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# **Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision**

Edited by

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The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

*In Memory of*

**George F. McLean, OMI**

(June 29, 1929 – September 6, 2016)

*With Gratitude*

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# Welcoming Address

FRANÇOIS-XAVIER DUMORTIER \*

*It is a great honour for me, at the beginning of this International Conference, to extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you to the Gregorian Pontifical University. With this inaugural function we begin two days of reflection on the theme, “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision.” I pray that you feel at home in our University, which is honoured by your presence.*

*I would like to express a special word of welcome to His Eminence Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, President of the Pontifical Council for Culture, under whose patronage this conference is held. Your Eminence, your esteemed presence is a joy to all of us because from the time you assumed this responsibility, you have committed yourself in promoting many aspects and dimensions of dialogue between the Church and Culture – or rather cultures – those of our time and the world. The initiatives of the “Courtyard of the Gentiles” were and are emblematic of an “outgoing Church” – now in accordance with the apostolic desire of Pope Francis – engaging in an open dialogue that entails a great capacity for listening to and encounter with the diversity of the world, armed with an inexhaustible desire to create bonds between persons and different environments, between fields of knowledge and human experience, between seekers of God (who are at times on paths far away) and the Catholic Church. Thanks a lot, Your Eminence, for your presence in our midst.*

*I also extend greetings of profound esteem and affection to Father George McLean, President of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. He has been a persevering promoter of such a Conference to be held at this University, the same where he was a student for seven*

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\* Pontifical Gregorian University (Roma). – This Address by the Rector of the Pontifical Gregorian University was delivered on March 4, 2015.



*years during the time of his formation towards the priesthood. We are all aware of Father McLean's efforts to identify areas and themes of reflection that need to be deepened through joint research work as much as through dialogue and inter-disciplinary discussion. Fr. McLean believes deeply that there is nothing like the power of intelligence and knowledge to break down the ideological barriers that divide persons and peoples and so build bridges of mutual understanding and sharing. I am glad that this conference, which owes much to Father McLean's determination, takes place here in Rome and at our University.*

*I would also like to greet, in a special way, Professor Charles Taylor, one of the most important and respected thinkers of our time, a thinker whose book, *A Secular Age*, since its publication, has been a major reference to many in the process of reflecting upon our cultural and epistemological situation, a book that remains a source of reflection and a boost towards the self-reflection of our time and generation. On behalf of the entire university which includes about 2,600 students who come from 120 countries, of which half the number come from non-European countries, and on my behalf, a passionate reader and admirer of your work for almost 30 years, I wish to let you know that we greatly rejoice for your presence with us.*

*Let me whole heartedly thank Father João Vila-Chã, Professor of Philosophy in our University and President of COMIUCAP (Conférence Mondiale des Institutions Universitaires Catholiques de Philosophie), who has dedicated himself with all his intelligence and energy – and not in a small way – to the birth and organization of this joint Conference in Rome. From the very beginning, he believed in the necessity and relevance of such a conference and with great care accompanied every step forward, supported by the Faculty of Philosophy, which deserves my heartfelt gratitude.*

*I would also wish to express our gratitude to all the speakers and to all the participants: most of you have come from far and wide. I really hope that you get a beautiful experience of encounter, dialogue and reflection together.*

*Before you start with your work, I believe I don't need to stress the importance of the theme of this conference. Your very presence is a significant proof its relevance. To me, the different stages of this conference which has been nourished by the research work carried out by different teams around the world are very important. The conference deals with the Church's relationship with today's world, that is, with men and women of today and with the societies and cultures of our time. It will not only deal with the frontiers of this society, culture and of ourselves, but it will go beyond all that with faith and hope in search of a God who works mysteriously in everything and in all, and who in some way calls us to leave our closely guarded safety zones and familiar places. This challenge of thinking about our contemporary intellectual and spiritual situation requires the ability to get out of one's area of specialization, confines of one's own culture and away from self-reference, in order to listen, to meet, to understand and to learn; and so not just to confront something that is different, and sometimes far away or strange. To me this attitude points to a Church that is not afraid of living the newness of the Gospel and that has the audacity to address the issues that shape the culture of today.*

*We need to acknowledge how much the human being is a seeker of God – the One who can never be private property of anybody, but rather gives Himself until the end of time –, and how much we need to deepen our contemporary ways of bringing to others the Word of God, that is, in a humble manner, speaking to the hearts and minds of the people of today, promoting a culture of mutual dialogue that does not despair of anyone and of nothing... These are the challenges that we are called to live now with the courage and strength of intelligence, within the realm of that generosity of intelligence that always widens the space where it moves.*

*I wish all of you not only two beautiful days, but also a journey of two days, today and tomorrow, that would be profitable and at the service of our societies of reference as they are engaged in processes of continuous becoming. I Thank You from the heart!*



# ***Towards an Enlargement of the Horizon: Researching the Dialectic of Church and Society***

**JOÃO J. VILA-CHÃ\***

In *The Secular Age*,<sup>1</sup> Charles Taylor offers an extraordinarily deep and relevant analysis of the phenomenon of Secularization. According to his analysis, the phenomenon is at its climax since the Protestant Reformation and it crosses the entire project of modernity in a rather structural way so that it can be read not only in socio-political and philosophical sense but also in an ecclesial one.

According to Professor Taylor, the event of secularization becomes visible to our eyes in three fundamental ways: 1. Separation of the religious context from public spaces, especially in its socio-political version; 2. Decrease of the observance of worship by people in the western world, especially with reference to younger generations; 3. Achieving levels of human consciousness in which commitment and religious identity are no longer taken for granted, but rather become a matter of choice.

After publishing his *opus magnum*, Charles Taylor has tried in recent years to express his vision of the problems we face today whenever discussing what the modernity is like and, as a committed members of the Catholic Church, what the direct consequences of that commitment are or can be for the ecclesial community, at least in the West. At least since 2010, Professor Taylor is proposing four disjunctions which appear as rather unavoidable in any process of reflection that claims to be serious and pragmatically oriented.<sup>2</sup>

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\* *Pontificia Università Gregoriana* (Roma).

<sup>1</sup> Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Charles TAYLOR, José CASANOVA and George F. MCLEAN (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*. Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012. This volume is of great importance both for the reflections we are

The first of the four disjunctions is between the so-called seekers, i.e., those moved by the desire to achieve in their own life more and more personal and authentic ways of being Christian, and more particularly of being Catholic; and on the other hand the so-called dwellers, or those who are in the Church and like to think that they have already definitively resolved all issues of their own existence and of the existence of the world, with the result that nothing remains to be done, except to follow what has already been said, taught, or expressed by previous generations.

The second disjunction occurs between those who seek to bring to the Church and its teaching a deeper sense of personal responsibility, and therefore are looking for consensus and critical ways for people and communities to converge, including in their corresponding narratives, and those who seek refuge in the authority of the Church and its jurisdiction and so are caught up in the desire to submit in unconditional obedience.

The third disjunction would be recognizable from, on the one hand, a moral and ethical praxis, conceived as deeply human, radically historical and fallible and, therefore, as an eminently existential fulfilment, and on the other from a sense of morality based on the idea of natural law and so tendentially attached to an (at least apparently) abstract, immutable and universal essence.

The fourth disjunction is then the one that, according to Charles Taylor, occurs between those intent on following a spirituality open to continuous enrichment through the study and experience of diversity among religions, cultures and even non-religious civilizations, and those who always feel inclined to underline with all possible means that only the spiritual traditions of Christianity, centered on the Second Person of the Trinity, are to be recognized as bearers of the true spiritual meaning of life.

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trying to develop here and for the different teams from around the world who contributed to the present volume of proceedings related to the joint International Conference *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision* (Rome, March 3-4, 2015).

Thinking about the social context of contemporary individualism, the fact is that we are losing the social context of the faith which the Church offers our contemporaries. For so many in the West, this no longer appears as something truly important, that is, of authentic relevance. But remaining closed in ourselves and losing the ability to experience transcendence, means to lose the liberating sense of religion, especially of Christianity and, therefore, being doomed to a life frustrated in its most fundamental aspirations. In any case, this provokes the need for the Church to return to its most genuine act of self-understanding, for which the Second Vatican Council was certainly a moment of great significance.

The thoughtful contributions of Charles Taylor, therefore, demand from us a serious consideration, and renewal, of the process by means of which we critically reflect today on the socio-cultural conditions of our existence in the world. First, being presented in the context of at least the last 400 years of Western history, Taylor shows that secularization is much more than just a process of subtraction by means of which modernity would simply appear as a process of progressive and continuous neglect of religious factors within the different spheres of human presence in the world. Of course, such a discourse hints at a Weberian background and suggests that modernity and religion cannot do anything but accept the abyss of their mutual separation. Yet Charles Taylor makes us understand something distinct, namely, that, at least in the West, the process of secularization becomes more and more inseparable from a deep search for fulfilment in human affairs!

But if this is true, then it seems problematic that the typical Catholic reaction to modernity, normally understood as the best way to defend against it, would be a simple restoration of what has been lost over the course of modern times. In fact, it was primarily in reaction to movements of ideas such as *nominalism* and *individualism*, that those reactions seem to have wanted nothing more than the *status quo ante*. This is comprehensible, and yet we must recognize that in the end, whenever we decide to make a true deal with the processes of our cultural and social history, there is nothing there

that can bring us back to positions formerly identified as “catholic.” The defenders of the *status quo ante*, however, never cease to declare others guilty of the diminutions the Church is “condemned” to live through in regard to the outward context to which the ecclesial community belongs. We know that for some the Church always has and in every case must see itself as the sole holder of the truth, and that not only in regard to essential matters which belong to the realm of faith and morals, but even in reference to any possible discourses in both philosophy and theology as if we were confined to the content, regardless of how amazing it may be, of the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. The problem, however, is that whoever defends such a stance is no longer in a position to be effective or respectful of other people’s questions, and is in part responsible for those same disjunctions that we have already mentioned and which, according to Charles Taylor, are now at the very heart of the socio-cultural situation in which we as individuals and as a Church find ourselves in the contemporary world.

Today, the challenges we are facing must make us not forget how serious is the loss of credibility of the Church in the eyes of many people, especially in western countries, as a result of the scandals related to sexual abuse of minors, committed by members of the Church. Therefore, it seems imperative to say that one of the most persuasive effects of Charles Taylor’s analysis is, perhaps, the call for a new way of doing theology, especially for a new way of thinking about the Mystery of the Church. Or, rather, this call highlights the need to offer the world a Philosophy and a Theology evermore capable of unity at the level of thought and life. One of its defining moments is to be found in the mystery of Christ’s *Kenosis*, that is, in the notion of God’s real descent and assumption of our condition even to the point of dying in cross, for us and for the life of the world. In other words, we need to ask about how to advance theological research, a question that becomes all the more important as secularization has for the most part been identified as a direct fruit of the Reformation. But I also think that the question needs to be re-articulated through a seriously interdisciplinary study of thinkers

such as Hegel and Kierkegaard, Pannenberg and Moltmann, as of many others. This is a study that in my opinion, from the theological point of view, should never exclude the contribution of one of the most brilliant and rigorous Catholic thinkers of the twentieth century, Erik Peterson (1890-1960), a Protestant theologian who then became a Catholic and of which relatively little has been talked about for decades. Yet he played a very important role in the intellectual configuration of theologians such as Eberhard Jüngel and, most particularly, Joseph Ratzinger (Benedict XVI).

The concern about how the Church speaks to the world makes us go back to Charles Taylor, the main inspirator of the project that culminated with the joint meeting held in Rome from March 3-4, 2015 and of which this book offers to the attention of all the respective proceedings. In preparation, and in a text presented in the preparatory meeting held in Vienna in June of 2011, the Canadian Philosopher formulated the matter most central to the Church today in terms of a simple question: *How does the Church speak to the world?* The question was asked by Taylor in terms of the situation in the West, comprising Europe and North America, but also Australia and New Zealand. I find particularly interesting the way in which Taylor describes the disjunctive manner we live in today's world, namely when he blatantly claims: *This world... contains lots of seekers!* Naturally, he is referring to the many people among our contemporaries that at present, especially in the West, recognize or declare themselves to be researchers of meaning, seekers of a life form capable of allowing, or promoting, the process of staying in touch with the spiritual sphere, and that regardless of how the spiritual dimension of life comes to be defined or understood.

As he warns about the radical importance of the seeker's condition in our contemporary world, Charles Taylor also evokes the famous distinction, proposed by the French sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger, between *pèlerin* (pilgrim) and *converti* (convert).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Danièle HERVIEU-LÉGER, *Le pèlerin et le converti: La religion en mouvement*. Paris: Flammarion, 1999.



This is a distinction that Taylor sees as two moments, or modes, of the same search, namely, the search proper of the condition of the person that claims to live the provisional nature of life to the extreme. In this typological case, *the pilgrim represents the “man” on a quest while the convert is none other than the one that has made a decisive turn in the quest!* As Taylor teaches, the West is today deeply marked by a line of cultural development centered upon the idea that there is indeed a form of human life that reaches down to us from ancient times and lives out of the intuition that every human person is called to find her own way of being. This is something that Herder expressed better than anyone else with his famous dictum: *jeder Mensch hat sein eigenes Maaß! – each human being is her own measure!*

We should not be surprised, therefore, that one of the most important chapters in Taylor’s *Secular Age* is dedicated to *Expressive Individualism*, an idea that the work explains thus: what before, for centuries, had been attributed mainly to the poets and artists, now, particularly after the second half of the twentieth century, has become the paradigm of every individual in such a way that, becoming a *subject* is something to be achieved in the image of artistic creation! Hence the undeniable fact that everywhere in the West, especially after the Second World War, *originality* has truly become an integral part of our social *common-sense*.<sup>4</sup>

According to Charles Taylor, this intense search for *authenticity*, a process that is actualized in many different forms, especially in the context of today’s *consumer capitalism*, constitutes a major social phenomenon in terms of which the search for authenticity is now being implemented at many different levels, even in simple ones, starting with the every-day-ness of choices pertaining to the goods of consumption. Thus, there are many social reasons why in our time so many people have such difficulty accepting the dogmatic body of the Church or in the face of it remain either indifferent or affected by severe forms of mistrust.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, particularly pp. 473 ss.

But the Church has many valid reasons to search for greater confidence in finding answers to the real questions of our time. Charles Taylor considers particularly relevant the role played by some of the most significant figures in the history of the Church. This is the case of such major examples of authentic seekers as Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Francis de Sales. There are many others, men and women who in their lives made extraordinary journeys of deep search and, eventually, of joyous encounter. For the Church, thus, one of the most pressing challenges it faces is to go back to its own treasures of exemplariness and, in so doing, rediscover in its own heart a renewed ability to answer the challenges that the many *pilgrims* of our time face us with.

Taylor's terms for the problem are basically the following: *The ethics of authenticity is an important part of the background of much contemporary seeking.* To that he adds: *for the first time, this ethic begins to reconfigure questions of sexual ethics and behavior.*<sup>5</sup> Obviously, the author here is trying to tackle such a sensitive issue as that of homosexuality and he does so in a way that makes us think about a very important aspect of the problem, namely, that sexual orientation is part of people's identity.

As they arise from the narrative that Taylor gives us about modernity and secularization, we can say that the challenges the Church faces in our time emerge from the fact that the many ready-made answers of the ecclesial community together with the little sense they sometimes make in the face of the enigmas of human existence means, it is rather unlikely they will appear plausible to authentic seekers today. This is so unless, of course, people are guided through the process of getting beyond the surface and so become able to experience the force derived from the examples left in the heritage of the many saints and mystics that often nourish with life and exemplarity the faith of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Charles TAYLOR, José CASANOVA and George F. MCLEAN (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

We must also remember that for Charles Taylor the counterpoint to the *seekers/pélerins* of today are mainly those who, with no discussions or clarifications, insist in presenting the long tradition of the Church and the certainties of its teachings as if they were the only way viable and accessible to the men and women of our time. This is the position of those who believe that the Church expresses its best not so much when trying to interrogate and question, when adapting or changing, but only if and when it remains firm in its replies, as it ever has. It is well known that this position, taken to the extreme, is symptomatic of people and movements, such as the one inaugurated by Mons. Lefebvre, who cannot or clearly do not want to overcome the, obviously false, idea that Vatican II is nothing else but an ecclesiological aberration. The problem is all the more complex as we also know that many converts to Catholicism tend to see the Church as endowed with a changeless and eternal order.

We are all eager to get into the proceedings of the joint conference that took place here in Rome about a year ago and which this book, finally, presents to the consideration of whoever wishes to reflect on the issues it dealt with. But before doing so, please, allow me to also mention one of the most insightful notions offered us by Charles Taylor, that of the *immanent frame*. In *The Secular Age* the concept plays a very important role, inasmuch as it expresses the idea that we live in a constellation of different orders, e.g., a constellation composed of the universe and modern science, of the constitutional state, of democracy and of the role of law, while on the other hand this idea of the frame implies that all these orders can be fully explained in immanent terms, as is the case with the laws of nature in regard to the universe, the constitutional State, etc. Moreover, through the historical examples of constitutions and different political realities, and not less through the arguments that Secular Reason gives us, we can interpret and explain the different cultural and socio-political codifications of our world. In short, although the sense of immanence can be understood and explained in very different ways, the most typical feature of modernity is to produce a great narrative able to show us how and why progress

occurs within each age and every human/cultural sphere of activity, through ever new discoveries and achievements in the overall immanent order of all things. Therefore, we should not say that, in a vision like this, there is a tendency to regard religious belief as something irrevocably belonging to a culture already passed away, i.e., to a world that no longer exists, and to which we can no longer return without sacrificing the role of reason and intelligence.

Charles Taylor makes clear that in our time we are increasingly confronted with people who recognize in themselves a sense of immanent order, and who therefore remain strongly exposed to think of religion as an old-fashioned event or look at it with contempt, and yet ultimately can, through the work of Grace, make the experience of being *freed* from the bounds imposed by such a *framework*. Undoubtedly, there are many people today that existentially consider a regime of strict immanence as rather oppressive as it denies access to a proper understanding of what reality truly is. Surely, there are many aspects in the human experience of reality that are well beyond the immanent frame and as such are impossible to deny.

Following the lead offered by Taylor himself, we consider, as was the case with many of the researchers gathered in Rome for this conference, that among the challenges that the Church has to face in our contemporary world are the following: to recognize the importance of *seekers*, without alienating *dwellers*; to meet the *pélerins*, without discouraging the *convertis*; finally, to be aware of the fact that *in many parts of the Western world, churches are passing from the status of the actual or at least the historical establishment, as the default church of the majority, to a condition more like fragments of a diaspora* and in this way joining the condition of Christians in many parts of the non-Western world where they have never been anything but a minority. In brief, among the challenges we are confronted with in the Church are the following: 1. to renew the capacity of truly listening to the many that are *seekers/pélerins* in the world of today; 2. to rediscover and implement models of authority and power that are consonant with the kenotic model of

Christ; 3. to deal with the recurrent issues of sexual morality without becoming either prisoners of an overly naturalistic or an a-historical outlook on the problem or being unduly affected by models that distort nature; 4. to learn how to give credible example of the respect that the Church demands and preaches regarding the dignity of every single human being; 5. in the spirit of Vatican II, to follow the path towards a hermeneutic oriented towards the integration of both dogma and history; 6. without compromising its ecclesial nature, to learn how to pay attention to human cultural and religious heritages as they are configured in terms of other cultures, civilizations and traditions, while at the same time taking into account the human contribution of those that are without faith, deny God, and seemingly live without religion.

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Entering now into the proceedings contained in this volume, in his presentation, George F. McLean, the main convener of the event in Rome, underlines anew the importance of the horizons opened by the *four disjunctions* formulated by Charles Taylor and José Casanova. As founder and president of the RVP, McLean sees this in terms of the need for “a kenotic theology of Church,” which he presents as entailing a “shift from the evangelist John’s descent of the Logos into time, as top-down and tinged always with a sense of divine glory.” He formulates this as follows: a) by putting the “focus upon the perfection of the Church as Mystical Body and “spotless bride of Christ,” b) the Church claims that its reputation must always be protected and so c) we face now one of the most tragic consequences of that attitude, as “protecting the Church as institution” became more important than the “welfare of its young.” Hence the importance of a renewed meditation on such a biblical passage as Philippians 2:5-11, that is, of the scriptural “account of Christ not holding to the form of God but emptying himself in order to take human form, indeed the form of a servant and to surrender even this on the Cross.” This approach is quite opposite to the one grounded in glory and perfection. As it starts with “Christ’s humanity,

passion and death,” it results in opening “a sense of God less as uncompromisedly absolute and immobile,” but rather as able and willing to share in the recognition of the autonomy of the world and of the science that claims tested knowledge about it, that respects the principle of freedom and human dignity.

For George McLean, therefore, the Church must cultivate “a lively debate among the laity in order for them to come to a consciousness of the living reality of the Holy Spirit at the core of their lives and of their Church” while at the same time, and in the face of “rampant individualism which accompanies the contemporary sense of human freedom and autonomy,” it must promote within the State a renewed sense of human unity and community.

In his intervention, Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi postulates the idea that Christianity constitutes a model of the “relationship between faith and politics, faith and society, which is extremely significant because it says *no* to *sacralism*, *no* to *hierocracy*, *no* to *theocracy*, *no* to *fundamentalism*, and naturally it says *no* to *statolatry*, to the negation of any religious component in society.” The famous render to Caesar *that which is Caesar’s* and render unto God *that which is God’s* is the basic recognition of how a strong autonomy belongs to that most fundamental image of God, which is the human being. Since the proclamation of the Gospel this principle must be at the heart of authentic religion and belong to the core of any understanding of the nature of society and the role of the State. As exemplified by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Cardinal Ravasi considers as the crucial challenge for faith in our time the need to “abandon the God of Theophany, the *Deus ex machina*, which embraces all of reality, for the God of *kenosis*, the God of the Cross, who is present not “in power” but in “seed.” Indeed, as for Karl Rahner, the Church wishes to “*co-determine* the way of the secular world,” which is not the same as to say that it wants to determine it “dogmatically or fundamentalistically.” And the Cardinal details some of the characteristics of secularity: “emancipation from the bondage and subjection to the sacred; emancipation from sacred authority, symbols, and institutions; emancipation from the jurisdiction of the sacred.” To these

characteristics yet one more has to be added, namely, the affirmation of the ontological and epistemological autonomy of science and philosophy from theology.

The first thematic unit of our joint-conference was dedicated to *The Dynamics of Secularity* in the West. According to José Casanova, from Georgetown University, the Catholic *aggiornamento* issued of Vatican II signaled a profound reorientation of Catholicism towards modern developments. This revised what had been to a large extent an anti-modern negative philosophy of history, and adopted a positive attitude which assumed the legitimacy of the *saeculum*, that is, of the modern secular age and of its modern secular world. This affirmation needs to be understood primarily in a context such as the European in which there was no careful distinction between secularity (affirmation of the legitimacy of the secular spheres), secularism (an ideology which viewed the secular age as a post-religious condition and the public secular sphere as a sphere of *laïcité*, free from religion) and secularization (historical processes which in modern societies were supposed to lead irremediably to a drastic decline of religious beliefs and practices). For the sociologist of religion, therefore, modernization does not lead automatically or irremediably to religious decline, but actually can be accompanied by different kinds of religious revivals. Professor Casanova also refers to the overwhelming sociological evidence that explains why Italian Catholicism, for instance, is doing much better than the Spanish one, or why Catholicism in Brazil or the Philippines has been able to confront relatively well the challenge of Pentecostal churches. Moreover, as the first Pope who did not participate in the Council Vatican II and who has been able to embrace and reconcile what appeared to be the opposite charismatic and liberation wings of the Latin American church, Pope Francis is today in a unique position to reinforce the richness of internal pluralism that characterizes the Church. He recognizes also as one of the imperatives that the Catholic Church has to face, that of “critically and faithfully” discerning the “various aspects of the profound gender revolution” of our time, certainly one of the “most dramatic in the whole history of

humanity.” This presents us with a situation that demands, from all agents in the Church, an “authentic readiness to listen to each other” and so be ready to re-open the conciliar dynamics of “catholicity.” Indeed, this tries to overcome by means of “conversation, debate, and dialogue at all levels of the Church,” the deep divisions that still affect the experience of the people of God.

The second major contribution in this first unit of the Conference was offered by Hans Joas, from the Humboldt University in Berlin. Starting by referring to the importance of the “social-scientific understanding of the Church,” on the one hand, and, on the other, by claiming the need to go back to a “characterization of the Church” close to the “early statements of the Christian faith as found in the Nicene Creed,” the German sociologist proceeded to an analysis of the Church as structured by the following key words of the Credo: *una, sancta, catholica, et apostolica*. For the author, however, the sanctity or holiness of the Church “does not mean that the Church is an institution that is released from the human condition of sinfulness” or that such sinfulness is only of individuals and not of the institution itself. He explains: “all members of the clergy including the Pope are sinners, and while the Church is or should be an attempt to realize on earth what can never be fully realized here, sacredness remains an inspiration and a normative yardstick, but must not be turned into self-sacralisation.” The Catholicity of the Church refers primarily to its constant attempts to “liberate itself from all cultural and national particularities.” This puts it not necessarily on the path towards a rational universalism, but rather implies a growing respect for “cultural diversity coupled with an emphasis on the penetration of all cultures by the Christian message of salvation.” Crucial to the author’s argument is the importance given to *option* and *optionality* as a basis for a real confrontation of the Christian faith with irreligion, in Europe as well as beyond. Indeed, this puts into question the traditional fusion of the Christian faith with particular cultural traditions, so that we have as part of our hope the possible emergence of a new language. This, of course, is not in the linguistic sense of the term, but rather “in ways that are based on distancing oneself from



a traditional idiom and is permeated with an understanding of other civilizations and of the achievements of secular worldviews.”

On his part, Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, from India, not only clarifies the importance of using the word *secular* as a base for an approach to the presence of religion in civil society that is non-sectarian, non-partisan, neutral, and equally supportive of all religions, progressive, liberal, and open-minded. Being from Asia, the Archbishop is particularly sensitive to the fact that while differing greatly in their religious expressions, Asians tend to agree on the assumption that *religion* has mainly to do with depth and the resistance to the egoism present in the human heart. In Asia, therefore, religion is always present in society and all the more so as countless people feel in themselves a constant desire for “reaching out to a Higher Order, which generates inner consistency, coherence, convictions and commitment.” The author adds: “We notice that God is marginalized in the economic, political, educational, professional, and recreational spaces of modern society. Most people today live merely by what appeals to their Good Sense in their own respective sphere of activity. Every Religion is under stress, seriously challenged by Secular ideologies. The latter are fast replacing the former. And a conviction is growing in many places that the present trend of Secularization is irreversible.” And yet, the real situation is that whenever there is a “religious vacuum” there is also a hunger for God to be found as well as consequent periods of intense appeals to religious meaning. Within the Church, for example, Archbishop Thomas notices a “dynamism in ecclesial movements and mounting generosity in charitable associations,” while at the same time “consecrated life is renewing itself both in traditional and new forms, inspired by the radical nature of the Gospel,” and all the more so since the beginning of the present Pontificate. This is all the more important and meaningful as what most people seek in religion is precisely access to the spiritual dimension of experience.

The second major thematic unit of our joint-conference was under the following headings: “Listening Church” and a “Discerning Church,” whereby the intention was to pay attention not only to the

implications of science and technology for the ecclesial discourse, but also to look more closely at what the Gospel experience might mean today in terms of the foundations required by any serious renewal of hope in our Secular Age.

Louis Caruana, from the Pontifical Gregorian University, offered a reflection on the “interaction between Christianity and natural philosophy or natural science,” which in the modern age has become particularly important for the Church. The author evokes the figure of Pierre Hadot and his understanding of Philosophy as a series of Spiritual Exercises,<sup>7</sup> an understanding from which follow the “various roles that philosophers were expected to adopt in each period of cultural history, from the times of Ancient Greece to the present.” Louis Caruana, thus, underscores the importance of Hadot’s discovery that “the intention of the philosophers of classical antiquity was in the first instance to form people, in the sense of educating them to live well.” This implies that the task of Philosophy is not primarily to convey information, but rather to assist “students to undergo a conversion.” More than about discourses and debates, Philosophy is concerned with the demands of the good life, with the so called “art of living.” Thus the author asks: What shall or can be the role of Science in the formative process of the human person? Caruana underlines the particular importance of what he calls the virtue of “heuristic courage,” which he interprets as a kind of “boldness in the face of the unknown,” the ability to face the future. This must play an ever more central role in our time in which “discoveries advance further and further towards the extremely large and towards the extremely small.” As we let “science take us further and further away from our everyday conceptual scheme, the more heuristically courageous we need to be.” Indeed, we need to learn, and then teach, how to recognize the “various doors to wisdom” and so how to choose the “door that is closest” and most adequate to fostering the growth of each and every person. Indeed, this is a marvelous expression of one of the most basic aspects of the mission of the Church in the world of today.

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre HADOT, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. London, 1995.

The late Father Leon Dyczewski, whose memory we here also honor, participates with a contribution dealing with some of the issues related to the impact caused by the so called New Technologies on the process of Evangelization. “New technologies, new media, and generally the digital world are a great achievement in the development of man, and at the same time they offer a great opportunity for believers.” As a result, it is mandatory for the Church to reflect carefully upon them, and all the more so since Pope Benedict XVI characterized the new media as a space of evangelization, a new “digital continent,” a global “agora” (cf. Message on occasion of the 47<sup>th</sup> World Communications, Sunday, 12 May 2013). We live in a time in which whenever “the Good News” is not made known in the digital world, “it may be absent in the experience of many people.” Hence the importance of introducing Jesus Christ into that “digital continent,” and so be able, in the spirit of the Gospel, to begin serious conversations and to raise fundamental questions in the minds of the users of internet about love, truth or the meaning of life. Needless to say that the most appropriate strategy always remains the same: that of sincere and authentic dialogue!

In the section dedicated to the idea of “A Discerning Church,” Tomáš Halík, from the Charles University in Prague, takes up the concept of “negative eschatology” and explains how it might well serve the apophatic dimension within the realms of what might continue to be called a “political theology.” In this case, *negative eschatology* means the rejection not only of naïve popular fantasies about the specific forms of life after death, but also from the many secular and political eschatologies grounded in the relentless promise of earthly paradises. For the author, therefore, *negative eschatology* means also a rejection of ecclesiastical triumphalism and its confusion so often present in human history between the historically conditioned forms the Church is assuming in its earthly journey, that of the *ecclesia militans*, and on the other the “spotless bride of the Lamb’s eschatological marriage,” or the celestial *ecclesia triumphans*. In this way, the author responds to ecclesiastical triumphalism and, by doing so, refers the problem back to the inability

to eschatologically differentiate between *ecclesia militans* and *ecclesia triumphans*. This problem is all the more serious as it tends to lead militant religion towards the path of arrogance normally associated with the condition of being “possessor of the truth.” Hence the importance of sustaining the ecclesiology of Vatican II that has as its consequence, the development of an image of the church understood as *communio viatorum*, one in which the people of God sees itself as on a journey through history. It also recognizes the importance of such gestures as that of Benedict XVI when he invited the seekers of the world “into the church’s entrance hall,” that is, into that “courtyard of the nations” already present in the temple of Jerusalem. Indeed, in the beautiful expression of our author, “Christ is knocking on the door from inside,” He “wants to get out of the confines of the church;” or rather, in Jesus Christ, God “wants to go onward” and so like the disciples that met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, we might go to meet Him under the figure of what is to us the “foreigner or stranger.”

Juan Carlos Scannone, from Argentina, evokes Ignatius of Loyola and his spiritual teaching according to which “one of the ways to seek and find the will of God in life and personal history is through affective experiences of consolation and desolation.” Here consolation consists in “an increase of new life both human and graced (an increase of living faith, selfless love, joy, deep peace of the heart, gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit). According to Scannone, the authenticity of consolation is manifested most especially when “the initiative comes “from above” and “its birth is the death of self, the renunciation of “self-love, will and interest” as of the spirit of revenge.” The crucial aspect, however, remains the recognition of how important it is to learn how to apply the spiritual “itinerary” of consolation and desolation not only to persons, but also to the “Church’s process of discernment of historical and social coexistence.” Paraphrasing W. Kasper, the author also considers “the deterioration of life, of coexistence and of human dignity, especially among the poor” and the pain and suffering that always arises from intractable social contradictions, this is the “social absurd” of which

Bernard Lonergan used to talk as sign of the absence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ in the life world of which we are a part. Aligning himself with authors such as Walter Kasper and Pedro Trigo, our author then moves on to identify as “positive criterion” for the discernment of the ways leading to a better future the recognition that “life emerges in surabundance,” and all the more so whenever this happens “amidst circumstances of death,” as Pedro Trigo would say. Paul Ricœur would simply put such emergence of life under the “categories of hope” and the other crucial notions that structure his “philosophy of the threshold.”

Massimo Grilli, from the Pontifical Gregorian University, helps us rediscover the meaning of Mauriac’s idea according to which “[T]hose who have never read the Sermon on the Mount cannot grasp what Christianity is all about.” In order to effectively assist us in understanding the Sermon on the Mount, one of the most distinctive texts in the entire history of Christianity, the author guides us along the search for the deep truth contained in that *justice* which Jesus talks about in Matthew’s Gospel and so he explores the theological and ecclesial meaning of such expressions as «*blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful*». In order to assist in the *renewing* of the Church, we need to understand and witness the “Truth of God” in a *Secular Age*, that is, to make sense of evangelic declarations such as the one about *the Kingdom and its righteousness*. In order to do so and to be attentive as he is to the contributions of modern linguistic analysis, the author begins by explaining that whenever Jesus declares blessed the *poor*, the *meek*, the *merciful*, He is actually *changing* the world, “turning upside down the categories of human wisdom, according to which the poor, the afflicted, the meek, the persecuted” would be just losers. The implication is that the message of Jesus is entirely about “another order, a new situation,” a different world, one in which the first place, precisely, has to be occupied by the *Kingdom of God and its Righteousness*, which for Mathew is infinitely more relevant than the “economic or social conditions to which a person belongs.” For the Church, therefore, the crucial thing can never be the defense of its own rights, but

rather the assumption of our human and most radical *responsibility for the poor*. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer would say, God occupies the center of the *village* only when every human being is *there*, that is, not chased to the periphery or excluded, but respected and cared for.

The third section of our proceedings closes with a contribution from Philip Rossi, of Marquette University, in which the center of attention is occupied by the pre-requisites needed for “discerning the challenge” represented by one of the most outstanding problems of our time, namely, the renewal and deepening of “mutual trust.” The following conditions are needed: 1. recognition of the “pluri-form workings of the Spirit both in the world and in the church;” 2. attention to the experience of faith in relation to an unceasing reflection upon the radical incompleteness of our Christian discourses and practices as well as of those with whom we enter into dialogue; 3. acceptance of the fact that in our participation and immersion in the “social imaginary” of the secular age we are already in touch with the workings of the Holy Spirit; 4. willingness to participate in dialogue and so share in the process of restoring trust. These conditions need to be integrated into any effort towards discerning “the presence and activity of God’s Spirit” in today’s “secular times,” and all the more so as the “fragilization of belief” typical of an “age of secularity” such as ours finds expression in that “fragilization of trust” which he sees at work in Charles Taylor’s account of the “cross-pressures” and the “dilemmas” inherent to the *immanent frame* already talked about.

The fourth section of our congress was dedicated to the *welcoming* nature of the Church. Robert Schreiter, from the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago, addresses with his contribution the double perspective we attach to the phenomenon of spirituality, namely, that of the “outsider” and the “insider.” The point is to be alert to the importance of recognizing how those who “follow the practices of historical Christian spiritual traditions view genuine spirituality as a disciplined set of beliefs, values and practices that follow a specific path toward holiness and faithful discipleship, laid out by trustworthy guides who have had years of lived experience.” The refer-

ence is here to the different spiritualities formulated by the major religious orders within Catholicism such as the Benedictines, the Franciscans, the Jesuits or the Carmelites, etc. But in fact we also need to recognize that in a secular age there is a prevalent mistrust of institutions and the tendency by many people to utter propositions such as “I am spiritual, but not religious,” an expression which means that the person claims to have spiritual yearnings and yet is unable, or does not want, to submit to institutionalized patterns of spirituality. Hence the importance of considering the extent to which secularity and Christianity share respect for fundamental values, something all the more important as “secularity could not have taken the shape it has historically without Christianity behind it.” As in other cases, also in regard to the spiritual experience of our time, we need to come to terms with the idea that *secular spirituality* does indeed share many fundamental human impulses originated in the Christian faith.

Anthony Carrol, from Heythrop College, on his part, takes up another interesting issue as well, namely, the importance, and the need, for the Church to enter into authentic dialogue with the so called skeptics of our time. One of the main features of contemporary skepticism is that “many of the cultures within which sceptics are now living are defined by being post-Christian,” meaning that “these cultures may have been formerly orchestrated by the rhythms of Christian life but now in many places have broken down.” This should have immediate implications for a transformation of the proper “missionary outlook” of the Church. As we are called to live in a time in which the former effort of Christianity to reach out to the peoples of the world has become the challenge to communicate “a Christianity which people consider that they already know about and have found wanting,” the renewing process we are engaged in becomes all the more central. Yet, the crucial question in regard to the so called skeptics remains the tension that exists between the idea of “an omnipotent God” on the one hand and, on the other, “the emergence of a truly modern notion of human freedom and self-assertion.” Here precisely resides one of the major disagreements between “believers and sceptics in modern times.”

Adriano Fabris, from the University of Pisa, defends the position that only a “welcoming Church” and “an open Church” can truly help define the “identity of our contemporary religious communities.” This demands from us not just a generic “witness to faith,” but rather the development of new forms of authentic communication and the creation of common strategies in the action “against violence.” Hence the importance of developing a serious criticism of fundamentalism as a fundamentally mistaken form of seeing the world according to which the oppositions of particularity and universality, of contingency and absoluteness become identified in a rather uncritical manner. Instead, we ought to develop an understanding of religion in terms of fundamental relation between “the particular and the universal, between the contingent and the absolute, between the human and the divine.” In doing that, however, we must become first of all aware of the fact that there are innumerable ways in which this relation has been realized throughout history, which the fundamentalist is either unable or unwilling to understand and accept. But it is not just fundamentalism that is a problem. As Pope Francis has been insistently teaching, another grave illness of our time is indifference. Accordingly, the Church is called to avoid both “the rigidity of fundamentalism and the confusion of indifference,” for which there must be a correct understanding of the relation between particularity and universality. It is precisely in this regard that Christianity has shown the geniality of its conception, as it puts us on the path of incarnation and redemption. The question, therefore, is about authenticity and the recognition of how authentic religion presupposes the willingness to “exchange views with others.” This is readiness to participate in dialogue, to foster authentic communication, and to participate in the creation of a space *in-between* all the interlocutors, in which all participants “can mutually understand each other.” In other words, a Church that is truly welcoming cannot but be a Church that is most serious about dialogue and communication as the most important antidotes to the illness of both fundamentalism and indifference.



The next major unit of our conversation in Rome was inscribed under the title “A Serving Church: Polarization, Participation and Peace.” Adela Cortina, from the University of Valencia, pointed to civic ethics as essentially dynamic and based on the “minimum shared justice” as “discovered through dialogue and common life.” But we are also reminded that as citizens we are also called to “choose the values of civic ethics from maximum ethics,” whereby the more vibrant and most committed principle of “maximum ethics” is “human dignity.” Ultimately this is grounded on the principle according to which “the more vulnerable the greater the demands of justice.” According to Adela Cortina, the “relationship between maximum ethics and minimum ethics” includes at least four dimensions, namely: 1) A “mutual relationship of non-absorption,” as ethics should not absorb “maximum civic ethics” while “civic ethics must not try to replace maximum ethics;” 2) The “minimum must realize that it feeds the maximum, the project of life in its fullness, whether religious or secular;” 3) The “maximum must be purified from the minimum, in order to avoid any appearance of charity in the circumvention of the demands of justice;” 4) More than avoiding the gap between minimum and maximum ethics we need to look after the possibilities of their “mutual fertilization.” The central proposition, however, is to be found in what Professor Cortina calls the *ethica cordis*. This is, an “ethics reasoned with the heart,” a reflective process based on communicative action and extended well beyond “pure logical reason.” At the center of Cortina’s approach to life in society is the recognition that reason alone is never enough for the understanding of justice, which rather presupposes a deep attention to the movements of the “heart.” The subjectivity of the human subject appears here as constituted in terms of communication, as a network of relations. Thus, the idea of an “atomistic individualism” is simply to be disallowed. More than the Kierkegaardian understanding of the other as a “law for me,” we need to assume what is obvious in any sound anthropology, namely, that it is “mutual recognition” that ultimately “constitutes us as persons.” It is precisely recognition, which must be at the center of any authentic com-

munication; this constitutes Cortina's idea of an "hearty appreciation" of the other and the consequent "compassionate recognition" that she puts at the center of any concern for justice worth pursuing. As Christians, we are blessed with not only the "good news" that "God exists," but also with the understanding, indissociable from revelation, that God is *Emmanuel*, One with Us, co-participant in the reality that we are, modulated by disease and abandonment, and inseparable from the experience of death. But if the Name of God is compassion, then we must be "actively working for justice and peace" as well, and that not just by ourselves alone but in connection with whoever shares in the appreciation of human dignity, that sincerely cares about nature, and that concretely refuses the idea that injustice can have "the last word in history." Indeed, as Adela Cortina so well demonstrates, the historical task of Christianity is inseparable from a deeply held belief, and hope, that "a better world is possible," and as such unavoidably necessary.

Peter Jonkers, from Tilburg University, addresses on his part the process by means of which what he calls the "bi-polar Church" more and more gives way to a "multi-polar Church," to a reality comparable to an "heterogeneous and instable field." The author pays particular attention to "Pope emeritus Benedict's suggestion that only by becoming 'unworldly' will the Church be able to serve the world in a truthful way". This is all the more so as the focus of the ongoing conversation should be on how "the Church can develop a new, authentic relation to contemporary society," that is, on how "it can become a serving Church." Not far from a groundbreaking position articulated by Paul Ricœur in his famous *Oneself as Another*,<sup>8</sup> Jonkers proposes a redefinition of the notion of religious truth which is markedly non-exclusivist. Thus, *in* the contingency proper to our contemporary ways of life, it is capable of being a guide in the complex process of seeking and discovering the essence of a "truthful way of life."

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<sup>8</sup> Paul RICŒUR, *Soi-même comme un autre*. Paris: Seuil, 1990.

William Barbieri, from the Catholic University of America, undertakes a deep analysis of the kenotic axiom. He attempts to present the elements of what he calls a “thoroughgoing ethic of kenosis” inasmuch as “self-emptying implies creating a space, it evokes a *giving-up*, a relinquishing of power or privilege or substance, and the making of room for something, or someone else. According to the Pauline understanding of *kenosis*, the end result is that ultimately we must humbly regard others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3). Hence, and regardless of whatever emphasis is put on the “internal emptiness of humility and sacrifice,” the ethical result must be marked by a tenor of “*welcoming-in* and protecting the other,” by a “stance of *servicing* and honoring the guest.” Barbieri also emphasizes the fact that an “ethics of kenosis” cannot but be supportive of “vigorous, nonviolent action in response to conflict, injustice, and war,” something that indeed must remain of capital importance for the consideration of the moral impact that the Church must have in our contemporary world when faithful to its mission. No doubt, the “self-emptying side of the kenotic ethic” is an integral part of the charismatic identity of the Church, of its capacity for “self-abasement and self-sacrifice.” It serves as well for the cultivation of all those attitudes that foster healing processes as given in the “forgiveness and reconciliation” that are essential to the thriving of “social and political life.”

The fifth section of the congress in Rome ends with a synthetic and yet relevant appreciation of the three last major contributions to the symposium. James Corkery, from the Pontifical Gregorian University, and Staf Hellemans, of Tilburg University, point towards what they consider a major consequence of the “power reversal in day-to-day reality from clergy to laity and of the easiness of the exit-option.” This they formulate as follows: “every religious institution or group, even a once mighty one like the Catholic Church, now has to count on the attractiveness of its religious offer.” As concerns the Catholic Church, the problem is described as follows: “Between 1800 and 1960, an extensive and widely used offer for the regular faithful was present. Sacraments and sacramentals, daily prayers,

fasting, devotional sodalities, dedication to a saint to which one felt particularly connected, the yearly celebration of the great religious feasts as markers of the calendar, the wide-ranging field of social and cultural associations, educational opportunities, even the religious decoration of the home all were regarded as being delivered or made possible by the Church. Many of these forms have now disappeared or they have lost their appeal for most Catholics. Practicing Catholics nowadays are mostly satisfied with a standard offer comprising the Eucharist and the ‘rites de passage’.” Hence the importance of the exclamation which the two authors rightly claim to be expression of something very real: all that is not enough! This, of course, is to be complemented with the recognition of the importance of contemporary experiences such as the *Camiño de Santiago*, the experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* in everyday life, or Taizé, etc. The renewing of the Church, therefore, cannot just be concerned with administrative matters or the processes of its organizational life; rather, as the authors wisely say, it requires a renewal of the “religious offer” as such.

