

In the sad old days of the Soviet Union everyone was able to marvel over the socialist police state at its very frontier: Having finally, after prolonged effort, acquired a visa, and after presenting a multiplicity of documents, one had to show one’s passport not just to one official but as a rule to four. The first official checked whether the visa was correct, and the passport still valid and properly stamped; the second official checked that the first one had checked correctly; the third checked the second; and the fourth, finally, had to check the third, second and first officials. Lenin’s precept ruled supreme: trust is good, but control is better.

But even the thinking person was bound to ask: what does all this lead to, and where does it stop? A hundred years earlier, Karl Marx had already perceived this dilemma of the police state and was forced to raise the unanswerable question: “Who controls the controllers?” The Soviet Union’s answer was: Controllers control the controllers. As a result, in the Soviet Union, and in the East European socialist countries, the state security authorities – the OGPU, KGB, secret police, etc. – expanded to an untold extent. Like a cancer, the sterile, life-destroying cells of the all-monitoring state security and its informers spread into every town, every village, every⁷ factory, into schools, universities, even into every family, and disseminated not security but general and total mistrust: Never say what you think, for the person who hears you could be a spy and informer in the pay of state security authorities. So stop forming your own judgment, and say only what you are supposed to say. Never speak the truth but only what they want to hear from you. And what got lost in the process was not just confidence in the state but self-confidence as well.

After the reunification of Germany in 1989, we got to know the archives of the East German state security authorities, which were made available to everyone. The information collected there is overwhelming. It reaches from political remarks overheard in the street down to the pillow-talk of lovers. Spoken and written words were put on record. Telephones were tapped, letters copied, movements in bank accounts docketed, and so on. The “STasi” – the

name for the state security authorities in the socialist police states – was often compared to an octopus, a Moloch, or a cancerous growth; for the financial expenditure required for these unproductive activities was enormous, and continued to grow. If the controllers have to control the controllers, the budget for the secret service already expands immeasurably before a controller has controlled a single person in the population as a whole. Why? The answer is simple: because no controller can be trusted. Nowhere is corruption as widespread as in the secret police and state security organization in Russia today.

Every escalating state security authority leads inescapably to the security state. That means the total surveillance state; in other words: the police state, the dictatorship, the Leviathan. But any such state is bound to self-destruct because of two insoluble problems:

1. Security becomes increasingly expensive the more officials and controllers the security authority has to employ in order to feel secure.
2. In a state of this kind no one tells the truth. Everyone says only what his or her bosses want to hear, in this case the party and the government. So production figures were falsified so that progress could be reported. In the end the government no longer knows what and whom it is really governing and lives from fantasy figures.

It will be true to say that the Soviet Union and the socialist states in East Europe destroyed themselves through these two factors: First, through the phantom of the total control of the people and the control of their controllers; second, through the lies about true conditions demanded by the government.

The conclusion to be drawn from this experiment, which failed so bitterly, is that the question of trust in politics is the question of truth. Controls spread mistrust and mistrust turns the truth into lies; but the lie is the power which destroys life.

Having become a little wiser from the experiences of state socialism, let us look more closely at the connection between trust and faith.

II. Control is (not) good – Trust is better

Without trust no controls function, but can the controllers be trusted? Without liberty there is no need for security, so what security guarantees our liberty? Let us first ask: What is trust?

If we look at trust psychologically, we shall follow Erik Erikson and arrive at the basic trust of the child, which grows out of its mother's loving commitment and care. Astonishingly enough, this basic trust endures even if the mother turns away or is absent from the child for a while. The child acquires a trust in life which is stronger than the fear of life and mistrust of what is strange. We might say that a capacity for trust develops which can even stand up to justifiable mistrust. Out of the trust which the parents (and especially the mother) give it, the child develops a slow but sure self-trust or self-confidence. This self-trust makes it possible to come to terms with the disappointments and betrayal which we experience if our trust is misused by other people.

If we look at trust ecologically, we understand it as an atmosphere for living without which there can be no human life. Human life cannot be lived just like animal life. It must also be affirmed, rejected and hated. A human life which is denied, rejected and despised atrophies, becomes sick and dies. This is not only true of children who have been made street children or child soldiers; it applies to adults too. Trust is the necessary habitat of freedom, its living space. Where other people trust me, I can develop freely and go out of myself. Where I meet with mistrust and rejection, I am forced into a corner and withdraw into myself. Fish need water to swim in, birds need air in which to fly, and we human beings need trust in order to develop our humanity.

