

2.3 Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Schoberth/Erlangen (Christian cultural history):

## **The image and the Christian religion**

Christian thinking about “images” rightly focuses on the biblical prohibition of images (Bilderverbot); the meaning of this commandment is much more than religious images in a narrow sense. It is, of course, not about the mere actuality of images, but rather about their function to the seer: how do we engage with images, or more especially – how do they engage with us?

The first part of the presentation outlines the meaning in Christian theology of the ban on images which, despite the rich tradition for imagery in Christianity, never quite vanished from this tradition, yet still raises important questions. At the same time it is not only, or even primarily, images in the superficial sense which attract criticism, but above all concepts and perceptions. The prohibition of images teaches that no image, no concept of God can be true. Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity could lead to a Christian way to talk about God, abandoning the temptation to create images of God.

The second part addresses the conclusions to be drawn from this regarding the use of images: the experience of God and also the experiences of the world are both constantly being reified. The important dialogue partners in the necessary reflection upon the power and temptation of images are not only the media and social sciences, but above all modernist art, one of whose characteristics is that its pictures do not depict anything. By presenting phenomenality rather than phenomena, by opening experience to the undreamed-of, the modernist aesthetic is a corrective to both unrestrained global power and false reconciliation; it can therefore be read as a tangible contemporary manifestation of the image ban.