The conference in Rome culminated with the intervention of Professor Charles Taylor and the response offered by Professor William Desmond. The Canadian philosopher, among other important ideas central to his analysis of the Secular Age, restated once again the importance of recognizing the *immanent frame* in which we are embedded, regardless of whether we want it or not. The fact is that the different levels of our contemporary *disenchantment* have become the frame for a widely shared world. As the author teaches us, “we have different ways of ascribing meaning to this world, and particularly between people of faith or without faith.” Indeed, our general understanding of the universe we share is the one defined by post-Galilean natural science and governed by “impersonal causal laws, which can be understood whether or not we see any human meaning in them.” Most importantly, however, we are led to recognize how our common understanding of society no longer reflects the cosmic order, but rather is constituted by what fundamentally derives from human action, socio-political, legal and other-wise.

Indeed, the immanent frame that our author puts at the center of the discernment needed for any reforming process of the Church implies the reference not just to an entire set of “natural and human laws,” but also to “ethical principles” in which we all share. This is so regardless of our differences when it comes to the resolution of questions such as those about the ultimacy of meaning, be it transcendent or not. According to Charles Taylor, it is precisely this shared understanding in regard to essential dimensions of our life in society that constitutes the “social imaginary” that regulates our cooperative interaction as human beings. In this sense, the life of faith refers us to that kingdom of God that Jesus came to announce. This is not built so much in terms of “lasting structures” but rather becomes visible in its very seeds, or better, in the “network of these seeds, which radiate power to other potential seeds.” For the Canadian philosopher, the implications are the following: 1. we need a renewed impulse in the effort to witness the faith; 2. the best way to talk about faith is by means of metaphors such as that of pilgrimage; 3. we must recognize the importance of doubt and reaffirm the value of the interrogative mode as we go through existence; 4. friendship and other forms of relationality are intrinsic to the dynamics of faith; 5. the two traditional facets of salvation, namely the universal and the individual, must be closely integrated. In other words, if the action of the Church is to be successful, then it must take as a basic form: the fellowship of Christ!

William Desmond, from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, offers an equally brilliant response. With his contribution, this volume approaches anew a very high mark in terms of the philosophical reflection fundamentally needed towards the process of Church renewal. In response to Charles Taylor’s idea of the immanent frame, Desmond proposes *porosity of prayer* as a symmetric manifestation of the *porosity of being* central to the elaboration of his autonomous thought. William Desmond writes: “Prayer at heart is not something that we do, prayer is something that we find ourselves in, something that comes to us as finding ourselves already opened to the divine as other to us and yet as in intimate communication

with us. The porosity of prayer is the original site of communication between the divine and the human. The moments of grace happen to us in the most intimate and exposed porosity.” If indeed, as Charles Taylor so masterfully defends, “we have become buffered selves,” then we need to pay careful heed to what William Desmond evokes in terms of communication and recognition, that is, the understanding that ours is “an *endowed* freedom, given to us as promise before we cooperate in the realization of its promise.” The focal point here is the ontology of the *in-between*, the center of which is the platonic notion of *metaxu*. This principle, once applied to the Church, implies a reaffirmation of the principle of *fidelity*, the notion that best describes life in and of the Church. No surprise, thus, that in Desmond’s reading of Taylor particular attention is given to what he considers the dangers of a *romantic* reinterpretation of *modernity*. This can be truly advanced by a rediscovery of the meaning of *fidelity* as something well beyond mere *authenticity*. Indeed, William Desmond considers that *fidelity* always implies “being true to what one receives, true to what one has been given, true to what has been entrusted to one, true to that to which one has committed one’s loyalty, true to what has been handed over to one, true to what in turn one has to hand over to others.” In other words, *being true*, is not just a matter of “being true to oneself,” namely in all those situations in which “one is a committed member of the community,” but also applies to all those situations in which we are called to be true with regard to what is “other than oneself.” The word *fidelity* appears here “saturated with the sense of a *spousal binding together*,” something that must continue deeply ingrained in the process of renewing the Church’s self-understanding along the diachronic line of its own evolution throughout history. The proposition, therefore, is about an understanding of the *Renewal of the Church* based on the recognition of the essential *porosity* of the Church, that is, of the fact that the ecclesial community lives out of the tense integration of intimacy and universality, of love and order. William Desmond speaks in this regard of an “*agapeic catholicity*,” that is, of a Church that is capable of living out of an “intimate universal” and so manifests itself as

“a common space of permeability, of communal passage in the mortal between,” that is, a community that lives through and appreciates “all the rights, and rites of passage that are part of our mortal condition: being born, coming to maturity, passing through the middle of life, being constant in a commons of patience where suffering is not meaningless.” More than anything else, the Church constitutes a communicational *space*, one in which human joys and sufferings are constantly transfigured under the common form of a “solidarity with transience,” in the modality of generous communication, in the ever recurring process that makes us confront the “promise of post-humous porosity, going into death in the hope of resurrection.”

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The International Conference on *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, the origin of the present book, took place at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome from March 4-5, 2015. The event was co-organized by the Pontifical Gregorian University (Rome) and the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (Washington DC). The event resulted from an initiative of the Council (RVP) that began with an open dialogue in 2009 between the late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago and Charles Taylor. Professor Taylor, is the first intellectual of the Church to address, together with José Casanova and George McLean, the *disjunctions of Church and People*, as (a) seekers who have left ecclesial practice in search of the Spirit, (b) the magisterium charged with pastoral responsibilities; and (c) contemporary moral guidance, (d) in the context of a world constituted of multiple and dynamic cultures and marked by the growth of diverse spiritualities. The part of the overall project which the present volume concludes grew out of a strong awareness of the urgent need to foster what at the same is already appearing as four major emerging conjunctions within the Church as (a) not only listening to the experience of the laity (b) but at the same time discerning together the path ahead together, and thus (c) becoming more and more welcoming towards the seekers, while (d) serving the religious needs of all in a context of diverging approaches to life and its questions of meaning.

The Conference involved the direct participation of more than 300 participants from over 30 different countries and was evaluated by many as a great success.

Hence, we express here sincere gratitude both to the *Pontifical Gregorian University*, represented in both the Rector François-Xavier Dumortier and the Dean of the School of Philosophy, Professor Louis Caruana, and to the *Council for Research in Philosophy and Values* represented by its founder and president, Father George McLean, as well as by its Executive Director, Dr. Hu Yeping. We extend our special gratitude to His Eminence Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi for granting us the High Patronage of the *Pontifical Council for Culture* as well as to *Our Sunday Visitor Institute* and *Raskob Foundation* for their generous financial support. The services done by many others, whether students or not, in Rome, China, Portugal and the United States of America is equally registered.

A special kind of recognition goes here to all the contributors to the volume, but most particularly to Professors Charles Taylor and José Casanova for their generous participation during the years in the laborious process of giving form and content to the project which the publication of this volume brings to a certain form of closure. Special thanks as well to all, among colleagues, journalists and interested persons, who journeyed to Rome in order to realize the proceedings which this book now presents, and all the more so as many of the participants in our Roman conversation also integrated the work of the different teams we had across Europe and the United States of America. Finally, I also would like to express gratitude towards COMIUCAP, the network of Catholic Institutions dedicated to Research and Teaching in the fields of Philosophy, for its input and participation in the production of this book.

Fifty years after Vatican II and under the leadership of Pope Francis, the Church needs now, as ever before, the coordinated efforts of all intellectuals entrusted with the gift of Faith so that the Church might in our time continue to respond with intelligent love and profound authenticity to the many, and most complex,



challenges it faces in our present global era. The conversation that took place in Rome at the beginning of March 2015 can and should remain a launching pad towards other initiatives to be implemented in the diverse regions of our culturally diverse world. Secularization is and will remain a crucial factor in the understanding of the human condition not only in the West, but also in such places as Africa, Asia and Latin America. We hope, therefore, that the attentive reading of the contributions included in this volume will stimulate many more persons to join in the global effort of promoting a renewed understanding of both Church and Society, and this not just for its own sake, but in order to achieve even in our time a world determined by a better Justice and greater Peace, by Dialogue and mutual Cooperation among all men and women of Good Will.

# ***Renewing the Church in a Secular Age***

**GEORGE F. MCLEAN\***

These are exciting days for the Catholic Church. In the past too often and unnecessarily seen as counter cultural, today it appears preeminently as bringing a welcome and saving message to a confused world.

In this light the joint conference of the *Pontifical Gregorian University* and the *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* (RVP), “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision,” holds special interest.

## **I. Setting the Conversation**

The *Pontifical Gregorian University* in Rome, founded by St. Ignatius Loyola himself, is especially well-known as a training ground in sacred doctrine for priests and bishops. The *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* (RVP) has a much briefer history but a breadth of engagements across the world. This experience has had special importance in shaping its way of reaching out to a secular world.

1. *Personal Engagement*: The work of the RVP began with a four-year project in North America on moral education with specialized teams of philosophers, psychologists and professors of education. This focused on the development of the person. But in the Anglo-Saxon, North American context it slid unintentionally, but somewhat inevitably, toward the development of the individual.

2. *Social Engagement*: However, on the very first day that this work was presented in Latin America at the Javeriana University

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\* *Council for Research in Values and Philosophy* (United States of America).

in Bogota, Colombia, this bias was noted. The professors called for a presentation the next morning by Luis Orosco Silva on the correspondingly essential importance of social consciousness for education. Thus the RVP expanded its vision to a broader sense of the person not only as individual but always as essentially social and communal.

3. *Peaceful Cooperation*: But the focus of its efforts was soon called beyond Latin America by the danger of world cataclysm from the cold war between two nuclear powers. In Poland, three long afternoon conversations with Janusz Kuczinski, editor of the *Polish Philosophical Review*, explored how a small and relatively private dialogue could be honest and helpful, and set up a meeting in Munich at the neutral Kardinal Wendel Haus in the English Gardens. Ominously the Soviets, conceiving all in terms of ideological conflict, planned to send their main atheist propagandist. So it was necessary to go to Moscow to visit Professor Fedoseev, head of the Russian Academy and member of the Politbureau, to stress that this was to be, not a fight, but a high level scholarly dialogue in a common search for mutual understanding and human comity.

As a result, the meeting in Munich began not as a conflict between opposing sides, but as a joint effort. Professor George Kline rose to deliver the first paper and began by saying “I have presented this paper a number of times but have never been able to finish it. Would you help me finish my paper?” Suddenly the cold war deformations fell away and all went to work in a truly joint effort.

4. *Cultural Sensibility*: Tang Yijie was the son of Tang Yongtong, the great Buddhist scholar of pre-Marxist China, who was also President of Peking University. As son he had been taught the classical lore of his people even after such teaching was no longer politically possible. When Mao’s time and the cultural revolution had run their course Tang Yijie emerged to develop a broad program to resurrect China’s classical treasury, the International Academy of Chinese Culture. On meeting at a conference in Honolulu in the early 1980s the first halting words were “Are you interested in culture?”

He was, indeed, and that interest soon developed into a series of joint conferences at Peking University and in Hong Kong.

In turn, this was extended to the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences whose Director, Wang Miaoyang, confided that as a boy he went to a Franciscan school whose principal gave the students a daily talk: “He taught me wisdom,” said Wang. So the RVP found itself also continuing a long tradition of Chinese wisdom. There followed a set of annual colloquia, held alternately in China and in countries around its borders. These discussed serially the dimensions of modern life: culture, technology, economic ethics, civil society, values, public administration, citizen participation and international relations – all as shaped and enlivened by Chinese culture. It was in sum the process of nation building as China went about rapidly becoming one of the great countries of our times.

5. *Religious Sensitivity*: But in this same period, Islam also was gradually coming to life, if in a less coordinated and at times conflictual manner. It seemed important then to develop studies in Cairo on its philosophical and cultural heritage, to lecture at Qom in Iran, Karachi and Lahore in Pakistan, and to work on building links with and between the countries of Islamic South East Asia. This endowed the RVP with a vivid sense of the significance and problems related to philosophical and theological work in the context of fervent religious practice.

This had been an original and originating concern from the time of Vatican II and the extended process during subsequent decades. How could one remain faithful to long religious traditions while moving ahead with the onward rush of secular cultures. If this question were to be examined with the philosophy and theology of the past the answer would be to conserve the past practices of the faith. Having been correctly reasoned in those philosophical terms any other conclusions would seem to be cases of infidelity. Only if examined with new philosophical and theological principles could fidelity entail new insights and horizons of both continuity and difference. This lesson proved to be especially important also in Africa for development in all its dimensions and stages.

In sum, for the last 50 years the RVP itself has lived through a process of formation by the set of some six of the world's major cultures with which it has serially engaged. Cumulatively each area of engagement added a new horizon until the whole began to correspond to a world that was becoming truly global in outlook. These multiple and diverse human experiences fleshed out the philosophical and cultural horizons which the RVP brings to this joint conference with the Gregorian University in Rome. This pattern of development of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy explains its ability to work with the many peoples and their cultures, their spiritualities as well as their secularity.

It was in this context that the RVP began to work with Professor Charles Taylor and José Casanova, both of whom were especially concerned with the phenomenon of secularization.

## II. Disjunctions of Church and People

The phenomenon of secularization since the Reformation and the beginnings of modernity has been traced by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*. He sees this in three modes: (1) separation of public, especially political, spaces from a religious context; (2) a lessening of ecclesial practice by the general populace, which the Pew Foundation Studies indicate as being particularly true among the younger generations of Catholics; and (3) at deeper levels of human consciousness in which religious engagement and identity are no longer expected but instead have become a difficult choice or option. It is upon this last that Charles Taylor focuses his attention, but undoubtedly the first two constitute enabling political and social contexts.

This has been summarized by Professor Taylor for the present project under four existential disjunctions, namely, between:

1/ “the seekers” who wish to realize in their life new and more personally authentic ways of being Christian and Catholic vs “the dwellers” who feel that in the Church all is already clear, well defined and simply to be assiduously followed;

2/ those who bring a modern sense of personal responsibility to Church teaching in search of critical adherence vs the Church as a jurisdictional authority to which is due obedience;

3/ ethical and moral praxis understood as a human, fallible and historical achievement vs a natural law morality built on abstract, unchanging and universal essences; and

4/ a spirituality open to enrichment by the experiences and spiritualities of the many great religious cultures and civilizations, and even the nonreligious, vs a stress on the completeness of the Christian spiritual tradition focused on the Second Person of the Trinity.

These four disjunctions could be read at a relatively surface level where in terms of today's rampant individualism the loss of the social context of belief provided by Church might appear to be of little account. But to be trapped in oneself and lose the ability to transcend is to lose the essence of religion as liberation and to be condemned to a life of frustrated aspirations. Or understood as diverse personal psycho-social attitudes the disjunctions might simply constitute the well-noted division among Church members in the interpretation and implementation of Vatican II. In either case the response might be a return to the Church's earlier self-understanding.

However, two major factors indicate this to be thoroughly insufficient. The first is Taylor's long narrative of the last four centuries which shows the process of secularization not to be a process of subtraction constituted by modernity's progressive abandonment of religious factors. That would accord with the modernization theory of Weber *et al.*, for whom modernity and religion are bound in a zero sum tension. Instead Taylor shows the process of secularization to be integral to the major search for human self-fulfillment. If that be the case then it calls into question the habitual Catholic response calibrated to the modernization theory, namely, the Church's effort to defend itself by restoring what had been subtracted. That begins by attacking nominalism and individualism, with the intent of restoring the *status quo ante*. While not erroneous,

uncalled for or fruitless, such an effort has led to a characteristic Catholic attitude, namely, that those subtractions are the fault of “the other” for not listening to the Church. It tends to consider itself to have the truth not only on key issues of faith and morals, but in all the supporting theology and philosophy. Hence it cannot effectively engage the general disjunction of Church horizons from the contemporary socio-cultural context in the four specific “Catholic” variants which Taylor identifies.

Yet these, in turn, lay out the map for a restorative research effort. That began with an effort to render the problematic as precise and perspicacious as possible. This laid the ground for the focused work of research teams on each of the four disjunctions.

That level of analysis and projected response, however, was radically shocked by the “scandals” emerging in the late 60s and the 70s. As these issues moved from the perpetrators to their episcopal overseers, and up the chain of responsibility to the Vatican itself, it appeared that the broad overriding concern had been the reputation of a supposedly spotless Church, even to the detriment of its own vulnerable young. Secular legal powers declared such actions of some chancery officials to have been so alien to contemporary secular norms as to call for criminal prosecution. Pope Benedict, in turn, bemoaned the whole tragedy in the poignant words: “What went wrong ... in our entire way of living the Christian life to allow such a thing to happen!”

We have then not only a legitimate matter for philosophical and theological research which will require all the scientific competencies of those and related social sciences. Moreover, this is no ordinary academic exercise, but rather an utter tragedy for the Church as witness to Christ and his salvific sacrifice on the Cross. Where before it was thought that the problem was that the world was not listening to the Church, it now becomes rather that the Church is in such disjunction from the legitimate modern aspirations of its members that the teacher and shepherd has become traitor to the flock and criminal before the law.

What this so desperately bespoke was, of course, the utter urgency of rethinking the entire nature of the Church and its presence in quite different, indeed kenotic, terms. Moreover, beyond responding to the tragic urgency of the present crises, this can also help to orient present theological investigations toward the new discoveries needed for bearing witness to Gospel values in this secular age.

Turning then to Taylor's four disjunctions takes us into the field of creative theology and religiously based reflection. If focused upon stating the problem this can make important, though as yet only initial suggestions. Nevertheless, the separate horizons of the four disjunctions converge in their repeated suggestions of the need for a change to a kenotic theology of Church. This entails a shift from the evangelist John's descent of the Logos into time, as top-down and tinged always with a sense of divine glory. That had as implications: (a) a focus upon the perfection of the Church as Mystical Body and "spotless bride of Christ," (b) whose reputation is therefore ever to be protected, and (c) which, in turn, has had the tragic consequence of protecting the Church as institution over the welfare of its young.

Instead this study points to Philippians 2:5-11 with its account of Christ not holding to the form of God but emptying himself in order to take human form, indeed the form of a servant and to surrender even this on the Cross. This leads to a bottom-up approach, quite opposite to glory and perfection. It starts from the humanity of Christ and indeed his sacrificial death – or even from creation as *ex nihilo*. It opens a sense of God less as uncompromisedly absolute and immobile, and rather as able to share with a universe and science which have their own autonomy and laws, and at the level of humankind even their own freedom. It would include also a critique of our overreaching technological sense of power to do everything, which can lead to social and political conflict. Instead it opens a metaphysics and ethics of the creativity of powerlessness and of a search for harmony and beauty. This has been the work of the RVP research teams in this project on "Faith in a Secular Age" which



began from the four ‘disjunctions’ identified by Charles Taylor and José Casanova. But thanks to the marvelous impact of Pope Francis this has been transformed into a set of four ‘conjunctions’ (see *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012). Here we shall look to this transformation in order to identify the prospective contribution of this joint conference on the Church and its renewal in a secular age.

Here we shall consider only the first disjunction: that of the seeker. But concern for the magisterium, its moral teaching and plural spiritualities should rightly follow in the sessions discussing the Church as listening and discerning, welcoming and serving.

### **III. Conjunctions of Church and People**

The general phenomenon of progressive secularization over the last 400 years must be seen in the light of: first, the broad human processes of the Reformation reacting against hierarchy, and the corresponding affirmation of individual authenticity and equality; second, the Enlightenment’s disjunction of human reason from the unitive influences of wisdom and faith; and third, democracy and human freedom in the evaluation and guidance of human action. All these came together after World War II upon the development of the pervasive personal communication system which bypassed the parish church as the dominant context for the formation of one’s personal outlook. Hence, it became especially common for young persons to set out on life with the attitude of seekers embarking on the exciting, if at times threatening, adventure of constructing their own life in their own terms. More threatening to their effort than the danger of occasional mistakes, they consider to be the imposition of a predetermined pattern of life or culture which one is destined to follow.

The first set of disjunctions/conjunctions begins then with the seekers in contrast to those focused on dwelling within the Church and its traditions. The enigmas of existence emphasized by contem-

porary theory and culture and the many and developing challenges to be faced in life generate in the seeker a sense of the inadequacy of universal laws. This leads increasingly to a search to build life with the individualistic coordinates of modernity.

Here the seekers can be seen less as having left the people of God, than as struggling to live the deep inspiration of the Spirit in facing their multiple responsibilities in the Church and the world, internal and external. The cost of their search for authenticity can be very high as it takes them beyond the mere following of authorities and the mimetic attitudes of neighbors and confreres. Their need is not for a Church as an ideal institution, but one that is no longer enchanted and in many ways is a fallible, human and humane way of living the gospel values. This is a community marked not by power and control, but by acceptance and encouragement of those who look to it in the midst of the needs they experience in their search. Here Christ on the Cross is the kenotic model for the Church in manifesting an endless willingness to suffer in order to serve.

Yet these same challenges lead others “as dwellers” to seek the constant guidance available in a Church tradition and the desire to have this articulated as amply as possible. This places Church leadership uncomfortably between two – and more – groups with quite different needs and expectations.

In terms of interior self-consciousness this is in effect the formation of one’s very identity as described in Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*. Here the truly challenging task is to relate the ecclesial and the secular in ways that are mutually complementary and enriching. For example, can the role of the Church be not an alternative to that of the secular state but, as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas have come to see, a helpful enablement of the human democratic endeavor. Indeed, one can go still further with Jürgen Habermas and Robert Bellah to recognize the presence of proto-religious modes of ritual and myth in the very origins of humanness itself, e.g., in the emergence of the ability to be conscious of and to express the unitive relation to others that founds and constitutes humane social life and behavior.

An alternate path sees living one's Catholic identity no longer as being part of an institution that is superior and opposed to the efforts of the people to build their nation from the ground up, but rather in the supportive terms of leaven and narrative. This entails a theology of Church in the kenotic terms of suffering servant. Thus it might be regretted that the nation has become more of a law enforcing than a political entity built on the will of the people, and similarly that the Church has come to be more of a moral than a spiritual institution. Together they leave "a world without forgiveness and without project."

This points toward some surprising suggestions, such as the following: a) that the Church needs to evoke lively debate among the laity in order for them to come to a consciousness of the living reality of the Holy Spirit at the core of their lives and of their Church; b) that in the face of the rampant individualism which accompanies the contemporary sense of human freedom and autonomy the state is in need of the sense of human unity and community which religion articulates and can support; c) that a renewed appreciation of humankind can restore the dynamic sense of history; and d) that in turn the heterogeneity of history needs the deeper sense of charity so that humanity can be not merely a sum, but a relation which, while rooted in the particular, opens towards the universal.

To move beyond the exclusivism of a disconnected religion some would replace religion as an objective category by the subjective category of faith, the sense of a cumulative tradition, and the shared category of the transcendent which is the "object" of all faiths. While this points to a pluralism, a Catholic concern is to unite this with a Christology of the unique and universal Savior. This road is opened by a theology of the Holy Spirit as expressed richly in the orthodox traditions of the East. This finds the Spirit present in "society and history, peoples, cultures and religions" (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 28 and W. Hryniewicz, *The Spirit, The Cry of the World*<sup>1</sup>). This could be reinforced by stress on the solidar-

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<sup>1</sup> Access to this work is available under the following link: <http://goo.gl/vDXxye>.

ity of peoples rooted in their common origin and destiny if related to a Christology, not of an imperial messiah, but of kenosis and cross leading to resurrection and new life. What then is to be done? Peter Jonkers contributed to this project an article on the Church as a minority institution lacking political power due to its declining levels of lay participation, of clergy and religious. He points to the work of the late Paul Ricœur, once Dean of the University of Paris and member of this Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. Professor Ricœur gave great attention in his hermeneutics (e.g. his *Conflict of Interpretations*) to this effort to understand other mentalities. This required an interest or willingness to respect and appreciate – though not necessarily to agree with or assume – another’s position on a point under discussion.

Here the logic is not that of science where every discovery must be exactly replicable by anyone willing to carry out the procedures of the original experiment. Indeed, it is a great scandal when this does not prove to be so, as exact, universal and univocal language and outcomes are of the essence. In religious affairs, however, this is not the case; in fact, this is not scientific description at all. That emerged with the Greeks and hence relatively quite late in human history after untold millennia of human development – specifically it came after Homer and life in relation to the panoply of the gods, which he described in the *Iliad*.

In the Bible and the teachings of Jesus the language is not that of precise scientific description; rather it is action oriented, being concerned with motivation and orientation. This is a language to teach wisdom, which uses analogy and parable. It evokes insight – indeed differing insights – in each one who hears or reads it no matter how many they may be or how often. In this sense it projects and promotes the freedom and creativity of each; it orients distinct lives in different contexts and cultures, each in their proper diversity.

This may be part of the reason why, despite the emerging proliferation and progress of science and its language, it is not capable of keeping up with the expansion and challenge of human experience. This has moved from local to national, and from national to inter-

national. But almost suddenly in the last 30 years all this has been transcended and is now global. The result is a world in utter confusion no longer able to understand and respond to its own evolution.

In these circumstances everything contributes and we look attentively to the sciences, but know that they do not keep up with political and economic developments and especially with the admixture and interaction of peoples and their cultures. Holistic dialogue must find another radically more open language in order to formulate, to suggest and to express the inspiration and orientation needed for life in these times; and this perhaps even more so now than in the past great ages of faith.

Indeed, as modern individualism develops the relationships which constitute the social relations essential to human flourishing or even survival, it begins to be suspected that life must be lived in a “new key.” It is not that of self-assertion and hence of interpersonal conflict, but of a kenotic vision which enables people, societies and the Church to listen, to sacrifice and to serve in unity with others.

That is the key to this present effort at Church renewal. Its 16 research teams have been working to understand and heal the disjunctions between Church and people manifest in the outflow of seekers in search of the spirit, the efforts of the magisterium to guide the life of the Church, its moral teaching and the plural spiritualities of all peoples.

The present conference will then seek to draw out resulting insights regarding the Church as listening and discerning, as welcoming and serving under the title: “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision.”

# Saeculum: A Theological-Pastoral Reflection

GIANFRANCO RAVASI\*

I would first of all like to express my excitement in being here. Over a half a century ago I was in this very lecture hall! In those days we didn't have any problems communicating in terms of language, since all of the lectures were given in Latin!

I am excited because I hope to treat, in a very modest and elementary way, a symbol; a symbol, however, that is central to the work of the true master who is Charles Taylor. As a symbol for this – and I repeat – modest intervention (modesty derived from the fact that I can no longer dedicate myself to the exegetical research that was the fundamental basis of my academic past) I would propose the word *saeculum*. Also because it is indirectly present in the title of this gathering.

The word *saeculum*, as we all know, is the source of two meanings, two connotations, around which I will develop my brief “theological-pastoral” reflection.

The primary meaning of this word, is a positive one: the Italian word “secolo” or “century” generates the word *secularity*, which is a Christian category. Let us not forget that “century” (secolo) in the Koinè of the New Testament is rendered as *aiòn*, a term that also expresses a dimension of eternity. The same goes for the Hebrew word *'olam*, which indicates both temporality as well as a dimension of totality.

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\* *Pontifical Council for Culture of the Holy See* (Vatican City). – The following text, reviewed and approved by the author, is the transcription and translation of the oral intervention offered by S. E. Card. Gianfranco Ravasi at the beginning of our Symposium. Special thanks are due to Luciana Petrocelli, for the transcription, and to Fr. Tadeusz Nowak OMI, for the translation.

I will begin, therefore, with the first positive meaning of this term: secularity understood as a theological category. I will present the theological matrix of this term in a simplified, “impressionistic” manner, by referring to three components of the Christian Faith, the first of which is creation. Let us simply listen to this term as it is used in the *Book of Wisdom*, a book that is, among other things, a locus for a dialogue between Hebrew and Greek culture (Wis. 1:14) “*all...creatures of the world are wholesome, And there is not a destructive drug among them nor any domain of the nether world on earth*” (NAB). I would invite you to focus on the phrase “*all creatures of the world.*”

Secondly: (Wis. 11:24) “*you, oh Lord, love all the things that exist and nothing that you have made disgusts you.*” For the Creator, nothing is profane, which helps us to understand how we need to look at the totality of reality, that we need to be hopeful.

Second component: Jesus is a layman, not a priest, as it is written in the *Letter to the Hebrews*, chapter 7 verse 14: “*It is clear that our Lord arose from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests*” (NAB). But this is not sufficient for the sacred author, who goes on to say in chapter 8 verse 4: “*If then he were on earth, he would not be a priest*” (NAB). The fact that our founder be a layman is truly significant with all of the exactitude that theologians exert.

Third element: Christianity presents a model of the relationship between faith and politics, faith and society, which is extremely significant because it says *no* to *sacralism*, *no* to *hierocracy*, *no* to *theocracy*, *no* to *fundamentalism*, and naturally it says *no* to *statolatry*, to the negation of any religious component in society.

What is this assertion? It is the affirmation that Christ formulates and on which exegesis and theology have dealt with for centuries, including the Incarnation. But the assertion is blunt and direct. It is, as I often say, a “tweet.” In the Greek text it is composed of 50 characters, including spaces: *Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's*. This is a recognition, therefore, that a strong autonomy exists for the image of God,

that is Man, that is, for religion and, naturally, on the other hand, a real autonomy for society and for the state.

The Christian religion cannot admit the extraordinary phrase used by the priest Jehoiada in the great 17<sup>th</sup> century French writer Jean Racine's story *Athalie*, and which is summed up within many religions, which we cannot negate (it is also the declaration of Islam, for example). The declaration is: *The Temple is my country, it is my nation and there is nothing else beyond it*. Instead, Christianity recognizes secularity.

At this point, I would like to end my first reflection, also because time is limited, with two concluding considerations on secularity.

First: secularity is a delicate but very real *locus theologicus*. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this was stated in various ways. I would like to present only three examples of the following authors that I have read. I will cite only one emblematic phrase.

The first author, and we all know him, is Dietrich Bonhoeffer and his theory of *mündig gewordenen Welt*, of the adult world, of the grown up world. As a youth he emancipates himself from the family and maintains his autonomy but does not sever his ties with the family. The challenge for faith is exactly this: to abandon the God of Theophany, the *Deus ex machina*, which embraces all of reality, for the God of *kenosis*, the God of the Cross, who is not present "in power" but in "seed."

The second author well known for his academic fecundity is Friedrich Gogarten, who in his 1953 work opera *Despair and Hope for Our Time* asserts that secularization is a necessary and legitimate consequence of the Christian faith. And here he introduces the second word and the second theme that I would like to treat: *secularism* (or secularization, if you will, but better *secularism*). This term expresses a reality that is a degeneration of the concept of secularity because it takes a furlough from God, radicalizing its own autonomy and precludes any place for the divine.

The author asserts that human autonomy is not detached from God, but neither is it overpowered or crushed by the sacred. He then



goes on to say that the Church needs to live in sincere solidarity with the world without trying to make it sacred, that is, without *sacralising* it.

The third author is Karl Rahner, whose lectures I attended in this very hall. In 1967, while speaking about secularization in his *Theological Investigations*, while referring to *Gaudium et Spes*, he made an assertion that for me is more significant than his many other valuable insights, namely, that the Church needs to, and indeed wants to, – now note the verb – *co-determine* the way of the secular world but without wanting to determine it dogmatically or fundamentalistically. This is the point: to *co-determine* the world with the world, but not to *determine* it totally or fundamentalistically.

Let us now go on to the second aspect of the word *saeculum*, the one defined by the term *secularism*. What symbol may we use at this point to represent *secularism*? Everyone knows it very well. It is a symbol that has become popular in everyday speech, also used in one of the last brief texts of Professor Taylor; *disenchantment*. Contrary to what everyone says, *disenchanting the world* is not a phrase of Max Weber, but rather of the great German poet Hölderlin, who uses it, however, in a totally different sense.

What are the characteristics of secularism?

Some of these characteristics include: emancipation from the bondage and subjection to the sacred; emancipation from sacred authority, symbols, and institutions; emancipation from the jurisdiction of the sacred. Another example, another color could be the ontological and epistemological autonomy of science and philosophy from theology. When it comes right down to it, in practice this seeks to relegate theology to a kind of protected but independent oasis with respect to the horizon of knowing and thinking, because now there is only one subject, humanity: the gods are no longer in heaven!

Another component, which is a consequence of this movement away from the sacred, is one that I often call *monotonicity* of awareness/knowledge, or knowledge/awareness in a singular tonality, that of the rational-scientific, which gives priority and importance to the

*set* or *stage* of the world, rather than to the foundation or basis for reality itself. Thus, one excludes even the possibility of the transcendent and of the language by which one gains access to it.

Fortunately, we now know that this attitude is in crisis; we know that human knowledge, everyone's awareness/knowledge, including that of the uneducated and simple folk, is polymorphic or multivalent. For example, when a person, who is also a scientist, falls in love, he or she uses another stream of awareness to express his or her experience, that of the esthetic or artistic.

A further component that I would like to present among the various examples of secularism is the phenomenon of the metropolis, of urbanization. This is a component that I take from a phrase used by Harvey Cox in his 1965 work, *The Secular City*, which he eventually considered to be outdated, but which, I believe, still retains its important significance. The phrase speaks of *urbanization* meaning a structure shared in common where diversity dominates and tradition is disintegrated; where a kind of impersonality dominates with a certain grade of tolerance and anonymity that substitutes for traditional moral sanctions and codified consciences.

And so it is when a man from the country enters the city with his own traditions and morality. The moment he enters this grey world of the city, he loses his identity. And this is true: anonymity is then substituted for moral sanctions and the codified conscience.

But I think – and this I would like to share with you now – that there are two pastoral and also cultural challenges that exist within contemporary secularism and which emerge from two particular phenomena, among the many other realities present in the current societal and cultural complex.

The first phenomenon I would call *apatheism*, a term that I need to explain because it is used by a few authors. It has to do with the current crisis that involves the union of *apathy* and *atheism*. In practice, we call this *indifferentism*. This is a phenomenon that the *Courtyard of the Gentiles*, the place of dialogue between believers and non-believers that I hope to develop, finds great difficulty in confronting because it faces the cloud of *apathy*.

I would point out the French cultural context and the definition that Diderot uses in his “Letter on the Blind for the Use of those who See,” which he addresses to his deist friend, Voltaire. He says: *It is very important not to mistake hemlock for parsley.* One should not confuse the two because they resemble each other. He goes on to say: *but not at all so to believe or not in God.* To believe or not to believe in God is totally irrelevant. This is the kind of attitude, I would say, the style of apatheism that is truly problematic and it is always more dominant. It does not contest from the front, like Nietzschean atheism. It does not fight faith as did the atheistic regimes. Rather, it ignores God, like a stranger. If God were to now enter into a modern city square, this would no longer astound or amaze. At the most, the police would ask for his documents, because his identity would be unknown. God should not interfere in human affairs. He is a foreigner, not the principle of existential choices. Even the transcendence over yonder one might recognize, should remain in the Limbo of his transcendence.

The time is long past when the rhetorical atheist, the famous Marquis de Sade used to say: *If atheism would want martyrs, I would say that my blood is ready.* Today this would be ridiculous! Today’s atheists are *apatheistic*. The latest aggressive atheists, those that have a strong sense of atheism, are an endangered species. In this situation religion is condemned to insignificance, to uselessness, to irrelevance. Here I need to say that the root causes of this situation are the object of research and analysis and it’s not the time to stop to look at what gave birth to such a situation, whether it was the *homo technologicus*, or the individualistic state, new talk, etc. I would only say that pastorally this situation of apatheism calls out to Christians and it calls out to them dramatically because it gives us to understand that Christians were not able to communicate their differences. Indeed, they have been totally flattened, flattened by penultimate reality. They are no longer capable of giving an answer to fundamental questions, because they cannot even stimulate the question of ultimate reality in their atheistic interlocutors.

An indifferent society doesn't like the question itself, which in our languages is represented as something that claws or provokes. Oscar Wilde justly said that everyone is able to give the answer, but to pose true questions requires a genius. In other words, the question itself presumes profundity, as well as tension. Thus, the importance of provoking with ultimate reality: evil, suffering, meaning of life, including the authenticity of truth, for example. But we Christians seem to have lost our fire, as a way of life, of bearing witness. We recognize that very often our communities are worthy of the condemnation that the Book of Revelation (3:15-16) lances against the Church in Laodicea: *because you are neither hot nor cold, neither cool nor warm, I'm going to vomit you out!* Communities that are totally bereft of Christian witness, lacking in moral coherence, are communities that no longer have evangelical ferment, they lack the leaven of the Gospel.

My final consideration is concerned with the second aspect of contemporary secularism. Indeed, the second phenomenon that may provoke us is what I would call *polytheism*, something that can also be defined in a more noble way as *religious pluralism*. We are all familiar with Max Weber who spoke about the *polytheism of ethical values*.

Today, this phenomenon is indisputably present, especially for us Europeans, and in particular for Mediterranean countries, where there is a constant crossing over among different religions, civilizations, and even the phenomenon of *polytheism* that, in my opinion, generates three possible reactions.

The first is fundamentalism, that is, the fear of another God, of a different culture. Thus, the kind of aggressive, self-referring apologetic we so often are confronted with. Islamic fundamentalism is a particular good example of this, that is, the choice of quickly lifting the sword against the other.

The second possibility is what we mostly live in Europe today, and that is, generic syncretism; the inoffensive syncretism of apatheism, without any identity. The famous poet T. S. Eliot used to

say that if we western Europeans lose our Christianity, we would no longer be able to understand Voltaire and Nietzsche. However, there is a much greater danger present: we would lose our very identity, we would no longer have a face. A kind of amnesia would occur, a loss of memory, both religious and cultural, in a way that would make us impotent in the face of fundamentalism because we would have no real identity of our own. Clearly, fundamentalism has an exasperating identity and this is certainly something negative.

The third way is clearly strenuous, modest, to be taken with our noses to the ground, with great effort. And the Church of Pope Francis is following this path: it is the path of interreligious and cultural dialogue, with all of the risks and struggles this entails.

One could speak at length on the essence of this dialogue, but let us only consider the beauty of the word *dialogue*. Not everyone is aware of the fact that in its Greek matrix, this word has two significances. The preposition *dia* has two meanings, not one. Usually one says that it is an interchange between two different *logoi*. In reality, *dia* also means to descend into profundity: *diàbasis*.

Ideologies are dead, but as the ideologies die so does thinking. We need to return once again to the depth of our faith, to dig deep and to look to ask others, to demand from others that their argumentation be both epistemologically valid and valid in its contents, that it be substantial.

But I think that dialogue also means many other things, like, for example, entering into closer relations with the other. It means to take on a listening posture with respect to the other, and this is a very arduous task. I think that the dream, the ideal for the Church is found in an expression used by John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Inuente*. I believe that it also needs to become the ideal for humanity, which always has a common, *Adamic*, foundation. The phrase is: “*We need to make the Church the home and the school of communion*. Here the call is to all of humanity, who in its diversity is able to be in one common home, which is this modest planet on which we find ourselves; this small flowerbed (*aiuola*), as Dante Alighieri coined it.

In rabbinical tradition there is a wonderful aphorism that says when men mint a coin they use the same dye so that all of the coins that are minted are of equal value. God does the same with humanity, He mints everyone with the same *Adamic* dye, that of the human being. And yet people are all different, beginning with each one's unique fingerprint. In the end the hope is for a dialogue like a slow, laborious, and perhaps eschatological construction of a common home.

I would like to conclude with a word from the Bible, a word that is significant for pushing forward and once again putting into practice the capacity to decipher our story. The Judeo-Christian religion is an historical religion. It does not invite one to fly away from reality towards some mythic or mystic heavens. It involves an incarnational religiosity, starting from Christ, who is the great Sign. It is, indeed, for this reason that I would like to recall that which has unfortunately become a stereotype used at the time of the Council.

I came to Rome on the afternoon of October 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962. On that very morning the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council was announced and in the evening I was present for Pope John XXIII's famous *Sermon of the Moon*. One continued to speak about the "signs of the times!" Signs are certainly important: *signs of power*, but I would rather say *the power of signs!* And it is at this point that I will conclude with the words of two witnesses, two fundamental personages of the Bible.

First of all, let us begin with the Prophets and here I will select Jeremiah 8:7 (Jeremiah chooses the stork (*has'îd*) because in Hebrew *stork* means *pious* or *devout*): *Even the stork in the air knows its seasons; Turtledove, swallow and thrush observe their time of return, But my people do not know the ordinance of the LORD* (NAB).

And in the same way Christ, as recorded by Matthew 16:2-3, uses the symbol of a weather forecast: *In the evening you say, 'Tomorrow will be fair, for the sky is red' and, in the morning, 'Today will be stormy, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to judge the appearance of the sky, but you cannot judge the signs of the times.*



# **A Catholic Church in a Global Secular World**

**JOSÉ CASANOVA \***

As we are approaching the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, it is opportune to reflect upon the global dimensions of the Council, insofar as it was, in the first place, as stressed by the theologian Karl Rahner, the first truly global ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, a gathering of Church Fathers from all the parts of the globe. But even more significantly, as the result of such a global gathering, even before the term “globalization” had been invented, the council documents recognized the phenomenon as “a sign of the times.”

*Nostra Aetate* begins with the words, “In our time... day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger.” *Dignitatis Humanae* reiterates the same idea in its concluding paragraph when it recognizes that “All nations are coming into even closer unity. Men of different cultures and religions are being brought together in closer relationship.” The entire text of *Gaudium et Spes* can be read as a critical and prophetic discernment of both the positive dynamics and the negative consequences brought by global trends:

Today the human race is involved in a new stage of history... Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces... True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems.

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This is not a self-referential church but rather one open to the entire world, scrutinizing prophetically global trends decades before those ideas became platitudes in global media. Its deep and long-lasting global consciousness, its unparalleled global reach, global networks, and global intelligence capabilities, and its proven dedication to the common good of global humanity represent some of the most significant competitive advantages and assets of the Catholic Church in our global age. Processes of globalization present “the People of God” with tremendous opportunities to become ever more “catholic” that is, ever more universal and more global, in its mission to bring “the good news” and to serve all of humanity in its pilgrimage through history to the Kingdom of God.

But this unparalleled opportunity can only be realized if the Church reaffirms once again with faith and hope its catholicity and guided by the message of Pope Francis leaves behind its most recent self-referential obsession with moral confessionality and goes out to the “plazas” of the world to contribute to the globalization of fraternity. From its very beginning, “Catholic” had the dual connotation of “whole” (i.e. universal) and that of being the one “true” (i.e. orthodox) church, and thus a particular Roman Catholic Church. This duality has always been throughout the history of the Church the source of much tension, not always resolved successfully. It is, one may say, when the Church in its identity as “the People of God” is able to maintain the right balance between the two poles of universality and particularity, without stressing the one at the expense of the other, that it is both most faithful to its “catholic” tradition and can best realize its “universal” mission. It can then truly become a global and a local church, universal yet deeply rooted and incarnated in the most diverse, concrete and particular local contexts. This is both the great challenge and the great opportunity for the Catholic Church in our global age. Sociologically, there are solid reasons to assert that perhaps no other institution in the world is simultaneously as “global” and as “local” as the Catholic Church. No other institution has such a global presence, such a global outreach, such a global potential and such a global responsibility.

However, our global secular age and our secular world also present the Catholic Church with very serious challenges, to which the Church will need to find some creative responses if it is to realize its global potential and its global responsibility. I propose to analyze those global challenges under four broad headings – secularization, pluralism, clericalism, and gender

### **1. Secularization: Its Multiple and Diverse Forms Demand Creative and Diverse Responses**

The Catholic *aggiornamento* signaled a profound reorientation of Catholicism towards modern developments revising what had been to a large extent an anti-modern negative philosophy of history, and adopting a positive attitude which assumed the legitimacy of the *saeculum*, that is, of the modern secular age and of the modern secular world. But this affirmation took place in a European context in which there was no careful distinction between secularity (affirmation of the legitimacy of the secular spheres), secularism (an ideology which viewed the secular age as a post-religious condition and the public secular sphere as a sphere of *laïcité*, free from religion) and secularization (historical processes which in modern societies were supposed to lead irremediably to a drastic decline of religious beliefs and practices).

Within a dichotomous understanding of a radical opposition between tradition and modernity, modernization was to lead necessarily to secularization. Becoming a modern secular person implied, therefore, leaving religion and other “traditional” customs behind. As a result of such strongly held secularist assumptions among European societies, sociological theories of secularization functioned not only as empirical analytical descriptions but became to a large extent a form of self-fulfilling prophecy.

The churches themselves as well as the analysis of great number of theologians internalized these secularist assumptions concerning “the secular city” and “the death of God” and suffered, as a result, drastic internal secularization. In overreaction to this obvious threat,

conservative groups within the Church closed ranks in an equally undifferentiated negative reaction not only to secularism but also to the various forms and manifestations of secularity and secularization.

We find ourselves luckily at a moment in which we can redress what had become pendular movements between extreme secularizing and anti-secular positions and find a more balanced condition for a critical rethinking of the implications of our global secular age. One of the most significant analytical-practical consequences of the recent revision of the traditional European paradigm of secularization is the recognition that secularization, in the sense of a drastic decline of religious beliefs and practices, is not a necessary consequence of modernization, and that different processes of modernization are connected with very diverse religious-secular dynamics throughout the world.