Trust is the element in which human life exists. In a trusted environment I feel free. I encounter a strange environment with mistrust.

If we look at trust sociologically, we discover that the foundations of all stable relationships are promise. Nietzsche maintained that the free human being is 'the being that can promise' and, as every child would add, must also keep his promise. If I keep my promise, I make myself reliable and trustworthy for other people. Through the promises I give, I pin myself down in ambiguity, and become unequivocal for other people and for myself as well. In faithfulness to our promise we acquire continuity in time because we are reminded of ourselves when we are reminded of our promise. Free people who are not already fixed by traditions

acquire identity in their promises. People who break their promises lose themselves; those who keep their promises remain true to themselves.

If we keep our promises as far as we can, we create trust. If we break our promises without good reason, then we are rightly mistrusted. The person who takes no account of what he has promised becomes a cheat, and in the end no longer knows himself or herself. The identity in our life-history is designated by our name. Through my name I identify myself with the person I was in the past, and anticipate myself and the person I am going to be in the future. With my name I can be addressed. With my name I put my signature to my contracts and guarantee my obligations. The shared life of free men and women in a society is always a dense web of promises and reliabilities. In this social warp and weft of mutual relationships, trust acquires its familiar face.

Since social dependabilities are the basis of every free society, the result is the social consensus, or what used to be called in Rousseau's phrase *le contrat social* – the social contract. In every society, even in the “pluralist” and highly complex society we know today, there are fundamental agreements and understandings, basic laws, constitutions, values, and unquestioned matters-of-course. The person who breaks or ignores them must reckon with sanctions. They represent the basis of trust for the social dealings of men and women. It is not a matter of eternal laws which are enforced under an appeal to a divine and therefore unquestionable authority. This is a covenant made by free members of society with each other and with the coming generations, and not least with the earth too. This covenant is subject to the principle that *pacta sunt servanda* – agreements must be kept. Those who infringe the covenanted constitution of society excommunicate themselves. Social trust is withdrawn from them.

Finally, in the political sector this fundamental covenant is the constitution in which civil rights are laid down so that they can be appealed and claimed before the courts if they are infringed upon or withdrawn. The laws of the state must accord with the country's constitution, written or unwritten; if they do not, they are invalid. The constitutional rights of the people can only be set aside in emergencies, if general security requires it, and even then only for an agreeable limited time. In a country's constitution, civil rights are formulated in accordance with the human rights which are generally recognized. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966, as well as the Earth Charter of 1992, provide the internally recognized basis of trust for the

countries in the community of the United Nations. They are the unifying bond of the world-wide community of nations. The country which departs from it because it trusts only in its own power is isolated. It loses its trustworthiness among the other nations and peoples. It can spread fear and terror, but it cannot win trust.

Having looked at the different dimensions of trust, we now come to the question of how one wins trust, creates trust, and restores trust. Whether in private or in public life, the answer is quite simple. It is: *Speak the truth and you will be trusted.*

For we remember that the boy who falsely called “wolf, wolf!” was not believed when the wolf actually arrived. And you can replace the word “wolf” with the word “terror.”

Only truthfulness wins, creates and restores trust. The rule is clear enough. Gustav Heinemann, a former West German president, formulated it for his political colleagues as follows: “Say what you mean to do, and do what you say.” Don’t think that the people who voted for you are stupider than yourself. They can stand the truth, even the bitter truth, better than smooth lies or political evasion.

But curiously enough it is politicians especially – and of course I am talking only about German politicians – who often have an impaired relationship to the truth. Does politics ruin the character? It is probably not so much a matter of the character of the people concerned as the attitude which sees politics as a struggle for power. In a struggle of that kind, speeches are tested not for their truth but for their effectiveness. They are then used for propaganda and to deceive opponents or enemies. We experienced that especially drastically in times of war. In war, truth is always the first victim, In order to invent causes for war, lies are spread and truths are repressed. I remember the German beginning of World War II: Polish troops attacked the radio station of Gleiwitz, Silesia, but they were SS-soldiers in Polish uniforms. During war the truth cannot be spoken because it could be of use to the enemy and would unsettle one’s own people. Because in war the people always have to stand behind their government, the government no longer needs to try so hard to win the people’s trust. It is easy to rule with emergency powers and martial laws – but not in freedom, and not with trust either.