Somewhat simplifying, one may say that one can observe two main divergent patterns with numerous sub-variations: there is on the one hand the dynamic which is clearly predominant in many European societies, namely the transformation from homogenous confessional church religiosity to homogeneous secularity, without any significant growth of religious pluralism (except for the one brought by new immigrants). Another alternative pattern, paradigmatically represented by the United States, shows that modernization may actually be accompanied by religious revival and increasing religious pluralization with limited secularization.

One can find throughout the world similarly divergent patterns of relatively homogeneous secularization or re-confessionalization and increasing religious pluralization. There is a need for critically reflexive post-secularist social science to develop much more nuanced models of comparative-historical analysis of diverse dynamics of modernization, secularization, and religious pluralization which can inform the Church's most appropriate pastoral initiatives and responses.

In practical terms, this means that the challenges of secularization and increasing religious pluralization are going to be different

across different societies and even among different groups within the same society and that therefore the Church's responses in order to be adequate will also need to vary accordingly. Obviously the response to the challenge of aggressive atheist secularism has to be different from the response to simply hedonistic materialism, to solidaristic exclusive secular humanism, or to the religious competition from other Christian communities and non-Christian religions, or to the competition that comes from non-religious spiritual searches. Each of these phenomena, all of which may contribute to the unchurching of Catholics, may nonetheless be carried by and attractive to very different groups in different societies, and therefore the pastoral response has to be appropriate and commensurable. No general and uniform pastoral strategy of evangelization will be able to address adequately all of these phenomena.

In a sense, this is one of the functions of synodal and conciliar gatherings as well as of regional and national conferences at the level of the Church hierarchy. They can serve both to express and articulate particular differences as well as to mediate and facilitate Catholic consensual understandings. But in order to gather all the situated intelligence as well as the rich diversity within the entire People of God it would be advisable to find ways to multiply such gatherings not only at the level of the hierarchy in Rome and within national and regional bishops conferences but also among religious orders, scholars and intellectuals, lay religious movements and lay associations within and across regions. After all it is those various communities within the diverse People of God which are likely to be most effectively engaged in the task of evangelization. As Pope Francis has emphasized in the encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, in order to bear abundant fruit, today's evangelization is a task that must be carried out by the entire People of God. As a pastoral strategy, facilitating the actual intersubjective gathering of the many sectors and communities constituting the People of God may be of crucial relevance not only in order to gain mutual understanding but also to strengthen catholicity within the Global Church.

## **2. Pluralization and Pluralism: Internal and External, Religious and Secular**

It is now empirically confirmed by comparative historical analysis that modernization does not lead automatically or irremediably to religious decline, but may actually be accompanied by religious revivals of all kinds, depending upon the phenomenological experience that accompanies processes of modernization in various settings. What comparative analysis, however, tends to show firmly and much more uniformly is that what characterizes modernization almost irremediably is indeed increasing pluralization of all kinds. This is the thesis which has now been articulated most forcefully by the great sociologist of secularization, Peter Berger. This is also the argument which in various forms has been developed by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*, by Hans Joas in his *Faith as an Option*, and in my own work. Globalization only enhances and heightens this pluralization of options, individual, communitarian, as well as collective, in all kinds of directions, religious and secular.

For the Catholic Church the proper response to increasing pluralization internally and externally ought to be not uniform self-enclosed exclusivity, but rather the recognition that plurality and pluralism in unity with the Bishop of Rome and with the local bishops is both, theologically and sociologically, a sign of universality, catholicity and wholeness. It is also sociologically speaking the most appropriate and effective pastoral strategy.

While the growing secularization of European societies represents a significant challenge for the Catholic Church, no less challenging is the significant growth of religious pluralism in many previously homogeneous Catholic societies, such as Latin America or the Philippines.

Partly in response to the sociological evidence that in the United States and elsewhere, conservative churches were growing at the expense of more liberal churches, there has been what is in my view, a misplaced diagnosis of the challenges facing the Catholic Church

today. Blaming the post-Vatican II liberalization for the confusion and the loss of the faithful, there has been the attempt to close ranks in a defensive, assertive and self-enclosed church which abandoned its “catholic” all-inclusive identity for a more pure and exclusivist quasi-sectarian community.

While such a strategy may be appropriate for Protestant denominations within an internally competitive pluralist religious market, it is self-defeating for a Catholic Church whose greatest competitive resource is its “catholicity” and its rich and complex internal pluralism, which can best accommodate the very different challenges of pluralization in various local and national contexts.

Undoubtedly, the process of secularization throughout continental Europe is associated with liberation from the confessional bonds of the territorial rural or urban parish and in this respect the process of secularization in Europe takes primarily the form of de-confessionalization.<sup>1</sup> In the European context, secularization means above all liberation from confessional affiliations and identities of the kind which were first determined by the previous process of religious and confessional territorialization across Europe in the wake of post-Reformation religious civil wars and the imposition of the Westphalian principle *cuius regio eius religio*.

For complex reasons much of European Catholicism never made the transition from the early modern ascriptive and prescriptive territorial parish that accompanied the vigorous renewal associated with the Council of Trent and its ecclesiastical reforms, to the kind of modern voluntary communities and associations in which one finds throughout the history of immigrant America and in contemporary global cities, which by definition cannot be prescribed from above but must be self-generated from the grassroots of the People of God.

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<sup>1</sup> The religious and secular situation across Europe is actually rather complex and diverse and no straightforward theory linking rates of secularization with rates of modernization or urbanization can do justice to this complex diversity. Cf. José CASANOVA, “The Religious Situation in Europe,” in Hans JOAS and Klaus WIEGANDT (eds.), *Secularization and the World Religions*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009, pp. 206-228.

As Pope Francis emphasized in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the local parish, the national churches and the global Church need to reinvent themselves as communities of communities. The face of the People of God is increasingly plural and diverse and the Catholic Church needs to embrace this rich internal pluralism, both to sustain itself and to respond adequately to the task of external evangelization in an ever more plural and pluralistic world.

There is overwhelming sociological evidence that one of the reasons why Italian Catholicism, for instance, is doing much better than Spanish Catholicism, or why Catholicism in Brazil or the Philippines has been able to confront relatively well the challenge of Pentecostal churches, is due to their rich and complex internal pluralism.

In the case of the Latin America Catholic Church, the most remarkable example of dynamic internal pluralism has been the dramatic growth of charismatic and neopentecostal Catholics, a development which the hierarchy first viewed with much suspicion, but have now officially embraced throughout Latin America.<sup>2</sup> This has contributed to a greater internal pluralism within Latin American Catholicism, so that analysts frequently distinguish among three major diverse tendencies: “Christian Base Communities” with origins in liberation theology, “*católicos renovados*” and “neopentecostals.”<sup>3</sup>

It should be obvious that Pope Francis has brought to Rome this experience of a rich, vibrant and internally pluralist Latin American Church, which is less concerned with its ecclesiastical identity and purity and more focused on the spiritual and material needs of the People of God. As the first Pope who did not participate in the Council and who has been able to embrace and reconcile what appeared to be the opposite charismatic and liberation wings of the

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<sup>2</sup> On Brazil the most comprehensive study is Brenda CARRANZA, *Catolicismo Midiático* (Aparecida, SP: Editora Idéias & Letras, 2011). See also, Edward L. CLEARY, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Cecília Loreto MARIZ, “Católicos de Libertação, Católicos Renovados e Neopentecostais,” in *Cadernos CERIS*, n. 2, 2001, pp. 11-47.

Latin American church, he appears to be in a unique position to bring this recognition of the richness of internal pluralism within the Church to Rome. He is in a privileged position to move the global Church beyond the opposite and polarized hermeneutics of rupture and continuity which had plagued much of the Catholic Church after Vatican II.

For a global Catholic Church that has to adopt and respond to the most diverse local challenges, the promotion of a rich internal Catholic pluralism often nurtured from below is a more fruitful way to respond creatively to the diverse tasks of evangelization, than are centralized, homogeneous and clerically-led programs of evangelization promoted from above.

A thriving global Catholic Church will be one which opens spaces for its diverse and rich historical spiritualities and can make room for Dominicans and Franciscans, Jesuits and Opus Dei, *Comunione e Liberazione* and Liberation Theology, *Focolari* and *Sant'Egidio*, Charismatics and Traditionalists.

### **3. The Disease of Clericalism**

If this analysis so far is to some extent correct, it should follow that heightened clericalism and the purification of the clergy to protect it from the temptation and deviations of the secular world cannot serve as a solution to the task of evangelization. The more adequate pastoral strategy ought to be the recognition and promotion of the wealth and diversity of charisms present among the entire People of God. This appears to be also a central message of Pope Francis.

Confronted with what at times appears to be an almost dizzying external and internal religious pluralism, one of the temptations of the Catholic hierarchy in Rome as well as in many national and local churches has been to try to reassert once again at least internal institutional control and hegemony over the Catholic faithful.

A recent problematic trend within the Church has been the growing clericalization of diocesan priests, who are becoming



increasingly detached from the laity and from the world, precisely at the time when the male and female religious orders are becoming ever more incarnated in the world. This entails a paradoxical reversal. The diocesan secular clergy is becoming ever more “religious” and detached from the world, while the male and female religious are becoming more engaged in the secular world. The religious orders remain today one of the rare places within the Church for pluralism and for relative autonomy from hierarchic clerical supervision and control.

Ultimately what is at stake is the model of Church that is being promoted. It is hard to avoid the impression that the model promoted by the hierarchy until very recently had been that of a purified clerical church in an impure secular world, a dramatic reversal from the letter and the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World. Perhaps unduly influenced by a sociological literature that has explained convincingly why Protestant conservative churches are growing while liberal ones are losing ground to secularization, the Catholic Church appeared also at times to be retreating to its conservative core, becoming ever more a “self-referential” church mainly concerned with maintaining its purity and the authority of the *magisterium*. Internally as well as externally, Catholic identity was being increasingly defined by moral confessionalism around gender issues.

To view modern secular post-Christian societies as a new form of paganism is a fundamental phenomenological mistake. Modern Europeans are characterized phenomenologically by a stadial consciousness that experiences secularity as a superior modern stage that supersedes and overcomes a prior more primitive or more traditional religious stage. Under such circumstances a return to a purified Christianity, self-enclosed and antagonistic to the secular world under a clerical ecclesiastical organization becomes self-defeating. This is the recipe for a pure sect of the elect, not one for a widely embracing Catholic Church open to the world which, as Francis has eloquently insisted, must be ready to serve on the model of a field hospital in the midst of battle.

Only the recognition that we live irremediably in a secular age can open spaces for a post-secular consciousness that begins to recognize secularity not as a higher state “after religion,” but as an anthropological condition of openness to all kinds of religious and secular options. That is the condition that Charles Taylor has characterized as the nova and supernova effects of the “age of authenticity.” The Church cannot be reconstituted again as a clerically and hierarchically organized ecclesiastical confession, but only as pluralist community of Christian communities open to diverse impulses coming from the entire People of God, from below as well as from above. Ultimately, the polarization between liberal and conservative tendencies within the Church can only be overcome by accepting the reality of an internally pluralist church. The fear of disunity and pluralism is today probably one of the most detrimental impulses within the Church.

Given the irremediable tendencies of individuation and pluralization in our global secular age, only a church that promotes and welcomes internally greater individuation and pluralization in communion with the Bishop of Rome can truly prosper as a “catholic” church and answer responsibly the plural challenges of our global age. By definition such a program of evangelization cannot be managed and controlled from the center but will have to respond to the increasingly diverse “glocal” challenges. Rather than uniform and homogeneous global Catholic responses what are most needed are “catholic” ones that are simultaneously global and local.

#### **4. Feminism and “The Gender Question”**

The gender question is arguably the most serious and complex challenge facing the Church today and in the foreseeable future. Indeed, the future of the global Church may be determined to a large extent by the way in which the church hierarchy, Catholic theologians and intellectuals, and the entire People of God, particularly faithful Catholic women, are able to find creative and positive responses to the challenge. One could argue that until very recently,

indeed until the arrival of Pope Francis, the response of the hierarchy had been mostly inadequate in so far as it tended to view and officially depict the very discourse of “gender” as a dangerous ideology produced by feminism, in the process turning feminism into an ideological foe, indeed into a specter not unlike Communism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The “gender question” is in many respects the fundamental moral question of our times in the same way as “the social question” was the fundamental moral question from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Catholic Church, pressed by Catholic dynamics emerging from the grassroots of social Catholic movements eventually developed a commendable track record of addressing the social question. But when it comes to the gender question, the Church, at least the hierarchy and the *magisterium*, have mainly failed to address theologically the new challenge, contenting themselves with reaffirming traditional teachings which fail to come to terms with the radical social transformation and to scrutinize prophetically the signs of the times.

At the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church embraced theological developmental principles grounded in the historicity of divine revelation, in incarnation, and in the continuous historical unfolding of the divine plans of salvation for humanity, that require the Church’s careful discernment of “the signs of the times.” The Catholic *aggiornamento* represented in this respect recognition of the fundamental moral principles of secular modernity. The human dignity of each and every person emerges as the guiding principle of the three most consequential documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Nostra Aetate*. All three documents share moreover the explicit reference to “the signs of the times” and the historicist recognition that we are entering a new age in the history of humanity with important repercussions for our understanding of the unfolding of the mystery of salvation.

Actually, the same historicist and developmental recognition appears most poignantly in the section directed to women in the Closing Speech of the Council when the Council Fathers asserted that “at this moment when the human race is undergoing so deep

a transformation ... The hour is coming, in fact has come, when the vocation of woman is being achieved in its fullness, the hour in which woman acquires in the world an influence, an effect and a power never hitherto achieved.” Yet this prophetic vision of the unprecedented transformation in gender relations which humanity was experiencing did not have the transformative consequences one should have expected in the life of the Church after the council.

Indeed, on issues of gender and sexual moral theology, the Catholic hierarchy, since the publication of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, has reasserted a traditionalist ontological conception of human nature and of human biology based on the essentialist conception of an a-historical, un-changing and universally valid natural law. Such a traditional ontological conception is increasingly in tension with the historicist conception of human moral development upheld by the social sciences as well as with the conception of a changing biological-historical nature informed by the new evolutionary life sciences.

Confronted with the radical character of the gender and sexual revolution of the late sixties the post-conciliar Church seemed to be back-pedaling and abandoning the historicist, prophetic, and forward-looking discernment of “the sign of the times,” reverting to the defense of an unchanging and unchangeable tradition grounded in eternal and divine natural law.

I want to make very clear that the historicist principle of *aggiornamento* and a critical prophetic discernment of the “signs of the times” do not imply at all an uncritical accommodation to modern secular liberal culture. Not every change is for the better or entails “progress.” There are many signs of the times particularly in high divorce rates, teenage pregnancy, abortion, pornography, and the commodification and debasement of the female body and of human sexuality in general which are negative, violations of human dignity, that many social scientists also recognize as anomic. But the Church can only maintain a critical, indeed prophetic, relationship to secular culture if it can differentiate its eschatological principles from

their irremediable historical embeddedness in particular traditional historical cultures.

The issue here is not one of moral relativism, as a matter of arbitrary individual choice or preference, but that of the clash between fundamental “sacred” moral values. Theologically, any religious community has the right and the duty to uphold what it considers a divinely ordained sacred injunction or moral norm. Sociologically, however, the question is how long any religious tradition, particularly a “catholic” one, can resist the adoption of a new moral value when a near universal consensus concerning the sacred character of such a value emerges in society. To denounce modern moral developments as a reversion to paganism or rampant relativism is to misunderstand modern historical developments.

Sociologically, in reaction to the Catholic Church’s official defense of a “traditionalist” position on gender issues and a singularly obsessive focus on “sexual” moral issues, one can observe throughout the Catholic world a dual process of female secularization and erosion of the Church’s authority on sexual morality. Perhaps for the first time in the accumulative waves of modern secularization women have left the Church in large numbers, most dramatically throughout Europe, but increasingly also throughout North America and incipiently in Latin America in a way that should sound alarm bells. Female secularization is probably the most significant factor in the drastic secularization of Western European societies since the 1960’s and in the radical rupture of European Christian “religion as a chain of memory.” To a considerable extent, the male intelligentsia left the Church in the eighteenth century, the male bourgeoisie in the early nineteenth century, and the male proletariat in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. But as long as women remained in the church, children were baptized and raised as Christians and there was a future for the church and the possibility of a religious revival and a reversal of secularization. Once women begin to abandon massively the church, as has happened and continues to happen since the 1960’s, the future of the Church begins to look sociologically much bleaker.

Equally crucial and of grave societal relevance is in my view the drastic secularization of sexual morality. Increasing numbers of practicing Catholics are disobeying the injunctions of the Catholic hierarchy and following their own conscience on most issues related to sexual morality. Moreover, there is increasing evidence from public opinion polls in Europe, North America, and Latin America that young Catholic adults are explicitly dissociating their sexuality and their religiosity, claiming that religion has absolutely no influence upon their attitudes toward sexuality.

We are witnessing on the one hand a church hierarchy which evinces an almost obsessive focus in defending traditional sexual morality, and on the other hand a majority of Catholic faithful in the secular world who not only ignore the moral injunctions of the hierarchy, but feel increasingly comfortable dissociating their religion and their sexuality. One must wonder how far this radical dissociation of private sexuality from religion and even from morality can go and where it may lead. In my view, it is leading to a radical secularization of the private sphere of individual consciousness that parallels the secularization of politics and of the public sphere.

But suddenly, the unexpected election of Pope Francis changed dramatically the nature of the debate, the official discourse coming from the hierarchy, and what appeared to be an acrimonious and growing disjunction between Church and secular world on issues of gender. His election brought a surprising sense of renewal and hope to the Catholic Church. His every gesture and word found a positive reception among the faithful and the world at large. Most encouraging and welcome was the change in tone from an inward and institutionally self-absorbed preoccupation to one of concern and service for every person, with a preferential option for the poor and needy, embracing all of humanity, believers and non-believers.

From the start Francis has found it natural to speak *urbi et orbi*, to the city and to the globe, in a direct and unassuming language that everyone can understand and appreciate. Equally important has been what was left unsaid. For a long time, there was no mention of any of the issues that for several years if not decades had been at

the center of magisterial and episcopal pronouncements and which served to define Catholic moral confessionality to insiders and outsiders. There was no mention of contraception, abortion, same-sex marriage and related gender issues, no critical mention of feminism, the ideology of gender, or the culture of death.

The pope himself repeatedly mentioned that one should not expect any change in doctrine or teaching from his pontificate. But the change in tone and the relegation of issues of gender and sexual morality from the core to the periphery of church teaching and the foregrounding of the Sermon on the Mount was in itself most relevant. A temporary moratorium for the time being at least on very divisive sexual and gender moral issues actually served as a welcome respite.

But issues of gender are not going to go away, and the growing gap between church and secular morality on sex and gender will need to be addressed eventually, hopefully in a new spirit and with a new tone. A renewed Church less self-absorbed in its own clericalism and embracing the poorest and the weakest must per force pay greater attention to women, who remain the poorest, the weakest, and the least respected in every society and every organization including “the People of God.” It is to be hoped that lay and religious women will gain greater access and participation in the administrative authority of the Church at every level, in the *magisterium*, and eventually in the priesthood.

In the same way that Cardinal Bergoglio praised the exemplary dedication of married clergy within the Eastern Rite Catholic Church, pointing out that clerical celibacy is a matter of discipline not of faith, the Church could discern more openly which aspects of the exclusion of women from positions of authority in the Church are matters of faith versus discipline, and therefore open to change.

Going forward, it behooves the Church to discern carefully the providential signs of the times in such secular moral developments.

The convocation of a Synod on the Family has finally begun the process and the possibility that the Church, the entire People of

God, may discern critically and faithfully the various aspects of the profound gender revolution, one of the most dramatic in the whole history of humanity. The process began actually with a call to the bishops to find out the sense of the faithful, of Catholics the world over, on issues related to marriage and the family. The synod itself began with the papal insistence on real frank debate with a spirit of authentic readiness to listen to each other, re-opening the conciliar dynamics of catholicity. What the frank debates actually evinced was that the People of God is deeply divided on those issues and that much more open conversation, debate, and dialogue at all levels of the Church will be necessary to discern which elements of the moral teachings on gender are essential on which there can be no disunity, which within the hierarchy of truths are disciplinary and thus left better to the discernment of the local churches, and which should be left to the moral responsibility of the individual conscience.

Two developments appear already clearly positive and promising. First, of course, the Synod is only the beginning of a long and arduous process until the Catholic Church may be said to have developed a body of teachings and moral doctrines in response to the modern gender question – one as elaborate and complex as the one that it developed on the social question over the course of a long century. This body of teachings will need to be a “catholic” one that balances the universality and the particularity of the Church and which has been developed through episcopal collegial consultation in a way that addresses the tremendous and rich pluralism of the global Church. That means, and this is equally positive, that the process will need to be as catholic and universal as possible.

Observing, documenting, and studying how the global Catholic Church engages a collegial and fruitful dialogue on hotly controversial issues such as gender, while maintaining unity with the Bishop of Rome in the essentials of the Christian doctrine, will be fascinating in the years ahead. Much will turn on whether the global Church manages to embrace its internal pluralism, preserve charity in all things, and interact with the world around it in a spirit of humility and service.





# ***The Church in a World of Options***

**HANS JOAS\***

A lack of public attention is not what the Catholic Church should currently complain about. Unfortunately, not all that attention is benevolent, and despite the overwhelmingly positive reactions to the personal style and first pronouncements of Pope Francis in the media worldwide, we Catholics have good reasons to remain cautious. We are all familiar with the sudden reversals in popularity many public figures have experienced. Shortly before the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI there was talk of a very serious crisis of the Church. Some even used the sexual abuse scandals, indications of corruption in the Church, and a widespread feeling of institutional stagnation to claim that the Church is at least approaching its most profound crisis since the Reformation. This should not be taken literally. From my – German – perspective, other phases in history like the secularization of 1803, Bismarck's attempts to suppress the Catholic Church in the 1870s, the rule of Nazism 1933-45 and of Communism in one part of Germany until 1989 and, of course, the far-reaching alienation between the Church and the liberal bourgeoisie or the Social Democratic labor movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries deserve the label "crisis" more and make us hesitate to accept exaggerations. Others, from Mexico to China, will refer to their own histories in a similar way. But nevertheless there can be no doubt that, indeed, we are in a situation in which a serious new reflection on the Church is needed.

This new reflection has to be both theological and social-scientific. As we all know, the cooperation of theologians and social scientists has not always been easy; the social sciences are not regularly part of the educational profile of Churchmen, and many theologians remain sceptical because they see the social sciences as

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\* *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin* (Germany).

driven by secularizing views and impulses. In that sense they may still find plausible the way Leo Tolstoy put it in a satirical piece of 1903 “The Restoration of Hell.” There we hear a devil in hell boasting of having invented the new discipline of sociology to draw men away from the teachings of Jesus: “I impress on them (...) that all religious teaching, including the teaching of Jesus, is an error and a superstition, and that they can ascertain how they ought to live from the science I have devised for them called sociology, which consists in studying how former people lived badly.”<sup>1</sup> José Casanova’s masterful presentation<sup>2</sup> has already demonstrated that sociology can play a fruitful role in the debates of the Church, and I hope that I can add further aspects to the picture without repeating too much from what José has already said.

José Casanova and I certainly share the enthusiasm for certain documents of the Second Vatican Council concerning the self-understanding of the Church in the contemporary world, from *Lumen Gentium* to *Gaudium et Spes*, including *Dignitatis Humanae* and *Nostra Aetate*. But when we refer to these documents today, half a century after the time when they were drafted, we cannot evade answering the question of why the reality of the Church today to a large extent differs from what was articulated and promised in these documents. Our enthusiasm for the Council may be an expression of our desperation about much of what happened since the Council, and as social scientists we have to develop an explanation for the discrepancies between the spirit of the Council and the hard realities of the Church or the world in which it finds itself. One possible explanation is that the Council itself failed to translate its vision of the Church into a clear and feasible program of institutional reform. The sociology of organizations teaches us, however, that institutional structures and their inertia easily resist lofty declarations and tend to restabilize themselves after phases of turmoil or even roll

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<sup>1</sup> Leo TOLSTOY, *The Restoration of Hell* (1903), in L. T., *On Life and Essays on Religion*. Oxford, 1934, pp. 309-330, here 326.

<sup>2</sup> José CASANOVA, *A Catholic Church in a Global Secular World*, here above in pp. 65-81.

back what came up in such an exceptional phase. This explanation receives support from one of the best sociological studies on Vatican II, the book by Melissa Wilde,<sup>3</sup> that describes the Council as a process in which unexpectedly a kind of “collective effervescence” (Durkheim) set in, a creative and shared enthusiasm of the assembly, theologically interpreted as the operating of the Holy Spirit. The documents are the products of this process, but the defeated minority did not necessarily give up its resistance to them after the end of the Council. A more radical explanation sees the documents themselves not as completely unambiguous. Not only their theological and philosophical vocabulary, also the visions of the Church and the views of the “secular” world would then themselves have to be clarified today. Given the fact that the Council was indeed a process with unexpected results, it would be surprising if there were no inconsistencies and vague passages in these texts. Moreover, the strong pressure to present new things not as new, but as being in continuity with the tradition of the Church and to avoid the impression of rupture with, for example, the highly centralized, hierarchical, and dogmatically anti-modern Church of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, made it very difficult for the Council to become a guideline for later developments. The empirical fact that there has always been an interaction between moral developments and the teachings of the Church – an interaction, not a determination in only one direction – still has to be recognized and respected in the self-understanding of a Church that is willing to learn from the world.

For me personally, therefore, a double movement is necessary. We have to be more specific and explicit with regard to the social-scientific understanding of the Church and the contemporary world, on the one hand, and on the other hand, we have to go back to the characterization of the Church in the early statements of the Christian faith as we find it, for example, in the Nicene Creed. These early characterizations had four dimensions: the Church was declared to be “*una sancta catholica et apostolica*.” By calling itself “one,” long

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<sup>3</sup> Melissa J. WILDE, *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*. Princeton, 2007.

before mankind developed a geographically correct knowledge of the globe and a full understanding of the varieties of civilizations and political orders in the world, the Church developed a vision of all human beings brought together in one spirit. As, for example, the German Cardinal Karl Lehmann<sup>4</sup> has written, this unity is not only a vision, but always already a reality when, despite all real and potential divisions, Jesus Christ remains the common point of orientation for all Christians wherever and however they live. Such unity should, however, not be misunderstood as uniformity; on the contrary, pressures toward uniformity will necessarily endanger unity.

Sanctity or “holiness” of the Church does not mean that the Church is an institution that is released from the human condition of sinfulness. And this is true not only for all individuals, but also for the institution itself. All members of the clergy including the Pope are sinners, and while the Church is or should be an attempt to realize on earth what can never be fully realized here, sacredness remains an inspiration and a normative yardstick, but must not be turned into self-sacralization. Self-sacralization is a constant danger of all human institutions, and the idea of a “reason of the Church” in analogy to the “raison d’état” prevents the institution from judging itself by the same high standards it uses with regard to others. Instead of being triumphalist, the Church has to remain humble if it takes its mission seriously.

“Una sancta *catholica et apostolica*.” The Catholicity of the Church emphasizes its attempt to liberate itself from all cultural and national particularities, although not in the direction of a rational universalism, but in the sense of a deep respect for cultural diversity coupled with an emphasis on the penetration of all cultures by the Christian message of salvation. A universalism that is not disconnected from the inherent particularity of all culture – that could be a contemporary paraphrase of what “catholic” intends to mean.

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<sup>4</sup> Cardinal Karl LEHMANN, “Catholic Christianity,” in Hans JOAS and Klaus WIEGANDT (eds.), *Secularization and the World Religions*. Liverpool, 2009, pp. 23-45, particularly 26-30.

Finally, the “Apostolic” character of the Church, although referring to the Apostles of Jesus Christ, is, above all, a call to continue the mission. It is the counter-notion to a self-referential church, the emphasis on a goal outside that lies not in a transcendent dimension alone, but in the human beings of the world.

A Church that is missionary, non-triumphalist in its self-image and historical views, and aiming at a concrete universalism – that is in my eyes the lesson that can be drawn from such a renewed reflection on the early statements of our faith. This must serve as the normative yardstick for our sociological analysis of the role of the Church in the world and of its institutional structures. In the following I will very briefly point to a few main features of what I consider a relevant sociological diagnosis of our time and then draw a few conclusions from such an analysis for what Christians and the Church have to take into account in our time.

The crucial term in my analysis of the contemporary situation is the word *option*. I rely on two great religious thinkers when I make that claim, on Charles Taylor and on William James. The main accomplishment in Charles Taylor’s monumental work *A Secular Age*<sup>5</sup> is to have studied the rise of a so-called secular option, chiefly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in light of its prehistory, enforcement, and impact. Taylor makes clear that the rise of this secular option entails a fundamental shift in the preconditions for faith. Ever since this shift, believers have had to justify their particular faith, such as the Christian, not just as a specific confession or with respect to other religions, but also as such, as faith per se – vis-à-vis a lack of faith that was initially legitimized as a possibility and then, as I argue with regard to some countries and milieus, even *normalized*. Of course, the rise of the secular option as such should not be understood as the cause of secularization, but it does establish it as a possibility. In the first instance, then, the optionality of faith arises from the fact that it has in principle become possible not to believe. Subsequently, under the conditions of religious pluralism, this optionality has become

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<sup>5</sup> Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass., 2007.

even stronger. But here we need conceptual distinctions originally introduced by William James in his influential article “The Will to Believe.” Options, James said, “may be of several kinds. They may be: 1. living or dead; 2. forced or avoidable; 3. momentous or trivial; and for our purposes we may call an option a *genuine* option when it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.”<sup>6</sup> I restrict myself here to the first element of this definition of a genuine option. “A living option is one in which hypotheses are live ones. If I say to you: “Be a theosophist or a Mohammedan,” it is probably a dead option, because for you neither hypothesis is likely to be alive. But if I say: “Be an agnostic or be a Christian,” it is otherwise: trained as you are; each hypothesis makes some appeal, however small, to your belief.”<sup>7</sup> This distinction seems to me to be extremely relevant for the understanding of what one may call *genuine pluralism*. If, as in many European societies, a Muslim minority lives together with a Christian or agnostic majority, where the majority does not feel attracted to Islam nor the minority to the religious or secular views of the majority, this would then not be genuine pluralism. There were many such cases of a mere coexistence of different faiths in the past, and such a mere coexistence of a plurality of faiths would have to be distinguished from a genuine pluralism in which people of one orientation can indeed at least imagine to be attracted by a competing worldview. The precise extent to which faith has indeed become an option in this sense in different countries or milieus is, of course, an empirical question. But I think it safe to say that in contemporary Europe most Christian believers are constantly confronted with the option of a secular worldview and, moreover, that in the traditionally biconfessional societies of central Europe we can observe not only a shrinking of confessional milieus, but also indications of a transconfessional Christian milieu that is beginning to emerge. The institutional differences between the Christian churches are no longer mirrored in the division of families, friend-

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<sup>6</sup> William JAMES, *The Will to Believe*. New York, 1905, pp. 1-31, here 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

ship networks, and sociocultural milieus. It is noteworthy that there are comparable developments in the United States.<sup>8</sup> Individuals are paying less and less attention to theological differences, particularly between the different forms of Protestantism, while individuals' political and moral affinities with particular religious communities are proving decisive to their appeal.<sup>9</sup> The majority of new marriages today are *interfaith*.<sup>10</sup> The religious landscape of the U.S. is constantly changing as a result of the emergence of new Christian churches that cannot be assigned to any major historical denomination.

But the significance of *optionality* is not restricted to the religious field. There are numerous sociological analyses of how people in "Western" societies experience the optionality of their most important social relations: friendship, love, family, but also, for example, of their professional careers or political affiliations. I cannot go into any detail here. Suffice it to say that this observable increase of options may lead to a situation where people are stretched to the breaking point. Crises of orientation, enduring confusion, and indignation may stunt the capacity for judgment or even lead to the aggressive elimination of options.<sup>11</sup> This is not a necessary consequence, though. We are all familiar with contingency-adapted forms of commitment, for example to lovers and children. When fixed gender and generational roles are dissolved, behavioral insecurity may occur, but it is also possible that partners change the ways they interact with one another and their children. As early as 1945 the Chicago sociologist Ernest Burgess tried to capture this change when he referred to a shift "from institution to companionship."<sup>12</sup> In this process, the effort involved in coordination and discussion has to increase, and individuals have to become more sensitive to

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<sup>8</sup> See Hans JOAS, *Faith as an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity*. Stanford, 2014, pp. 116-125.

<sup>9</sup> Robert WUTHNOW, *The Restructuring of American Religion*. Princeton, 1988.

<sup>10</sup> Robert PUTNAM and David CAMPBELL, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. New York, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> See JOAS, *Faith as an Option*, pp. 78-91.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest W. BURGESS, *The Family: From Institution to Companionship*. New York, 1945.



the nature of a given situation and to others' needs. These abilities compensate for the loss of "static" stability and potentially generate a more elevated, "dynamic" form of stability.

We are living today, therefore, in a world of options. But this is true in another sense as well, not only with regard to the great number of options we encounter in the world, but also with regard to the ever more intense process of globalization. Perhaps the most important sociological trend regarding Christianity today is the enormous globalization of Christianity itself. Serious observers (like Philip Jenkins)<sup>13</sup> speak of our time not as an age of secularization but as one of the most intense phases of the expansion of Christianity in history. This expansion partly has demographic reasons (=rapid growth of the population in some Christian countries), but that is not the whole story. There are also some impressive success stories of mass conversion to Christianity in Africa, but also in South Korea and parts of China. Through migration and a fundamental shift in the geography of power outside and within the churches this will rather sooner than later affect Christians in Europe and North America in many ways.

All these processes that can be described by historians and sociologists of religion have enormous intellectual, for example theological, implications. One of the first thinkers to realize this was Karl Rahner. In a retrospective article on Vatican II originally published in 1979<sup>14</sup> the great theologian who had been deeply involved in the drafting of the Council documents, already recognized that the Council constituted a "qualitative leap," as he said, for the Catholic Church on its way to truly becoming a World Church. What it has always been in potentia, it is now becoming in actu, he wrote. One of the reasons why the Council led to the experience of collective effervescence clearly seems to have been the intensity of the mutual

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<sup>13</sup> Philip JENKINS, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*. Oxford, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Karl RAHNER, "Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," in Karl RAHNER, *Schriften zur Theologie*. Bd. XIV. Köln, 1980, pp. 287-302.

encounter of bishops and theologians from all over the world. Rahner saw this as the beginning – and not more than the beginning – of a totally new phase in the history of the Church, comparable for him only to the “radical new creation” of Saint Paul when he transcended the limitations of a Jewish religious sect and turned Christianity into a magnet for people from the whole mediterranean world of his time. More than even Rahner might have anticipated this leads to a new constellation of “genuine pluralism” in large parts of the world. Christianity is becoming a living option for people for whom it was either not available before or tainted by the missionary activities of colonial powers. But for the Christians in Asia the long intellectual and religious traditions of their own civilizations also remain living options. In the words of Cambridge church historian David Thompson:<sup>15</sup> “Asian Christians have therefore sought to understand all world faiths as being in some way vehicles of God’s self-revelation: in this respect they asked questions similar to those asked by western missionaries. Almost inevitably this has raised questions about Christology (...). Comparisons between Jesus and Krishna or Buddha seem to require abandonment of any Christian claim that God is uniquely revealed in Jesus Christ. This in turn raises the question of whether Christianity was distorted as it was expressed in Hellenic culture.” While these questions are not new, they are now posed in non-European contexts in new and challenging ways.

The two main new constellations of optionality I have briefly sketched here: the confrontation of the Christian faith with widespread irreligion in Europe and a few other countries outside Europe and with Asian and African cultural traditions in other continents have a striking similarity. They both undermine the fusion of the Christian faith with particular European cultural traditions. I am deeply interested in investigating what this means for a contempo-

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<sup>15</sup> David M. THOMPSON, “Introduction: Mapping Asian Christianity in the Context of World Christianity,” in Sebastian C. H. KIM (ed.), *Christian Theology in Asia*. Cambridge, 2008, pp. 3-21, here 13 f.

rary rearticulation of the Christian faith. All theologies that do not take seriously these challenges seem to me obsolete. But I will not go into these intellectual challenges for Christianity here.<sup>16</sup> They certainly force us to speak in a new language, not in the linguistic sense, of course, but in ways that are based on distancing oneself from a traditional idiom and permeated with an understanding of other civilizations and of the achievements of secular worldviews. They also force us to “elementarize” the faith, as the East German bishop Joachim Wanke put it, to take the hierarchies of truth in the Christian faith very seriously.<sup>17</sup>

Instead of elaborating on these intellectual challenges for contemporary Christianity, I will conclude with a short sociological reflection on the Church as an institutional structure. In the course of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mostly Protestant church historians began to integrate insights from the emergent discipline of sociology in their research, and around 1900 some of the greatest figures in sociology began to investigate which forms of social organization were created out of the spirit of religious innovations. Max Weber distinguished between two main types of religious organization in Christianity, the church and the sect; his friend and rival Ernst Troeltsch introduced a third form called mysticism or individual spirituality. They did not consider the types they described as exclusive. When discussing the Salvation Army, for example, Troeltsch clearly was sensitive to further types – the army as model for a religious organization. There are four reasons why these attempts are relevant for the contemporary situation in which we discuss the possibilities for a renewal of the Catholic Church “in a secular age.” The first reason is that the typology of Christian churches and groups here is not simply an attempt to develop a classification. It is much more ambitious, namely an attempt to study institutions by putting them back into their *status nascendi*.

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<sup>16</sup> H. JOAS, *Faith as an Option*, pp. 126-138.

<sup>17</sup> Bischof Joachim WANKE, “Wie heute von Gott sprechen, ... im nichtchristlichen Umfeld.” Vortrag, München St. Bonifaz, 27. März 2012 (manuscript).

We should not take the existence of the Church for granted, but recognize how improbable its emergence and growth were. The second reason is that these sociologists of religion took the plurality of Christian religious organizations seriously, and this in a value-free manner. They did not treat sects or the formation of spiritual communities as aberrations from the path of the only saving Church nor did they like the sectarian tradition condemn the Church as necessarily corrupt, decadent, authoritarian or whatever. All these organizations have, according to Troeltsch, their own “sociological logic.” This also implies that they denied (my third reason) a historical teleology in the direction of one of these main types. They do not assume that the Church will definitely defeat the stricter organizations based on voluntary membership (“sects”) or the tendencies toward religious individualization,<sup>18</sup> but they see an interplay of these organizations, new developments in one direction as reactions against developments in the other direction, and individual biographical trajectories leading through different types of Christian religious organizations. And, fourth reason, Max Weber and in our time Robert Bellah open our eyes for the parallels between the emergence of the Christian Church and the institutional innovations brought about by the other religions based on the innovations of the Axial Age. All these religions have a certain potential for a utopian order that they preserve in special types of institutions, “relaxed fields within the ‘gentle violence’ of established social orders and sometimes the not so gentle violence in times of political turmoil.”<sup>19</sup> In India, the tradition was carried by the hereditary caste of the Brahmins, while the Buddhists invented monasticism and the ancient Greeks and Chinese philosophical *schools*. The dialogue between such a historico-sociolog-

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<sup>18</sup> Ernst TROELTSCH, *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen*. Tübingen 1912. The interesting book by Rainer Bucher suffers from the tendency to connect organizational types and historical phases too closely. See Rainer BUCHER, ... *wenn nichts bleibt, wie es war: Zur prekären Zukunft der katholischen Kirche*. Würzburg, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Robert N. BELLAH, *Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age*. Cambridge, Mass., 2011, p. 596.

ical analysis of the Church or of the history of Christianity in general with the theological self-interpretation of the Church seems to me to be a pressing task in this “world of options.”

This task is all the more pressing since a number of easily available interpretative patterns of the Church have lost their plausibility. The Church cannot simply become a membership organization nor should it be imagined as a quasi-state. Charles Taylor has taken up ideas from Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar and spoken of the Church as – at least potentially – a “network of agape.” I agree that the ethos of love has to be the guiding idea and that the idea of a network could be attractive as an antidote to the hierarchical centralization of a quasi-state. But perhaps the most fruitful idea so far is the idea of a synthesis of the main types of social organization from the history of Christianity. We have to preserve the universalism of the Church, but integrate into it the pluralism of the voluntary organization that energizes the sects. And this renewed Church ought to be experienced by the individual believers not as an impediment for individual spiritual development as it unfortunately often is, but as enabling such development. That at least was the perspective of Ernst Troeltsch with whose characterization of Catholicism I would like to conclude: “Catholicism is not the miracle of rigid consistency as which it has often been considered. From its beginning on it has been an infinitely complicated system full of contradictions that has again and again in ever new ways attempted to combine fantastic popular religion and philosophical dogma, revolutionary individualism and absolute authority, profane cultural techniques and otherworldly asceticism, lively laymanship and priestly domination – a masterpiece of mediation that created in church authority only the ultimate regulator for the cases in which these mediations lead to frictions and a lack of clarity.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ernst TROELTSCH, “Modernismus,” in *Die Neue Rundschau* 2 (1909), pp. 456-481. Here quoted after Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften II*. Tübingen, 1913, pp. 52 f. (abbreviated translation H.J.).

# **Secularization: An Invitation to Deeper Search and More Intense Dialogue**

**THOMAS MENAMPARAMPIL\***

## **1. Secular Values in Asia**

*[It is everyone's duty] to recognize and satisfy the right of all to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination of race, sex, nation, religion or social condition (GS 60).*

In Asia the word “Secular” has a positive connotation. The Christian minority in particular greatly appreciates the value of a secular polity for its religious neutrality. They long for a secular Government, by which they do not mean a Government that denies spiritual values or persecutes religious believers, but one that deals with all religious communities with equal respect and extends *protection to minority* religious groups.

In India that precisely is the meaning of the word ‘secular’, being non-sectarian, non partisan, neutral, equally supportive all religions, progressive, liberal, and open-minded. When Indians say that theirs is a secular State what they generally mean is that their Constitution believes in democracy, equality before the law, separation of Church and State, right to participation in decision-making, freedom of expression, equal access to human rights and economic opportunities.

Secular values are most important for Asian societies to ensure equality to all communities in respect of freedom, opportunity and development. The fact, of course, is that many countries that claim to be Secular, act in a biased manner towards their religious minorities. But the ideal still remains.

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\* *Catholic Diocese of Guwahati (India).*

In the same way, Asians have appreciated their exposure to Western thinking, Secular values, scientific attitudes, liberal political styles, and productive economic skills, which have helped them to modernize themselves and make themselves self-reliant. Western education has been widely welcomed from the beginning, which provided most Asian nations with leaders who were able to take the destinies of their countries into their own hands.

## 2. Fundamentalism as a Reaction

*The fundamentalists teach us one thing. Memory is important. One of the chief characteristics of modern societies is that they are no longer societies of memory (Hervieu-Léger 2000: 123). Fundamentalists affirm that cultural and religious amnesia will not be helpful (Aldridge 2007: 99).*

Access to Western thought also brought Secular ideologies to Asian societies, ideologies that ignored or even denied spiritual values and professed either dialectical materialism or capitalistic materialism... occasionally of the extreme type. Today, with the global economy reducing most members of society merely to the level of producers and consumers and drawing their attention away from inherited beliefs and lifestyles with an offer of abundant consumer goods, the worldview of the masses is fast changing, particularly at urban centres.

However, in societies that have preserved cohesion based on caste, culture, ethnicity or religion, there is sturdy resistance to change and an eagerness to ensure continuity in traditions, more especially in rural areas. In spite of that, with both education and the mass media placing themselves at the service of the Global Economy that has profit-making as its sole goal, religious and ethical values have come under severe strain.

Thus a tension has arisen between the two outlooks: one, materialistic, to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the New Economy; and the other, religious, expressing itself in traditional forms, but with greater ardor. There is a section of society on either

side that exaggerates and provokes each other to further exaggeration. Not many have taken it as their mission to bring the two groups together.

The section that exaggerates their religious fervor is called Fundamentalist, whether it be due to their literal interpretation of sacred texts, expression of fanatic loyalty to their own community, unwillingness to listen to other points of view including the proposals of modernity and science, manifestation of attitudes that are exclusive, authoritarian, and repressive; or most of all due to their hostility to other communities to the point of violence. Most people see the fundamentalist stance as irrational and unacceptable, especially after they have publicly chosen to adopt violence as their chief means of communication to convince people.

### 3. Fundamentalism-related Tensions

*If one closes eyes to 'rational' causes of terrorism, it is irrationality (Lott: 22).*

Speaking about Fundamentalism, we have to assume today a global responsibility. Condemning the wrongdoer is insufficient. Being helpful is what is really needed. Usually what happens in society is that one exaggeration invites another. Banishment of religion from more and more areas of social life created a sense of insecurity in the hearts of many. The ridiculing of religious beliefs publicly and the trivializing of religious symbols hurt the sentiments of millions of people round the world. Anger kept rising. Any slight provocation was enough to cause an explosion. Freedom of expression does not include the freedom to wound other people's feelings in their most sensitive area. One cannot forget that Eastern sensitivities are more particularly in the area of religion. When these are added to colonial memories and a perception of being taken advantage of through political interference or economic exploitation, grievances get accumulated. Troubles are bound to come.

Those who actually collide are people who pride themselves in taking radical positions, but those who suffer are ordinary people.



Those who exaggerate on either side move away from reasonable positions, and gradually emotions take over. This is a moment for perceptive, balanced and sensitive people on both sides to study the historical and psycho-social reasons for the emergence of fundamentalist radicalism in modern times, take note of the emotional content of what is being said and done by the parties concerned, attempt bringing down anger by making an effort to remove some of the causes, and engage them in a dialogue after the emotions are down. Certainly a surrender to negative emotions is not helpful to anyone. Reason and Religion must enter into a helpful conversation, avoiding exaggerations, and reducing possibilities of tension.

#### **4. Religion as Depth and Egolessness**

*From faith springs a passion for the eternal, which is even stronger than love. Many of us have lost that passion or have never known it (Chopra: 5).*

While Asians greatly differ in religious expressions, they seem to agree on one thing: that Religion has something to do with Depth and Egolessness. If these are absent, no matter how beautiful the teachings and how impressive the organization, something central is missing. In fact, these are values that all humans need to remain human and society needs to hold together as a society. Human beings cease to be human if they lose touch with the deeper dimensions of their inner being, and a society ceases to function in the absence of a measure of concern for each other. Humanity cannot do without these qualities at least in some measure. That is why predictions that religion is going to die out in a few generations do not make sense to Asians. They consider it an ethnocentric assertion. For them Religion is as real as life. The Divine is always present.

Depth means here not intellectual sharpness or contemplative abstruseness, but an ability to search into one's inner identity for one's self-realization and perfection, and consequent desire for reaching out to a Higher Order, which generates inner consistency, coherence, convictions and commitment. In this sense the

understanding of a farmer may be as Deep as that of a philosopher. Maybe, the farmer would see in the Higher Order a personal God, and the philosophically inclined person an un-definable Energy, a subtle Spiritual Force. But a journey to this destination is always one of depth.

Egolessness may be described in terms of renunciation, but in day-to-day life it is expressed in concern for others, at times even to the point of self-forgetfulness; altruism in general, generosity, and readiness to take trouble for the common good. So if superficiality and self-interest are too evident in a community, Asians would find it hard to recognize Religion there, even if doctrines, structures, activities are formidable. This may call for self-examination on the part of many religious organizations in the present context. In Mother Teresa Asian society observed precisely depth and egolessness. In her they saw Religion in the most convincing form, and all claimed her as their own, even though she was of foreign origin and belonged to a minority community.

## **5. Hindu Depth Helped and Alien Domination**

*Loneliness is the natural result of feeling empty inside; the cure is inner fullness (Chopra: 80).*

Asians would not look at the rejecting of certain external expressions of Religion as rejection of Religion itself, nor would they see serious threat in the denial of entitlements and privileges to religious personnel, devaluing of religious practices, or even a fall in religious attendance. In these they would see a self-questioning attitude in society and a call for depth. When those questions will be answered in due time and convictions deepened, many precious dimensions of Religion will reveal themselves which were never perceived before. And we shall look on a new face of religion that we never dreamt of.

Hindu society, not having lived under any constituted religious authority that could impose teachings or decisions, did not develop complexes against their religious teachers as Christians seem to be

often doing. They never needed to contest them if they differed. Their loyalty was to their own identity, their own inner depth. And that kept them faithful. Even though they lived for nearly seven centuries under Islamic rule, they succeeded to preserve their original identity, precisely because they gave importance to their depth.

While great civilizations like those of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, and Persians surrendered their original identity to Islam, Hindus remained true to their self, because even in their helplessness they were confident of their inner assets. Hence, it is not likely that they will surrender to the forces of secularization today.

## 6. Secularization as a Global Phenomenon

*What separates me from most so-called atheists is a feeling of utter humility toward the unattainable secrets of the harmony of the cosmos*  
(A. Einstein).

As a world phenomenon, secularization deserves and needs to be studied. We notice that God is marginalized in the economic, political, educational, professional, and recreational spaces of modern society. Most people today live merely by what appeals to their good sense in their own respective sphere of activity. Every religion is under stress, seriously challenged by secular ideologies. The latter are fast replacing the former. And a conviction is growing in many places that the present trend of secularization is irreversible. There are too many prophets of doom. More than a century ago Søren Kierkegaard had said “Christendom has done away with Christianity, without being quite aware of it. The consequence is that, if anything is to be done, one must try again to introduce Christianity into Christendom” (S. Kierkegaard 1941: 39). It is no longer religious faith that provides a worldview to most Moderns, but Secular ideologies. Unbelief dominates entire societies more particularly in the West, unbelief controls most of intellectual life.

It is not that the phenomenon of a Secular and materialistic outlook is totally new in human history. In India there were the Charvakas and in Greece the Epicureans. Various versions of ratio-

nalism and secular humanism have existed also in earlier eras. However, in our times, with general education, more doubts are being raised and more uncertainties expressed than ever before, and a secular vision seeks to enter into every area of human activities. There are some intellectuals who strongly believe that “many developing and non-developing countries are only three generations away from the first serious encounter with the modern” (Bruce 2011: 182), meaning that they shall soon be learning to do without religion.

There are reasons for worry. History has often taken humanity by surprise. Remember, for example, that in the year 650 there were 440 dioceses in Anatolia. Where are they now? In 1914, 40% of the area covered by Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey was Christian, today less than 2%. One third of displaced Palestinians were Christians (Bruce 2011: 191). But what has happened to these communities? Will what happened to the Christians in the Ottoman Empire happen to the Christians of Africa and Asia? (Elst 2001: 373). Will faith-fatigue in the West lead to a secular option? Will secularization swallow up believers of all other religions as well in due course? Is there something that can be done by believers before it is too late?

## **7. On the History of Secularization**

*Secularization is the effort, in itself just and legitimate and in no way incompatible with faith or religion, to discover in creation, in each thing or each happening in the universe, the laws that regulate them with a certain autonomy, but with the inner conviction that the Creator has placed these laws there (Evangelii nuntiandi, 55).*

Many scholars hold that the present Western thrust towards secularization derives from Aristotle’s concept of the independence of human reason introduced to Europe through Thomas Aquinas. Thomas’ contention that philosophy has its own autonomy because it belongs to the natural order, set in motion a gradual shift from the prevalent theological abstractions to rational analysis and scientific research. “From such beginnings arise the intellectual search of later middle ages and the Renaissance period, the idea of the ‘natural man

and free citizen', and the urge for technical invention, material prosperity, trade crafts, investment, banking" (Küng 2007: 383). Modern society is proud of these achievements, towards which the Christian community has made not a small contribution.

We need not go into the details of the Reformation's rejection of religious authority, the French Revolution's development of a secular vision, the Industrial Revolution's shift of emphasis to mechanization of production and rationalization of economy; the spread of diverse ideas on religion like, religion as alienation, a natural instinct for softening painful realities, plain escapism; a useful emotion, a search for solace and inwardness; Karl Marx's view of religion as the opium of oppressed people, Sigmund Freud's as a psychological illusion. All of these perspectives introduced some useful insight in their own times and their own contexts, and helped in some measure the self-understanding of human beings and their longing for freedom and betterment. But evidently they exaggerated.

Church leaders in particular had the anxiety of taking along with them the less enlightened and more conservative crowds of believers. Their cautious approach to new thinking made them look more traditional than they actually were. But the apparent conservatism of the clergy was interpreted by the rest of society as resistance to progressive ideas and unwillingness to change. This perception drove a large number of lay people to the camp of the progressives and liberals. Wherever, in addition, Church leaders seemed too closely linked to the dominant regime, the progressives became anti-clerical or more and more hostile.

## **8. Consequences of Radical Secularization**

John Paul II: *"Among the troubling indications of the loss of a Christian memory are the inner emptiness that grips many people and the loss of the meaning in life"* (Collins: 143).

Not only were the teachings of the Church discarded one by one, but every new insight that dawned in the mind of man was accepted in haste, tried out without reflection, and taken to the extreme:

Marxism, liberalism, libertinism, collectivism, individualism, atheism, rare forms of mysticism, agnosticism, syncretism, fundamentalism, and relativism (Jankunas 2011: 190). Since by now society accepted no ultimate reference point, e.g. the Pope as it would have been for the Catholics, Bible for the Protestants, antiquity for Renaissance society, reason for the Moderns, many people moved almost unconsciously from a personal God to an impersonal reality, then to exclusive humanism (Taylor 2007: 257), and many to crass materialism and even total meaninglessness.

There were reactions. Just as the proponents of Modernist concepts had questioned Religious authorities and certitudes at one stage of history, Postmodernism began to question reason itself at the next stage of human self-understanding. Limitations of a purely rational approach to social thinking and state-planning became evident during the great tragedies of last century: Revolutions, World Wars, Holocaust, Hiroshima, ethnic cleansings. It became evident that ‘Reason alone’ cannot be trusted, any more than ‘Bible alone’. Finally, then, when all authorities seemed to fail one after the other, the ultimate authority remained the ‘self’. Every person becomes a law unto himself/herself. Intellectual truths and ethical principles are held to the extent that they suit one’s ‘self’.

## **9. The Impact of 9/11**

*For the Enlightenment would be utter blindness if it were to assume that with a few centuries of criticism of the content of religion, it could destroy a yearning that has dominated humanity from the first stirrings of its history, from the most primitive indigenous people to the supreme heights of culture (Simmel 1997: 9).*

The shock that went through the world on September 11, 2001 stirred a religious instinct that had gone dead in the West for a long time. People the world over were awakened all of a sudden to an awareness of what Religion meant to a significant section of humanity, even though it was expressed in the crudest way possible. The skeptical section of the human family all of a sudden came face

to face with the section that was radically loyal to their faith. Referring to the tragedy of the Twin Towers (11/7/01), Jürgen Habermas, an eloquent spokesperson for Secular thinking, admitted that “The secular society acquires a new understanding of religious convictions...” (Ratzinger and Habermas, *The Dialectics of Secularization*, 11-12). Several prominent European figures sent out similar signals, like Norberto Bobbio, Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas (Jankunas 2011: 318).

We wish, however, that this loyalty to Religion was expressed in ways that were more true to genuine religious teachings, not through the violence of September 11. Interestingly, Uma Bharati, a maverick Hindutva leader, was once asked how we should deal with religious violence. She did not suggest less of religion as a solution, but more of Genuine Religion. True Religion is then the answer to fundamentalism. Similarly, when Khuswant Singh, who was known as a pronouncedly Secular intellectual in India, was asked how to tackle corruption that had become so widespread in society, his reply was that solution lay with the ‘right sort of religion’, a religion that transformed persons and societies.

## 10. People are Looking for Answers

*Talcott Parsons says that religion has lost the functions it once had – in education, the legal system, political order, etc. ...The shedding of secondary functions, however, does not mean that religion ... has declined. Rather, religions have been liberated. Religions’ primary function is to address the problems of meaning in adult life (Aldridge: 107).*

Religion is not dead. It is alive. It still moves millions. It is good to awaken ourselves to a consciousness that a secular worldview has its own limitations. Habermas frankly admits that one may need the aid of religion to provide motivation for the observance of healthy social norms. He concedes that the secular society can learn a lot from Religion, especially with regard to the concepts of good and evil (Jankunas 2011: 184-85).

In the face of increasing violence in society, confrontational attitudes, materialistic outlook, selfishness, crime, breakdown of

families, divorce, venereal diseases, drugs, people are looking for answers (Edwards 1997: 595). It is true that the rising generation finds it difficult to accept dogmatic positions on anything, whether they be in the field of philosophy, religion or ideology. They chafe under imposed codes of conduct and refuse to listen to readymade answers to complex questions. But they are attentive to spontaneous and natural expressions of faith.

The main advantage of the liberal society that secular neutrality has created is that every opinion has a chance to express itself. Jesus' Message too finds it possible to make itself heard. Thus we see that new problems also bring with them their own solutions. In the same way, new trends in society soon enough manifest their limitations as well. For example, while people claim that absolute individualism is on the rise, in reality even the most individualistic individuals cannot afford to ignore the basic assumptions of their own culture and community nor of the peer group to which they belong (Edwards 1997: 593-594). It is the common ground into which an evangelizer too has an entry.

## 11. The Deep Past Cannot Be Wished Away

*There is something eternal in religion which is destined to survive all the particular religious symbols in which religious thought has successively enveloped itself (Durkheim 1915: 427).*

After the collapse of the great Roman society, there arose humble faith-led Christian communities rescuing all that was worthwhile in the earlier civilization with the sense of dedication that their religious faith inspired. The very values that had built up the Roman civilization had disappeared. But the Deep Past cannot be just brushed away; it clings to a society like its core identity. The challenge of the reconstruction of the fragmented post-Roman society was taken up by the disciples of St. Benedict. They formed the creative minority that gave themselves to the mission of salvaging all that was precious in the vanishing civilization with the sturdiness that their Christian



Faith supplied. What was possible for them should be possible for the creative Christian minority today as well. (Edwards 1997: 595).

On careful reflection we realize that most of our daily life and relationships are constructed on mutual trust. It is impossible for us to test and verify every event in our life or every statement that we hear at every instance. Life would be unthinkable without mutual confidence and dependence. Trusting in God is not something different. Every path, including the path of reason, calls at some stage for a 'leap of faith' (Taylor 2007: 550). An objective appreciation of the worth of reason itself calls for a 'leap of faith'. The theory of relativity or of quantum mechanics ultimately does not point to certainties, but to wonder!

## 12. Rediscovering New Depths in Oneself

*Religions are being reconfigured and revitalized* (Karner and Aldridge 2004).

But what is most interesting is the fact that there is no argument against reality. That is what makes outright atheists wonder in helplessness when new forms of Faith emerge. They forget that neither historical nor anthropological studies have revealed any society without religion. Belief and unbelief have often existed side by side and contended for a while (Taylor 2007: 295), but belief has ultimately re-emerged.

A religious vacuum creates a hunger for God and is followed by a period of religious fervour. A little later, empty and lifeless religious forms lead to faith-fatigue, intense questioning, doubts, apparent rejection... and finally a re-discovery of religion and a deeper understanding of religious truths, and a return to renewed fervour. Adolescence passes away and adulthood arrives. The adolescent merely challenges; the adult chooses intelligently and decides responsibly. He decides for religion in the long run.

Empirical evidence establishes that the very religious experiences considered heavy, dull and uninspiring in one part of the world, are found excitingly beautiful in another. Christian Churches in Asia

and Africa are growing, despite opposition and persecution. Christian numbers in China keep running ahead of statistics. New Christians revel in traditional forms of prayer. They find inspiration and strength in age old teaching. There must be something valuable in religion, if it is found attractive in the most challenging situations. One thing we know: there is always admiration for what is genuinely good.

No wonder that the churches with deep attachment to the traditional values of faith keep growing (McManners 1993: 613); on the contrary, those that adapt to the standards of a materialistic society keep losing followers (Jankunas 2011: 178). People realize that shallow values trivialize life: they experience no depth, no grandeur, no challenge (Taylor 318). The fact that God remains invisible is not the main problem. After all, even ardent believers spoke of a 'hidden God'. Rather, rediscovering the depth that is hidden in the human person... that is the challenge... and that is possible. In fact, it is within reach.

But the most revealing information that Steve Bruce gives is that materialistic societies have fewer children and consequently their number is declining, while the proportion of religious believers in the world is growing (Bruce 2011: 195). The future then seems to belong to believers. It is for each one to decide where he/she likes to belong.

### **13. The Intersection of a Secular and a Faith Vision**

*Materialism is a mirage of deeper level quantum reality, one which surfaces in living systems, guiding consciousness and evolution. The 'Watchmaker' isn't blind. Dawkins is (Stuart Hameroff, Arizona).*

What an intelligent believer desires is not that the secular vision be banished from public life but that it relates with a faith vision in a stimulating manner. There may be moments of differences; however, there are also ways of narrowing differences which will offer them opportunities for gaining unforeseen insights and strength from each other. Criticism of religion can be helpful, but when it is expressed

in insensitive ways like those of Salmon Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* or the Danish Cartoons, they merely lead to painful consequences. Similarly, the approach of scholars like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, seeking not only to propagate atheism but also to humiliate believers, does not help. Maligning the opponent is not a noble mission.

After all, it is easy to write a 'Criminal History' of any particular religious group, nation, race, or philosophical persuasion. If wars were waged in the name of religion, so were they done in the name of national interests, values of civilization, ideologies favouring the oppressed, defense of Human Rights... all legitimate causes. Ultimately they all expressed the collective self-interest of communities (nations/societies) and pride of individuals, who invoked noble causes to further their own selfish interests.

Moreover, the failure of a few should not be attributed to all. Comparing the best in one's own tradition with the worst in another is unfair. Every tradition is best understood in its own context. Its internal functioning becomes intelligible mostly from within. Being judgmental from outside is not fair. Islamophobia is as unfair as Christianophobia, or a phobia of any new intelligent thinking.

We would invite every religious community and every secular thought to be open to normal criticism for its own benefit. For, what every tradition requires are not mere uncritical admirers but truthful friends. What is most important for everyone to cultivate is sensitivity in sensitive matters. What is held precious by millions deserve respect.

The criticism of religion by secularists need not always be considered denial of the value of Religion in itself, but a rejection of a number of external realities associated with religion: authorities, structures, teachings, institutions, observances, traditions, which appear incongruous. But the secularists will have to admit that even the most precious human values cannot do without external expressions and some form of institutional continuity in history.

In any case, more often the criticism of religion is a protest against the manner in which they see religious faith lived, or against the persons who represent it in contexts they are familiar with. Ultimately their criticism merely reflects the negative experiences they have had, with overbearing clergy, highbrow moralizations, annoying interferences, boring worship, tiresome vocabulary, and absence of genuine human touch and spiritual experience. As a matter of fact, to the extent the mainline churches yielded to the force of secularization, they ceased to be a spiritual force (Bruce 2011: 189). There is always room for secular intelligence and authentic spiritual experience to encourage each other by sharing their insights.

#### **14. Longing for Consensus**

*Be ready at all times to answer anyone who asks you to explain the hope you have in you, but do it with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3: 15).*

Ardent secularizers and propagators of Atheism are feeling uncomfortable when the collective thinking of society is moving in the direction of the moderate positions of postmodernism, which oppose all sorts of aggressive antagonisms and fanaticisms and encourage good neighbourliness, peaceful co-existence of religions, cultures, and ideologies. Today most people believe in the need for reconciling opposites, integrating diverse points of view, and developing a holistic vision of things, affirming interdependence, rejecting an irresponsible and value-free use of science and technology, and promoting healthy social morality.

This can be achieved only through inter-disciplinary collaboration, and not through individual specialists taking rigid positions or experts in one discipline making overconfident statements beyond their own areas of competence, e.g. nuclear science on scriptural exegesis. Psychological and social sciences must complement each other, physical and human sciences must dialogue, reason and religion must collaborate in shaping the destinies of the human person and interpreting the cosmic processes. The Universe is constructed to interrelate.

Therefore, we need to dialogue in all directions and “with men of all shades of opinion” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 43). We recognize the fact of ‘multiple modernities’ (Taylor 2007: 1-22), which means that different people wish to show themselves modern in different ways, each being rooted in their own native culture. Ratzinger believes that there is an element of truth in almost everything anyone says; but they must be singled out (Jankunas: 52). A mono-civilizational interpretation of historical processes has become outdated.

It is through the sharing of what is most precious in different human traditions that humanity can create its own future. Religion too is going to play a role in its making. History is not shaped in battlefields alone but also in study groups, thinkers’ clubs, workshops, school rooms, lecture halls, libraries, laboratories, artists’ dark rooms, adoration chapels, sharings of the Gospel and cloistered convents.

## 15. Emptiness and the Need to be Filled

*In a globalizing world, religion has demonstrated its capacity to provide... mechanisms for coping with anxiety, networks of solidarity and community (Aldridge: 88).*

The marginalization of religion has led to a strain on the inner dimension of the human person. Carl Jung frankly admitted that most psychological disorders he knew of were due to the fact that people missed religious experience (Collins 2010: 141). In Erich Fromm’s view, denying the fact that religion is a human need has led humanity to self-alienation, emptiness, and obsessions. Gerald May says that the effort to escape from inner pain leads to addictions and obsessions (Collins 2010: 48-49). It leads even to suicide.

Charles Davis wrote thus, “I have found a sense of emptiness, but together with it a deep yearning for God. There is an emptiness at the core of people’s lives, an emptiness waiting to be filled. They are troubled about their faith; they find it slipping... They are waiting for something to fill the void in their lives, and what they hear does not do that. The more perceptive know that they are looking for God...who will speak to them quite simply of God as of

a person he intimately knows, and make the reality and presence of God come alive for them once more” (*America Magazine*, 29 January 1966). Such reflections may make radical secularizers re-think their views.

## 16. Criticism of Religion Keeps Purifying It

*Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’ (Unless) you execute justice one with another, not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow...not steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely...I will do to the temple as I did to Shiloh (destroy it) (Jer 4-14).*

Israelite faith had initiated a form of secularization centuries ago, with the intention of purifying religion, launching a campaign against superstitions, rejecting belief in many gods, in natural forces, spirits, image worship, occult practices, and magic (1 Kings 18; 1 Sam 28:3-25). Israelite prophets questioned even legitimate expressions of religion like fasts, sacrifices, holocausts (Is 58:3-6; 1:11-13) when they lacked authenticity. To some extent, this was an effort to remove from religion what did not stand the test of sound reason. The prophets gave far greater importance to justice and social concern than to empty worship. Jesus too seemed to attach less significance to the superficial dimensions of religion like ritual cleansings and Sabbath regulations than to their deeper meaning. He always called for a deeper reflection on his teaching lest the disciples merely listen without understanding, because their hearts had grown dull (Mt. 13:13-15).

All through Christian history, criticism purified religion, whether it was from the proponents of heresies and schisms, Reformers, Enlightenment thinkers, Marxists, social observers, persecutors, or from disillusioned believers themselves. A more relevant, meaningful, authentic and socially committed Christianity has emerged. Our response to a negative evaluation of the Christian Faith is not aggressive self-defense nor absolute surrender to secularizing trends, but an effort to take their criticism as an occasion to set right

what is inauthentic in our personal lives and in the lives of our communities.

Arnold Toynbee believed that religion played a big role in periods of historic transitions. Ours is such a period; we are moving from modern to postmodern age. Though Ratzinger rejects the pessimism of Oswald Spengler about the decline of the West, he accepts the thesis of Toynbee about the big role that Religion will play in such a critical juncture of history, a role that will be played by creative minorities (Ratzinger, *Europe, Today and Tomorrow*: 25). It is no wonder that Postmodernism makes place for Religion and considers it a progressive and liberating force.

### **17. Rediscovering the Spirit in Human History**

*What is needed are conservatives who are prepared to be critical of tradition and liberals who are prepared to be critical of contemporary fashions (McManners 1993: 643).*

Early Christians believed that the God's wisdom revealed itself through the thinkers and the sages of Greece. They claimed "Whatever is well said among them belongs to us Christians." In fact, Justin called Christianity *true philosophy*, which meant, true human wisdom. This attitude of openness argues that a true Christian can learn from other religions some forgotten or undeveloped aspects of one's own faith (Jankunas 2011: 143). Today all great cultures are fast opening to each other. This is a moment for all religious believers to come together and dialogue with ardent secularizers. If believers are respectful and attentive, secularizers may mellow; and if secularizers mellow, fundamentalists may soften their stand. And something new will emerge.

Ratzinger thought that Christianity had more in common with the ancient cultures of humankind than with the relativistic and rationalistic dogmas of Enlightenment that have cut itself loose from the fundamental insights of all of humankind (Jankunas: 155). We should take collective responsibility for the re-discovery of the Spirit in human history and the re-introduction of religion into human dis-

course rather than keep cold distance from the evolution of human thought, arrogate a moral high ground, and remain a lone voice speaking to deaf ears.

## 18. Adapting to Cultures and Sciences

*The Greek hero, the Christian ascetic, the Nietzschean critic, the twentieth century analytical philosopher, the Buddhist monk, the capitalistic entrepreneur, and the Confucian scholar...stand alongside one another as alternative visions of the virtuous life* (Fiorenza).

Paul adapted himself to the mentality of the people at every place: Lystra (Acts 14: 15-17), Athens (Acts 17: 18; 26-28). Speaking to the Lyconians who practiced cosmic religion, he referred to religious experiences related to the cosmos. Addressing the Greeks, he quoted their own poets: Epimenides of Knossos (6<sup>th</sup> cent BC), Aratus of Soli (3<sup>rd</sup> cent BC). Similarly, Justin and Tertullian used the vocabulary of the Greco-Roman world of their times.

Today's evangelizers should adapt themselves to different cultures and communities: on the Continent of Asia, to the wisdom of the sages of East Asia, the seers of South Asia, the prophets of West Asia. Further, in this scientific age, they will need to make references to the advance of the sciences and their new findings: biological sciences, psychology, social sciences, anthropology, physical sciences, technology, and debates in the Postmodern world.

## 19. Ancient Teachings Must Be Made Relevant

*Your speech should always be pleasant and interesting, and you should know how to give the right answer to everyone" (Col 4: 6).*

Carl Jung warned against the danger of religious truths being "interpreted, explained and dogmatized until they become so encrusted with man-made images and words that they can no longer be seen" (Carl Jung, *Psychology and Western Religion*, Ark, London 1988: 289 – quoted at Collins: 40).



Christianity must be explained in words that today's society can understand. And it is possible. Pope Benedict XVI has these most encouraging words: "Christianity is not a highly complicated collection of so many dogmas that it is impossible for anyone to know them all; ... it is something simple: God exists and God is close in Jesus Christ" (Benedict XVI speaking to priests in July 2007, see Collins 2010: 11).

## 20. A Vision for the Future

*That... words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the Gospel" (Eph 6: 18-20).*

Even in this sophisticated world of ours there is fresh interest in Jesus' message. An increasing number of people are manifesting their hunger for God: greater interest in pilgrimages to cathedrals and sacred shrines, to Compostela, Lourdes, Fátima, Czestachowa, Vailamkani, Bandel; World Youth Days, Taizé prayer, apparitions, messages. There is dynamism in ecclesial movements and mounting generosity in charitable associations. Consecrated life is renewing itself both in traditional and new forms, inspired by the radical nature of the Gospel. Church leaders are in the news. The Christian voice is in the media. Religion is publicly discussed, rejected, defended, and re-accepted. All that people seek from religion is a spiritual experience.

Asians love sacred places, respect religious persons, admire spiritual depth. There is hope. Situations of poverty, injustice, corruption, and conflict, call for attention; the pitiable conditions of migrants, refugees, war-victims, drug addicts, abused women, post-abortion parents, broken families... these and others call for a whisper of hope, a word of encouragement, an assurance of assistance, a vision for the future.

The bad times that believers have gone through are a pointer to good things to come. When "A woman is in pain..." (Jn 16:21), it is good news for those who look forward. An era is ending, a new dawn is due. People have been looking forward to a new Renais-

sance, a new Reformation, a new Enlightenment, a new Revolution. All these may come true together. For, Jesus is alive. “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” (Lk 24: 34).

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# ***Nurturing the Human Face of Science***

**LOUIS CARUANA\***

This paper presents a brief overview of some of my research and then explores how we can apply it to determine the kind of role the Church can adopt towards the current scientific mentality. The interaction between Christianity and natural philosophy or natural science has a long and checkered history. Supported and propagated by the exponential growth of scientific knowledge and technology, the scientific mentality now extends beyond national and cultural boundaries to a degree never seen before. The correct attitude towards it by the Church has therefore become very important, especially within the context of a secularized developed world. This paper will be divided into three parts: First, a brief historical survey showing some prominent attitudes that Christianity in the course of its long history has adopted vis-à-vis the sciences; second, some results from my work on the way scientific practice can affect moral character; and third, an exploration of the implications of these results for the Church.

## **1. Christianity and Science Through the Centuries**

In the early centuries of the Christian era, we find three distinct attitudes towards natural philosophy. These can be conveniently associated with three prominent figures: Tertullian, Origen, and Augustin. Tertullian's attitude was very negative. In this context, his famous question was "What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?" He intended this question to highlight the distance that we must keep between our inquiry concerning natural phenomena and that concerning Christian life and doctrine. For him, if we have Christ, we need nothing more. He admits that, from the point of view of natural philosophers, this attitude may sound irrational, but he was

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\* *Pontificia Università Gregoriana* (Roma).

not worried in the least. In fact, he was quite happy to be judged irrational by the standards of the philosophers. For him, the life of faith was precisely the overcoming of the constraints of reason.<sup>1</sup> His position was therefore radical. Diametrically opposed to it was the view of Origen, who as a Christian scholar was exceptionally open-minded. One of his students left us an interesting note about him: “he [Origen] selected everything that was useful and true in each philosopher and set it before us, but condemned what was false [...] for there was nothing forbidden, nothing hidden, nothing inaccessible.”<sup>2</sup> These two opposing views were to some extent harmonized in the more balanced views of St Augustin, who, among many other things, pioneered the study of the various literary genres we find in the Bible. He acknowledged the importance of the knowledge of nature and astronomy, but argued that the truths conveyed by the biblical text were of another kind.

If we move on to the medieval world, we need to beware first of all of the hidden agenda of some current historians. Protagonists of anti-Christian historiography have tried to propagate the idea that the medieval schools were in league together against the emergence of natural science. For them, the medieval universities were an ecclesiastical system intent on blocking the liberating forces of the new science. Serious scholarship, however, has proved these simplistic views completely wrong. As early as the 12<sup>th</sup> century, we find medieval scholars accepting the indispensable role of observation and experiment as regards our knowledge of the material world. This is not to say that the Church during this period was never suspicious or negative about natural science. My point is rather that the situation was complex, and that there were some scholars, people like

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<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church? What have heretics to do with Christians? [...] Away with all attempts to produce a Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic Christianity! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus.” *On Prescription against Heretics*, chapter 7.

<sup>2</sup> The student was Gregory Thaumaturgus; the quote is from David C. LINDBERG, “Science and the Early Church,” p. 24, in *God and Nature*, edited by D. C. Lindberg & R. L. Numbers. Los Angeles, 1986, pp. 19-48.

St Albert the Great, who achieved a level of harmony between faith, reason, and experiment that remains impressive even for us today.

When we move to modern Europe, the situation becomes even more complex. The rise of experimental science and of heliocentric cosmology motivated the search for a new metaphysics. The appearance of various forms of atomism, especially the kind of atomism associated with René Descartes and Thomas Hobbes, started to put pressure on those theologians who had depended heavily on Aristotelian categories for articulating Christian doctrine. This situation highlighted the suspicion between the nascent science and the tradition-oriented theology. We should recall however that during the first century of the scientific revolution some of the most sophisticated pro-science philosophers were priests, well versed in theology. The most prominent of them was probably Pierre Gassendi, who made considerable advances in revising atomism. As the decades passed, the cultural relations between science and religion became more intricate and strained. What we call the Enlightenment was a Europe-wide movement driven by a somewhat vague set of principles, an ideology that celebrated universal reason and personal freedom. As this movement emerged and took shape, many of its protagonists realized that science could help their cause. They therefore connected scientific progress with the downfall of religion. For the Church of 18<sup>th</sup> century France, the Enlightenment was a very traumatic experience. Under the pressure of the efficient organization of the *philosophes* and under the hammer of the relentless satire of Voltaire, theologians, especially Jesuits, soon became the laughing stock of the elite academic world.

This is what the situation looked like at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By that time, science had made impressive advances in practically all fields. The attitudes of individual theologians varied: some were positive, some negative, and others remained indifferent. The official line of the Catholic Church however remained very cautious, especially during the modernist crisis. Towards the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we find an interesting revival of a positive attitude that acknowledges the compatibility between truths from revelation and truths discovered by the natural sciences. In his famous encyc-

lical on these issues, *Humani Generis*, Pius xii remained cautious, but managed to open the door for a theistic version of evolutionary theory.

As we move on to the 1960s, the period of the second Vatican Council, we see official documents of the Catholic Church sometimes highlighting the nobility of the methods of reason and experiment, and also sometimes raising a critical voice denouncing those tendencies within the scientific mentality that undermine the dignity of the human person. Such warnings insisted that, if an exclusively scientific mentality goes unchecked, it could reduce culture to numbers, persons to particles.<sup>3</sup> If we move closer to our times, we find a very interesting new attitude emerging in the 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* by John Paul II. One particular point, in my opinion, deserves careful analysis. I am referring to paragraph 81, where he writes, “To be consonant with the word of God, philosophy needs first of all to recover its *sapiential dimension* as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life [...] This *sapiential dimension* is all the more necessary today, because the immense expansion of humanity’s technical capability demands a renewed and sharpened sense of ultimate values.” Here the focus is on philosophy. John Paul II was seeking to clarify how philosophy in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century should seek to rediscover the richness of its original vocation. Although there are other sections within this encyclical, listing the dangers of the scientific mentality, the insistence on the *sapiential dimension* is relatively new in this context. It opens a new door. My claim is that John Paul’s precious observation regarding philosophy is applicable also to the natural sciences.

## 2. The Sapiential Dimension

Let me first present some results of relatively recent research in the area of the sapiential dimension of philosophy. Many are familiar

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<sup>3</sup> For 1960s attitude within the documents of Vat II, see especially *Gaudium et Spes* 58-62.

with the classic definition of philosophy as the love of wisdom. As etymology goes, this is accurate, but it says little about how the character of philosophy changed in the course of history. The philosopher Pierre Hadot spent much of his time carefully retrieving and describing the various roles that philosophers were expected to adopt in each period of cultural history, from the times of Ancient Greece to the present.<sup>4</sup> One of his more important discoveries was that the intention of the philosophers of classical antiquity was in the first instance to form people, in the sense of educating them to live well. They were not concerned with conveying information, but with helping their students undergo a conversion. Philosophical texts were conceived primarily as spiritual exercises, tested and confirmed by the author himself, and then offered to disciples to help them grow spiritually. A Socratic dialogue, for instance, was really a spiritual exercise practiced in common, inciting readers to attend to themselves, to take care of themselves, and to know themselves. The dialogue in fact involved an interlocutor who prevented the discussion from stalling on what is only theoretical. Hadot showed how ancient philosophers did not know only how to speak and debate. They also knew how to live. People expected them to have the art of living. This was the case even when philosophers talked about physics. This discipline was not primarily a set of theories and descriptions of reality, but a spiritual exercise to enable neophytes to live in harmony with the cosmos. Philosophy was not a collection of information but the overall organizing achievement of the individual. We can in fact distinguish between the various ancient philosophical schools by referring to their specific ways of encouraging the learner to grow in wisdom. Socratism, Platonism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Skepticism – all these were models of life, fundamental ways in which reason may be applied to human existence. Hadot calls them archetypes of the quest for wisdom. For instance, Socratism concentrates on the dialogue as an exercise that makes the interlocutor put himself or herself into ques-

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre HADOT, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. London, 1995.



tion so as to make the soul as beautiful and as wise as possible. For Plato, as Hadot shows, philosophy is a kind of training for death; and so on for the other schools.

Here the major point is this: we cannot assume that this list of ancient wisdom-schools is closed. There is no reason to hold that today we are limited to merely rediscovering, or re-enacting, one or other of these archetypes. It is probable that the rise of the scientific mentality in modern times was so radical that it gave birth to a new wisdom-school. How can we explore this point? As we know, modern science is geared primarily towards the acquisition of knowledge. Therefore, we need first to distinguish carefully between knowledge and wisdom.

In general, knowledge has often been described in terms of belief, for instance in the well-known formula “true, justified belief.” Because of this, we often assume that we acquire knowledge piecemeal, in the form of distinct beliefs or propositions, approved one by one. In modern science, we usually express such propositions, seen as units of knowledge, in terms of laws describing regularities. When we emphasize objectivity, when we emphasize validity for all observers, such a view of knowledge highlights what is known rather than the knower. In fact, we relegate what is personal to the level of secondary importance or to the level of no importance at all.

Wisdom is different. Wisdom is not an attribute of a proposition but of a person. While knowledge is cumulative, often the result of a group effort, wisdom is a personal attainment of the individual, somewhat like friendship. There is no stack of wisdom. There is no library of wisdom corresponding to our libraries of knowledge. Each person needs to attain wisdom as an individual achievement. The good example of others can help, but, at the end of the day, each person is alone in the achievement of wisdom. While knowledge is acquired piecemeal, wisdom is a unifying feature of the person. It takes the various elements of one’s knowledge and the various experiences of one’s life and brings them all together. It unites cognition with practical concerns.

It is clear therefore that knowledge and wisdom are different. So we are now in a position to ask, “How does natural science fare as a wisdom-school?” To answer this question, it is useful to recall some basic facts about habits. Habits are acquired features of a person. As Aristotle had rightly observed, repeated acts leave a trace on the person. Repeated acts of courage render the person courageous. Repeated acts of justice render the person just. So we can rephrase our question as follows: “What would repeated acts of natural science leave as an effect on the person?” By acts of natural science, I mean instances of the style of inquiry characteristic of modern times, a style that highlights observation, experimentation, hypothesis-testing, and collaborative research. Do such acts have an effect on the deeper dispositions of the person? Do they have an effect on the art of living? Can we speak of novelty with respect to the wisdom-schools of ancient times?

The scientific mentality, like other mentalities, can certainly have deleterious effects on the person. Nevertheless, my claim is that, within the style of scientific inquiry, we can discern a positive and relatively new core of wisdom-generating trends. There is a specific virtue that human beings have access to today, to which they did not have access before the emergence of natural science. I call this virtue heuristic courage, a kind of boldness in the face of the unknown, a nerve when facing the future. It corresponds to the disposition whereby a person conserves what is best of what has already been achieved, and yet accepts the possibility of some radical revisions. Such a virtuous person does not wilt in the face of pure novelty but remains open to adjust and readjust his or her categorical framework in an act of intellectual, ongoing conversion. This notion of heuristic courage is much richer than what I can explain here. Suffice it to say that the need for heuristic courage, as historians of ideas have shown, has become increasingly urgent in the course of history in proportion to the growing range of inquiry.<sup>5</sup> It has become increasingly urgent in line with the increasing separation between,

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<sup>5</sup> For more on this see: L. CARUANA, *Science and Virtue*. Aldershot, 2006, chap. 6.

on the one hand, the everyday, manifest image of the world, which Edmund Husserl would call the *Lebenswelt*, and, and on the other hand, the sophisticated, mathematical and scientific image of the world. As our discoveries advance further and further towards the extremely large and towards the extremely small, and as we let science take us further and further away from our everyday conceptual scheme, the more heuristically courageous we need to be.

### 3. Conclusion

I hope it is clear by now that the Church needs to start taking into consideration these newly identified features of scientific practice. Just as in its missionary outreach, regarding non-European cultures, the Church did not engage only in denouncing the evil she found in them but also in identifying and nurturing the good she found therein, so also as regards the scientific mentality. She needs to do less denunciation of the problematic aspects and more as regards the identification and nurturing of the positive dispositions that derive from this practice and can benefit the person as a person. As I explained, the most prominent of these positive dispositions is heuristic courage. It would be good therefore, if the Church in its institutional role were to identify clearly this virtue and sustain it by showing how it is in line with Gospel values. What I am suggesting here is not a radical change in the Church's attitudes, but a shift of emphasis, a shift towards presenting reason and experimentation as gifts bestowed by God on humanity, gifts that enable humans to realize the full potential of the material world. Nature is a storehouse of potentiality, and modern human beings are now endowed not only with reason but also with the virtue of heuristic courage, and with a heightened sensitivity towards observation, theory, and experiment. They can thus help in the process of what the medieval scholars called the *educio formam e materiae*, the extraction or realization of form from matter. We today, because of the scientific mentality, are more motivated than ever before to uncover how matter can relinquish one form to adopt another, how nature can disclose its com-

binatorial possibilities, how it can reveal its secrets. Many things lay hidden for millennia within matter as mere possibilities but are now made manifest through the assiduous work of natural science. Without human beings, these potentialities would have remained forever unrealized.

Of course, things human have their negative side, and science is no exception. The scientific mentality can make people arrogant, power-hungry, blind to personal needs, closed to transcendence. There is no end to possible vices. The aim of this paper however was to highlight the positive features. We sometimes hear it said that icons are doors to the sacred. There are many doors to the sacred, and you choose the icon you need. Analogically we can think of various doors to wisdom, and we choose the door that is closest and most convenient. In today's global context, the door that is closest to us is precisely the one we find within the scientific mentality. The Church should lead the way.



# ***New Technologies and New Evangelization Styles***

**LEON DYCZEWSKI\***

In the first years of the existence of the Church, Apostles and Disciples preached the Gospel in the Greco-Roman world. And to make their evangelization efficient they tried to thoroughly understand the culture and customs of the then pagan peoples. It is similar with us: promoting the unchanging truths about God and man requires a good knowledge of social, cultural, economic, political and religious changes, as well as a new way of interpreting the Revealed Word, of experiencing our faith and of preaching it in a new way.<sup>1</sup> In a changing world the Church continuously searches for new forms and methods of evangelization.

## **1. New Technologies, New Media, New possibilities of Communication**

Evangelization is based on communication and on interpersonal relations, and new technologies and new media have modified and broadened them. Digital media do not create limitations as far as the amount of the content, the space and the time of communication is concerned. Information is easily gathered, stored and processed, and it is easily accessible and easily transmitted. Creating, processing and distributing information is decentralized, and, moreover, it can easily circumvent censorship.<sup>2</sup> New media give a possibility

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<sup>1</sup> The Gospel in the world – *Message* to the People of God at the *conclusion* of the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.

<sup>2</sup> A concise characteristics of the new media: cf. Andrzej ADAMSKI, *Media wanalogowym i cyfrowym świecie: Wpływ cyfrowej rewolucji na rekonfigurację komunikacji społecznej*

of global and local, mass and individual, one-way and interactive communication to everybody; and that with the use of relatively simple means. Also, everything is present in the media today, so that “if you’re not on the media, you don’t exist” (or “if something is not on the media, it doesn’t exist”) becomes ever more true.

Owing to new technologies and new media today there is a communication network and space with a global range. Anybody who has access to the Internet may contact anybody he wants to, and transmit and receive any contents he wishes. Access to cellular phones and to computers makes it possible to transmit words and images to the farthest and most remote corners of the world. The Christian message may reach *the ends of the earth* (Acts 1,8).

Social media created on the basis of the Web 2.0 technology are especially significant. They make it possible to exchange the contents created by the users.<sup>3</sup> The best known social media are: Blog, Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Digg, MySpace, Twitter, Second Life, podcasts. New Internet forums, social network services, websites with information about events, organizations, people etc., are continuously created. New forms of cooperation on creating data bases, on exchanging information and opinions as well as discussion groups keep appearing.

New media have already entered the life of everyone of us and our culture. We use them every day and we are present on them through our contacts with others and through our creativity. With people we do know and ones we do not know we can share information, life experiences, our own vision of the world, our hopes and ideals; we also create various forms of bonds with them. Communication networks facilitate cooperation between people having different geographical and cultural backgrounds; they favor accepting common

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(*Media in an Analogue and a Digital World: The Effect of the Digital Revolution on Re-configuration of Social Communication*). Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2012, pp. 93-99.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas M. KAPLAN and Michael HAENLEIN, “Users of the world, unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media,” in *Business Horizons*, 2010, 53 (1), pp. 59-68.

values and forming co-responsibility for the common good.<sup>4</sup> In this way “the digital world can be an environment rich in humanity; a network not of wires but of people,” says Pope Francis.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. New Evangelization Spaces

New technologies, new media, and generally the digital world are a great achievement in human development, and at the same time they are a great chance for believers. They may and should be used in evangelization: “No door can or should be closed to those who, in the name of the risen Christ, are committed to drawing near to others.”<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI defines new communication technologies as means of evangelization, and he calls the communication space that is formed by them a space of evangelization, “a digital continent,” a modern «agora», “in which people share ideas, information and opinions, and in which new relationships and forms of community can come into being.”<sup>7</sup> The Pope notes that “The digital environment is not a parallel or purely virtual world, but is part of the daily experience of many people, especially the young,”<sup>8</sup> part of their existence, the “environment,” in which “people communicate with one another, expanding their possibilities for knowledge and relationship.”<sup>9</sup> In the media space numerous and different

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<sup>4</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship. Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 43<sup>rd</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> May 2009].

<sup>5</sup> FRANCIS, Pope, *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter: Message of Pope Francis for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014].

<sup>6</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word. Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 44<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2010].

<sup>7</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *Social Networks: Portals of Truth and Faith: New Spaces for Evangelization. Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 47<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, 12 May 2013].