How can trust be restored once it has been misused? I believe through the honest admission of the lie and the plea for forgiveness – that is to say, a request for new trust. If I tell the truth about my lie or my breach of trust, it is painful, and I become vulnerable for reproaches and attacks, but it is the first step into the light of truth; and only ‘the truth will make you free’.

Whether or not others forgive the person who acknowledges his or her lie, or continually hold it against him or her, he or she is superior to them because he/she stands in the truth and has regained self-respect. He/she has taken over responsibility for him/herself, and that sets him/her far above all his/her accusers. One can trust someone who tells the truth about his mistakes more than someone who claims never to have made a mistake at all. The trust that is restored through reborn forgiveness is a strong trust because it had gone through broken trust, and mistrust, and is now trust that has become wise and which is able to stand up to opposition and contradictions. Children have an innate and innocent basic trust. Adults have to find and learn a mature, realistic trust. Blind trust must become clear-eyed trust. Today we use the terms for credibility as “transparency” or “calculability”. But they are only objectifications which exclude the human dimension of trust and the personal dimension of responsibility. Computers are transparent and calculable but they can’t be called to account. With this we turn now to a theology of trust.

III. “In God We Trust”

On every dollar note we read “In God We Trust”. I will leave on one side the familiar and cheap critical comments and ask instead: What has the name of God got to do with a banknote? If goods are no longer exchanged directly – potatoes for milk and milk for apples, etc. – but instead issued by banks, this is preeminently a matter of trust. That is why banks give themselves names like “Trust Bank”, in order to appeal to the trust of the investors. Anyone who puts his or her money in a bank does so trusting in its probity. Anyone to whom the bank lends money has to prove his or her credit-worthiness. But what has credit to do with creed? I suppose that in the early period of monetary transactions there were few ways of checking clients, so that their reliability was deduced from their religious ties: if they trust God and are good god-fearing persons, they can also be trusted with one’s money. Can one believe someone who doesn’t believe in anything? That is why banking transactions were overarched by the heaven of confidence in God: “In God we trust”.

But what God is it in whom we place the trust of our heart and who promises us confidence in life?

Let us listen to Martin Luther's interpretation of the First Commandment in his *Large Catechism*, because it seems to be the most modern interpretation of faith in God. Following medieval tradition, Luther puts the Bible's first and second commandments together:

The First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods."

That is, you shall regard me alone as your God. What does this mean, and how is it to be understood? What is it to have a god? What is God? Answer: A god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need. To have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe him with our whole heart. The trust and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you have not the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself is really your God.

This mutual relationship between faith and God is so modern that it could derive from Feuerbach or Nietzsche. And in fact for his projection theory Feuerbach actually referred to this passage in Luther's *Large Catechism*. Luther of course meant that the faith of the heart makes the eternal God present within us. Feuerbach, on the other hand, made "the divine" the invention or wishful thinking of human belief, so that all gods were idols and human products. But Luther and Feuerbach agree in their criticism of capitalism, saying that money is the most evil idol to which human beings can subject themselves. This idol's name is Mammon.

Luther goes on:

Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property; in them he trusts and of them he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. Surely such a man also has a god – mammon by name, that is, money and possessions – on which he fixes his whole heart. It is the most common idol on earth.

Many critics of the modern world have followed Luther's demonization of money. In his *Philosophy of money*, Georg Simmel called money "the god of our time". The systems-theorist Niklas Luhmann maintained that in bourgeois society "the omnipotence of God is replaced by the omnipotence of money"; money is "the all-determining reality". And today anti-capitalist

programs are often called “anti-mammon programs”. God or money: that is then supposed to be the decisive question of faith.

But then how can we distinguish the true God from the false ones, according to Luther? By relating both to “the trust of the heart”, Luther makes this the anthropological criterion for the distinction: “That to which your heart clings and entrusts itself, is really your God.” “If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true God.” “To have a God means to have something in which the heart trusts completely.” The little word completely offers the criterion for distinguishing God from idols. The Sh’ma Israel already stresses totality:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might (Deut. 6:5).