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Address of the Holy Father Francis to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*, Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013.



people meet each other with their questions and expectations. It is in this space that their views and their consciences are formed; this space determines the rhythm and contents of their lives. And it is a new opportunity for touching the human heart.”<sup>10</sup> Statements by the recent three popes clearly show that evangelization in the modern world requires a special interest in the new media. Unless “the Good News is made known also in the digital world, it may be absent in the experience of many people,”<sup>11</sup> Pope Benedict XVI states. This is why we must enter this world of the media, this new digital, and at the same time living space, with the Good News; we must introduce Jesus Christ into it, and in the spirit of His Gospel we must answer people’s questions about love, about the truth and about the meaning of life; in this space we must share our faith in God by the choices we make and by our readiness to have a dialogue on faith. “It is natural for those who have faith to desire to share it, respectfully and tactfully, with those they meet in the digital forum.”<sup>12</sup>

“Keeping the doors of our churches open also means keeping them open in the digital environment, so that people, whatever their situation in life, can enter, and so that the Gospel can go out to reach everyone. We are called to show that the Church is the home of all. Are we capable of communicating the image of such a Church? Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Pope Francis calls: “Let us boldly become citizens of the digital world. The Church needs to be concerned for, and present in, the world of communication, in order to dialogue with people today and to help them encounter Christ. She needs to be

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<sup>10</sup> *The Gospel in the World – A Message to the People of God concluding the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops...* Nr 10.

<sup>11</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *Social Networks*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> FRANCIS, Pope, *Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter: Message of Pope Francis for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014].

a Church at the side of others, capable of accompanying everyone along the way. The revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge.”<sup>14</sup> We need to respond to that challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God.”

### **3. Every Christian is an Evangelist**

“The entire people of God proclaims the Gospel,” Pope Francis emphasizes in his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.<sup>15</sup> This postulate today is more possible to be realized than ever before, because new technologies move the pulpit that had its place in the church or in the lecture hall, to the media space, where everybody may proclaim the Word of God. It may be preached not only by professionals, as Pope Francis says, but by every Christian who “has encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ,” who feels he is a “missionary disciple.”<sup>16</sup> Benedict XVI adds that evangelizing in the media space is a special task and duty for young Catholics (both clerical and lay), for they already “have grown up with the new technologies and are at home in a digital world,”<sup>17</sup> understand it and appreciate the possibilities that digital communication offers.

### **4. The Aims of Evangelization**

Jesus Christ and the care for the human person are in the center of the new evangelization, so that every person could encounter Him. Through the media Christians learn to read and understand the Gospel, are shown the way to God, teach the art of life with Jesus Christ, the art of life in the community of those who believe in God, the art of life with people who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Here

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> FRANCIS, Pope, *Evangelii gaudium*, n. 111.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., n. 120.

<sup>17</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *New Technologies...*

are the particular problems to which one should pay attention conducting evangelization in the media space, and to which two recent popes point in their messages for the World Communications Day:

#### **4.1. Discovering God and Sharing the Experience of God**

«Crisis of God» is the great problem of our time. It is manifested in the fact that in the consciousness of many contemporary people there is no God. Today's actors in public life do not talk about Him, and His signs are removed from the public space. The "crisis of God" is also manifested in the "empty religiousness," for many Christians live as if there was no God. But man does need God. Without Him man cannot be understood, and the meaning of life or a justification for constant and basic moral norms cannot be found. This is why in the media space God must be talked about – but the talk must be less doctrinal, and more existential; that is, it must point to who God is for a particular man and what role He plays in his everyday life. Experiencing God must be shared. A bond between God and man must be shown. It is God who is the strongest defender of man's existence, of his dignity and freedom; it is God who supports his development in the individual and social dimensions. The task of evangelization is to show "the beauty and perennial newness of the encounter with Christ,"<sup>18</sup> to share Christ who became a man, suffered, died and was resurrected in order to save mankind. Evangelizers should free modern people from ignorance and prejudices in matters of religion; they should promote peace, justice, solidarity and cooperation; revile all manifestations of discrimination and social marginalization.

The Catholic Church, recognizing the autonomy of the world and the secularity of state and social institutions, wants to penetrate these structures by means of individual people. The post-council conception of evangelization consists exactly in reaching every man

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<sup>18</sup> *The Gospel in the World – A Message to the People of God concluding the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops.*

with Jesus Christ and with the Christian values, and through man, in a way “from within,” imbuing all fields of human activity, and especially culture and morals, with Christian teaching and ethics.<sup>19</sup> The new evangelization seeks to “convert both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs. (...) It also seeks to affect and as it were upset “through the power of the Gospel, mankind’s criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.”<sup>20</sup>

## 4.2. Conversion and Forgiveness

Modern man is sure of himself, but he is not always right, he is not always on the right track. His conversion is necessary. And to convert means: “to rethink – to question one’s own and common way of living; to allow God to enter into the criteria of one’s life; to not merely judge according to the current opinions /.../, to begin to see one’s life through the eyes of God; thereby looking for the good, even if uncomfortable; /.../ to look for a new style of life, a new life. /.../. «Conversion» (metanoia) means /.../: to come out of self-sufficiency to discover and accept our indigence – the indigence of others and of the Other, his forgiveness, his friendship. /.../ conversion is humility in entrusting oneself to the love of the Other, a love that becomes the measure and the criteria of my own life.”<sup>21</sup> We should begin converting with ourselves by opening “to the power of Christ who alone can make all things new, above all our poor existence.”<sup>22</sup> The one who is converted, can also forgive. Conversion

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<sup>19</sup> Katarzyna POKORNA-IGNATOWICZ, *Kościół w świecie mediów: Historia-dokumenty-dylematy* (*The Church in the World of the Media: History – Documents – Dilemmas*). Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego 2002, p. 152.

<sup>20</sup> PAUL VI, Pope, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, nr 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Card. Joseph RATZINGER, *New Evangelization*. Cf. <http://goo.gl/YDkTjd>.

<sup>22</sup> *The Gospel in the World – A Message to the People of God Concluding the 13<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, nr 5.

and forgiveness are two immensely significant factors in building a community with God and neighbors, they are the basis for a creative and harmonious life in the community.

### 4.3. The Communal Quality of Faith

In today's society, ever more people feel lonely. They are not able to develop and maintain a lasting bond with another person/other people. A living faith in God efficiently protects one from such a state and helps to overcome it. It integrates people and strengthens the bonds that exist between them. The communal quality of the faith is manifested, assumes a peculiar beauty and particular strength first of all in common participation in the Sunday Eucharist, in saying a prayer together in family or in a prayer community. The media space provides a lot of possibilities to build a prayer community. It is often a starting point for an immediate contact. Especially the social media provide opportunities to pray, to meditate, to share the Word of God. Thanks to an online contact many people establish immediate contact with one another and experience religious community. Through the media we may invite people to a religious discussion, to a concert of religious songs, to a Holy Mass in a particular church or chapel, to a pilgrimage, to a walking tour, to a retreat or to a day of focusing. In the situations in which Christians feel isolated spatially, politically or culturally, the media may consolidate their sense of connectedness with the universal community of believers. The media help us to feel closer to one another, to see the unity of the human family, the community of believers, and in this way they inspire our solidarity and involvement in building a better world.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Message of Pope Francis for the 48<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter* [Sunday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2014].

#### **4.4. The Family**

At present the family is in a particularly difficult situation, as phenomena discrediting the existing model of the Christian family are increasingly frequent; they include divorces, marital infidelity, abortion, informal marital-like relationships, the style of living alone (single), life in matrimony with the exclusion of offspring, in vitro fertilization. Also such views and models of life – incompatible with Catholic morality – as homosexual relationships that demand marriage and family rights, the freedom of sexual life outside marriage – become widespread. In evangelization through the media it is necessary to promote more competently the Catholic model of marital-family life, the family as the basic environment of a person's development and the school of social life. The family is also the first environment, in which the Christian values, regulating the behavior of people differing in sex, background and age, bond themselves together into a constant community. It is in the family that faith is transmitted from one generation to the next one in a natural way. Despite the cultural and social differences all the bishops taking part in the last Synod dedicated to the family confirmed this essential role of the family in the transmission of the faith.<sup>24</sup> In new evangelization such families should be shown, which live according to the requirements of the Catholic Church; and this should be done much more distinctly and frequently than phenomena that are incompatible with them.

#### **4.5. Silence**

Today we are flooded with information, pictures, sounds and emotions; we are bombarded with answers to questions we have never asked, or with needs we do not feel. This exceeds our possibilities to reflect and judge, and it does not allow us to express ourselves in a balanced and proper way. In the media noise it is easy to lose oneself. Pope Francis, seeing this threat, remarks that for some

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<sup>24</sup> *The Gospel in the World – A Message to the People of God.*

time we should withdraw, “be silent and listen.”<sup>25</sup> In evangelization balance should be kept between silence and word. When word and silence exclude each other, evangelization gets worse, it becomes superficial. On the other hand, when silence and word complement each other evangelization becomes profound and meaningful. Pope Benedict XVI thinks that “When messages and information are plentiful, silence becomes essential if we are to distinguish what is important from what is insignificant or secondary.”<sup>26</sup> In the evangelization process one should be encouraged in “silent reflection, something that is often more eloquent than a hasty answer and permits seekers to reach into the depths of their being and open themselves to the path towards knowledge that God has inscribed in human hearts.”<sup>27</sup> Digital evangelizers should acquire the skill of joining silence and word. “Silence is not easy, but it is necessary, if we want to begin our journey from within in order to meet God who lives inside us.”<sup>28</sup>

#### 4.6. The Attitude of Resignation and Renouncing

Rich consumption closely connected with pleasure and experienced quickly and intensively is the feature of modern man that is widely publicized in the media. It does not favor realizing the basic values that are nurtured in Christianity, that is the three triads of values: 1. truth – good – beauty, 2. faith – hope – love, 3. dignity of the human person – social justice – solidarity. Realization of these values requires constant readiness to renounce something, readiness for sacrifice and limitations. The idea of limiting one’s ownership and consumption, the attitude of asceticism, should be significantly present in evangelization through the media.

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<sup>25</sup> FRANCIS, Pope, *Communication in the Service...*

<sup>26</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *Silence and Word: Path of Evangelization: A Message for the 46<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day 2012*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine de Hueck DOHERTY, *Poustinia: Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man*, Notre Dame, Ind., 1975. Here: *Milczenie: Doświadczenie ciszy Boga*. Kraków, 2011, p. 7.

#### **4.7. Tolerance for Otherness and Accepting a Person**

Today tolerance is often identified with acceptance or indifference towards otherness and towards another person. The Christian understanding of tolerance contains disagreeing to a given otherness, with simultaneous acceptance of the person who is the subject of the otherness. Hence, a Christian closely connects tolerance for anybody's otherness with respect for the person, and he accepts the person, albeit not his otherness. Pope Francis emphasizes that "People only express themselves fully when they are not merely tolerated, but know that they are truly accepted."<sup>29</sup> The benefit of such an attitude is that we learn "to look at the world with different eyes and come to appreciate the richness of human experience as manifested in different cultures and traditions."<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.8. The Christian's Dialogue with Science and Culture**

In evangelization science and technology – if they do not try to close a man in materialism and earthly life – should be treated as close allies of the Christian vision of the development of life. Those who create various forms of art that develop the love of beauty in a man are such allies. However, in evangelization it should be shown that although beauty is a precious value, highly appreciated especially today, it should be subordinated to the truth and that good. Its role is to add a special brilliance to these values, so that they would become even more attractive. This is why evangelization must take care of beauty.

A special role in evangelization through the media is played by formative and research institutions: Catholic schools and universities. The online education they conduct can promote the personalistic vision of man and of social life, as well as of the principles of Christian ethics.

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<sup>29</sup> FRANCIS, Pope, *Communication in the Service...*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



#### 4.9. Immediate Relations are the Most Important

A virtual contact cannot and should not replace an immediate contact with specific people. This principle is especially important in evangelization. The Gospel is real, and that is why when it is preached in virtual space, it should be preached by specific people, with whom we share our everyday life. Direct human relations always remain fundamental for the transmission of the faith.<sup>31</sup> This is important, because a modern man, who spends a lot of time surfing the internet, starts feeling isolated, starts breaking real social bonds, which leads to upsetting the proper development of his personality.

#### 4.10. Clear Catholic Identity

Much is said today about a lack of coherence and about fluid identity. Identity is often such because of staying in the media space too long. Evangelization requires clear, coherent, relatively constant Catholic identity. Only with such identity is someone authentic in the social networks, and at the same time shares with others his faith, hope and joy anchored in God and Christ's Church. Sharing one's faith does not consist in bombarding others with religious news, but in giving oneself to others by patiently and respectfully engaging their questions and doubts in their search for the truth and the meaning of human existence on the basis of the Gospel.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.11. Encounter and Dialogue

The ability to enter into a dialog with people of our times is of the utmost importance, so that one could understand their expectations, doubts and hopes. Many are disappointed with Christianity, or they

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<sup>31</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *Truth, Proclamation and Authenticity of Life in the Digital Age: A Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 45<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [June 5, 2001].

<sup>32</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *Social Networks, Portals of Truth and Faith: New Spaces for Evangelization. A Message for the 47<sup>th</sup> World Communications Day* [Sunday, 12 May 2013].

think that in a modern society Christianity is not very useful, or they have trouble understanding the meaning of life that is offered by the Christian faith. Disorientation, solitude, a lack of the meaning of life, difficulties in establishing profound bonds appear. Hence it is important to be able to have a dialog through the new media, especially through social portals. Pope Francis encourages us to do this with the following words: “Allow yourselves, without fear, to be this presence, expressing your Christian identity as you become citizens of this environment.”<sup>33</sup>

The new cyberspace allows meeting and learning other people’s values and traditions. “Such encounters, if they are to be fruitful, writes Pope Benedict XVI, require honest and appropriate forms of expression together with attentive and respectful listening. The dialogue must be rooted in a genuine and mutual searching for truth if it is to realize its potential to promote growth in understanding and tolerance. Life is not just a succession of events or experiences: it is a search for the true, the good and the beautiful. It is to this end that we make our choices; it is for this that we exercise our freedom; it is in this – in truth, in goodness, and in beauty – that we find happiness and joy.”<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.12. Taking Care of the Poor Without Passing over the Rich**

For Pope Francis care of the poor and granting them a privileged place in our communities is a sign of authenticity. “The presence of the poor in our communities is mysteriously powerful: it changes persons more than does a discourse, it teaches fidelity, it makes us understand the fragility of life, it asks for prayer: in short, it brings us to Christ.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *Address of the Holy Father Francis to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications*, Saturday, 21 September 2013.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *New Technologies, New Relationships: Promoting a Culture of Respect, Dialogue and Friendship* [Sunday, 24 May 2009].

<sup>35</sup> *The Gospel in the World – A Message to the People of God*.

As part of the evangelization process a much appears in the media that expresses sympathy, charity, disinterested aid, love and justice for marginalized people. They play the role of conscience in the field of our relations with our neighbors. This is necessary for people fed by the media, first of all commercial ones, with images of rich consumption, luxury, easy life, egoism – often very refined, though of blatant injustice. And although many recipients have already accustomed themselves to these phenomena, deeply in their heart they want to be noble, and it is good if this desire is heightened with the contents of evangelization.

The care for the poor in the new evangelization does not mean that the Church is not interested in the rich. They are also a subject of her care. The Church encourages them to provide more goods and services and to improve their quality, but to do it always with maintaining the principles of justice and dignity of the employees, without exploiting them and by taking into consideration the common good.

The Church's social teaching must be included in the program of the new evangelization, and so must the formation of Christians who are active in the economy and politics. This must be based on teaching. Wise, good and reliable people must be promoted. Positive work must be shown that is done by politicians, clerks, administrators, entrepreneurs, people providing services, doctors and nurses, schools and kindergartens teachers, farmers, shop assistants and housewives, as well as their achievements and work for other people, for the society and for the Church. The harm done to ones who are weak with respect to their social and material position, or to their health must be exposed; unjust social structures, unjustified wage differential, unemployment, homelessness, excessive bureaucracy and corruption must be spoken about.

## **5. Features of the Evangelizing Communication**

Evangelization requires a lot of respect for people and great sensitivity to people's needs; it should make one think, touch his

heart, form his conscience. It should “avoid the sharing of words and images that degrade human beings, promote hatred and intolerance, debase the goodness and intimacy of human sexuality or exploit the weak and vulnerable.”<sup>36</sup>

In evangelizing through the media dialog is a good form; it was used by Jesus Christ Himself, e.g. in His conversation with the Samaritan at Jacob’s well, or with the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In both cases with His questions and answers He brought out what was hidden inside: their doubts, anxieties, fears, life plans; he complemented their knowledge and consolidated their trust in themselves, until they changed their views, returned to their people and preached the truth about Him: the Samaritan preached that Jesus was the Messiah, the disciples going to Emmaus that Jesus had been really resurrected, and had shared bread with them.

Conducting evangelization, we are not supposed to win people for ourselves, but for God and in the name of God. Hence, evangelization must be based on a bond with people and with God, which often requires sacrifice and renouncing various things. Jesus did not redeem the world by means of beautiful words, but by means of His suffering and death. Death preceded the Resurrection. One cannot make a man learn about God and form a bond with Him just with words. This is why actions leading to an encounter with God through experiencing a community of faith and through prayer are important. It is important to share various forms of individual and communal prayer, to involve individual people in prayer. A conversation about God must always go hand in hand with a conversation with God.

## **6. Dangers Connected with Evangelization**

In conducting evangelization, the willingness to achieve success is the greatest danger. “Success is not the name of God” – says an old proverb. Without counting on great successes evangelization

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<sup>36</sup> BENEDICT XVI, Pope, *New Technologies, New Relationships...*

should be conducted with simplicity and humility; strategies that would treat the Gospel, the truths of the faith and moral principles as goods to be introduced into the media market to be profitably sold to customers should be avoided. Hence, one should avoid sensationalism, emphasizing the extraordinary nature of things or events, or celebrities, owing to which the number of recipients of a given media communication is increased. On the other hand, the ways should be discovered anew that Jesus Christ used in preaching the Good News and with which He gained new recipients for it so that they were drawn to Him and followed Him. Similar ways should be used in the conditions obtaining in our times.

### **7. A New Language of Evangelization**

In order to evangelize in the media space one should learn a new language “not just to keep up with the times, but precisely in order to enable the infinite richness of the Gospel to find forms of expression capable of reaching the minds and hearts of all.”<sup>37</sup> It must be an acoustic-visual language: living and reflective, informing and entertaining; one that would make people reflect on themselves, and make them want to meet their neighbors as well as God.

Evangelization through the media should have its own language, because language is the soul’s tool; it is a channel through which all passes that is in the soul. Catholic media too often use the language of theologians, the language of the canon law, of encyclicals, pastoral letters. It is a clear, correct and intelligible language, but it does not elucidate the obscurities that an average recipient encounters and does not spur him to any action. Everything is very nicely said or shown, but there is no effect. Like firing cannons at a parade, there is a terrible bang, but everything is still in its usual place.

Evangelization through the media needs a language of the Gospel, and this is a language of images, of parables, of deeply moving symbols, pertinent sayings, paradoxes and proverbs, a language of

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<sup>37</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Social Networks...*

dialog and polemics, a language that is both common and solemn, a language of prose and of poetry. It is characteristic that Jesus rarely uses catechetical or theological language. He avoids legal language, because there is no life in it. Jesus speaks the language used by His contemporaries, the language of their everyday life; He uses metaphors, comparisons and paradoxes; He refers to the revealed Word. His speech sounds like the voice of God, but people do understand Him.

It is interesting that the language of the Gospel is used in many youth subcultures today. The Gospel is the most widely-read book in the world, and one of the reasons for its great and universal appeal is exactly its language – everyday and solemn, lay and religious, deeply human and divine. In the digital media just this kind of language is desirable. Media evangelizers must create new metaphors of the faith, modern parables, profound dialogs modeled on the ones that Jesus Christ had with the Samaritan, with Nicodemus, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, because also in the modern world there are many people who are similar to them, with a similar past, and with the same doubts about Jesus Christ.

## **8. Effects of the New Evangelization**

The three recent popes state that preaching the Gospel yields good fruit owing to the power of the very Word of God, that the social media are not only a tool of evangelization but a factor in man's development as well, that albeit there are social media in the virtual world that offer an opportunity to pray, meditate or share the Word of God, there are also direct encounters and experiences of the community of the faith.

Thanks to the digital media, multimedia presentations appear with religious contents, various groups with religious character are established, communities are formed in the cyberspace that are based on the people's favorite music or some interesting religious subjects. Prayer meetings, marches, protests in defense of human rights or of the principles of Catholic ethics are organized. New testimonies

to the faith in the form of literary works, music, dance, theater or various kinds of visual art are created.

Within evangelization through the media a new culture is being formed with religious contents and form. It is based on well understood and profoundly experienced truths of the faith and principles of Christian life. If today's Christians did not create a new culture it would mean that they do not understand their faith and they do not experience it deeply.

# **Recognising the Signs of the Times**

**TOMÁŠ HALÍK\***

One of the fundamental dimensions of Christianity is its prophetic role. We affirm that Christ entrusted his church to continue his prophetic mission. An important component of the prophetic mission is “reading the signs of the times” – the art of interpreting current events as God speaking to us, as God’s continuing self-communication.

Throughout the history of the church that interpretation has not only taken the form of preaching and theological writings, it has also manifested itself in the lives of charismatic individuals. Veneration of the saints is the church’s recognition of their life stories as the means whereby God had a say in history through them and answered the important needs of the church at a specific time. The tragic features of the lives of those great witnesses to the faith – particularly their persecution, not only at the hand of Christianity’s enemies, but often of the Church itself – are evidence that the prophetic mission entails many risks and a cross.

These are not the only risks of a prophetic mission, however. It is clear that in few areas of its activity is the church so powerfully exposed to the risk of error, to the temptation of perceiving its own fears and desires as the word of God, and of proclaiming human (all too human) fantasies, ideologies and the interests of worldly power as having divine authority. The endeavour to “read the signs of the times” with theological responsibility is a very difficult task of interpretation, because God does not have a direct voice in history.

What represented the revolutionary turning point of modernity was understanding the importance of *history* as the ever changing context of everything that makes up our world. The emphasis on

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\* *Charles University* (Czech Republic).



temporality and the historical dimension of all reality, the discovery of history as an all-encompassing process of constant change altered the approach to what had previously been perceived statically. Darwin turned biology into history; the theory of evolution perceives nature as a dynamic drama, as events in time. In place of unchanging human nature Heidegger posits human existences as *Being in time*. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the emphasis on history also established itself in theology. Modern theology perceives the Bible as testimony to God's self-revelation in the history of salvation, as a testimony that must be understood in a historical and cultural context.

If we are to grasp the meaning of any phenomenon we need to know the context. God is the ultimate context of human history. Human history and the stories of individual people that form part of it are fragments. But God is not "available" as an all-embracing context. God is revealed but yet remains an inexhaustible mystery. God "dwells in unapproachable light" and here we see God "in a mirror, only dimly." We relate to God with the patience of faith, hope and love.

We must therefore be very circumspect when attempting to interpret current events as part of God's communication with humankind and must show "eschatological patience" and self-critical humility. If "political theology" is to be an authentic component of prophetic interpretation of the present, it must not become a political ideology. It should rather be critical of ideologies and protect itself all the time against contamination by ideologies and power interests, as well as the institutional interests of the church.

In some of my books I have tried to give an idea of that in which "negative eschatology" consists. It is an application of the principle of "apophatic theology" in the sphere of political theology. "Negative eschatology" means rejecting not only naïve popular fantasies about the specific forms of life after death, but also secular eschatologies and political eschatologies that promise "earthly paradises." "Negative eschatology" is also a rejection of ecclesiastical triumphalism, which confuses the historically conditioned form of

the church on earth (*ecclesia militans*) with the “spotless bride of the Lamb’s eschatological marriage” (the celestial “*ecclesia triumphans*”).

I have tried to demonstrate that ecclesiastical triumphalism – the inability to differentiate eschatologically between the *ecclesia militans* and the *ecclesia triumphans* – leads to militant religion. It is necessary to abandon the triumphalist concept of the church as an arrogant “possessor of the truth.” Instead we must develop the image of the church as a *communio viatorum*, as God’s people on a journey through history. This is the ecclesiology bequeathed to us by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council. Only Christ may say of Himself: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” The church is the servant of the Truth. We stand on the path of truth insofar as we follow Christ. But we are on a journey not at the destination. On our journey through history towards our eschatological goal we need to dialogue with others. We are all pilgrims and we should not ignore others’ experiences.

Attempts at spiritual diagnosis of the times – a theological interpretation of the “signs of the times” require dialogue, and also a dialogue of theology with the social sciences, particularly sociology.

There are two topics in contemporary sociology of religion that are important both for theological reflection on society and the church’s pastoral practice. I refer to the new attitude to the phenomenon of secularisation and the growth of a “grey area” between believers and atheists.

Secularisation has long ceased to be perceived as an irreversible process that started in Europe on the threshold of modernity and will sooner or later pervade the entire history of religion and determine the future shape of the world.

I am convinced that secular humanism is more likely “an unwanted child” of traditional Christianity. The secular humanism of the Enlightenment was the fruit of efforts by European intellectuals, who were frustrated by mutual religious quarrels and wars between Catholics and Protestants, to find a “third way” for Christianity. One might speak about one of the many “recontextualisations” of Christian faith.

Secularisation does not mean the end of Christianity, but rather the absorption of many fundamental elements of Christianity into the context of modern society. This absorption can be described as a success on its part, but that success has been offset by a loss of visibility. That paradox only reveals the fundamental paradox of Christianity that is inherent in the very *kenotic* character of the Gospel.

Pope John Paul II proclaimed the necessity of a “new evangelization” of a secular society. The difficulties involved in contemporary attempts for “inculturating Christianity” in modern society – society with Christian roots – were highlighted by Charles Taylor in his lecture “A Catholic Modernity.”<sup>1</sup>

There will never be a complete and trouble-free symbiosis of Christianity and modernity; it has always been dynamic and dramatic in nature, and will continue to be. Nonetheless I agree with the conclusion reached in the well-known dialogue between Cardinal Ratzinger and Jürgen Habermas in Munich in 2004, namely, that Christian faith and secular humanism need each other as a mutual corrective to their one-sidedness.<sup>2</sup> A Christianity that sought to turn its back on the legacy of Enlightenment rationality would end up in the quagmire of fundamentalism and, conversely, a secularism that sought to tear itself away from its Christian roots and the spiritual and ethical richness of the Christian tradition could end up as barren pragmatism and political cynicism. In certain cases, *laïcité* itself can turn into an intolerant pseudo-religion.

José Casanova has indicated the need to distinguish between secularisation, secularity and secularism. Of great importance is his assertion that, “Only the recognition that we live irremediably in a secular age can open spaces for a post-secular consciousness that begins to recognize secularity not as a higher state ‘after religion’,

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<sup>1</sup> Charles TAYLOR, *A Catholic Modernity?* Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Cardinal RATZINGER and Jürgen HABERMAS, *The Dialectics of Secularization: On Reason and Religion*. Ignatius Press, 2006.

but as an anthropological condition of openness to all kinds of religious and secular options.”<sup>3</sup>

In our times, when contact between Islam and Western civilisation is assuming new forms and there is a threat of dramatic confrontation, the catholic church could play a role similar to the one it played at the time of mass migration and the collapse of the Roman Empire, when it passed onto the “barbarians” not only the catholic faith, but also the cultural heritage of Antiquity, together with Hellenistic philosophy and Roman law.<sup>4</sup> The catholic church would now seem to be the only force capable, in certain circumstances, of being a mediator of some kind between Islam and the secular culture of the West, since it shares many common values with both camps.

Another important topic in the contemporary sociology of religion is the discovery that the chief division nowadays is not between believers and non-believers, but between *dwellers* and *seekers*. I regard that distinction as the most momentous feature of the spiritual situation of our times and am convinced that it will be of crucial importance in our reflections on the church’s future role and tasks.

The assertion heard from many quarters that the number of believers in our part of the world is on the decline is based on the assumption that by believers is meant “*dwellers*,” namely, people who have a home in the church as it has existed heretofore, who are entirely identified with the existing institutional form of the church, with its liturgical practice and manner of preaching and with its social action. Yes, the number of such people is declining, and the same is true of the number of “*dwellers*” in the atheist camp, of those who are totally at home in the old dogmas of atheism.

However, both among those who consider themselves believers and those who consider themselves non-believers the number of “*seekers*” is growing all the time. There are more and more believers

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<sup>3</sup> Jose CASANOVA, “The Catholic Church in a Global Age: Challenges and Opportunities” (Position Paper for the Porticus Foundation, December 4, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> For that matter many values of the culture of Antiquity were received by Latin Christianity via Islam.

who regard their faith as a journey, as a dynamic process that also involves crises and periods of uncertainty, as well as new experiences that oblige them to reappraise many old attitudes and opinions. In many countries, in addition to regular churchgoers, there is a greater number of those who have not abandoned their faith but identify only marginally with a church or have ceased identifying at all with one (Grace Davie terms this phenomenon “believing without belonging”<sup>5</sup>). Many of our contemporaries are *simul fidelis et infidelis* – the contradiction between belief and non-belief is no longer between two distinct and separate groups, but often manifests itself within the minds and hearts of many individuals.<sup>6</sup>

But even among the “unbelievers” there are increasing numbers of those who are by no means “tone deaf” regarding religion. Their critique and rejection of “organised religion” is often directed at a caricature of faith and a caricature of God which they have created themselves or adopted, or which they have come across in their community. The space between “dwellers” on both sides – traditional believers on the one hand and resolute atheists on the other – is fertile ground for spiritual experiments and new forms. But as well as “seekers” there is also a fairly considerable percentage of people who are apathetic concerning religion or spirituality: one might refer to them as *apatheists* rather than as atheists.

In my view the church’s service for “seekers” is distinct from the two main classical forms of pastoral activity – from “the care of souls” of already functioning institutions (most frequently parishes) and from missionary activity, aimed at bringing “new sheep into the existing fold.” The third way is “spiritual accompaniment.”

The aim of accompaniment is not to bring “lost sheep” back. Seekers cannot be approached from a position of “possessors of the truth.” Accompaniment involves partnership, dialogue, solidarity

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<sup>5</sup> Grace DAVIE, “Believing Without Belonging: Is This the Future of Religion in Britain?” in *Implicit Religion / Le religieux implicite*, Social Compass, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Some of them are coming closer to the Catholic Church once again under the influence of Pope Francis.

and mutual respect. Accompaniment requires generosity: if someone makes you go one mile with them, go two miles. Accompaniment also calls for the courage to leave one's familiar territory and grant the person we are accompanying the freedom to choose their own direction and goal, even it means that one's paths subsequently diverge at some point. Dialogue implies the possibility that the attitude of both partners might change – and that “risk” should be viewed as an opportunity.

It is not a matter of bringing the accompanied person to where we are at home, i.e. into the church as we now know it, but rather to marvel on the way, like Solomon did at the dedication of the Temple, when he realised that God's temple is much bigger than what he had built, that all of earth and heaven belong therein.

The words of the orthodox theologian Evdokimov are inspirational in this respect: We know where the church is, but we don't know where she isn't. The practice of accompaniment requires a new theological understanding of the church.

Pope Benedict invited seekers into the church's entrance hall, where, like the Jews in the Temple of Jerusalem, we should maintain a “courtyard of the nations.” Maybe we need to go further. Pope Francis reversed the gospel image about the Lord knocking on the door: Christ is knocking on the door from inside. He wants to get out of the confines of the church. God in Christ wants to get out, He wants to go onward. Maybe we will meet him there like the disciples met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, as a foreigner and stranger.

The French theologian Joseph Moingt – invoking Jesus's words, “it is better for you that I go” (John 16.7) – urges us *to let God go!*<sup>7</sup> That is to say: Let Him go to others! Let us discover that He is not simply “the God of our fathers,” our inherited property, but also the “God of others.” Precisely because He is the one universal God, he is not a God on which we could have a monopoly.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Joseph MOINGT, “Laisser Dieu s'en aller,” in *Dieu, Église, Société*. Paris: Centurion, 1985.

Moingt's position is a radical emulation of St. Paul. The apostle presents Christianity to us as a faith capable of dissociating itself with its past, ridding itself of old customs and certainties, rejecting particularity and going to others. Paul presents Christianity to us as a new *politeia* – a new way of communication between people and between societies. Paul's crossing of the borders of Israel and setting out for the "peoples" (the pagans) should be a paradigm for the entire history of the church.

But when we look at history, we get a different picture. The church quickly withdrew into a new particularism of its own; the notion of a "new Israel" did not engender the courage to be constantly people on the way, boldly crossing all borders. Instead, we tended to become a "second Israel," another particular community alongside Israel, rather than a truly new Israel that would take up the dynamic aspect of the chosen people's faith – Abraham's departure from his homeland and the exodus, the departure from Egypt, above all Paul's crossing the frontiers of the Mosaic Law in search of all human beings without any difference. The church became more of a new particular group among others; it started to guard its frontiers and turn its faith into a "heritage of the fathers," inherited property. The Hellenization of Christianity, Moingt maintains, which enabled the early church to leave the rather narrow context of a single nation and enter the much wider cultural context of the then world, paradoxically led to a fixation once more on "one language." Yet the church should pentecostally "speak all languages," and not presuppose that our Christianity is the language whereby God speaks to all and that everyone is required to understand it. It is we who must try to understand others; only in that way can we then try to address others intelligibly.

"Our" God is also the God of others – including seekers and those who don't know Him. Yes, God is above all the God of seekers, of people on the journey. If we profess the God of Abraham we prove our faithfulness, not by clinging to a specific tradition of the past, but, like Abraham, by entering new territory.

“Our” God is a pilgrim God, the God of the eternal exodus, who leads us out of the homes and homelands even though we would prefer to settle in them and fortify them.

Our openness toward others is our openness towards God, because through Christ God shows solidarity with others. God seeks to be present in the world through our testimony of love.<sup>8</sup> God is present in the world also through our seeking. The eye by which we see God and the eye by which God sees us is the self-same eye, Master Eckhart maintained. The God’s seeking us and our seeking God is the self-same seeking. God is present in the inquietude of our hearts.

If the church is to fulfil its prophetic mission and learn to read the signs of the times, if it is to be a discerning church, then it must be a serving church and a welcoming church. It must learn to recognise Christ in the seekers and in its own seeking.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Tomáš HALÍK, *Patience with God: The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us*. Doubleday, 2009, pp. 49-55.





# **Church and Spiritual Discernment in a Secular Age and a Global World**

**JUAN CARLOS SCANNONE\***

According to Vatican II, the Church must be faithful to its mission “to scrutinize the signs of the times, interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (*Gaudium et Spes* 4; hereafter: *GS*). These not only characterize the time, but also are “genuine signs of the presence of God’s plans” for and in the Church (*GS* 11), inasmuch as they are oriented “towards solutions that are fully human” in the process of answering the challenges of evangelization.

In this secular age and globalized world, such a spiritual discernment – one that for the believer is always guided by the Spirit of God – can and must also be shared by all men and women of good will, whether believers or not, regardless of belonging to one or the other culture and religion, in an holistic dialogue that is as wide as possible and endowed with a kenotic vision, free from self-centeredness and open to a “culture of encounter.” This is not reserved for monks and bishops, or for the Christian faithful alone; rather, it is possible to anyone who has the right intention and whose heart is open to the good.

The Church still holds to the Gospel reading of the signs of the times as discerned by the spiritual senses in accord with the tradition of Origen, Bernard of Clairvaux, Bonaventure, Ignatius of Loyola, Pope Francis... The radically human and religious core of that experience can be shared by all who possess good will. Therefore, in this essay I will turn first to the discernment of faith, especially following the Ignatian heritage. Then I will discuss a discernment of historical action and passion as illuminated by contemporary experience and philosophy, which in principle is acceptable to all.

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## 1. Christian Discernment of the Signs of the Times

According to the method *see, judge, act*, as practiced by the last Council in the Pastoral Constitution *GS*, and the plenary Conferences of the Latin American Bishops at Medellín, Puebla and Aparecida,<sup>1</sup> we begin with a vision of faith. For this read the following quote of Walter Kasper, “some of the efficacy and reality of God’s Spirit appears, (...) always where something new arises, always where life awakens and reality tends to exceed itself ecstatically. The Second Vatican Council has noted the universal efficacy of the Spirit not only in the religions of mankind, but also in cultures and in human progress.”<sup>2</sup> A sign of God’s action in history is, therefore, newness of life – especially when inexplicably it emerges or breaks through –, in the self-transcending of the factic order of being as something that exceeds or does not find its sufficient reason in its antecedents, a “more” or unexpected excess not deductible, not even dialectically from what precedes. In the terminology of Jean-Luc Marion, this phenomenon is saturated in meaning and value.<sup>3</sup> It happens above all whenever that new life in excess arises fruitful and creative from

<sup>1</sup> Cf. my article: “La recepción de *Gaudium et Spes* en América Latina” (“The Reception of *Gaudium et Spes* in Latin America”), in J. C. MACCARONE (et al.), *La Constitución Gaudium et Spes: A 30 años de su promulgación (The Constitution Gaudium et Spes: At 30 Years of its Enactment)*. Buenos Aires: Ed. San Pablo, 1995, pp. 19-49. The first part of this work draws paragraphs from my “Notas sobre la metodología del discernimiento de la realidad histórica” (“Notes on the Methodology of Discernment of Historical Reality”), in C. GALLI, et al., *La crisis argentina: Interpretación y discernimiento a la luz de la fe (The Argentina Crisis: Interpretation and Discernment in the Light of Faith)*. Buenos Aires: San Benito, 2004, pp. 253-255.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *Der Gott Jesu Christi*. Mainz: Mathias Grünewald, 1982, pp. 279 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Among other works, cf. J.-L. MARION, *Étant Donné: Essai d’une phénoménologie de la donation*. Paris: Puf, 1997; and ID., *De surcroît: Études sur les phénomènes saturés*. Paris: Puf, 2001; see my article: “Los fenómenos saturados según J.-L. Marion y la fenomenología de la religión” (“The Phenomena Saturated as in Jean-Luc Marion and the Phenomenology of Religion”), *Stromata* 61 (2005), pp. 1-15 and J. C. SCANNONE, R. WALTON and J. P. ESPERÓN (eds.), *Trascendencia y Sobreabundancia: Fenomenología de la religión y filosofía primera (Transcendence and Overabundance: Phenomenology of Religion and First Philosophy)*. Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2015: the book’s title refers to *overabundance* as a sign of transcendence.

realities such as death, from among the poor, the excluded and the victims. Such claims find their foundations, firstly, in spiritual experience and theology, and secondly, in the analogy of faith. I will discuss these two points below.

### 1.1. Following the Ignatian Spirituality

According to Ignatius of Loyola, one of the ways to seek and find the will of God in life and personal history is through affective experiences of consolation and desolation (which he calls the second time of choice). Consolation is an increase of new life both human and graced (an increase of living faith, selfless love, joy, deep peace of the heart, gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit...). Its authenticity is manifested especially when: a) the initiative comes “from above” in both senses of the Spanish expression (as free and as “descending”); b) its birth is the death of self, the renunciation of “self-love, will and interest” and of the spirit of revenge. It arises from caring, cheerful and free service to the other, or from a previous desolation that has purified us of narcissistic and selfish attitudes. This is what Jesus said: “Whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for me will keep it” (Mt. 16: 25).

It is permissible to apply this Gospel text and the itinerary of consolation and desolation not only to persons, but also to the Church’s process of discernment of historical and social coexistence. Not infrequently desolation shows that the existential movement of our spirit does not match the Spirit of God; thus we are troubled in darkness, lacking inner peace and tranquility, and in contradiction to our deeper call.<sup>4</sup> To paraphrase Kasper, we can say that the deterioration

<sup>4</sup> Jorge Mario BERGOGLIO, quoting Romano GUARDINI (*Berichte über mein Leben*. Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1985), speaks of an “existential kerygma” or call of each human being, anterior to the evangelical kerygma, on a personal note for his doctorate (July 12, 1986), cf. D. J. FARES, “Prefazione. L’arte di guardare il mondo,” in R. GUARDINI, *L’opposizione Polare: Saggio per una filosofia del concreto vivente*. Roma: Civiltà Cattolica-Corriere della Sera, 2014, p. IX; according to Bergoglio, that primordial *kerygma* is the basic criterion of discernment.

of life, of coexistence and of human dignity, especially among the poor, and its unnecessary suffering, the seemingly intractable social contradictions, and Bernard Lonergan's so called "social absurd,"<sup>5</sup> are often signs of the absence of the Spirit of Christ living and risen, but rather, of the presence of personal, social and structural sin, source of death.

## 1.2. The Analogy of Faith

Such a method of discernment of consolation and desolation according to affective and sentient intelligence and intelligent feeling,<sup>6</sup> agrees with the analogy of faith, especially the Paschal Mystery of Christ. In both cases this is the new life that comes from loving surrender to death. It is the Paschal mystery framed in the Trinitarian Mystery, for love of Christ until the end bears its fruit in resurrection thanks to the gift of the Spirit given by the Father who is Love.

Therefore, the life of faith has a trinitarian structure, incarnational, Paschal, ecclesial, Eucharistic, which can serve as a criterion of discernment, even with respect to historical and social dimensions. The analogy holds not only for the Christian experience of individual persons, communities and Churches, but also for history and historical praxis, interpreted and judged from faith, so as to guide historical action and passion.

For history is for the believer, a history of salvation and a struggle between grace and sin (Augustine speaks of the two cities and Ignatius of the two flags), not as separated but as in the parable of the wheat and the chaff. Yet, it can be interpreted and discerned

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. London-New York-Toronto: Longmans-Green, 1957, pp. 229-232.

<sup>6</sup> Xavier ZUBIRI, *Inteligencia sentiente: Inteligencia y realidad (Sentient Intelligence: Intelligence and Reality)*. Madrid: Alianza, 1980. I associate this with Thomist "knowledge by connaturality" and Lonergan's "affective conversion," in my article "Justicia, conocimiento, espiritualidad" ("Justice, Knowledge and Spirituality," *Stromata* 70 (2014), pp. 23-28.

personally and communally, although “with fear and trembling.” That is, with humble fear of errors, in holistic and kenotic dialogue with others and waiting for the assistance and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, in the light of Scripture, in accordance with its symbolic and analogous sense.

## 2. Theory of Philosophical Discernment of Historical Action and Passion

In my opinion, developed at length in my book on *Philosophical Discernment of Historical Action and Passion*,<sup>7</sup> the human core of that experience and judgment can be found in today’s secular and globalized world. It also can be articulated philosophically, so that it can be accepted and practiced by every man and woman of good will. The philosophy of action of Maurice Blondel, several theoretical contributions of Paul Ricœur and certain contributions, particularly methodologically, of Bernard Lonergan have helped me in this work.

### 2.1. The Blondelian Background

The presupposition and background of my understanding of Blondel is that for him action constitutes the link of all links as an a priori synthesis that links all existential and social dimensions of man.<sup>8</sup> The various sciences of man, society, history, culture, including philosophy and, for whoever has faith, theology, with all the various types of formal objects that belong to them, are rooted in this life-

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Juan Carlos SCANNONE, *Discernimiento filosófico de la acción y pasión históricas: Planteo para un mundo global desde América Latina (Philosophical Discernment of Historical Action and Passion: Position for the Global World from Latin America)*. Barcelona-México D.F.: Anthropos-Universidad Iberoamericana, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Especially cf. *Les premiers écrits de Maurice Blondel. L’Action (1893). Essai d’une critique de la vie et d’une science de la pratique*. Paris: Puf, 1950. In relation to the Ignatian discernment, cf. my article: “La filosofía blondeliana de la acción y la acción del Papa Francisco” (“Blondel’s Philosophy of Action and the Action of Pope Francis”), *Stromata* 71 (2015), pp. 211-226.

world that action constitutes. In action, these areas are given together without division or confusion. Yet, Ricœur's critique of Blondel should be taken into account, namely, that he does not sufficiently take into account the presence of evil and the structures of sin in personal and historical praxis.<sup>9</sup> Here, I would add my own philosophical discernment of action as well as historical passion, especially regarding the victims of injustice and violence.

## **2.2. Discernment of Action and Passion as a Text according to Paul Ricœur**

First, I shall take action as a text like Ricœur does, whose method of interpretation is similar in both cases (2.2.1). Secondly, he inspires me to raise the corresponding discernment, in light of what he calls an "imagination of innocence" and the category of "superabundance" (2.2.2).

### **2.2.1. Action and Passion as Texts**

According to Ricœur, the text serves as a paradigm for interpreting action, historical events, history, society and culture; one can apply the same hermeneutical method to all of these.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, each event involves its own meaning, which in itself is independent of both, of the intention of the immediate authors and of the particular circumstances of their historical context. This allows many philosophers, writers and filmmakers to be able to interpret and reinterpret the events from their own situation and historical perspectives, for example, the French Revolution, or the Exodus event in the Bible which has lent itself to countless reinterpretations

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<sup>9</sup> See P. RICŒUR, *Philosophie de la volonté. I: Le volontaire et l'involontaire*. Paris: Aubier, 1949, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Paul RICŒUR, "Le modèle du texte : l'action sensée considérée comme un texte," and "Expliquer et comprendre. Sur quelques connexions remarquables entre la théorie du texte, la théorie de l'action et la théorie de l'histoire," in ID., *Du texte à l'action : Essais d'herméneutique II*. Paris: Seuil, 1986, respectively, pp. 183-211, 213-236.

from the new contexts of Israel, the New Testament and even today, in Latin America.

For Ricœur the text opens up a world of possibilities (“the world of the text”), even to readers in other generations and cultures. The same thing happens when historical action is treated as a text. But for philosophers this is not only strictly semantic content, but also pragmatic, with the illocutionary force of fear, hope, joy, sadness, patriotic fervor, etc., or the perlocutionary, more or less effectively historic. As in the texts, the historical actions and passions “shape” human figures, lifestyles and real possibilities for the future, with an inexhaustible semantic and pragmatic potential. This “gives you to think and what to think,” and what you intelligently feel and discern.

Hence, the hermeneutical method of the historical starts with the whole-part relationship. One begins with a guess, which favors certain parts of a first and provisional understanding of the whole. Although there is no method for guessing, such a method does exist when it comes to their validation, or not, through analysis and explanations that are more or less scientific (intentional, causal, structural...), until an entirely satisfactory deeper understanding of the whole is achieved. Ricœur compares this task with that of a judge, who, using data, signs and indications, is able to reject some interpretations as impossible and to calibrate the probability of other interpretations, so as to achieve even some moral certainty. The same applies to the “conflict of interpretations” of historical events, which, though different, can be equally possible and valid, provided they are not contradictory.

On the other hand, in the field of human affairs this means being attentive not only to what is objectively interpreted, but also to the radically subjective attitude of the interpreter, because, according to Lonergan, after the “masters of suspicion,” the interpreter’s authenticity cannot be assumed today.<sup>11</sup> Aristotle states that, in practical

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. B. LONERGAN, “Third Lecture: The Ongoing Genesis of Methods,” in F. CROWE (ed.), *A Third Collection. Papers by Bernard J. F. Lonergan S.I.* New York/London: Paulist, 1985, pp. 146-165, especially 157.



matters, i.e., ethics and politics, right appetite is a *conditio sine qua non* of true practical knowledge (cf. his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, Ch. 7). According to Ignatius of Loyola, this can be distorted by disorderly affects – today we would rather say *ideologically*. Lonergan emphasizes the importance of affective conversion in the method of the human sciences (sciences of history, society, culture, religion, etc.), as well as philosophy and theology, all of which have something to do with the “world of meaning and value.”<sup>12</sup> No surprise, thus, to see Heidegger attending to the affective temper of serenity (*Gelassenheit*) so that being is let be and things in themselves are known without the interference of our own will to power.

### 2.2.2. The Imagination of Innocence and the Category of Overabundance

In his book *L’homme faillible (Fallible Man)*, Ricœur mentions three basic human passions: for power, worth and (self-) value, as they relate to core social dimensions such as politics, economics and culture. However, due to human fallibility, these passions tend to become disordered, though of themselves they are neutral. Furthermore, they can and must bear the affective basis of the moral and social virtues. Hence, in order to judge their disorder, to distinguish them from the neutrality of the passion itself, and to direct or redirect them to their respectively good of order, Ricœur proposes what he calls an “imagination of innocence”<sup>13</sup> in which light it is possible to carefully discern both personal and social affective attitudes. In my opinion, this proposal of Ricœur’s philosophy is parallel to Ignatius

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<sup>12</sup> See my article: “Afectividad y método: La conversión afectiva en la teoría del método de Bernard Lonergan” (“Affection and Method: The Affective Conversion in the Method Theory of Bernard Lonergan”), *Stromata* 65 (2009), pp. 173-186.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. P. RICŒUR, *Finitude et culpabilité. I: L’homme faillible*. Paris: Aubier, 1960. See my work: *Religión y nuevo pensamiento : Hacia una filosofía de la religión para nuestro tiempo desde América Latina (Religion and New Thinking: Towards a Philosophy of Religion for Our Time from Latin America)*. México-Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005, ch. 5, especially pp. 144 ss. The “Imagination of Innocence” raises a corresponding affective disposition.

of Loyola's spiritual theology when he teaches us to examine ourselves in order to discern the affective movements that subjectively trigger the contemplation of the (objective) life, action and passion of Christ, the Virgin and the Saints as models of right affection, virtue and innocence.

In the face of moral disorder and/or moral decadence, such discernment takes place not only in a counterfactual manner, but also in a positive form whenever in the light of imagination of innocence we discover in the historical action and passion not only the social absurd, but also the seeds of greater humanity, real possibilities of humanization, an emerging "plus" of life and freedom, growth in justice, solidarity and respect for human dignity. One can discern the "plus" in both personal and social affective experience of these basic human passions, in right "goods of order" and in corresponding institutional structures: political, economic and cultural.

Both Pedro Trigo and, as mentioned above, Walter Kasper identify as a positive criterion of discernment for a better future that is truly possible the fact that life emerges in surabundance, particularly, according to the first mentioned author, when that happens amidst circumstances of death.<sup>14</sup> Here Ricœur can help us understand for among the "categories of hope" in his "philosophy of the threshold," superabundance can serve as a hopeful criterion of discernment, since "where sin increases, grace also abounds."<sup>15</sup> This happens also today, in the context of the secular age.

Such emergent situations of new life amidst death not only causes "radical amazement," but is also a sign of the creative presence of God who is calling for the freedom of man, as it is also the creative capacity of man when, having been taken to the limit, he opens generously to the gift that comes "from above."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See Pedro TRIGO, *La cultura del barrio (The Culture of the Neighborhood)*. Caracas: Univ. Cat. Andrés Bello-Centro Gumilla, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. RICEUR, *De l'interprétation: Essai sur Freud*. Paris: Seuil, 1965, pp. 507 ff.; ID. *Le conflit des interprétations: Essais d'herméneutique*. Paris: Seuil, 1969, p. 310.

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of self-transcendence of human freedom thanks to the concurrent divine action, see: K. RAHNER and P. OVERHAGE, *Das Problem der Hominisation*.

When Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* 228, teaches that “unity is above the conflict,” it is another sign of the Spirit who, without that name, can be discerned by anyone who has good intentions and will when “... solidarity becomes a way of making history, a living area in which conflicts, tensions and opposites can achieve a unity that generates life.” This is similar to what Kasper says as mentioned above, then it achieves “resolution on a higher plane, which itself retains the valuable virtues of competing possibilities.”<sup>17</sup> Thus it is possible to achieve social harmony not only ethically and aesthetically, but also historically and politically, as positive signs of the times as a work of art. These cases generate both personal and political creativity. In my opinion, this existential and social harmony is the aesthetic component of discernment. For the overabundance of gratuity generates a beauty that attracts.

Thus, one is able to see, read and discern the signs of times in historical action and passion, and is also able to renew hope and to act freely according to it.

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Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1961, but especially the section: “Zur philosophischen Problematik des Werdebegriffes” (pp. 55-78).

<sup>17</sup> Earlier, Jorge Mario Bergoglio applies this to the social and political Ignatian spiritual experience of existential and social conflict resolution at a higher level: cf. his article “«De acuerdo con esta esperanza» (Const. 812): Algunos pensamientos sobre la unión de corazones” (“«And According to This Hope» (Const. 812): Some Thoughts about the Union of Hearts,” *CIS* (Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis) 20 (1990), n. 63-64, pp. 121-142, especially 131-133.

# ***Between Grace and Responsibility: A Fresh Reading of the Beatitudes in the Church (Mt. 5,3-12)***

**MASSIMO GRILLI\***

The literary *ouverture* to the Sermon on the Mount as presented by the evangelist Matthew shall be the focus of this brief study. But before entering into the heart of the question, let us have a brief look at the Sermon itself. François Mauriac, the French writer, wrote: “Those who have never read the Sermon on the Mount cannot grasp what Christianity is all about.” This phrase from Mauriac, though certainly in need of further theological refinement, elegantly captures the influence which these 109 verses have asserted in the history of Christianity, not to mention in the history of Western society. Indeed, the *Sermon on the Mount*, to which the *Beatitudes* function as *ouverture* or doorway to its meaning, has enthralled and shaken many generations of readers. It has been defined as the «*magna charta*» of Christianity, history in miniature of Christianity... and one could go on. G. Barth affirmed that, besides the Letter to the Romans, «no other New Testament text has put so much pressure on the church nor caused so much soul-searching as the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> In the winter of 1888-89, while studying Law in London, Mahatma Gandhi was won over by this discourse: “The Sermon on the Mount went straight to my heart....” He commented: “the message of Jesus, as I understand it, is encapsulated in the Sermon on the Mount... It is thanks to this discourse that I became fond of Jesus.” Immediately afterwards, however, Mahatma Gandhi added: “In the West this foundational message has seen various deformations... Much of what is considered as Christianity is a negation of

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<sup>1</sup> G. BARTH, «Bergpredigt», in *TRE* 5 (1980), 611.

the Sermon on the Mount.”<sup>2</sup> We must also take up the challenge of the great German Chancellor Otto Bismarck (1815-1898) who argued that “with the Sermon on the Mount one cannot govern a State,” and yet I wonder if the Gospel does not contain a call for new attitudes for individuals and communities, a questioning of profound motives, which the Church cannot and must not renounce when witnessing to the foundations of human society.<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly the Church cannot and must not take the place of the State, but it cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the struggle for justice; it cannot and must not renounce proclaiming the Truth of God and human dignity, awakening those moral forces without which just and dignified structures cannot be built. These, then, are the questions which I shall confront in this brief study: What is the truth about God and about Man proclaimed by the Beatitudes? What is the *justice* revealed in the Beatitudes which Jesus pronounces on the Mount? *Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness*, Jesus declared (Mt. 6:33). I would like to explore what «*blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful*» means in our secular world. What is the Truth of God to which a *renewed Church* is called to witness *in a Secular Age*. I shall approach the question about the Truth that a *renewed Church* is asked to witness under three headings determined by the meaning of *the Kingdom and its righteousness*.

1. *First of all* I would like to point out the oddity of a discourse (that of the Mount) focused fully on the demanding Will of God, which, nonetheless, begins with *blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the peacemakers...* Pinhas Lapidé also noted this incongruity: “I have often thought that in reality the Beatitudes would go better if put at the end of the teaching on the Mount, of which they would then constitute its crucial

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<sup>2</sup> Pocket Gandhi Series 6, Bombay 1963, cover page and p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. W. EGGER, “Handlungsorientierte Auslegung der Antithesen Mt. 5,21-48,” in K. KERTELGE (Hrsg.), *Ethik im Neuen Testament*. Freiburg/Br., 1984, pp. 119-144.

affirmation, which concludes with the crowning promise: «Rejoice and be glad, for great shall be the your reward in the Kingdom of Heaven».<sup>4</sup> One thing is certain: the repetition of the word *makarioi*, nine times, introduces readers to an atmosphere of joy and blessing. Why? The response is to be found in light of the context. The Gospel proclaimed by Jesus began to set in motion a community called to be the messianic community. In this first discourse, Matthew places before the community the radical demands of the Kingdom, but not without first saying that the Kingdom is grace. The forceful relationship between indicative and imperative is placed exactly here – perhaps for the first time in the Gospel of Matthew – thus forming a relationship which has cut across and divided the interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount and even those Christian denominations which have made constant reference to it. By placing the nine Beatitudes at the beginning of a radical and demanding speech, Matthew wants his readers to perceive above all the salvific character of the proclamation of the Kingdom and to understand that the same demanding Will of God is *Gospel*, that is, *Good News*.<sup>5</sup> A comparison may be drawn with the Ten Commandments in Ex 20 and Deut 5. They also express the demanding Will of God, yet they also begin with «I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of slavery» (Ex 20,2).<sup>6</sup> The Decalogue begins, therefore, not with an imperative, but with an indicative: “The proof of the love of God, which, according to the rabbis, only gives him the right to address man with «thou», expecting that he be able to bear the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, which in Judaism is a way of defining the voluntary acceptance of the commandments.”<sup>7</sup>

The First Testament joins joy primarily to the awareness of belonging to a “Salvation History,” which contains a guarantee

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<sup>4</sup> P. LAPIDE, *The Sermon on the Mount: Utopia or Program for Action?* New York 1986, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup> U. LUZ, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*. Neukirchen-Vluyn <sup>5</sup>2002, p. 218.

<sup>6</sup> P. LAPIDE, *The Sermon on the Mount*, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

of success in the same Promise of God also (and especially) in time of crisis. In Isaiah 12 the divine herald invites Zion to rejoice for the presence of the Holy One of Israel in her midst (Is 12,6), and in Is 35 all of Creation – represented by dry places through antonomasia, or also as the desert and the plain – is invited to rejoice for that which God is about to do (Is 35,1-2; cf. also Is 49,13; 55,12-13; 61,10-11; Zeph 3,14, etc.) This joy for the coming of grace must not be confused, however, with the *apatheia* of the stoic wise man, who advances along the path to happiness by choosing those things which are within himself – and therefore within his power – and withdrawing from the world and from that which it represents within us. The wise man, master of himself, imposes upon himself *apatheia/impassibility* in the face of passions: in the face of *desire, fear, pain, pleasure*, which constitute the four fundamental human passions. Biblical Man, however, knows above all that joy is a gift of God and that it is incarnated not only in man's interior, but also in human history with its turbulences and its contradictions: a history in which every believer participates in fullness, without detachment or contempt. Joy, as witnessed to in the Bible, is not a pure interior feeling, but is rather a story of salvation in the history of humanity, in the present and future, when *God will make the daughter of Zion exult and shout for joy* (Is 12,6) and *those whom the Lord has ransomed will come to Zion with shouts of joy and eternal rejoicing* (Is 35,10). Certainly joy has an eschatological character, but the believer cannot and must not affirm the future at the expense of the present, just as he or she cannot close themselves off without hope in the future!

2. *The second aspects of the truth according to the Beatitudes* may be deduced by a reflection on the linguistic acts in which those same Beatitudes are formed. We all know that through language we not only describe things but we also act; we *do* things. Language has an *agent* or *actional* dimension. J. L. Austin expressed this function with an expressive title: *How to Do Things with Words*. This means that every speech we deliver, every story we tell, every utterance we

pronounce<sup>8</sup> has not only the purpose of expressing «how things are», to ascertain the truth or falsity of a thing, but also to *perform* that which a text says, tells, utters. That to which we refer is language as a performative act.<sup>9</sup> To which of the linguistic acts belong the macarisms? All nine of the Beatitudes contain not imperatives but rather indicative verbs. Are they, therefore, «representative» acts,<sup>10</sup> which describe the reality of things as they are, or are they «declarative» acts, which change the state of things? Or, again, are they «commisive» acts, with which God commits to change the world in line with the words of hope expressed in the Beatitudes? How should these linguistic acts be understood? A decision must be made, because, with the category of *Beatitudo* applied to the situation of human deprivation, there is a risk of endorsing passivity in the face of conditions which should rather be denounced as *unworthy* of the human person. Does not the hope of future reward (in Mt. 5,4-9 the verbs are in the future tense) turn the message of Christ into an opiate for the present? This concern – which has also seen historical deformations caused by an equivocal hermeneutic of the Christian message – demonstrates above all a mistaken understanding of the linguistic acts of the Beatitudes.

This pushes us to reflect on the constant combination *makarioi* / *blessed* applied to the categories of people seen as lacking – or at the very least, insignificant – from a human point of view. It is a destabilizing element, because the reader knows from daily experience, that the poor, the meek and the persecuted are not *blessed*. Blessed are those who have the means to impose themselves, who hold strength and power, and who attract the attention of the world to themselves. The destabilization produced by this combination of beatitude on the one hand and deficiency on the other is intentional:

<sup>8</sup> As with Semiotics and Semiology, there is a certain confusion between «sentence» and «utterance», as if the two corresponded exactly. In my opinion, the *sentence* belongs to the realm of Syntax, while *utterance* belongs to the realm of Pragmatics.

<sup>9</sup> A performative act is one which performs a function; it does what it says.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. the classification in M. GRILLI, «Parola di Dio e linguaggio umano», *Gregorianum* 94 (2013), pp. 530-531.



it seeks to provoke a reversal in the reader. The Beatitudes are in fact «declarative» acts, which change reality. It is a reversal of prospective, according to which the true cornerstones of the messianic community – the compass of the builders of the church of Christ – are exactly those persons whom the world has rejected! The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone (Mt. 21,42). After this first discourse, the readers of Matthew come to know that the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus is the alternative to worldly categories. The world lives in its myths: the compass of the builders of the world is neither meekness nor mercy. Jesus turns these categories upside down: *The stones rejected by the builders become the cornerstones*. The compass of God is not the compass of the builders of the world. Too often the Church has been guided by the compass of the builders of this world, according to the logic of power and prestige. Too often the Church – it was said by St. Bernard nine centuries ago – has measured its fidelity by the criteria of Justinian rather than by those offered by the Sermon on the Mount. She has often forgotten that she is *built on the stone rejected by the builders*. Jesus *declares* blessed some categories of persons, which by common standards are not so. Declaring them blessed, Jesus modifies the state of things, turning upside down the categories of human wisdom, according to which the poor, the afflicted, the meek, the persecuted are the losers. This means, above all, that the beatitudes should be read in the optic of the Kingdom which is made present in Jesus. The Kingdom brought by Jesus establishes another order, a new situation in which the first place belongs to the Kingdom of God and its righteousness. Placing the poor, the meek, the merciful front and center is not to put consciences to sleep; rather, it is to radically challenge the hierarchical order of secular society, according to which only the rich and powerful count. Jesus declares the paradox of God and of His Kingdom: the losers become the beneficiaries of messianic salvation. This is exactly the contrary of a lax conscience, because it involves the radical confrontation of the categories of the world. In this way, Matthew is not making a historical condition absolute and is not tying Christian joy inseparably to that condition.

The absolute for Matthew is not the economic or social conditions to which a person belongs. Rather, his absolute is the *Kingdom of God and its righteousness* (6,33), with the reversal of the criteria which the *prōton* of the Kingdom provokes. If we want to translate all this into socio-economic terms, it must be said that the reintegration of the excluded and marginalized into the people of God is an essential part of the mission of Jesus and of Christian salvation (Mt. 9,13).

A rabbinical story on the tower of Babel goes thus. When men decided to build a city that extended to the sky, they climbed up a ramp on the right side to carry the bricks to the top and went down on the left to pick more up. Now if a slave died in the ascent or descent no one cared, but if someone broke a brick everyone was worried about how much it would cost to replace it. Who would repay the cost of the lost merchandise? When God saw that men were more concerned with the bricks than with their companions, He came down and scattered them over the face of the earth. End of the *midrash*.

It has been said – and I agree – that, in the actual state of affairs, “... the most alarming aspect is not that some peoples depend upon other peoples; and that some human human beings depend on others. Indeed, what happens is something much worse; namely, that rulers no longer consider those who depend on them as their subjects, but rather as excluded. In other words, those persons no longer count, they are not even considered in their machinations, in their accounting, in their projects for the future, not even in their economic, political, or cultural programs. This, for example, is exactly what is taking place with the vast majority of African countries.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus establishes a different order and a Church in the process of renewing must not forget it!

**3.** *A third connotation of the truth* that emerges from the Macarisms also derives from the reflection on the linguistic acts mentioned above. The linguistic acts of the Beatitudes are declarative,

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<sup>11</sup> J. M. CASTILLO, *I poveri e la teologia: Vita, libertà, utopia nella teologia del terzo millennio*. Assisi 2002, p. 334.

as we have affirmed. But they are also *commissive* acts. Commissive acts, according to the definition of J. R. Searle, are those with which the speaker commits him/herself to do what he/she says. In other words, by saying *blessed are the poor, the meek, the merciful*, Jesus engages God's self, ensuring that this becomes true! The categories of poor, of merciful, of meek are declared blessed, because God is committed with them and in their favor to establishing a different order. The *divine passives* found in the Beatitudes (*they shall be satisfied, they shall be consoled*, etc.) present God committing Himself in the first person: God is the artisan of this reversal! This commitment of God at the side of the poor makes them the protagonists of history and not its victims. All of this derives from the conception – in force in the Ancient Near East and in Israel – that the function of the king was not to remain impartial, respecting the *status quo*. The function of the king was not even to render justice to his subjects according to their merits, but to come to the defense of the one who knew not how and/or could not defend him/herself, of the poor, of the orphan, and of the widows who have no guarantee, because they have neither rights nor property. Therefore, it is not neutrality the ideal condition of the king but the assumption of responsibility for the *poor*, in the face of those who are deprived and vulnerable. God is committed and calls the disciples, indeed all believers, to commit themselves in accordance with the same model, which is the one we see incarnated in Jesus.

At this point, however, another fundamental aspect of the Sermon on the Mount presents itself: It is not only God who is responsible for these categories of people; men and women are also called to responsibility. It is, in some manner, a task which Jesus the Messiah presents to his disciples. In Semitic languages verbs are not classified based on their tense (present, past, or future) but on the basis of the completeness or incompleteness of the action they represent. The *yiqtol* in Hebrew does not properly speaking correspond to the future; it rather manifests an incomplete action. But who is called to realize the incomplete? The passive form of the verbs (*they shall be satisfied, they shall be consoled, they shall obtain mercy*, etc.)

indicates on the one hand that God is the protagonist. But the look put upon active agents such as the *merciful*, the *peacemakers*... and above all the context itself of the Sermon on the Mount with its call *to do the Torah* (cf. 5,17-48), puts the accent on man's responsibility more than on God's. The future is the place of human responsibility: it is the space of human action, between the present of God and the incomplete future of human justice. It is the time of responsibility; i.e. that which is spread between the present promise – established with the Kingdom of God – and the future fulfillment, when the afflicted shall be consoled and the meek shall inherit the earth. Christianity is exactly the opposite of an opiate doctrine of the masses. The Christian is involved, performs that which he/she declares. Matthew is the Evangelist of orthopraxis and not purely of orthodoxy. Many orthodox persons will present themselves on that day and say: '*Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?*' Then I will declare to them solemnly, '*I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers!*' In this regard, the Theology of Liberation was perfectly right: *praxis*/action is the place for the verification of faith!

4. *To conclude*, let's now look briefly at what in Matthew's Gospel appears to be an opening in the form of the beatitudes and a closure delivered with the scene of the universal judgement. Indeed, what has been said so far becomes all the more evident as we take notice of the fact that Matthew puts in a position that corresponds to the beatitudes, which open the first of the speeches in the Gospel, the so-called universal judgment (Mt. 25,31-48) which instead closes the five great speeches of the same Gospel. Mt. 25,31-48 presents a king who proclaims: *I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was naked and you clothed me.* In this text, that which defines an action as "just" is not its relationship to any just "formally Christian law." In the declaration of the king and the response of those who are judged, a list of six works

of mercy is repeated which is naturally exemplary:<sup>12</sup> the measuring rod of justice is the doing of these works of mercy. There are also texts within Judaism which witness to an analogous program. In *Sotà* 14a we find a saying from Rabbi *Chanina bar Chama* in which he comments on Dt. 13,5 “the Lord your God you shall follow” in this manner:

Is it possible for a person to walk and follow God, when in the same book it is said that the Lord your God is a consuming fire? Rather, this teaches us to emulate the conduct of God. As God clothed the naked (Adam and Eve), so you must also clothe those who are naked; as God visited the sick (Abraham), so you must also visit the sick; as God consoled the afflicted (Isaac), so you must also console the afflicted; as God buried the dead (Moses), so you must also bury the dead.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that in Judaism this is not merely an ethical program, lacking theological tension, because the works of mercy in that same Judaism constitute an *imitatio Dei*.

Yet the text of Mt. 25 remains unique. In all the history of world religions there is no page analogous to this one, in which the judge identifies himself with the most wretched among men and for which the eternal destiny of an individual is decided on the basis of his/her behavior towards them. Its newness consists, therefore, not only in the *imitatio Dei*, but in the definition of the relationship with Christ on the basis of solidarity with the poor of the earth. Matthew presents us with a new perception of *His presence* in history. The hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, these are the temple of Christ's presence. It is a new perception of *God-with-us* (cf. 1,23; 28,20). The king-judge invests his authority in the defense of the poor: their cause becomes his cause in judgment, their destiny his own.<sup>14</sup> It would surely be a misunderstanding of Matthew to interpret the final judgment, contained in chapter 25, as an affirmation of a Christianity defined essentially as a ‘philanthropic ethic’. What we have here, in

<sup>12</sup> Giving food to the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the foreigner, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, seeking out the imprisoned.

<sup>13</sup> Taken from A. MELLO, *Evangelo secondo Matteo*. Magnano 1995, p. 438.

<sup>14</sup> D. MARGUERAT, *Le Jugement dans l'Évangile de Matthieu*. Genève 21995, p. 515.

the first place, is not an *ethic*, but a *theology* in the most noble sense of the word, that is, the ability to recognize the Presence of God in history. For sure, it is an element of notable theological interest that Matthew concentrates the presence of God here – not in the Temple, nor merely in the plenipotentiary representatives who speak in the name of God (cf. 28,20) – but in the poor in need of aid: the *hungry*, the *naked*, the *prisoners*... Instead of a defense of the rights of the church, Matthew offers us the final criterion for judgment, namely, the *responsibility for the poor*. And this is the *secularity* of which Dietrich Bonhoeffer also spoke. God is in the center of the “village” whenever the human beings, every human being, is not chased to the periphery, is not excluded. Grace is at the center whenever there is responsibility for the many others. Indeed, the Church must continue to speak about the last things and articulate with renewed energy the Name of God, Salvation, Eternal Life; yet, in order to do so, it must also seriously pronounce all the words that are penultimate as it understands that to serve the Kingdom of God is to serve Man. And this is the good news of the Beatitudes!



# ***Authenticity, Accompaniment and Trust: Graces for a Discerning Church in an Age of Secularity***

**PHILIP J. ROSSI\***

Among the many themes sounded within the presentations and discussion of the Roman conference “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age” have been a series of vibrant reminders that we are members of a Church that, like the disciples in their following of Jesus, is, has been, and will continue to be *in via* in this world: As a pilgrim Church, we accompany one another on a journey that is at once arduous and joyful, suffused in light yet often cloaked in darkness, with sure hope in the destination ahead of us, even in the face of uncertainties on the path that lies immediately before us. We are pilgrims both of and amid the secular ways of our age, who walk with each other within the concrete multiplicity of its cultures; these ways and cultures each provide daunting challenges as well as creative opportunities for an attentive, discerning, and faithful accompaniment of one another walking into the future. In that journey, we find ourselves united in the common fragility of a shared humanity, even as we are called together by God’s Spirit to the self-emptying service that gives witness to the transforming abundance of God’s love for us and for the creation of which we are a part and in which we walk and dwell.

In this prelude to the presentations that were given in the conference session on “A Discerning Church: The Gospel Experience, and Foundations in Secular Times for Renewed Hope,” I would like to locate them as a set of complementary articulations of what I believe to be a crucial challenge that the Spirit invites us to engage on the journey we have undertaken as Church. This challenge is to shape

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and enact practices for a renewed, reformed, and deepened mutual human trust that will enable us to move together into the future in and through the challenges and the opportunities that issue from this age of secularity. In particular, these presentations suggest a need for us to attend to at least four pre-requisites for, first, discerning the challenge of renewing and deepening mutual trust and, second, for mapping ways that provide us with hope for successfully addressing the specific challenges to mutual trust that arise within the circumstances of secularity. These pre-requisites are: 1. Openness to recognition of the pluriform workings of the Spirit both in the world and in the church. 2. Attentiveness to the experience of faith as continuing reflection, not closure, reflection that enables recognition of incompleteness in our Christian discourse and practice as well as of complementarities in the discourse and practice of our partners in dialogue. 3. Recognition of our own participation and immersion in the “social imaginaries” of a secular age as itself a modality of the working of the Spirit. 4. Commitment to open and inclusive dialogue as a modality of discerning opportunities and practices for the rebuilding of trust.

My proposal is that we read these presentations as urging us to incorporate these prerequisites into the efforts we make to discern the presence and activity of God’s Spirit in our “secular times.” If we pay attention to these prerequisites, we may then begin to see how authenticity, accompaniment, and trust can function in concert as modalities of enacted grace that are particularly apt for a time of secularity: these three are, in my judgment, appropriate for shaping our discernment of the signs of our times into a practice and an enactment of the renewed hope in the living God that the Gospel calls upon us to witness. When discernment is exercised in these modalities, I am suggesting, it will be possible for us to attend more readily to the Spirit as present and active in the dynamics of plurality, not just in a comforting uniformity; as present and active in the incompleteness of uncertainty, not only in the closure of certainty; as present and active in the cultural particularities of our “age,” as well as in what is rightly treasured from the past; and, perhaps most

significant of all, as present and active in the challenging deep and persistent otherness of all our companions on the way, as well as in what we recognize of ourselves in them.

In the background of my proposal for reading these presentations in terms of authenticity, accompaniment, and trust as modalities of the “grace of discernment” for our times is a variation on a central affirmation made by Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age*. In that work, he articulated the impact of the “immanent frame” that constitutes the social imaginary of a secular age in terms of a major alteration of “the conditions of belief” that has been brought about in the dynamics of modernity and its aftermath. In Taylor’s account, this alteration of these conditions of belief has its impact not just upon professed adherents of the religious traditions of theism, but also upon religious non-theists, atheists, agnostics, and the religiously indifferent (the last of whom have recently been designated sociologically as “nones”<sup>1</sup>). In other words, we all find ourselves in “a secular age” as the historically contingent locus that has shaped the social imaginary in which we live with one another and through which we accompany one another *in via*. The particular contingencies of history that have shaped us as participants in the globalizing culture that (so far) has been given its main trajectory by the West have changed the conditions of belief for all of us, not just for those of us who profess to be believers. These conditions of belief have been constituted by the socio-cultural, linguistic, material, and conceptual landscape of modernity and its aftermath in which we now are constrained by our contingency and historicity to profess, articulate, and justify affirmations, as well as denials, of the status of our humanity with respect to a transcendent (or transcending) reality. Belief and unbelief, as well as indifference to either, cannot but be “of the age” in which they are enacted – and that age is now, for all

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<sup>1</sup> “Religious “nones” – a shorthand we use to refer to people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is “nothing in particular” – now make up roughly 23% of the U.S. adult population,” Michael LIPKA, “A closer look at America’s rapidly growing religious ‘nones,’” May 13, 2015, <http://goo.gl/QcAhtU> (accessed June 21, 2015).

of us, stamped in all of its contingency with the marks of secularity. Taylor has summarized this effect in a pointed way by noting that a secular age has made “naïve belief” difficult if not impossible; all belief – particularly the beliefs (*and* the non-beliefs) that matter most for us – has become “contestable;” all of us, theists and atheists, the “nones” and the indifferent, can and will find ourselves challenged by what he terms the “fragilization” of belief.<sup>2</sup>

In the seminar for the Gregorian faculty that preceded the Conference, discussion of Taylor’s account of the conditions of belief suggested the possibility of an important expansion of its scope: The secularities of our time have altered not only the conditions of belief, they have also altered the conditions of mutual trust with which we approach and engage one another. The alteration in conditions of trust brought about by secularity has had widespread impact both within the Church and throughout society at large, and the questions about the ways these effects bear upon one another generated a lively discussion in the seminar. As important as these larger questions may be, a secular age’s alteration of the conditions of trust has a more immediate significance for the more limited scope of this prelude, which seeks to point out why and how, in consequence of this alteration, attention to authenticity and accompaniment will be especially crucial for the Church’s discernment of its role and responsibility as agent for the renewal of trust in a time of secularity. In order to do this, a return to Taylor’s account will be helpful, since it provides at least one telling clue to the specific mutual bearing that conditions of belief and conditions of trust have upon one another in a secular age.

My point of reference for this will be a general description that Taylor provides of a social imaginary: “the ways in which [people] imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and

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<sup>2</sup> *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 303-304, 531-532.

images that underlie these expectations.”<sup>3</sup> This description indicates the all-encompassing extent to which a social imaginary provides the fundamental horizon of expectation and meaning that frames our interaction with one another; it is in consequence of its provision of such an all-encompassing horizon that the “immanent frame,” the designation Taylor gives to the operative social imaginary of secularity, can have an impact that results in an alteration to the “conditions of belief” that makes all beliefs “contestable.” This description further suggests – and this is a key basis from which an extension to “conditions of trust” can be made – that trust, as a condition for elements of a social imaginary such as “fitting together,” “how things go between them,” and “expectations,” itself constitutes one of the “deep normative notions” embedded in the structure of a social imaginary. Mutual trust is requisite for the functioning of any social imaginary, so the discernment of how mutual trust functions in the social imaginary of a secular age is certainly of importance for orienting the journey that we as church find ourselves taking in and through it.

It should thus not be surprising if the fragilization of belief that ensues in an age of secularity brings with it a correlative fragilization of trust. Such a correlation seems to be at work within Taylor’s account of the “cross-pressures” and the “dilemmas” that emerge within the “immanent frame” as it tries to bear the weight of the moral expectations entailed in our efforts to attain the fullness that our human hopes and aspirations hold out before us.<sup>4</sup> In these aspirations and efforts, trust emerges as a central locus for the dilemmas and cross-pressures that bear both most heavily and often most subtly upon the putative self-sufficiency and inner adequacy of the immanent frame.

This can be seen in the extent to which Taylor’s account gestures toward the conditions of trust as the loci in which these dilemmas and cross-pressures play themselves out, particularly upon those

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<sup>3</sup> *A Secular Age*, p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> *A Secular Age*, chapters 16-18, pp. 594-710.

forms of our human vulnerability for which trust constitutes both an urgently necessary yet radically fragile constituent element in enacting proper recognition and regard for the vulnerabilities that are threaded into our lives.<sup>5</sup> The contingencies of the world often manifest our vulnerabilities in ways – such as severe life-time physical disabilities or affective incapacities; social circumstances foreclosing possibilities for even minimal development of basic human capacities for knowledge and well-being; large and small dislocations of people in consequence of war, civil unrest, economic instability, or natural disaster – that stretch to and beyond the limit the capacity of the chief moral sources that the immanent frame recognizes, universal justice and impartial benevolence, to move us to respond in timely, appropriate, and effective ways to those affected by them. In consequence, the multi-dimensional vulnerability of our embodiment, the variety of ways in we are subject, both as agents and victims, of the “draw to violence,” the temptation to codify values in ways that allow a facile distinction between “good guys” (“us” of course) and “bad guys” (obviously “them”), can work, both separately and together, to overwhelm the fragility of our moral intent and sympathy in ways that result in the transformation of the high demands of universal justice and impartial benevolence into a condescending and destructive misanthropy.

Taylor’s gesture towards the link between vulnerability and trust helps mark out the contested status in which they each stand in a secular age, a contestation that is fraught with significance for questions that are fundamental both for philosophical and theological anthropology: What constitutes us as human? What is the meaning and worth of our humanity? At stake in the framing of our responses to the concrete individual and social manifestations of our vulnerability and to the invitations that they offer for enactments of mutual trust is nothing less than the fundamental constitution and import of our humanity. It is in recognition of the vulnerability that goes

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<sup>5</sup> Also relevant here is Pope Francis’s discussion of vulnerability in *Evangelii gaudium* §§ 209-216.

“all the way down” in the humanity of all of us that our authentic selfhood is rendered open to the transforming presence of divine love – a point that Taylor reminds us has been given abidingly powerful expression both in the Johannine writings and in the novels of Dostoevsky.<sup>6</sup> By referencing this point, Taylor’s account identifies vulnerability and the space it creates as a primary locus for the enactment of trust. It is the place within which the Church is invited to enact graces most fitting to its character as a Church *in via*: the graces of a welcoming and an accompaniment that are abundantly inclusive in their attentiveness to the deepest and most fragile points of our human vulnerability.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 451-453; cf. *A Secular Age*, pp. 709-710; cf. p. 569.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of the church’s enactment of welcoming and accompaniment and its basis in God’s hospitality in creation, see Philip J. Rossi, “Sojourners, Guests, and Strangers: The Church as Enactment of the Hospitality of God,” in *Questions liturgiques – Liturgical Questions* 90, 2009, pp. 121-131.



# ***Spirituality as Platform and Forum for Encounter***

**ROBERT J. SCHREITER\***

## **Trying to Grasp “Spirituality”**

Secularization in the West was seen through much of the twentieth century as being on an inevitable trajectory, wherein first of all religion would gradually disappear from the public sphere to become a purely private matter. Then it would disappear altogether. Europe placed itself in the vanguard of all of this, to be followed by other developed, industrialized nations.

For a long time in academic circles, this appeared to be accepted truth. Even as it was admitted that secularization took somewhat different forms and moved at different paces in, say, northern Europe and the United States, the inevitability of religion’s gradual disappearance remained the intellectual norm. Many observable trends appeared to support this claim. Most notable was the continuing decrease in attendance at religious services, a diminishing number of participants in religious practices, and fewer people accepting religious beliefs.

While there are some sociologists and cultural commentators that continue to hold on to this narrative of the disappearance of religion, most today would likely opt for a somewhat different view.<sup>1</sup> Although the West may have appeared to become increasingly secular, a closer look reveals a good deal of religious sentiment remains there that is not expressed through traditional institutional channels. This sentiment is expressed in a variety of ways and is

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<sup>1</sup> A major figure continuing to adhere to the secularization hypothesis is the British sociologist Steve BRUCE. See his *Secularization: In Defense of an Unfashionable Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.



manifested at distinctive occasions. As a sentiment, it can be a desire for transcendence or for a re-enchantment of the world. It can be expressed as a quest for authenticity or integrity, as a sense of connectedness with the earth or a moral solidarity around issues of justice and human rights. It is manifested in an almost instinctive coming together in times of catastrophe (such as after the 9/11 attacks in the United States in 2001) or shared civic tragedy (such as the Utoya Massacre in Norway in 2011). Collectively, these sentiments have come to be known as an amalgam of “spirituality.”

While there is no agreement on just how to define this phenomenon (if it indeed can be considered a single phenomenon), there seem to be some salient characteristics many observers appeal to when describing it. First of all, “spirituality” so construed is juxtaposed to institutional religion as it has been understood in the (Christian) West. There is special attention here to the institutional dimension of religion, both in these traditions’ self-understanding (as a set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices), as well as in a religion’s relationship to other institutions in its environment (political, social, and cultural). It is captured in the often-heard phrase, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” In this respect, spirituality participates in an anti-institutional bias that many observers have found throughout the developed world. Ronald Inglehart, in his longitudinal study of forty-three of what he calls “post-survival” societies (i.e., where a majority of the population does not have to worry about day-to-day physical survival), sees such an anti-institutional bias as one of the three consistent features in those societies, especially among the young.<sup>2</sup>

Second, this spirituality is often shaped very much by and for individuals. It reflects the larger cultural pattern of the developed world, where individualism – especially what Robert Bellah and his associates have called “expressive individualism” – is the prevailing

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald INGLEHART, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997. The other two features are a quest for meaning and concern about the deterioration of the physical environment.

social form, at least among those living in the dominant culture of those societies.<sup>3</sup> This individualism is marked by a concern for the autonomy of each person, seeing one's life as a project of construction shaped by choices the individual makes (as opposed to conforming to preset roles, as is more common in collective societies). In the more fluid world of postmodernity, those choices are never deemed as permanent or irrevocable, but always subject to revision.

A third feature that goes along with the anti-institutional quality and the individualism is an eclecticism that can annex larger or smaller parts of established traditions, with their beliefs and practices to the spirituality project, often with little regard as to whether those parts are consistent or compatible.

Among the many attempts to give more precision to the study of this phenomenon, two recent proposals from sociologists of religion in the United States might be mentioned. The first is an attempt to map the field of study methodologically. In a working paper for the Social Science Research Council, Courtney Bender and Omar McRoberts note two widespread assumptions about the spirituality phenomenon that need to be challenged. First of all, they say, spirituality is not simply a weak or attenuated form of religion; it is a social phenomenon that deserves to be studied in its own right. Second, while spirituality as found in secular cultures is often viewed as an individualistic phenomenon, it must be studied as well in its social forms. They go on to urge that spirituality be studied (1) genealogically (in its developing and changing historical forms) and in the multiple discourses, practices, structures and imaginaries in which it is manifested; (2) in its spatial, social, and power-laden dimensions, and not just as something "ethereal;" and (3) in both its popular and scholarly manifestations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Robert BELLAH, Richard MADSEN, William M. SULLIVAN, Ann SWIDLER, and Steven M. TIPTON, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Courtney BENDER and Omar MCROBERTS, "Mapping a Field: Why and How to Study Spirituality" (Social Science Research Council Working Paper, October 2012).

Nancy Ammerman conducted an empirical study of what practitioners self-described as spirituality. She cautions against creating a rigid binary between “spirituality” and “religion” and urges readers to attend to the variety of approaches to spirituality within the population of the United States. Out of her empirical research, she identified four “cultural packages” that shape discourse on spirituality: (1) one that ties spirituality to personal deities; (2) one that locates spiritualities in various naturalistic discourses about transcendence; (3) one that is more ethically oriented in nature, focusing especially on compassion; and (4) one focusing upon (not) belonging, presented in a “spiritual but not religious” discourse.<sup>5</sup>

There are “outsider” and “insider” perspectives on this phenomenon of spirituality. Those who follow the practices of historical Christian spiritual traditions view genuine spirituality as a disciplined set of beliefs, values and practices that follow a specific path toward holiness and faithful discipleship, laid out by trustworthy guides who have had years of lived experience. Some of these paths are associated with the historic religious orders within Catholicism. One can thus speak of Benedictine spirituality, Franciscan spirituality, Jesuit spirituality, Carmelite spirituality and the like. In contemporary secular discourse, however, spirituality has come to have more diffuse limits on what can and cannot be considered an approved path of spirituality. Such is the picture one finds in the 2003 Vatican document, “Jesus Christ the Bearer of the Water of Life: A Christian Reflection on the ‘New Age,’” issued jointly by the Pontifical Council for Culture and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. While a genuine attempt is made to give a balanced reading of the elements that together make up the New Age phenomenon, not much room is left for a genuine dialogue. To the practiced eye of those in Christian spiritual traditions, the self-guided and self-regulated nature of this more diffuse spirituality is very different from what most religious traditions require; namely, a handing over of one’s autonomy to a trusted guide who has already

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<sup>5</sup> Nancy T. AMMERMAN, “‘Spiritual but Not Religious’? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52:2 (2013), pp. 258-278.

trod the pathways the inexperienced person wants to travel. Those schooled in spiritual traditions are often put off by what seems to be casual and unreflective borrowings that rupture the integrity of those spiritual pathways. This is especially the case when elements of Christian spiritual traditions are mixed with elements from other religious traditions as well as esoteric and even non-religious, anti-religious and anti-Christian sources. Moreover, the idea that this all can be self-directed flies in the face of virtually all the established religious traditions who speak of the need to work with an experienced guide into these mysteries.

For those inside this new spirituality, pronouncements by leaders in Christian churches on their practices of this new kind of spirituality bring out their inherent mistrust of institutions. Some of this mistrust arises when custodians of religious institutions have acted in ways contrary to the professed teachings of those same institutions. The sexual abuse scandals of recent years have made some individuals suspicious of Catholic claims on any topic. Extravagant displays of wealth or the hankering after power by religious leaders turn others away. In other instances, the mistrust arises simply from the fact that institutions impinge upon individual autonomy. This generalized mistrust of institutions may indeed be at times warranted. But the casual dismissal of institutions is an assertion one hears in secularized societies whose very stability and dependability make possible the pursuit of highly individualized agendas, where institutions provide a security that one can take for granted. Such pursuits are simply not available in many societies where, for example, the judiciary or the police forces are corrupt and cannot be called upon to administer justice, or endemic violence threatens everyone's well-being.

On the other hand, in yet other situations, religious institutions are not so much disdained as taken for granted. Religious institutions are seen as one of the social services of the state, which can be called upon as needed. This is something that British sociologist Grace Davie has called "vicarious religion."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the churches are there

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<sup>6</sup> See her "Is Europe an Exceptional Case?" *The Hedgehog Review* 8 (2006), pp. 23-34.

with their sacred spaces and assuring rituals when they are needed. This was in evidence when a memorial service for the victims of the Utoya Massacre in Norway in 2011 was held at the Lutheran cathedral in Oslo, rather than at Labor Party headquarters (the Norwegian Labor Party had sponsored the gathering on Utoya Island). In another instance, an ecumenical church service was held in Amersfoort in The Netherlands in 2014 for the victims of the Malaysia Airlines flight that had been shot down over Ukraine. In both instances, highly secularized societies chose to hold their memorials to the dead on church property rather than in a secular, civic arena. The Oslo instance is especially interesting, because there were people at the Oslo service (the service was actually a Holy Communion service) who did not want to go inside the cathedral, but did want to be on church property for the service – so they stood outside, surrounding the cathedral. This shows something of the ambivalence of vicarious religion: one expects religion to be there, but one is also free to participate selectively and keep it somewhat at arm's length.

Mistrust of institutions leads to such well-known expressions as “I am spiritual, but not religious” – which often means I have spiritual yearnings but I do not want to submit them to institutionalized patterns. Such thinking goes hand in hand with the proposed cultural ideal that each individual's life is a project of self-construction, assembled out of a series of choices that can be done or undone along the way. Charles Taylor's work has helped us rethink secularity and the religious response to it.<sup>7</sup> He has reminded us of how many values secularity and Christian faith share. Indeed, secularity could not have taken the shape it has historically without Christianity behind it. Taylor has helped us see that what is being called “spirituality” holds many impulses that also find a home in Christian faith.