The one, eternal God can only be loved entirely or not at all. If we love only half-heartedly, with a divided mind, and only from time to time, with a little bit of faith, we fall short of God. For the One God is the creator of all finite things. We can make the counter check: can I love things that are earthly and created, transitory and destructible so totally that I place the whole trust of my heart in them – money or health perhaps, or my country, or football? No, that is impossible. It demands too much of them and leads inescapably to disappointment. It destroys the finite, vulnerable beauty of created things if I take to be absolute what is relative, and expect of these fragile things what only God can give. Only a love of God that has gone wrong deifies what is human and absolutizes what is worldly, thus destroying it. Ecclesiastes already says that “He who loves money will never be satisfied with money” (5:10). Because that person knows in his heart of hearts that money is not God, he becomes addicted. Addiction is always a sign of idolatry. The trust of the heart in the God who holds everything in his hands frees us from idolatry in the world of human beings, and lets created things be seen as they are in their finite and transitory beauty. Then money ceases to be a “mammon” and becomes a benefit in dealing with the goods of this world. Our whole heart and our whole confidence belongs only to God. We can then deal sensibly and wisely with everything else, in the way suited to their nature. Jesus gave good advice: “Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon” (Luke 16:9). The value of money changes, but friendship endures.

But can we trust in God? I believe the true God is the God who bears. We are, however, much more used to a God who rules and reigns from above at will, and whose will is

incomprehensible for us humans. A closer look into the biblical witnesses shows, however, that the God of Israel and the God of Jesus Christ is much more a bearing, an enduring, a suffering God. His rule is not one of command, but of patience; his omnipotence is his all-enduring strength.

Look at Israel's exodus-story and what is behind the first commandment: On the one hand Yahweh's power is liberating his enslaved people, destroying Pharaoh's army. On the other hand it is God's bearing power: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you up on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19:4). What images were used for this bearing God? First, a female image: "Carry them in thy bosom as a mother bearest her sucking child, unto the land, which you swore unto their fathers" (Numbers 11:12). And then a masculine image: "And in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God bares you as a man bears his son, in all the way you went, until you came to this place" (Deut. 1:31).

The true revelation of this bearing, enduring, suffering God is the suffering Christ on the cross: Enduring our sicknesses, bearing our sins, sharing our griefs and our sorrows (**Jes?** 53; Matt. 8:17). And by doing so Christ is "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrew 1:3).

We can learn from this how God's creative power is God's bearing power, giving his creatures time and space and ever new possibilities for their lives and for their development. We can rely upon this God like resting on a fundament. To use a concept of old Greek philosophy: The bearing God is the hypokeimenon, the trusting ground of everything. The image of the bearing God is not the untouchable sovereign of this throne, but **Atlas?** Carrying the world on his strong and patient shoulders.

IV. In us – God Trusts

Trust is always a mutual affair, and this is true of trust in God too: we trust God because God trusts us. That is the heart of the biblical stories and message: God trusts us, God believes in us, God hopes for us and God expects us. People who understand this become God's trusted and familiar friends in his creation. Gloria dei est vivens homo, said the Church Father Irenaeus: the living human being is God's glory. If we are to be God's glory and blessing in the world,

then trust in God is the foundation for firm self-trust, and challenges us to look with confidence to the future of the world.

As we have said, there is a trust which arises of itself in a familiar environment – a trusted environment, as we say: I know my father’s house, my home, my friends and my country. In my neighborhood I am known and valued, so trust for me is a matter of course, a matter of familiarity.

But there is also the trust in God which made Abraham and Sarah ready to leave their country and their friends and their father’s house and all their familiar surroundings and to wander as strangers through strange lands in order to follow the star of God’s promise: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. And by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2). This trust in God’s promise for the future is what the New Testament calls faith. It is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1) – a confidence about the things we hope for, and a lack of doubt about what we don’t yet see. As the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells, the biblical stories from Noah to Jesus are stories about this confidence in the future, confidence in the promising God. It puts men and women at odds with their familiar and trusted environment, and makes them ready to let go of the old and to look for the new thing which God has promised. It does not familiarize them with their environment; it alienates them from it. But this makes them capable for the future, and free.

Here we discover a qualitative difference in the concept of trust. In the one case our trust is linked with familiarity, with safe-keeping in what is familiar, and the preservation of what one has and knows. This trust in the familiar and accustomed binds the present to the past and is conservative through and through.