Those impulses can be perverted by larger social forces, of course. Most evident at the present time is the attraction of extremist groups like the Islamic State or Boko Haram for young men and

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<sup>7</sup> See his magisterial *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

women, seeking to be part of something larger than themselves. The motives of these would-be jihadists are complex. But among the elements that spur some on into those groups is a dissatisfaction with the quality of their lives in Europe and North America, as well as the reach for transcendence embodied in fighting for a cause. There is an element of quest for those heading to the Middle East and other places where extremists are in combat.

### **The New Spirituality as Platform and Forum**

What I want to suggest here is that the glimmerings of transcendence or breakthroughs into the “buffered self” can serve as a platform for the Church to meet those with spiritual hungers they are trying to satisfy. What I have detected in places that have been marked by acute secularity, such as Norway or The Netherlands already mentioned, or in less secularized nations such as the United States, is that among the youngest generation now coming of age (although by no means restricted to this age cohort) there continues to be a manifest desire to touch the transcendent. This desire is framed by a strong individualist mindset, one often distrustful of institutions. Yet the yearning is there. It is at this point that the Church needs to begin. It is not the platform that perhaps leaders in the Church would want to have to make its case. But we have to meet people where they are as a way of beginning. For those of us within the Church, it will require a certain kind of self-emptying or *kenosis*. I do not mean a forsaking of our integrity, but rather a self-emptying that will exhibit the self-integrity of our humanity, with all our own desires for the transcendent to become manifest among us and around us.

Upon that platform of a shared human quest, a forum for encounter can be built that allows for a more sympathetic understanding of these undertakings, and in turn be seen as a site for more focused and constructive critique of these spiritual efforts upon the part of secular people. Pope Francis has spoken of the *mística* of encounter. *Mística* is an untranslatable Spanish word that speaks of a whole

world that certain actions can create. “Encounter” is a word that creates its own *mística*. It summons up meeting people where they are, rather than having them come into the Church before they can be spoken to. It means attending to all the complex, confusing, and sometimes contradictory words, feelings, and gestures that are displayed. It listens too to the silences and the stammering that bespeak yearnings of great power that may be what St. Paul called “a groaning beyond words” (Rom 8:26). Here the example of the encounter of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with the risen Christ gives us a clue: Jesus enters into their conversation as a listener, and only speaks after he has heard the two disciples out. Only when they concluded their narrative, does he take up their narrative to tell it in a new way. (Luke 24:13-25) Pope Francis urged religious institutes to engage in this *mística* of encounter again and again in his writings. He has embodied this mode of encounter in his own behavior by going to what he has called the “existential peripheries” of our societies, to those who are poor and who are marginalized.

Now the first reaction of many to climbing onto such a platform and engaging in such encounter is that one cannot accept just everything. One must remain critical. This is indeed true. But what Pope Francis is calling us to, I believe, is to understand that encounter means we do not begin with critique, but rather that we must first gain trust. Gaining trust allows those whom we encounter to feel safe enough to share their aspirations as well as their doubts and fears with us. Critique comes later, as a constructive affirmation of their struggle toward transcendence that helps them move a bit further down the road. Typically, we are too quick to engage in critique. That urge to jump in and counter assertions that are being made may say something about our own insecurity. Pope Francis’ own manner of suspending judgment until such bonds of trust are established provides a good model here of how to proceed.

Engaging in such a practice of encounter, however, brings with it another possibility. The spiritual traditions that have arisen in Christianity in the course of the centuries arose in specific cultural

circumstances that not only shaped their beginnings, but also caused them to engage distinctive concerns and issues as they developed. Think how the trauma of war shaped the founders of such distinctive spiritual traditions as those of the Franciscans, the Carmelites, and the Jesuits. Francis of Assisi's experience as soldier for Assisi may have had some effect on his making the pilgrimage to Rome. The earliest Carmelites were soldiers in the Crusades who abandoned the military to live as hermits around Mount Carmel. Ignatius of Loyola's long recovery from a battle wound became the time of his conversion to a very different kind of life as well.

What became great spiritual traditions in the Church were often not welcomed in their beginnings. One thinks of Teresa of Avila's reforms of the Carmelites, or the many stories of official Church hostility to those founding new religious orders (especially to women who did so.<sup>8</sup>)

Moreover, Christianity has long appropriated non-Christian rituals and practices and made them its own. The "holy wells" of Ireland and the grottoes and caves that were holy places before the arrival of Christianity in southern Europe became places of Christian pilgrimage. Churches were routinely built over the sites of pre-Christian temples and shrines. Christmas trees and Easter eggs from northern Europe – the list could be very long. In more recent times, the use of psychology in spiritual and religious formation was frowned upon or even forbidden. (The censure of an abbot in Mexico in 1967 for using psychoanalysis on all the members of a monastery is an example of this.<sup>9</sup>) Today, psychological testing and psychological counseling are widely used in the formation of candidates for religious orders and for the diocesan priesthood.

The point I am trying to make here is that the spiritual traditions that have developed within the Church were not uniformly quies-

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<sup>8</sup> One thinks here of Mary Ward in Great Britain or Mary MacKillop (now St. Mary MacKillop) in Australia.

<sup>9</sup> The story is recounted in Rubén GALLO, *Freud's Mexico: Into the Wilds of Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010.



cent. Their beginnings were often turbulent and contested. They borrowed from sources around them. Again, this is not an invitation to be uncritical about something so important as spirituality. It is, rather, a reminder that patience at the beginning, enfolded in a hospitable and welcoming surrounding, may be the best way to engage the forms of newer spirituality than simply rejecting them.

As the Church engages secular and post-secular societies, looking for those points of engagement may expand its own existing spiritual traditions in significant ways. Let me give a few illustrations of this. One point of encounter has been the use of silence and of contemplative prayer. I have seen young adults attracted to Eucharistic adoration, for example, for very different reasons than those that had formed earlier practices of that devotion. For those older practitioners, Eucharistic adoration was an act of resistance to Protestant polemic against the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament. But for the young adults practicing Eucharistic devotion today, it is the atmosphere of silence in a media-soaked world that attracts them. I have also seen Eucharistic adoration practiced in poor and violent neighborhoods in the United States as an antidote to gunfire and senseless violence. Likewise, monasteries in many parts of the secularized world have opened their doors to weekend guests who wish to partake in the silence and the rhythm of prayer as a respite to everyday lives filled with restlessness and competition.

Another site of encounter are the short-term so-called “mission projects” that expose young people from wealthy parts of the world to the poverty and injustice that the poor in much of the rest of the world face on a daily basis. Such projects awaken in those who go on them not only motivation to bring about justice and an end to oppression, but also make them aware of the resilience that allows people to maintain their humanity in such dehumanizing conditions. They see what life is like when basic social institutions fail to provide security or are absent altogether. They learn too what a relation of dependence upon the transcendent can mean – not just a sacrifice of their own autonomy, but also a discovery of deeper sources

of support and strength when all things around them seem to falter and fail.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, rather than seeing the constructed spiritualities of individual seekers in secular society as misguided, we may be able to see in their journeys gateways into exploring common themes of our humanity. These can indicate genuine spiritual hungers that speak of both those things that are deficient in our post-secular societies, despite all the promises of globalization, as well as offer opportunities to introduce seekers to the rich spiritual traditions of Christianity in new and creative ways. A certain self-emptying on our part may lead to a dialogue with seekers that has the potential to enrich their lives even as it purifies our own.

### **A Closing Critical Note**

To be sure, monasteries, houses of religious orders, and spiritual centers across the secularized West have been opening their doors to spiritual seekers for several decades. What they offer to those who come to them ranges over a broad spectrum of possibilities, from initiation into “classic” Catholic spiritual traditions, to programs that mingle those traditions and elements from non-Christian traditions. A recent study of those spiritual centers in The Netherlands is worth noting here.<sup>11</sup>

The Netherlands has undergone one of the most rapid and thoroughgoing experiences of secularization in Europe. Within the span of a little more than four decades, it has gone from among the most religiously observant countries in Europe to one of its most secular. The author investigated fifty-one Christian spiritual centers (mostly Catholic, but also some Protestant and other ecumenically oriented) that had adjusted their programs to encounter and engage the newer

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<sup>10</sup> I have explored this further in Robert SCHREITER, “Third Wave Mission: Cultural, Missiological, and Theological Dimensions,” *Missiology* 43 (2015), pp. 5-16.

<sup>11</sup> Anke BISSCHOPS, “The Newer Spirituality and Religious Transformation in The Netherlands,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 19 (2015), pp. 24-39.

forms of spirituality. What she found was indeed striking. Although these centers were trying to reach out to these “unbound spiritual seekers” (people who had no experience of religious affiliation, yet were seeking spiritual values in a variety of ways), what these centers ended up attracting were principally people who did have (or had had) church affiliations. While the intended audience of these programs were young adults who had grown up with no religious affiliation (i.e., those whose parents had explicitly left behind institutional religion), the majority of its patrons were older persons who had been religiously affiliated in their younger years or were even still active in their parishes. They were seeking a wide variety of experiences: inspiration, transcendence, meaning, connectedness, and many other things. Those who were still active in their parishes said they felt they were not getting a hearing in their parishes, and had no other place to come with their questions and concerns.

The author presented this picture, and did not attempt to generalize beyond her data set about whether what she discovered in The Netherlands might be the same elsewhere. What she did find, however, corroborates some of the points that I have brought forward here from other authors. One must not create a too firm binary between being spiritual and being religious, as Nancy Ammerman has warned. One must study not only the beliefs and practices, but look also to the context. The author suggests that it would be interesting to carry out parallel studies in other parts of Europe that are highly secularized. One thinks of Estonia, the Czech Republic, and the former East Germany. Similarly, one might look to societies that are in the process of rapid secularization at this time, such as Ireland and perhaps Poland. In all of these instances, it will be important to attend to the historical and contemporary cultural context.

Although this study from The Netherlands may give some pause to consider the proposal put forth here, to my mind it makes seeking such a platform and forum more compelling. It is too simple to reify religious traditions as we have them or dismiss spirituality in secular contexts as we experience it. Encounter and engagement is still the best way forward.

# ***Dialogue with Sceptics***

**ANTHONY J. CARROLL\***

One of the defining features of the religious landscape of western societies today is the presence within it of religious scepticism. Whilst headline grabbing religious fanaticism may well seem to characterise our present age the phenomenon of scepticism seems to be much more widespread. This scepticism is sometimes born out of a familiarity with religious traditions. Those that have been educated in a religious context may well decide, or perhaps less deliberately, to drift into a place of scepticism as they consider that whilst the humanitarian message contained within it may be a good one the whole institutional and speculative superstructure surrounding it is questionable. Critical of institutional dogmatism and moral judgmentalism, angered by traits of hypocrisy and a self-serving attitude, and unable to understand an old language of transcendence in a modern scientific world characterised by immanence, the worldview of the sceptic seems to be increasingly becoming what Charles Taylor has described by the phrase ‘exclusive humanism’ as the default option of the western world.

At other times, and perhaps increasingly, this scepticism is born out of a lack of familiarity with the basics of a religion. As children are less and less formed in religious contexts the religious vision of the world becomes just one more story amongst others. A story to be enjoyed but not ultimately considered to convey a truth value. Whether through familiarity or through ignorance the religious framework of the western world is undoubtedly now subject to a scepticism that seems here to stay.

Yet, whilst scepticism has a long history going back to ancient times and has even been an important part of the Christian tradition itself, the current form in which religious scepticism presents

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itself has some new and distinctive features that require a church open to the signs of the times to take particular note. Chief amongst these characteristics is the advent of a new pluralism of values and worldviews which previous ages lacked to the extent that these are now on offer. Now a whole variety of positions are available which present themselves as justified approaches to the great challenges of human life. Such epistemic pluralism, as Charles Taylor notes, has inaugurated a situation within which the choice for Christianity is just one option amongst a host of others available. Because of this epistemic pluralism an almost consumerist-like attitude has developed amongst many in which individual choices are made on the terms of the *religious customer* and not simply on the terms of the *religious vendor* so to speak. In other words, the monopolistic hold of traditional religions on people has largely broken down in many parts of the western world. This means that the *capital*, of which religious traditions considered themselves to be the sole dispensers, namely salvation of one kind or another, is no longer accepted as being in the hands of any one single religious institution to dispense. One might say that in the contemporary western world salvation is a matter of individual choice rather than of institutional dispensation. And if empirical evidence is required to reinforce this point one need only ask parish priests about their experience of the current practice of the sacrament of reconciliation.

Together with a new context of pluralism another defining feature of contemporary scepticism is that many of the cultures within which sceptics are now living are defined by being post-Christian. That is to say, these cultures may have been formerly orchestrated by the rhythms of Christian life but now in many places these have broken down. And, as a result, if in the ancient world scepticism towards Christianity was due to confronting a new religion which challenged the old one, today scepticism is more akin to having once tried something which no longer serves its purpose. As such there is doubt as to how a religion like Christianity can recover its lost ground. As a consequence of this transformation a whole change of missionary outlook needs to be fostered since in former times the

missionary effort was to bring a Christianity to peoples who had not yet encountered it, today the challenge is to communicate a Christianity which people consider that they already know about and have found wanting. The post-Christian milieu of many western countries has often been forged through more of an institutional rejection than a personal decision to reject the gospel. And, much of the culture of these countries still trades upon a Christian understanding of dignity, the respect for the individual, and a commitment to the common good. Yet, these influences often remain subterranean and are fused into a secular amalgam of rights based language that treat all alike and make short shrift of any claims to the singularity of the Christian message.

Another defining feature of contemporary religious scepticism is a somewhat paradoxical one given the origins of scepticism in ancient thought. Whilst for the ancient sceptics the power of reason to see reality as it is in itself was questionable since they considered appearances to be as close to reality as we might arrive at, in the contemporary form of religious scepticism it is precisely the lack of a scientific rationality that makes religious belief questionable. In other words, the scepticism which characterises religious scepticism is a disbelief based on the fact that justifiable evidence for religious claims seems to be lacking. This form of scepticism is a modern one which depends on an exclusive humanist interpretation of the scientific worldview which now characterises the contemporary western world. It is dismissive of the claims of faith as unable to convey any reliable knowledge about the world and of falsely making claims about a supernatural realm which transcends the ordinary dimensions of space and time.

Finding ways to encounter and to dialogue with such sceptics raises a number of important challenges for the church today. And, actually interesting sceptics to enter into dialogue is not easy especially when they may be hostile or see little point in doing so. This is perhaps the central challenge of reaching out to sceptics. It is further complicated by the fact that a feature of this dialogue seems to be that understanding it according to the model of interreligious

dialogue (IRD) may not be an appropriate one, since in some ways, the model of IRD is itself part of a religious attitude which seeks to deepen the faith of the participants. Consequently, adopting this means of communicating with sceptics is inadequate as it presupposes a common religious quest which should not be taken as a given in the case of dialogue with religious sceptics. I experienced this recently myself when at a seminar of believers and sceptics it became clear to me that the exploration of questions of meaning and truth which are inevitably raised in a religious framework were avoided in favour of practical questions of moral and political action. Religious groups were seen as partners of humanists in terms of being committed to building a better society but not in terms of exploring the existential depths of questions of meaning and truth. It was almost as if it was already concluded that such questions are irresolvable and so the important thing is to act humanely together. And who could doubt that this option is indeed important. In fact, much humanitarian inspiration has itself come from religious traditions. And yet, if questions of meaning and truth are not addressed the dialogue between believers and sceptics is happening in such a way that has already excluded some central religious questions. The reasons for the tendency in contemporary culture to exclude such types of questions are of course manifold. However, some issues seem to me to be central and important to address if we are to grow as a welcoming church for an ever increasing sceptical population.

First of all is the sense that for an answer to these questions to be truly effective it should be 'homemade'. That is to say, rather than accepting readymade answers to life's existential questions deep and personal questions require answers that the persons themselves have come to often gradually and through trial and error. Existential answers today are much less accepted because they originate from an authoritative source than that they arise out of the lived experience of the individual concerned who has tried and tested them. As such, presupposing a common religious quest may well undermine a dialogue with a religious sceptic from the start. And, raising the issues of meaning and truth need not be confined to the religious sphere of

course. These fundamental questions are profoundly human and so a dialogue with sceptics may well need to respect the fact that these questions arise in all human beings at some time or another and religious sceptics may well be developing non-religious ways of giving answers to them. The language of ‘seekers’ rather than ‘dwellers’ developed in many of the studies in the Disjunctions Project speaks to this issue and provides resources to think anew about the dialogue with religious sceptics.

To take just one example to illustrate this point, we can consider the issue of mortality and death. I, for my part, have never been happy with the presupposition that if there is no eternal life then human life here and now has no meaning. Surely, doing the best that one can to care for others and be a person of authenticity is its own reward. That this may not live on for ever does not undermine the value of acting here and now with integrity. Even death itself need not be considered as meaningless from a non-religious point of view. If death is the end of individual existence, then facing it with dignity and surrendering to the fate of one’s own mortality might be understood as acknowledging the natural cycle of life that one observes each year in the changing of the seasons.

The point, however, is not to second guess religious sceptics but rather to dialogue with them about what gives them meaning in the face of mortality and death and to communicate what gives meaning to religious believers. To presuppose that another position is inadequate simply because different from one’s own is a poor way to carry out a serious dialogue. Perhaps contemporary religious sceptics are discovering truths about human existence that shed light upon its extraordinary capacity to confront the ultimate challenge of death. The recent development of the so-called ‘death café’s indicates that there is a need to talk about these issues in new and inclusive social spaces that are not confined to any one religious or sceptical tradition.

Whether such insights are revealed in purely humanistic approaches to death or not does not change the fact that in dialogue with sceptics new challenges present themselves. And, if, as many



have argued, there is a common genealogy to both Theism and Atheism, perhaps the contemporary dialogue between believers and sceptics may well be an important moment in the healing of a modern separation between the gospel and culture that has its roots in the Nominalist revolution at the dawn of modernity and which was so powerfully spoken of in Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The tension between on the one hand an omnipotent God and on the other hand the emergence of a truly modern notion of human freedom and self-assertion has undoubtedly orchestrated much of the force field of disagreement between believers and sceptics in modern times. This cultural fault line has led to both the rise in fundamentalist conceptions of religion and religious observance and also to the emergence of an exclusive humanist secularism which is nurtured on the fundamental value of modernity, namely, human freedom. The articulation of both of these dimensions has proved to be difficult for a western culture that sees them as intrinsically oppositional.

Recent attempts to rethink this dialectic often following in the tradition of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth have born great fruit in theological and indeed philosophical literature but these ideas seem not to have permeated broader culture to any significant extent. It seems as if the 'scandal of the cross' is still unbelievable for a culture which is very much wedded to the metaphysical conception of God inherited from antiquity. If an exclusive humanist framework can no longer conceive of transcendence it may well be that it has not yet taken on board the "humanity of God" who humbled Himself to take the form of a servant. One can only hope that in creatively finding ways to preach the humility of God we may discover anew a transcendence from within that reinforces a religious scepticism about human arrogance rather than about the God who emptied himself to become one of us.

# ***Rethinking Universality: A Condition for a True Interreligious Dialogue in a Pluralistic Age***

**ADRIANO FABRIS\***

## **1. Introduction**

This study will discuss three aspects that concern and promote the development of an idea of *welcoming Church*. In the first place, it will try to describe some aspects of today's religious life in the Western World. Once again, three points must be emphasized in this context: religious pluralism, fundamentalism and religious indifference. Secondly, it will attempt to outline the conditions which might open the way for a true dialogue in the pluralistic situation we are now experiencing. In relation to this aim, it is necessary to define a specific concept of "identity:" an "open" identity. Lastly, I will develop, from a philosophical viewpoint, an idea of universality which can support and foster interreligious dialogue. This idea must overcome the traditional, fixed notion of "universality" and move in the direction of a progressive *universalizability*.

The thesis is that a "welcoming Church," an "open Church" can help us to define the identity of our contemporary religious communities; it can help us to bear witness to faith, develop a true form of communicating faith and share a common engagement against violence.

## **2. Plurality vs. Pluralism**

What the globalized West is experiencing today has only rarely been available in the past. We are witnessing an effective coexistence of various cults and rituals, faiths and beliefs. The elements

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that were kept apart in the past by the barriers of space and time – a fact which entailed the identification of a specific religion with a precise territory or with a determinate period – are now intermingled within the same sphere. A *plurality of religions* is present in the same public sphere.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, it is mainly about *religious pluralism*, and not plurality, that we talk about nowadays. This expression refers not only to the description of a fact, but also to the solution of the problem this fact presents. Indeed, this expression does not merely foreground the fact that many religious cults coexist side by side within the same environment and, therefore, that it is necessary to peacefully manage their coexistence. Rather, the use to which the term “pluralism” is put seems to indicate that plurality in religious experience is a good thing, that it might be seen as the solution of the conflicts arising nowadays precisely because of the simultaneous presence of many religions within the same territory. What counts is that there be some tolerance.

These ideas are constantly being repeated by the *mass media*. According to some commentators it is better to have many religions rather than just one. A disarticulated multiplicity is better than a monolithic unity. Therefore: conflicts can be avoided only if we attach a value to a point of fact, i.e. only if we transform the plurality of religions into the ideological thesis of pluralism. It’s a pity that this idea is usually promoted by lay people and not by believers.

### 3. Fundamentalism

The believer, every believer, is in fact convinced that his faith represents the only way to deliverance. And he is quite right: otherwise he would change his religion. But does this mean that – since his is the only true religion – all the other faiths and all the other religions must be undervalued if not even fought and eliminated? What opens up here is the possibility of another misunderstanding. After

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. José CASANOVA, *Public Religions in Modern World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994; Hans JOAS, *Faith as an Option*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014.

the failure to distinguish between plurality as a fact and pluralism as a value, we plunge into the confusion between religious faith and religious fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism does not correspond to faith. Rather, it is a tendency which can be found not only within every religious field but also within some non-religious conceptions. Fundamentalism is a partial, unilateral way of expressing one's ideas by emphasizing some of their aspects and taking them to extremes. It is a way of expressing one's convictions in an intransigent, self-referential, exclusive and excluding way.<sup>2</sup>

This is the reason why the fundamentalist rejects dialogue and encounter with people who profess different ideas: having reached true faith, he thinks that he does not need anything else. Of course, this might be a reaction to religious pluralism. And yet, by denying the productiveness of every relation other than the fixed and closed relation with his own God the fundamentalist denies, as a point of fact, the self-same essence of religion. He denies the fact that, as indicated by the etymology of the word, "religion" means relation (*religamen*), an open and productive relation with God, with the other human beings, with creation.<sup>3</sup>

But how does fundamentalism arise? Or better, what generates the mentality that produces it? What is its genesis and, above all – putting the word into inverted commas – its "logic?"

Fundamentalism, religious fundamentalism in this case, instantly identifies particularity and universality, contingency and absolute-ness. This is its fundamental mistake. Religion is, in point of fact, a relation between these two spheres – between the particular and the universal, between the contingent and the absolute, between the human and the divine – and there are innumerable ways in which this relation has been realized throughout history. On the contrary,

<sup>2</sup> Martin RIESEBRODT, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen: Fundamentalismus und der "Kampf der Kulturen."* München: Beck 2001; Malise RUTHVEN, *Fundamentalism: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> LACTANTIUS, *Divine Institutes.* Transl. by A. Bowen and P. Garnsey. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004, IV, 28.

the fundamentalist believes that there is only one way – his way – to realize this relation. His contingent, historical, human relationship is made absolute.

This means that a *specific approach* to the divine, a particular experience of the divine, is held as having *absolute validity* and is immediately seen as normative for all human beings. Every other experience, every other approach must be excluded and condemned. Anybody who disagrees with the fundamentalist must choose between the immediate acceptance of these abstract principles – which are to be applied concretely, without interpretation – and (if one does not adhere to the same principles) the likewise immediate exclusion; running thus the risk of being fought against and killed.

In other words, the fundamentalist forgets the fact that the absolute incarnates itself in the history of human beings. He absolutizes this history and believes to be already safe. In more general terms, fundamentalism is an illness which originates in abstractness and in the rejection of interpretation. It is a pathology of the thought in which a particular, contingent, circumscribed assumption is *immediately* held to be valid, necessary and absolute for everyone.

In fundamentalism, allow me to repeat it, the human level is *identified*, together with its history and its language, with the absoluteness of the divine level. This process takes place without the necessary mediation. That is why fundamentalism is blasphemous. It makes the relationship between the particular and the universal rigid. It overlooks the fact that the Word of God always manifests itself through the words of human beings. It disregards the meaning of incarnation. It is a unilateral and improper way of understanding religious identity.

#### 4. Identity

As a point of fact, our understanding of religious identity cannot be conceived of just in these terms. At least three different meanings can be attributed to the word “identity” in order to indicate the ways in which identity is realized. We can talk about a closed identity

(or, using an image, a “wall-identity”); a reflective identity (that is to say, a “mirror-identity”) and, finally, an open identity.

“Wall-identity” is the one that sees the other merely as someone to be excluded. There has to be a wall between myself and the others so as to guarantee this exclusion. This, as we have seen, is the position taken by fundamentalist mentality on the issue of identity.

On the other hand, the image of the mirror presents us with another – less violent but just as hegemonic – an idea of identity. According to this model, the others are taken into account only on the basis of my assertion, of my confirmation. That is, their only function is to mirror my position. In this conception, the interlocutor serves merely to prove me right.

Finally, an open identity is an identity forged through my relationship with others. It can be viewed as such only if it realizes itself in this relationship: it is open to anything new that might occur in this relationship and is always open to new relationships. I am not erecting a barrier between me and the others in this case. I am not merely mirroring myself in them. Rather, in establishing a relationship with the others I challenge the perception I have of myself and understand better who I am. Identity, therefore, is not something static, but a dynamic process, subject to constant becoming.

## 5. Indifference

So far I have attempted to shed some light upon the idea of identity and (in relation to fundamentalist interpretation of religion) on the difference between plurality and pluralism. I attempted to do so through a series of distinctions and in-depth analyses because, if we really wish to go to the heart of the matter, one of the basic features emerging from the common mentality of today is precisely the tendency to eliminate every distinction, to iron out and flatten everything to one single level. I will refer to this flattening, to this smoothing out of differences, with the term *indifference*.

Indifference is not only a feature of fundamentalism. Of course, as we have already seen, fundamentalism tends to blur the bound-

aries between particularity and universality, historicity and absolute-ness. This is, furthermore, the reason why fundamentalism shows indifference towards (or even threatens to annihilate) anyone who has different beliefs. And yet, something similar is to be found in conceptions which are not religious in character. But I refer above all to the conception that displays an attitude of indifference precisely towards the religious dimension.

This attitude is not to be exclusively identified with atheism because it is through its opposition to religion that atheism, in fact, acknowledges it, although only to the extent that religion is recognized as an opponent. What I am referring to here is the conception according to which all religious worlds are essentially the same and must, therefore, be repudiated. In other words, religions do not arouse much interest anymore. God is definitively dead. So, we have to leave him behind.

This is how we understand nihilism today. As a matter of fact, *contemporary nihilism* is synonymous with indifference: an indifference shown, first and foremost, towards the religious field.<sup>4</sup> But this indifference is contagious. It transcends the boundaries of this field. In fact, everything can be placed on the same level: ideologies, philosophies, perspectives which are able to provide guidance for human action. So, when seen through this indifferent and disenchanted gaze, nothing any longer has meaning.

Yet, that is not exactly how things are. Not everything is regarded with indifference. In the end, one saves at least one point of reference and the nihilist knows very well whose point of reference this is: his own.

## 6. The Illness of Our Time and The Therapy for It

If we wish to restate the main points of the reasoning followed so far, we might affirm that the analysis of fundamentalist mentality – seen as a reaction against religious pluralism – has contributed

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bülent DİKEN, *Nihilism*. London: Routledge, 2009.

to bring to the fore both a specific *ontology* and a specific *logic*. In accordance with this ontology, the being of religion, the identity of religion, is interpreted in a closed, exclusive way. In accordance with this logic, what is particular is immediately apprehended as universal without the possibility of mediation; without making the necessary interpretations.

This logic and this ontology imply indifference. If viewed from a perspective of indifference, everything is the same, everything is placed on the same level. Therefore, nothing can arouse my interest. Nothing, besides my own position. A position that juxtaposes itself to other positions which, in their turn, believe to be the only ones of value. What ensues is a war of everyone against everyone. What ensues is the idea that if I am indifferent to the opinions of others, then it is not possible to avoid the use of violence.

The illness of our time is indifference. It is a contagious illness. As I have already stated above, it concerns not only the religious spheres or the secular attitude towards them but also, in more general terms, the life of the person that does not believe. Nothing has a meaning anymore: this is the nihilism we must deal with today.

What is the therapy for this illness? One of the possible answers could be provided by the line of reasoning that I followed thus far. If fundamentalism and indifference arise from a wrong way of looking at the relationship between the particular and the universal – that is to say, from the tendency to identify the contingent with the absolute and from the attempt to avoid mediation between these two levels – then the therapy should consist in rethinking this relation in a proper way. First of all, it is necessary to rethink the notion of universality.

## **7. Universality and Universalizability**

To avoid both the rigidity of fundamentalism and the confusion of indifference, we should – allow me to repeat it – establish a proper way to mediate between particularity and universality. This is where the problem lies. Yet, we cannot avail ourselves for this purpose of



the mediation which has been developed by a certain philosophical tradition starting from Plato. Rather, we should refer to the idea of mediation which was elaborated by Christianity and was drawn upon by various strands of philosophical thought.

In fact, in order to “save the phenomena” from their contingency, *Plato* considers the content of a universal as fixed in nature. He locates the universal in another, preliminary world, which is defined once and for all: the world of ideas, the real, absolute and eternal world. The world of experience must comply with this world and be commensurate to it. If the phenomena of experience adhere to the world of ideas, then they can be legitimized and saved. They can be seen as objects of true knowledge. Otherwise they lose themselves in the flux of becoming. The philosopher – especially Socrates – guarantees and verifies the accuracy of this adherence. He is the one who provides phenomena with their stability. And he does so consistently, even putting his life at risk.

From the perspective of Plato, the phenomena of the world of experience undoubtedly gain a stable reference point. This occurs only if they adhere to the world of ideas. Nevertheless, there is *only one way* to achieve this adherence and to verify it and only the philosopher is aware of it. Anyone who is not aware of this way, or does not subscribe to it, is wrong. In Plato’s view, therefore, the mediation between particularity and universality is fixed, once and for all, in the form of an incorporation of the particular and the contingent, in a universal and eternal perspective, because only the universal is valuable.

In opposition to this rigid and exclusive subsumption of the particular under the universal, *Christianity* invites us to follow another path: on the one hand, the path to incarnation and, on the other, the path to redemption. In philosophical terms, *incarnation* means that the absolute becomes contingent, that it enters into history. In this way there is no definite separation between history and eternity, which can be handled only by letting the former comply with the latter (i.e. only by subordinating the particular to the universal). Rather, there is a dynamic relation which fosters the con-

nection between these two levels and, at the same time, preserves their insurmountable difference. Furthermore, *redemption* is not only the focal and terminal point of salvation; it is not only an experience aimed at retrieving the eternity of what is contingent, but also the course that the human being must follow in order to realize all this. There is more. By means of the individual's moral actions and the participation in the community's rites, this course foreshadows, as much as possible, the eternal life on this earth.

If conceived in this way, both redemption and incarnation do not identify in an indifferent manner the absolute with the contingent, the universal with the particular. Neither do they separate once and for all these two levels or interpose between them – as the only possibility for correlation – an adherence of the former to the latter, seen as a subordination and an integration of the particular within the universal.

Rather, Christian history and Christian doctrine promote the idea of an authentic relation, a relation in which – as already stated before – the differences are maintained and the connection is established without eliminating them. This is possible because, unlike the static relationship envisaged by Plato, this relation is dynamic; it is not defined once and for all.

In other words, the sphere of the incarnation is where the absolute meets the contingent and inhabits it. What is contingent and historical is, in this way, sanctified and devoted to increasingly accomplish its sanctification throughout history. For this reason, it can strive towards the absolute and undertake the path to redemption. Even so, the absolute remains absolute and the contingent remains contingent throughout this relationship.

Therefore, if the problem resides in the question of how to understand the relation between the particular and the universal without succumbing neither to indifference nor to fundamentalism, then the solution might be provided by opening up a different way for understanding the selfsame notion of *universality*. The point is not to separate the universal and the particular. Neither is it to blend them

together. Their relationship arises from a mediation, from following a path. What underlies the transference of the particular to the universal is precisely this dynamic, this act of following a path: they coincide with the process – which has to be chosen and activated – of universalization. If we start from this process of progressive universalization we can also begin to understand the concept of *mission*.

So, if universality is a process and not a given fact, then we should talk about *universalizability* and not about *universality*. This term indicates the way in which the particularity of one's position is not immediately viewed as universal or adhering to a universal dimension, but is, instead, prompted to *realize itself in a universal way*. This can be achieved only if one is willing to exchange views with others, only if one is exposed to the position of others and affirms oneself in relation to them. All this is intertwined with the awareness that, by virtue of incarnation, one's particularity contains an aspect that can be universalized; an aspect that can stimulate openings instead of closures; an aspect that must be chosen and realized. It is faith that justifies and motivates the Christian to undertake and realize this process.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that plurality is not pluralism. It is a given fact, not a value in itself. It presents us with a problem – the relationship between various religions – that must be solved.

Fundamentalism offers a possible solution to this problem: the easiest and most comfortably effortless one. It argues that one's particular position possesses a universal value. At its heart, therefore, fundamentalism coincides with relativism: it absolutizes a relativist stance. This is the reason why it disregards the possibility of mediation with the other and is disrespectful towards multiplicity. What ensues from the particular position assumed by fundamentalism is the contraposition of other particular positions which, in turn, immediately consider themselves as absolute.

Fundamentalism bears witness to indifference and adds to the confusion between the particular and the universal. It exemplifies an indifference inherent in many other, not necessarily religious, conceptions. Basically, indifference consists in confusing the particular with the universal, the relative with the absolute, and in avoiding the effort and engagement that mediation requires. This leads inevitably to violence.<sup>5</sup>

In order to overcome this situation, it is necessary to adopt a different perspective. The given fact of universality must be transformed into the process of universalizability. It is not possible to achieve unity by attempting to make the self coincide with itself or by attempting to forge a closed identity. Rather, unity can be brought about by building up and fostering a true relationship between the self and others. Unity consists in a dynamics of unification.

This is the point. Unity is interaction and communion. This does not mean that I lose my identity or that I renounce the truth which this identity expresses. Neither does this mean that I shed this identity in favor of a wider dimension. Quite the contrary: the identity of the individual develops and is realized only through the relationships it establishes. In this way, this open identity contributes to move one's particular position towards the process of universalization: towards the universalizability of the act of welcome and the act of mission.<sup>6</sup>

From a practical perspective, this can be realized in many ways. Among these, the form which is most typical of the human being is communication. And yet, to "communicate" does not mean to transmit information. Rather, it means to create a space that can be shared by interlocutors: a space in which they can mutually understand each other. In particular, dialogue is one of the forms in which this communication takes place and fosters the sharing of what is proper to everyone.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Regina SCHWARTZ, *The Course of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Adriano FABRIS, *Filosofia delle religioni*. Roma: Carocci, 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Richard JOHANNESSEN, Kathleen S. VALDE and Karen E. WHEDBEE, *Ethics in Human Communication*. Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2007.

Summing up: dialogue, communication and the open identity they express allow us to experience the very same identity of Christianity and the dynamics of progressive universalization which characterizes it. All this contains the antidote to the illness of fundamentalism and indifference. Above all, this is what provides us with the indication of how concretely to realize and experience a *welcoming Church*.

# ***Religions and Transnational Civil Ethics in Public Space: A Journey Toward Peace***

**ADELA CORTINA\***

## **1. Another World is Necessary**

The Social Forum in Porto Alegre, years ago, launched the message: “Another world is possible.” It was a message of hope against political, economic and social mechanisms that seemed inexorably to generate injustice and material and spiritual misery. Precisely in confrontation of those miseries the Forum announced this positive message that another world is possible.

And so it is. But I would say more, namely, that “another world is necessary” because we are not at the height of what the dignity of human beings deserves. We are not sorry for the vulnerable, but generate exclusion and forget gratitude, nor do we appreciate the value of animals and nature. Another world is necessary, and what is necessary is possible and has to be real. The Catholic Church has to make Christian efforts, to take up this task, and to work closely with all those who walk in the same direction.

From an ethical point of view, which is what this paper assumes, Christians must at least work simultaneously on two levels: 1) in Western society which is morally pluralistic and increasingly multicultural, and 2) in a global world which has always been multicultural.

First of all, I would like to clarify what I mean by “secularization” and why I believe that the challenges to renew the Church are found in places, other than in an alleged “secular.”

As has been repeatedly mentioned in recent times, the term “secularism” is polysemic. But among the many meanings to be found

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in the literature, the term “secularization” is used more in areas of autonomy and differentiation between the state, economy and science, on the one hand, and religious institutions, on the other. It is conceived as emancipation with respect to these areas.<sup>1</sup> Based on legal obligation and a source of social integration, if in the legal sense the secularization of some goods means a “compulsory transfer of Church property to the power of the secular state,” then the secularization of society would be the process in which religion no longer legitimates political domination.

Understanding the term “secularism” thus it is impossible to speak of a “secular age” for, at least, two reasons. First, as stated by a number of authors, the process of secularization, so understood, is a fundamentally European phenomenon, which cannot be extended to other countries, including the U.S., Latin American, African or Asian. Second, even in European countries the fact is that the Churches are morally pluralistic, and must act in morally pluralistic societies. Moral pluralism is not only part of European societies, but also American and Latin American; increasingly pluralism is becoming moral multiculturalism.

Moreover, at the global level, and speaking from an ethical point of view, it is urgent to build a global ethic, which is able to cope with the global consequences of economy, science and technology, and to put at the service of all human beings the benefits of the globalization process. This must be done in a world that is multicultural.

To work at both levels, the one of pluralistic societies and of a globalized world, Christians face the urgent task of finding as many allies as possible in favor of the cause of the person from an ethical perspective. These levels will be discussed below, beginning with the ethics of pluralist societies.

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<sup>1</sup> José CASANOVA, “Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective,” in *The Hedgehog Review*, vol. 8 (2006), pp. 7-21, here p. 7.

## 2. Pluralistic Societies: Minimum Ethics and Maximum Ethics

Despite the discussions in recent years in political philosophy about the place of religion in the public space of secular societies, which are considered more appropriate as “morally pluralistic societies,” the legitimation of political power and the law require the exercise of “public reason,” which is not had by any comprehensive doctrines of the good.<sup>2</sup> As Rawls says, “secular reason” is itself one of the comprehensive doctrines of the good, and therefore is not suitable for building moral political justice. It is a concept that can attract overlapping consensus among different comprehensive doctrines of the good. Thus, secular reason should translate discourse to public reason, precisely because it is part of the comprehensive doctrine of the good.

I find it unfortunate to call certain societies of liberal democracy “post secular” as do Habermas and some other authors.<sup>3</sup> According to them, a “post-secular” society would be a society of liberal democracy, in which religious contents have been translated into secular reason. However, they realize that religions are still necessary, and that these must have different voices in the public space. In “post secular” societies, Habermas says, there remains a “conscience of what we lack,” which religions would complete. However, in my view, public reason is not identified with secular reason and comprehensive doctrines of the religious right, or, to use Rawls words, an ethical or religious maximum. To use the expression that I have been using since 1986 in minimum ethics, secular reason is not added to public reason, but part of the structure of morally pluralistic societies.

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<sup>2</sup> John RAWLS, “The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,” in John RAWLS, *Collected Papers*, edited by Samuel Freeman. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1999, pp. 573-615.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen HABERMAS, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005; IDEM, *Philosophische Texte*, Bd. 5, Studienausgabe. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2009, IV and V.



Indeed, in these societies there are different maximum ethics, various proposals for the good life, and they share a minimum of justice under which they cannot be falling into inhumanity. In morally monistic societies only one “current” moral code is imposed on all citizens with one model of the good life. In morally polytheistic societies the “current” models of a good life are so different that they cannot even talk to each other and find a common minimum of justice. In morally pluralistic societies there are different maximum ethics which invite people to follow different models of the good life, but these ethics can talk to each other and find a minimum of shared justice. In this the distinction between good and righteous would be that the good life is invited, while justice is required.

These minima of shared civic ethics enable society to be just and its citizens ethical without a state ethics in the style of Durkheim. While maximum ethics is either religious or secular, a civic ethics is secular. Therefore, in my opinion, the best way for morally pluralistic countries is to articulate the following: in a secular state (neither confessional nor laic), a pluralistic society, a complex citizenship (with different beliefs, different capacities, different sexual tendencies, etc.) and a polyphonic public sphere, one in which all voices can be heard that do not violate the minimum of shared civic ethics.

Naturally, civic ethics is dynamic, not static, because the minimum shared justice is discovered through dialogue and common life. But we must remember that citizens choose the values of civic ethics from maximum ethics, and that the more vibrant and committed the maximum ethics is with human dignity and the more vulnerable the greater the demands of justice. Therefore, as I proposed in some cases, the relationship between maximum ethics and minimum ethics should include at least four dimensions: 1) A mutual relationship of non-absorption, because ethics should not absorb maximum civic ethics, but civic ethics must try to replace maximum ethics. 2) The minimum must realize that it feeds the maximum, the project of life in its fullness, whether religious or secular. 3) The maximum must be purified from the minimum, in order to avoid any apparent charity in the circumvention of demands of justice. 4) It is necessary

to avoid a gap between minimum and maximum ethics, but to seek their mutual fertilization.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately, civic ethics is not only a “must” in the Kantian sense, it has already been incorporated, following Hegel’s advice, in the institutions of Western societies. It guides the development of codes and the creation of institutions in the various applied ethics: politics, business, education, development, various professions, etc. Gradually ethics becomes transnational, because different countries are inspired by the codes and guidelines of other countries, all of them making joint statements which assume common principles and shared values.

As the title of this paper indicates a transnational civic ethics could be the seed of a global ethics. Naturally, in order to build such an ethics, it has to have different cultures because the world is multicultural. This is an issue which will not be dealt with here. What we will respond to are the following two questions: 1) What would be the philosophical framework of a civic ethics that has reality in everyday life and is becoming transnational, assuming that a philosophical point of view needs a rational foundation? 2) To what extent is the Christian message close to it?

### 3. *Ethica Cordis*

In my view, the philosophical framework that underlies a civic ethics which is transnational is a peculiar procedural ethics. In principle, it is procedural because it has to design procedures in order to discover an agreement within which people can live various maximum ethics; it cannot be a substantialist maximum ethics to be imposed on others. In this sense, from the point of view of critical hermeneutics, I consider a better public ethics to be based on the principles of discourse ethics. However, speaking of a “peculiar” procedural ethics, I believe that discourse ethics must become what

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<sup>4</sup> Adela CORTINA, *Ética mínima*. Madrid: Tecnos, 1986; IDEM, *Covenant and Contract: Politics, Ethics, and Religion*. Leuven, Belgium; Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2003.

I would call an *ethica cordis*, an ethics reasoned with heart. This is realized by exposing a set of elements derived from reconstructing the presuppositions of communicative action and going beyond pure logical reason, because we know justice not only by reason, but also by heart.<sup>5</sup> What, then, are these elements?

A discourse ethics attempts to reconstruct communicative actions through the presupposition of a transcendental reflection which gives meaning and rationality to it. This reconstruction can discover that there is a link between all beings who are endowed with communicative competence. Hence, anyone who performs communicative actions acknowledges that any being who is endowed with such communicative competence is a valid interlocutor, with whom one joins in a communication link and, therefore, performs certain duties, and discovers a *ligatio* that obliges (*ob-liga*) internally, rather than from an outside imposition.

As Apel claims, the presupposition of transcendental reflection on arguments indicates the result of a fundamental ethical norm, according to which anyone who seriously argues acknowledges that “All beings capable of linguistic communication should be recognized as persons, as in all their actions and expressions they are virtual partners, and cannot give up the unlimited thought justification to any interlocutor, nor their virtual contributions to the discussion.”<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, the discovery of the communication link disallows the claims of any atomistic individualism, and shows not only that “the other is a law for me,” as Kierkegaard says, but also that mutual recognition constitutes us as persons. It is the tradition of recognition, which has religious roots in the story of the Book of Genesis, and, from a philosophical point of view in Hegel’s notion of recognition, extended to such contemporary authors as Paul Ricœur, Honneth and Forster, and those who work in the field of discourse ethics. We are what we are because of our relationship with others (Mead); individualism is false.

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<sup>5</sup> Adela CORTINA, *Ética de la razón cordial*. Oviedo: Nobel, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Karl-Otto APEL, *Transformation der Philosophie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, Bd. 2, p. 400.

Therefore, we can say that another world is possible and necessary. A world, in which mutual recognition is the core of shared life, is necessary.

However, discourse ethics does not display all the potentialities of the communication link, rather it reduces it to logical-discursive reason whereas communication requires many other dimensions in order to succeed. In this paper we can mention only three of these dimensions which would form an *ethica cordis*.