In the second case trust is bound up with confidence, in German, “Zuversicht”. It has to do with setting forth out of what is familiar and known. It is about alienation and freedom, about openness for the unknown future, and faith in the promising God. Here trust has the future as its lodestone, and is a power which can face up creatively to the challenges of the future, with joy in the experiment. Here trust in God means the courage for risk.

The God who – as the biblical stories tell – calls men and women to take the path towards his promised future, evidently trusts his word to the fickle and inconstant people we are. He challenges us to accept his covenant. He hopes for us and expects us along his ways. He

promises to go with us and bear us when we start out and seek his future. God believes in the human beings he has created to be his image, and whom he has taken into covenant with him. Although the history of humanity is a history of injustice and violence, unbelief and godlessness, God believes in us, and holds fast to his trust in us. That is an inexhaustible source of new courage, new beginning, and reborn hope, which doesn't give itself up.

In biblical faith, trust in God doesn't mean safe-keeping, as if we were still in our mother's womb. It means freedom in the wide space of the coming God.

V. Restoring Trust – Creating Trust

We asked: can trust be restored once it has been misused? Let us look, finally, at this possibility, first on the personal level, and second on the political level. For our analysis we shall draw on the distinction we have just made between the trust that comes from familiarity and hope for the future, which means confidence.

On the personal level: If the trust in a relationship or an atmosphere for living is destroyed through lies, unreliability and unfaithfulness, the people who trusted are hurt, and the ones who have destroyed the trust lose their credibility. The atmosphere is poisoned. The old trust cannot be maintained. But can a new trust be created? The Christian tradition of the sacrament of penance and liberation offers us three steps which can be of help:

- a) *confessio oris*: the admission of guilt, the step to truth;
- b) *contritio cordis*: the contrition of the heart, the turning away from guilt and the turn to righteousness, the change of mind;
- c) *satisfactio operum*: the making good of the harm done, as far as this is possible, the new community.

These three steps are preceded, accompanied and followed by the forgiveness of guilt, the assurance of new trust, and the offer of new community. So it does not matter which step we take first. Repentance without forgiveness is a sterile torment; forgiveness without the new community leads nowhere. Forgiveness can only be given in the power of the assurance that a new community is possible. With this prospect, which is opened up for the guilty, the process of repentance and liberation can begin, and it becomes a joy in new life. Forgiveness of guilt is not

a backward-looking act. It opens up a new future. The person who experiences it can let go of the past, for forgiveness of guilt is a down-payment of trust made in hope.

On the political level, enmity can be dispersed through “confidence-building measures”. Through trust in an alternative future of peace and cooperation trust can replace mistrust. For this there are models:

-- In the middle of the Cold War between the Eastern bloc and the West, from 1973 – 1975, the Helsinki Conferences on Security and Co-operation were held in a divided Europe. Here the confidence-building measures were agreed upon, which perforated the Iron Curtain because they dispersed the mutual ideological mistrust. The propagandist deepening of the divisions gave way to co-operation for the purposes of a new community. Today’s integration of the European community is the result of sustained effort to build up mutual trust.

-- I was never very happy with German politics in general and stood most of the time on the side of the opposition, but looking back on the German post-war-politics as a whole, I would say that it was a politics of reconciliation, first with France, then with Russia, most recently with Poland. This politics of reconciliation replaced the old German ‘realpolitik’, power-politic. It began with the Nuremberg trials, which brought some justice into our bloody history, and with the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt, made by the Protestant Churches in the summer of 1945. But the secret motivation behind it was and is “Auschwitz” as a reminder of the German change of heart. “Auschwitz” became the primordial story of post-war-Germany as after-Auschwitz-Germany. In the center of Berlin there is no monument of the unknown soldier of World War II, but the Auschwitz monument. And last but not least, German politics dealt with reparation payments to the victims of German crimes against humanity, and with a strict commitment to peace and never again war.

-- In the peaceful transitions from Stalinist dictatorships to social democracies in the East European countries, similar processes of repentance and liberation have been undramatically initiated in order to arrive at the truth, which alone can guarantee freedom: realization of the wrong done, change of heart, and reparation to the victims of the rule of violence.

-- The Truth Commissions in South Africa are organizing the rebirth of freedom in an exemplary fashion as perpetrators and victims are brought into the light of truth.

This brings us to the following conclusion:

- The restoration of trust is politically possible.
- Every step to truth leads to new trust.
- Hebrews 10:35 is right when it says: “Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.”