The first dimension is the ability to estimate values. If people “want to argue seriously” they have to be able to perceive positive values and reject negative values; they have to have an ability to estimate values.

It is true that ethics of values was created by Max Scheler, and although it has a number of defenders, it also presents major problems. But it is also true that those who are unable to estimate the value of justice will not be even interested in arguing seriously because the values which people appreciate are embedded in the procedures, such as the rules of discourse, and the values of justice, autonomy, equality, solidarity and care for the vulnerable.

The second dimension: if we can say that a rule is just when it meets universalizable interests, this is to recognize that the best argument that satisfies these universalizable interests depends not only on the internal logic of the argument, but also on the interlocutors being predisposed to interpret correctly these interests in order to search out the fairest option. This requires forging an ethos, and a “virtue of dialogue.” Without an “*antroponomía*,” to use Kant’s expression, it is impossible to be predisposed to meet the categorical imperative.<sup>7</sup> Without being willing to recognize that these interests are universalizable we cannot discover what is most just.

But the world of emotions and feelings is part of genuine communication. According to Nancy Sherman, though she says it in another context, those “incapable of compassion cannot capture the

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<sup>7</sup> Immanuel KANT, *Metaphysik der Sitten*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968, p. 406.

suffering of others. Without a capacity for indignation we cannot perceive injustice.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to properly articulate these dimensions there is need for a more complete analysis of the communication link. Indeed, that link can be understood in two ways: 1) as a link between the participants in an argument, which leads us to Transcendental Pragmatics; and 2) as a link between the participants in a dialogue. This brings into play, not only an ability to argue logically, but also communication skills; the ability to estimate, interpret, and appreciate what stands on its own, a sense of justice and, last but not least, an ability for compassion with recognition of those who are themselves flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone.

These two forms of relationship are, in my opinion, complementary; so much so that without the second it is difficult, if not impossible, that people want to talk seriously; it is difficult to get seriously interested in finding out whether there are valid rules to affect humans; and it is difficult to choose universalizable interests, which always benefit the worst. Because the well-off will benefit from their privilege, while the disadvantaged are precisely those who benefit from the universalized.

Addressing this experiential side of mutual recognition is essential for the formation of dialogic moral subjects.<sup>9</sup> Without that experience it is difficult for a person to be seriously interested in finding out the content of just rules which affects human beings with whom one is not bound but by means of a logical link.

This form of recognition which serves the communication links in their entirety is called “heartly appreciation” and “compassionate recognition,” because compassion is the feeling which urges concern for justice. It is not understood as condescension, or as magnanimity of the strong that agrees to take into account the weak; rather it is the

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy SHERMAN, “Taking Responsibility for Our Emotions,” in Paul E. FRANKEL, Fred D. MILLER and Jeffrey PAUL (eds.), *Responsibility*. Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 294-324.

<sup>9</sup> Jesús CONILL, *Ética hermenéutica*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2006.

ability for compassion with the suffering and the joy of those who recognize each other as flesh of their flesh and bone of their bones. At the same time, they know themselves as vulnerable and linked and yet with a vocation for autonomy. To discover that link or *ligatio* leads to obligation, always more original than duty, to be compassionate of the suffering and of joy, the necessary condition for the building another world.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4. Building Credible Reasons for Hope

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper the urgent task that Christians face from an ethical point of view is to work with a few allies to defend the cause of the person at the level of pluralistic societies and in our global and multicultural world. The question, to what extent the Christian message is about the transnational civic ethics which weaves and becomes the seeds of a global ethics, still remains to be answered. Such answers are inextricably linked, because they have historically grown together and shared the core of ethical messages. Although Christianity also makes specific proposals, they are not exclusive.

The first of these messages is the affirmation of the *dignity of the person*, foundation of the human rights according to the United Nations 1948 Declaration. This is a statement that Judaism and Christianity have as their own since the book of Genesis recognized the human person as made in the image and likeness of God and so as sacred. The statement that different philosophical proposals are rooted in a rational basis, as Kant claims, according to which, man is an end in him/herself, has an absolute value, dignity and not merely a price.<sup>11</sup> Just in the late eighteenth century, when human relationships became commodities, people began to recognize from the perspective of an ethic which was becoming transnational that

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<sup>10</sup> Adela CORTINA, *Ética de la razón cordial*. Oviedo: Nobel, 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Adela CORTINA, "Würde, nicht Preis: Jenseits des Ökonomizismus," in Javier MUGUERZA (Hg.), *Ethik aus Unbehagen*. Freiburg/München: Karl Alber 1991, pp. 209-232; *Las fronteras de la persona*. Madrid: Taurus, 2009.

the person is valuable in him/herself, that the person is not a thing among the things, that the person should not be instrumentalized.

The question “what is a person worth?” has been answered ethically with the discovery of human rights, which are essential components of transnational ethics.

However, one might think that Christianity has died because its central ethical message has been absorbed by a culture that has a substantial ingredient of Christianity and now nothing more to offer. But this is not true, because it has much more to offer, something specific to Christianity, though not exclusive.

The good news is that God exists, and this is really good news. The famous “atheist buses” are carrying the slogan: “God probably does not exist. Stop worrying and enjoy your life.” That would be true in the case of an inquisitor and vengeful God, but not in the case of the lame who can walk, the blind who can see, the poor who is announcing the good news: blessed are the merciful and the peacemakers. It would be true in the case of a distant God incapable of compassion. The gods of the classical world were invulnerable, which excluded compassion. The Christian God, however, is Emmanuel, God with us, subject to disease, abandonment, sadness and death; and because of that, capable of compassion.

Since the story of Genesis it is known that it is not good for man to be alone (as with autistic individualism) because we are in relation to one another from the depths of our being. From this recognition of the link or *ligatio*, arise obligations that go beyond the duties of justice, while not replacing them. So the duties of justice bind with obligations of gratuity, whose fulfillment may never be required as a must or claimed as a right. The obligation to seek affection, comfort, hope and sense of sharing spreads not demands of justice, but the abundance of the heart.<sup>12</sup>

However, the issue of evil is still the big problem for the monotheistic religions, which explains much of unbelief. The balance

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<sup>12</sup> Adela CORTINA, *Covenant and Contract: Politics, Ethics, and Religion*. Leuven; Dudley, Mass.: Peeters, 2003.

between a ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to the existence of God, with all its consequences for each side of the scale, some feel it more reasonable to work for justice and peace, accepting the hope that injustice is not the last word in history.

It is Horkheimer who told masterfully in the precious text: “If I had to explain why Kant persevered in the belief in God, I find no better reference than a passage from Victor Hugo. I will quote it as I have it recorded in my memory: an old woman crossing the street educated her children but received ingratitude; she worked and lived in misery, but still loved and was left alone. However, her heart is far from hatred and assists others whenever she can. She moves on and says, ‘*ça doit avoir un lendemain*’, there must be a tomorrow. Because they were not able to think that injustice will definitively dominate history, Voltaire and Kant called for a God, but not for themselves.”<sup>13</sup> Actively working for justice and peace, side by side with those who share an appreciation for human dignity and the care of nature, and in the hope that injustice is not the last word in history, it is the task of Christianity; it is the task of a church convinced that another world is necessary.

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<sup>13</sup> Max HORKHEIMER, “La filosofía de Kant y la Ilustración,” in *Teoría crítica*. Barcelona: Barral, 1973, p. 212.





# ***A Serving Church: Overcoming Polarization Through Christian Wisdom***

**PETER JONKERS\***

## **Introduction**

This paper will take the situation of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands as a starting point in order to present some ideas on how the Church can overcome polarization. Since the sixties of last century, the Catholic Church in the Netherlands has been marked by a fierce polarization. Its causes are partly common to all Western European societies, and partly specific for the situation in the Netherlands. First, the pan-European trends of pluralization and individualization have not only resulted in a growing number of religious and secular worldviews, meaning that all organizations have become minorities, and that the Catholic church is only one of them, but these trends have also profoundly changed the ways in which people consider themselves as member of a (religious) community.<sup>1</sup> The overall result of these processes is that almost everyone, not only those outside, but also inside the Church, has become a seeker: people live a life that is no longer comprehensively bound by an insti-

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the effects of these common factors on religion, see Loek HALMAN, "Patterns of European Religious Life," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*. Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015, pp. 21-70; Staf HELLEMANS, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," in S. HELLEMANS and J. WISSINK (eds.), *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity: Transformations, Visions, Tensions*. Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2012, pp. 23f. and IDEM, "Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 129-160; Joep de HART and Paul DEKKER, "Floating Believers: Dutch Seekers and the Church," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 71-96.

tution or by transcendent substantial values, but are guided by the normative examples of expressive individualism and authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

It goes without saying that many people, inside as well as outside the Church, members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and ordinary faithful, evaluate these ongoing evolutions very differently: some fear that (religious) traditions and institutions are jeopardized by the rise of expressive individualism; others, by contrast, welcome individualization as a means to put an end to every form of (ecclesiastical) organization, which they deem as an oppression of (spiritual) freedom. Anyway, as far as the Church is concerned, the overall result of these heavily diverging evaluations of the role of religion and Church in today's predominantly secular society has been a growing polarization.

But in order to fully understand the current polarized situation of the Church in the Netherlands, several specifically Dutch factors have to be taken into account as well. Because Dutch society had traditionally been tightly organized in different (religious) segments or compartments, the above trends affected it particularly gravely. They caused a sharp decline of formal church membership in a short period of time, thus changing Dutch society from one of the most churched societies in Europe into one of the most secular ones.<sup>3</sup> As regards the Catholic part of the population, this evolution can be explained by the fact that, after the Second World War, many Dutch Catholics felt the dominant role of the Church in their 'compartment' of society as a more and more galling bond, especially because they had just started to make up their social and economic arrears. They were convinced that their emancipation was only completed if they totally identified with mainstream, secular society. Other Catholics, however, wanted to hold on to the compartmen-

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<sup>2</sup> Staf HELLEMANS and Peter JONKERS, "Introduction. The Contingent Meeting of a Catholic Minority Church With Seekers," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> However, the decline of formal Church membership has hardly affected the general religiosity of the Dutch, as the contribution of Joep de HART and Paul DEKKER, "Floating Believers: Dutch Seekers and the Church," pp. 73 ff. shows.

talized society and to the clearly identifiable, hierarchical Church of before the Second World War. In a similar vein, a lot of Dutch Catholics saw the texts produced by the Second Vatican Council not as the final results of a long process of internal consultation about the role of the Church in society, but rather as a starting point for an even more radical opening of the Church to secular society. Hence, they wanted to implement the decisions of the Council as quickly and extremely as possible. Others, however, experienced the disappearance of the pre-Vatican Church as a loss. Especially the renewal of the traditional liturgy with its ‘smells and bells’ was the cause of fierce polarization among many loyal Catholics.<sup>4</sup>

Now, fifty years later, it is clear that the costs of these polarized options in the Netherlands have been considerable: the conservative option has led to a retrenchment of the Church into a small defensive bulwark against modern society, whereas the liberal option has resulted in a Church that has lost a great deal of its identity, because it proved to be unable to distinguish itself from secular society at large.<sup>5</sup> But, far more importantly, the overall consequence of both options has been that the Church in the Netherlands has lost a great deal of its relevance to society in the eyes of many people.

In this context, it deserves to be noted that the traditional description of the situation in the Church as being polarized between liberals and conservatives may not be an adequate indication anymore of current situation. A bi-polar polarization presupposes the existence of two clearly defined camps of more or less equal strength with

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<sup>4</sup> See Staf HELLEMANS, “Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West,” pp. 20-23; Joep de HART and Paul DEKKER, “Floating Believers: Dutch Seekers and the Church;” Peter JONKERS, “From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom,” in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 168 ff.

<sup>5</sup> S. HELLEMANS, “Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers,” p. 156. Halik draws a similar conclusion when he writes about Ecclesiastical Christianity’s unfortunate reactions to the victory of secularism: “either *liberalism*: uncritically allowing its identity to dissolve into the secular culture, or *fundamentalism*, withdrawing into a ghetto of disgruntled and paranoid counter-culture’.” Cf. Tomas HALIK, “Europe Between Laicity and Christianity,” in Tomas HALIK and Pavel HOSEK (eds.), *A Czech Perspective on Faith in a Secular Age*. Washington: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015, p. 57.

conflicting or even incompatible views. During, approximately, the last three decades of the twentieth century this was certainly the case in the Dutch church. But because individualization and pluralization have pervaded all Western societies more and more, the clear dichotomy between liberals and conservatives in the Church, just like many other dichotomies in society at large, have somehow evaporated. Pope Francis' informal way of doing, his decision to reorganize the curia, his attempts to 'rebrand' the image and to a certain extent also the doctrine of the Church make it difficult for conservative faithful, and even for some bishops, to hold on to their fundamental attitude of loyalty to the Pope. And although liberals have welcomed the opening of the Church to the modern world, many of them are not at all happy with the direction that today's society is taking in many moral and social issues, and the fact that society has turned its back to the Church altogether. These and many other examples show that polarization has not so much disappeared, but is taking a different shape: the bi-polar polarization in the Church has been replaced by a multi-polar Church, a heterogeneous and instable field. Depending on the specific issue at stake, individual faithful decide which side they take, the one taking a liberal stance, the other a conservative one. This, again, shows to what extent the processes of individualization and pluralization have pervaded Western society, including the Church.

However, all these heterogeneous answers to the question how the Church should react to specific developments in the (post)modern world, reflect the far more important underlying issue that Christians' relation to the world has been and always will be a fundamentally ambivalent one. In my view, this principled question needs to be examined first in order to answer the question how the Church can overcome its polarized ideas on how to relate to today's society. Therefore, I will, in the next section, analyze this ambivalence further, thereby making use of Pope emeritus Benedict's suggestion that only by becoming 'unworldly' will the Church be able to serve the world in a truthful way. Building on this analysis, I will discuss, in the section thereafter, a few ideas on how the Church can develop a

new, authentic relation to contemporary society, in other words, how it can become a serving Church. These ideas derive from the contributions to the second part of the volume on *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*.<sup>6</sup> In the final two sections, I will develop my own ideas on this issue further, namely that the Church can serve the world by presenting itself as a tradition of practical wisdom, and the implications of this approach for the question of religious truth.

### ***In the World, but Not of the World***

In his address in Freiburg of September 2011, Pope emeritus Benedict gave an intriguing analysis of the ambivalent nature of Christianity's relationship with the world, by commenting on the proverb of the Gospel that Christians should be *in*, but not *of* the world.<sup>7</sup> In his view, the Church, "in order to accomplish [its] mission, [...] will need again and again to set [itself] apart from [its] surroundings, to become in a certain sense 'unworldly'."<sup>8</sup> He defines a 'worldly church' as a church, which "becomes self-satisfied, settles down in this world, becomes self-sufficient and adapts [it]self to the standards of the world."<sup>9</sup> Hence, he welcomes the secularization process as a necessary step in order to untie the traditional knot between Church and society, thereby referring to well-known examples of secularization, such as the expropriation of Church goods or elimination of its privileges.<sup>10</sup> He qualifies this process not

<sup>6</sup> S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 163-268.

<sup>7</sup> John, 17:16.

<sup>8</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Freiburg im Breisgau, Sunday, September 25, 2011*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. F.-X. Kaufmann, unfortunately, interprets the address of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI primarily in this sociological and juridical way, and thereby fails to see its theological intention. See Franz-Xaver KAUFMANN, "Entweltlichte Kirche?," in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 7, 2012, p. 11.

as a loss, but rather as a liberation of the Church from all kinds of problematic forms of worldliness.

With his warning of a church that has become too much *of* the world, or his plea for a detachment of the Church from the world as it actually is, Benedict expresses his opposition against the above mentioned liberal option. Given his conservative reputation, this should not be a surprise. But his proposal for the Church's detachment from the (modern) world should not be misunderstood as a plea for a complete withdrawal from it, since this would run counter to the admonition of the gospel that Christians should be *in* the world. So, in spite of his fierce critique of the moral, cultural, and intellectual relativism of (post)modernity and its reductionist positivism, Benedict's main concern is a positive one, namely to explore new ways, in which the Church can be truly *in* the world.

But how does Benedict concretize this exhortation of the Gospel? In his view, if the Church is liberated from its material and political burdens and privileges, it is far better equipped to fulfill its missionary task: it can reach out more effectively and in a truly Christian way to the whole world, and be truly open to it. To phrase it paradoxically, insofar as it resolutely moves away from its worldliness, that is, from its problematic alliance with the world as it actually is, the Church "open[s] up afresh to the cares of the world, to which she herself belongs, and give herself over to them."<sup>11</sup> In sum, characteristic of an unworldly Church is that it is "not bracketing or ignoring anything from the truth of our present situation, but living the faith fully here and now in the utterly sober light of day, appropriating it completely, and stripping away from it anything that only seems to belong to faith, but in truth is mere convention or habit."<sup>12</sup>

However, in spite of all his good intentions, one can ask whether Benedict's fierce opposition to the modern world will not result in a Church that is completely out of touch with it, thus running the risk that, eventually, its voice will not be heard anymore by the world.

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<sup>11</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Address of September 25, 2011*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

In particular, many people have the impression that the Church often does not open up to their cares, but overpowers their authentic search for meaning and hope with fixed certainties and abstract, doctrinal truths. In sum, many do not experience the Church as helpful in their quest for orientation in today's radically pluralist and individualized world, in which almost all traditional points of reference have dissolved. But if Benedict's only positive alternative for his critical stance towards contemporary society were to harp on the importance of doctrinal truths, such an approach would not only be counterproductive, but also, and more importantly, fail to realize the Church's true vocation, namely that it should open up to the cares of the world, and fulfill Christ's appeal that his disciples should be *in* the world. So, the question remains how the Church can overcome its internal polarization over the question of its relation to the world in such a way that it opens up to the cares of the world, while at the same time remaining to be the salt of the earth, in other words, refraining from becoming *of* the world. The idea of a serving Church points to a possible answer to this question, since it wants to spread a message of hope in response to the cares of the world.

### **A Church Open to the Cares of the World**

In the second part of the volume *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, various authors present their ideas about how the Church can serve today's individualized and pluralized world in a truthful way. In his contribution, Terrence Merrigan links up with Taylor's investigation of the modern ideal of authenticity, resulting in a subjective turn in religion, and examines if and how the work of Newman can be interpreted as an in our context still relevant reaction to this situation.<sup>13</sup> His central idea is that of the exile of the religious subject in a secular age. This exile is a kind of no-man's-land, meaning that the subject is no longer at home in the world

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<sup>13</sup> See Terrence MERRIGAN, "The Exile of the Religious Subject: A Newmanian Perspective on Religion in Contemporary Society," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 193-222.



and no more secure in himself, that he is threatened by the cold, secular world without and unsettled by the fragility of the spiritual world within. The term 'exile' evokes the religious subject's sense of dislocation, of being uprooted, of being somehow in the wrong place. However, it is quite probable that, ultimately, when he wants to leave this exile, this subject gives ear to the siren song of the world, thus reaffirming the status quo rather than being challenged to improve his life or even entertaining the hope that life can be better than it is. From this perspective, the future for the religious self, when left to himself, seems rather bleak.

According to Merrigan, the only possible escape from the overwhelming grip of the world on those who really seek to follow the lead of the voice speaking from within is revealed religion. Revealed religion gives rise to a practice-oriented spirituality, which is no longer restricted to determining 'who one is', but also requires one to engage in a reflection on one's appropriation of experience. This may promote an interest in the stories of others, of fellow practitioners and their narrative traditions. This line of thought resonates Taylor's idea that the subject who strives after authenticity, is in need of inescapable horizons of meaning and strong evaluations, which are embedded in, among others, religious traditions. Hence, the churches, which are the treasurers of revealed religion, can help the religious subject from his exile in the no-man's-land between the secular world outside and the fragile, spiritual world within.

When applied to European Catholics, living amidst the remains of Christendom and regularly seeing portions of its historical patrimony 'returned' to the world, there is a profound sense of estrangement from the prevailing culture, a culture in which even the interest in practice-oriented spirituality is at best a minority concern, and, far more problematic, the person (of whatever faith) who takes religion seriously is regarded with suspicion. This points to a concrete way in which the Church can open up to the cares of the world, namely by coming to the aid of the religious exile. This means that the Church should acknowledge and understand the appeal to inwardness that is characteristic of modernity. To put it more concretely, the Church

should value the religious potential of the inward turn, while at the same time remaining skeptical about the potential of a vague, general spirituality to generate religious depth and promote communitarian religion. Thirdly, the Church should encourage the quest of the committed religious subject for a dynamic orientation towards the ‘otherness’ represented by revelatory traditions and communitarian forms of religion. But even if this way of opening up to the world is successful, this will not prevent the life of the committed religious subject from experiencing a twofold experience of exile, namely, a nagging sense that our age is out of joint, and a profound awareness that the religious subject himself is somehow party to the experience of dislocation. In this situation, a concrete way, in which the Church can open up to the cares of the world, is by endeavoring to tap into, and engage with, the religious subject’s spiritual aspirations and to allow itself to be challenged by them. It is only by doing so that the Church can begin to overcome its own (sometimes self-imposed) exile from the people it is called to serve.

In his contribution, Stephan Van Erp discusses another approach for the Church to serve today’s society without accommodating itself to the world and thus losing its identity.<sup>14</sup> He explores public life as a sacramental practice in order to construct a theological framework that could serve as a proposal for reconsidering the relationship between the Church and the secular. The Church considers the concrete sacraments as signs and instruments of God’s presence in the world at significant moments in people’s lives. However, as Van Erp argues, thereby following Schillebeeckx, the presence of God’s salvation through the sacraments is not limited to the Church alone, but encompasses the whole of human history. But in order to avoid the erroneous conclusion that the Church could be found everywhere, one has to recognize at the same time that there are important differences between the Church and public life. Against this background, Van Erp is rather critical with regard to the current

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<sup>14</sup> Stephan VAN ERP, “Exploring Public Life as a Sacrament: On Divine Promise in a World of Seekers,” in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 223-241.

forms of public theology, precisely because they have failed to maintain a theological position and distinguish themselves from the world. By contrast, the *nouvelle théologie* of the twentieth century is much more promising in this respect, because it offers an ontology that allows for a less disjunctive representation of the relationship between the Church and the secular, without resigning to non-religious or non-theological arguments.

Against this background the question arises whether, in our times, such an ontology offers still a convincing account of reality that could make the Church appealing to the world again. In order to answer this question one has to reflect on how faith can be a responsive act to today's world, a response that is critical of modernity without becoming anti-modern, and operates in an increasingly secular culture without losing its position as a particular tradition of faith. Van Erp proposes that public life could itself be regarded as a sacramental practice of response or witnessing, thus pointing to a concrete way in which the Church can serve the world. In particular, the Church's social teaching must be the proof of the extent to which it understands itself as the eschatological community of salvation in the world.

In order to bridge the gap between the Church and secular society Van Erp assumes that people in and outside the Church have something in common as far as their relationship to their environment and fellow human beings is concerned, namely a similar way of participating in public life. Insofar as this participation can be marked as sacramental, it is possible to understand the becoming of the Church from that sacramental practice. Hence, Van Erp pleads for an engagement of the church in a conversation with contemporary society about their respective ways of participating in public life. To discern the sacramental in public life, it is important to note that sacraments are not considered to be instances of a miraculous divine revelatory act, but effective signs of God's ongoing presence to the world. Sacraments are calling on the community of believers to witness to God's presence and to make visible and become the instrument of the promise of salvation. Secondly, sacraments should

not be viewed as the right of a hierarchical Church to dispense or withdraw them to the faithful, so that the former become an instrument of control, since this would create a sharp distinction between the church and public life. Rather, sacraments can be compared with an oath, which is an assurance backed by religious sanctity, a solemn promise to be sacredly kept. By taking this approach, Christian faith can offer to today's secular culture a view of God's coming presence in public life: an ongoing relationship confirmed and maintained by a politics of trust, a sacramental performance that will not suggest it could make God's presence itself visible.

In his contribution, Rainer Bucher makes a third suggestion how a Catholic minority Church can serve today's world.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary society is characterized by the fact that religion is not only individualized from the side of demand, in the sense that everyone can and actually does build his or her own personal religion, but also from the side of production: many religious characteristics are dispersing, migrating to other cultural fields, such as the media, economic forms, art, and sports. The consequence of these processes is a dramatic internal power shift within the Catholic Church: from the clergy to the individual faithful, and from the ecclesiastical control on the religious offer to a market situation, in which the Church is only one of the competitors, all bidding for the public's favor.

Against this background, Bucher focuses on the need for the Church to move from its traditional position as the 'people's Church' to a 'Church of the people', thereby following the path of Vatican II. This new path is an inclusive one, characterized by openness towards spiritual, intellectual, and political challenges. It implies that the Church moves from a position of unreachable and untouchable sovereignty to a position in which it only focuses on salvation, a position which accepts no limitations to solidarity. This means that the Church needs to take a new social shape, and becomes a true

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<sup>15</sup> Rainer BUCHER, "The Roman Catholic Church in Late Modernity: Analyses and Perspectives from a Western Point of View," in S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 243-268.

‘Church of the people’, whose central characteristic is the kenosis. The term kenosis means here that the Church is not an end in itself, but the servant of a message, that it has given up its exclusivism and redefines itself as a Church of the people, expressing its solidarity with humankind without reservation, and, finally, that it has become aware that Christian faith has to verify itself pragmatically in the here and now, and can only achieve presence and prove its truthfulness through this verification. In other words, the Church’s pastoral actions have to accept the risk of exposure in all kinds of concrete situations.

Hence, Christian practice no longer derives its identity from an overall and encompassing Christian historical narrative, but solely from Jesus as role model, whose actions were, indeed, situational responses to what seemed necessary from the perspective of the other. This principled stance to exclude nobody, to become, paradoxically, a minority church for all, is not only really new for the Church, but it is also risky because it is not realized in the institution, but only in the singular event of the graceful encounter with God. This means that the Catholic Church has to give up what constituted its structure in modernity, namely manageability, continuity and the claim to exclusivity. With his focus on the singular event Bucher intends to show that the Christian message cannot be encapsulated in a static and ‘eternal’ order, but rather represents a dynamic that is much more in the present. God’s Kingdom is the unexpected event of a new beginning without any certainty of its outcome. From this perspective, pastoral care is concerned with God’s presence among people in the risky processes of human actions, done in his name. Hence, flexible arrangements get a pivotal role in the Church, to the detriment of maintaining the Church as an established organization.

### **A Church That Serves the World Through Wisdom**

In the final two sections of this paper, I want to develop a bit further my own answer to the question how the Church can serve today’s society, based on my contribution to the volume *A Catholic*

*Minority Church in a World of Seekers.* In today's world, in which everyone, in a certain sense, has become a seeker,<sup>16</sup> the Church can find a new appeal by approaching Christian faith not so much as a doctrine, but rather as a source of true wisdom.<sup>17</sup> To put it more concretely, the invaluable service that Christian wisdom can render to today's people is to offer them a truthful life orientation in a world that has lost most of its traditional orientation marks, because it is so profoundly marked by individualization and radical pluralism. As I will develop in the final section, this approach of Christian faith as a truthful orientation in life also sheds a new light on the hotly debated issue of religious truth.

In the introduction of his book on Christian wisdom, David Ford notes that wisdom may be making a comeback, after being associated for a long time with old people, tradition, and conservative caution in a culture of youth, modernization, innovation, and risky exploration. The revival of wisdom is especially evident in areas where knowledge and (technical) know-how come up against questions of ethics, values, beauty, the shaping and flourishing of the whole person, the common good, and long-term perspectives.<sup>18</sup> As is common knowledge, the getting of wisdom takes time and is bound up necessarily with bodies of tradition, scriptural and otherwise, which are preserved, adapted and passed on in particular human communities, in this case a Christian community of faith.<sup>19</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> S. HELLEMANS and P. JONKERS, "Introduction: The Contingent Meeting of a Catholic Minority Church With Seekers," pp. 4-7.

<sup>17</sup> Peter JONKERS, "From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom," pp. 163-191. Interestingly, in a recent document the International Theological Commission holds a similar plea for a reevaluation of the sapiential dimension of theology, thereby criticizing the unilateral focus on apologetics and other doctrinal issues, which has dominated theology since the Enlightenment. See: International Theological Commission, *Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles, and Criteria* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), 70, 86 ff. Cf. <http://goo.gl/OoOHcL>.

<sup>18</sup> David FORD, *Christian Wisdom: Desiring God and Learning in Love*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen C. BARTON, in "Introduction," Stephen C. BARTON (ed.), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church, and the Contemporary World*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999, p. xvii.

examples of wisdom abound in Christian faith, from the Books of Wisdom and the sayings of Jesus to the life stories of people who follow Jesus' example.<sup>20</sup>

In what follows, I will first develop in more detail the idea practical wisdom in general, and then examine to what extent Christian faith can indeed be interpreted as an instantiation of this kind of wisdom, or as an example of a life orientating kind of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> In our times, this kind of knowledge is needed more than ever, because people have come to realize that the enormous growth of scientific knowledge and technical knowhow has been unable to solve all kinds of existential conflicts. Because these conflicts are at the heart of human existence, they are inevitable, consisting of the confrontation between the one-sidedness of moral principles and another one-sidedness, namely that of the contextual and complex nature of human lives.<sup>22</sup> These conflicts give human existence a tragic character. Against this background, the task of practical wisdom is precisely to overcome human tragedy by making the transition from insight in the general principles and the true nature of the good life with and for others to the concrete situations of individual and collective human lives. This means that someone who has a vast knowledge about moral principles, but is unable to relate these appropriately to the complexities of concrete human lives, would not be termed wise, but makes himself guilty of a hubris of practical reason. Similarly, someone who is sensitive to the complexities of people's concrete situations without taking into account the importance of moral principles as objective standards of the good life, yields to the illusions of the heart, and would not be considered wise either.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For an overview, see Stephen C. BARTON (ed.), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Part I: Wisdom in Israel and the Church, pp. 3-181.

<sup>21</sup> This means that I leave aside the kind of wisdom that Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas define as a theoretical knowledge of the first principles.

<sup>22</sup> Paul RICEUR, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 240-296, here p. 274.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241. In this context, it deserves to be noted that several authors deplore the fact that, since modernity, the tension between theoretical, detached knowledge and

Hence, the essence of practical wisdom is to respond to the above existential conflicts by giving a ‘moral judgment in situation’. Such a judgment holds at bay the ruinous alternatives of focusing only on the universality of moral principles, leading to the illusion of the univocity of these principles, as well as on the historical contexts of human lives, which leads to the arbitrariness of sentimentalism.<sup>24</sup> Only through a moral judgment in situation can practical wisdom reach its final goal, namely to assist people in their search for a truthful orientation of their lives. However, this does not mean that practical wisdom would be able to put a final end to these existential conflicts, because they result from the conflicting nature of human existence itself.<sup>25</sup>

The capacity to deliberate is essential for practical wisdom, precisely because the latter aims at a moral judgement *in situation*. To phrase it in Aristotelian terms, the objects of practical wisdom are – unlike those of theoretical wisdom – the things that are not of necessity and, hence, are capable of being otherwise. A judgment in situation starts from the general principles of the good life and connects them with the particularity and plurality of human life. Just throwing universal principles and propositions concerning the good life at people’s heads is anything but wise, because such a way of doing yields to the illusion that these principles can univocally be applied to the contextual situations of human lives. There-

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life-oriented, engaged love of wisdom has widened to a complete rift, which has obviously gone at the cost of the more holistic idea of knowledge. See: Robert NOZICK, “What is Wisdom and Why do Philosophers Love it so?,” *IDEM, The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*. New York: Touchstone Press, 1989, p. 273. D. FORD, *Christian Wisdom*, pp. 269-271; Brenda ALMOND, “Seeking Wisdom: Moral Wisdom or Ethical Expertise,” in Stephen C. BARTON (ed.), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, pp. 202-205; Daniel KAUFMAN, “Knowledge, Wisdom, and the Philosopher,” *Philosophy* 81, 1 (2006), pp. 129-151.

<sup>24</sup> P. RICŒUR, *Oneself as Another*, p. 249.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* In this study, Paul Ricœur gives several examples of such conflicts between general principles and contextual situations of human lives, which all come down to the problem of how to apply a general rule in a plurality of concrete, existential contexts. The essential task of practical wisdom, in this respect, is to mediate this antinomy by a situational judgment. See *Ibid.*, pp. 249 ff.



fore, a refined deliberation is needed, aimed at a careful assessment of these situations in the light of general moral principles.<sup>26</sup> This explains Nozick's remark that the notion of wisdom always has to take into account the constraints of feasibility, that is, the negative aspects of the best alternative, the value of the next best alternative, and the limits on possibility themselves, which exclude certain alternatives as feasible objects of choice. Furthermore, a wise judgement has to incorporate and balance each of the partial evaluative factors thought relevant. As to the human person, these factors include specific characteristics, current and future opportunities, the kind of life led so far, the situation of others, etc.<sup>27</sup> But it is equally essential not to reduce wisdom to a kind of practical knowhow or to drawing up an inventory of the contingencies and pluralities of human life, since practical wisdom also involves a fundamental reflection on the true nature of the good.<sup>28</sup> All this means that the moral judgement in situation of practical wisdom remains a fragile one, always open to reconsideration, and that practical wisdom can never propose, let alone impose one single response to people's quest for a truthful life orientation. Moreover, because such a judgment in situation has to be made in a context of plurality, the conviction that seals this judgment benefits from the plural character of the underlying debate; a wise person is not necessarily one individual alone.<sup>29</sup>

In my view, the main reason that many traditional as well as contemporary views on practical wisdom are so problematic is that they actually negate the transitional character of wisdom's moral judgments in situation. Most traditional forms of wisdom are rather theoretical, focused on the universal principles of the good life, thereby raising themselves above human passions and the com-

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<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang WELSCH, "Weisheit in einer Welt der Pluralität," in Willi OELMÜLLER (Hrsg.), *Philosophie und Weisheit*. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989, pp. 241ff.

<sup>27</sup> R. NOZICK, "What is Wisdom and Why do Philosophers Love it so?," pp. 270 ff.; 277 ff.

<sup>28</sup> Sharon RYAN, "Wisdom, Knowledge and Rationality," *Acta Analytica* (2012) 27, pp. 99-112, here p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> P. RICŒUR, *Oneself as Another*, p. 273.

plexities of existence. Wisdom thus seems to be something which is imposed on the world from above.<sup>30</sup> But in this way, these traditions give the impression that wisdom is a simple univocal affair, so that it risks to become severed from the concrete lives of people.<sup>31</sup> Contemporary manifestations of wisdom, by contrast, focus on the spatio-temporal settings of human lives, thereby failing to critically examine the hidden assumptions of these settings, in particular the need to relate them to universal moral principles. Consequently, such a kind of presumed wisdom risks to be nothing more than an ideological justification of the existing order.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that neither of these two views on practical wisdom is able to truly orient human lives; the popularity of these approaches, then and now, probably stems from the fact that they give us the illusion of being able to find a definitive solution, albeit in opposite ways, to the existential conflicts that haunt us, and thus create the erroneous impression that either one of these approaches can make human life easy. But by doing so they negate the very nature of practical wisdom, which consists in the fragile nature of every judgment in situation.

When applying these general theses about the nature of practical wisdom in general to Christian wisdom, one can say that it also typically offers a judgement in situation, thus avoiding the above problems of traditional and contemporary forms of wisdom. In essence, being a Christian comes down to the *imitatio Christi*, following the teachings of Jesus. Accepting such a perspective on human life is a way of doing justice to the doctrinal, universalist character of Christian faith. Keeping in mind pope emeritus Benedict's admonitions, if Christians would identify completely with the world as it is, or, to phrase it differently, if Jesus's teachings would be interpreted in such a way that they accommodate to the contingent contexts of human lives, faith does not hold a mirror up to our face anymore, and loses its capacity to orient our lives. If Jesus is only a good

<sup>30</sup> Robert SONG, "Wisdom as the End of Morality," in Stephen C. BARTON (ed.), *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, pp. 299-302.

<sup>31</sup> W. WELSCH, "Weisheit in einer Welt der Pluralität," p. 227.

<sup>32</sup> B. ALMOND, "Seeking Wisdom: Moral Wisdom or Ethical Expertise," p. 199.

friend, who comforts us in times of need,<sup>33</sup> and no longer the risen Christ, who returns to earth at the end of times to judge our ways of life, then faith is no expression of practical wisdom anymore, since wisdom is a *judgment* in situation. Eventually, Christian faith would then become *of* the world, instead of *in* the world. But in order to be true wisdom, it is equally important that Christian faith makes the transition from its universalist principles to the concrete situations of human lives. As a judgement in *situation*, Christian wisdom consists in numerous concrete ideas and practices to follow a path of life, aimed at letting one's everyday existence be oriented by a transcendent promise of eternal bliss. But in order to be truly situational and, hence, a true expression of practical wisdom, faith also has to take into account the contingent contexts of human lives and the inevitability of existential conflicts. This implies that following the teachings of Jesus always has to make the transition from these teaching to the specific contexts of human lives.

In my view, an aspect of faith that comes closest to Christian wisdom is the Church's social teaching. It explicitly makes the transition from the universal principles of justice from a Christian perspective to the particular contexts of individuals and societies. In particular, it confers to prudential individuals and groups in society the responsibility to fulfil the task of making situational judgements, which mediate between universal principles and particular contexts.

According to the encyclical *Deus caritas est* "the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live."<sup>34</sup> This quotation shows, first, the ambition of the Church to help orienting the contingent sphere of contemporary societies on the basis of the universalist principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and human dignity,

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<sup>33</sup> See Gianni VATTIMO, *Belief*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 27.

being concretizations of the common good. But, second, the church also recognizes ‘the autonomy of the temporal sphere’, because it refrains from imposing these principles directly on modern, and by definition pluralist societies. Phrased positively, it means that the Church admits that these principles have to be brought into a dialogue with society at large: “The Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest.”<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the encyclical explicitly recognizes that it is the state’s responsibility to answer “the question of how justice can be achieved here and now,”<sup>36</sup> in other words, to determine how these guidelines can be implemented in the contexts of specific societies. The encyclical thereby takes for granted that the outcome of this mediation will differ from society to society.

Interestingly, when it comes to interpreting the contingent sphere of daily politics in the light of its social teaching, the Church’s concrete approach is itself an example of practical wisdom. In order to help achieving justice here and now, the Church does not opt for a top down model, since this would imply becoming disconnected from the diverging societal contexts, in which people are living. Rather, according to its social teaching, the Church has to rely on the prudence of (Christian) politicians and members of civil society at large; they are supposed to have the practical wisdom to make the transition from a profound insight in the fundamental principles of social teaching to the contingent opportunities and constraints of civil societies.

A concrete example of practical wisdom in the social sphere is the idea of participation. According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* this idea is the typical implication of the principle of subsidiarity, being one of the fundamental principles of the social teaching of the Church. This principle stipulates that “all

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<sup>35</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Deus Caritas est*, 28.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help (“subsidi-um”) – therefore of support, promotion, development – with respect to lower-order societies,<sup>37</sup> so that intermediate social entities can properly perform the functions that fall to them, without being absorbed and substituted by entities of a higher level, e.g. the State. The importance of this principle is that people are protected from abuse of power by a higher-level authority. In order to put this principle into practice, “appropriate methods for making citizens more responsible in actively “being a part” of the political and social reality of their country are needed.”<sup>38</sup> Hence, the characteristic implication of subsidiarity is participation.

The *Compendium* defines this notion as “a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”<sup>39</sup> Herewith, the *Compendium* shows the practical wisdom character of the Church’s social teaching. It recognizes that answering the question how the universal principle of subsidiarity is brought about, in other words, how a participative democracy is organized, depends on the social and historical contexts of the society in which this principle is implemented. But, at the same time, the *Compendium* also stresses the universal importance of the participation: “every democracy should be participative.”<sup>40</sup> Because participation is one of the standards of a humane society, initiatives that could jeopardize it “are a source of concern and deserve careful consideration.”<sup>41</sup> Time and again, the *Compendium* warns of the dangers of inadequate or incorrect practices of participation. It also

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<sup>37</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005, p. 186.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.

expresses its concern about attitudes “that cause widespread disaffection with everything connected with the sphere of social and political life.”<sup>42</sup> So, the example of participation shows that the Church’s Social Teaching is indeed an expression of practical wisdom: this Teaching makes a careful transition from a universal principle to the contextual situation of a concrete society, resulting in a judgment of situation about the (in)adequate ways this principle is implemented.

### **Wisdom and Religious Truth**

In my view, approaching Christian faith as an expression of practical wisdom can shed a new light on the hotly debated issue of religious truth. Due to the vivid experience of the devastating effects of an exclusivist idea of religious truth on the core societal values of religious freedom and tolerance, many people, including many prominent contemporary philosophers, have come to the conclusion that we would be far better off if we drop the idea of religious truth altogether. It should be replaced by the notion of consensus (Rawls and Habermas), or be considered as the effect of a social construction of reality, implying that the plausibility of a religious truth claim does not reach beyond a local community of likeminded people (Rorty). But to my mind, the notion of religious truth cannot be discarded so easily, especially in the case of religions of conversion, e.g. Christian and Islamic faith. When the faithful confess the truth of their religion, they do not simply express their personal attachment to a number of contingent religious opinions and practices, but bear witness to their faith as source of true practical wisdom, because it enables them to find their true destiny in life. The crucial question in this respect is: what entitles religious people to speak of *true* practical wisdom, of their *true* destiny, and what kind of truth are they referring to when they make such claims? Obviously, the truth of practical wisdom is not primarily a theoretical, doctrinal one, because doctrine comes only after the truth that is experienced

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

and lived by the people who adhere to a specific religion. Hence, the claim to religious truth refers primarily to the experienced truth of a judgement in situation, and is thus linked to the experienced truth of a life-orientation. I have proposed the expression ‘existential truth’ in order to cover the kind of truth which is expressed by (religious) wisdom.<sup>43</sup>

In contexts of both religious and secular wisdom we use words like ‘true’ and ‘universal’ in order to express something essential for human existence, something that is not just true for the individual who expresses it or for a small group of like-minded people. In order to make this concrete, we communicate our commitment to a tradition of (religious) wisdom with others in the public domain, asking them to recognize these expressions of wisdom as expressions of something essential, in other words, to recognize their existential truth. This striving for recognition does not mean that others have to accept our commitment to a specific tradition of wisdom as a source for orientation of their own lives too. This would be a denial of the inevitable dissemination of human existence, and consequently of the real divergence of our substantial commitments. Moreover, expecting, let alone demanding that others accept our tradition of wisdom as the only true one would come down to imposing an exclusivist truth claim, which runs counter to the very essence of modern, democratic societies.

Nevertheless, the fact that people strive for the recognition of their (religious and secular) traditions of practical wisdom shows that there is something essential at stake: others ask us to recognize that,

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<sup>43</sup> I developed the notion of ‘existential truth’ in various contributions. See: Peter JONKERS, “Contingent Religions, Contingent Truths?,” in D. M. GRUBE and P. JONKERS (ed.), *Religions Challenged by Contingency: Theological and Philosophical Perspectives to the Problem of Contingency*. Leiden: Brill, 2008, pp. 161-181; Peter JONKERS, “Religious Truth in a Globalising World,” in Ph. QUADRIO and C. BESSELING (eds.), *Religion and Politics in the New Century: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2009, pp. 176-206; Peter JONKERS, “Redefining Religious Truth as a Challenge for Philosophy of Religion,” in *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 4 (2012), pp. 139-159.

through their substantial commitment to a tradition of wisdom, they aim to express essential meanings, which they claim to be equally essential as the meanings that we express through our substantial commitments, and this although we may not share their commitments and they may even fill us with repulsion. Hence, the striving for recognition can only take place against the background of conflicting substantial meanings, because only then can all partners become aware of the fact that there is something essential at stake. Therefore, we feel deeply frustrated when others don't want to take these meanings seriously, and reduce them to contingent, private opinions whose acceptance does not rest upon their substance, but merely upon sentimental things, such as not wanting to hurt our feelings, provided that these opinions and, above all, the practices connected to them do not cause too much of a fuss in the public sphere.

What matters to me here is not so much the concrete results of mutual recognition and its social and political implications, but the fact that, while striving for recognition, we reach out towards something essential, towards an existential truth which is beyond our subjective, contingent self. In the end, we don't want to be left alone with our contingent convictions and practices, nor are we prepared to leave others alone with theirs. We humans are too finite to be left alone with our own finitude, too dependent on the recognition of our substantial meanings by others to seriously consider ourselves as the only creators of truth and meaning in a meaningless world.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> It deserves to be noted that the idea of existential truth has much in common with Charles Taylor's idea of the inescapable moral sources of the Self, whose atrophy he considers as one of the main causes of the 'malaise of modernity'. See: Charles TAYLOR, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 91-107. He distinguishes these sources from life-goods as such, which refer to anything valuable, worthy of admiration, to that which makes life worthy or valuable. The term 'moral sources', however, refers to a being or reality that constitutes both the goodness of our actions and aspirations, and our own goodness. Hence, moral sources are not just ideas regarding the good, but also require our commitment to them; in other words, love of the good is what empowers us to be good and to constitute ourselves through these sources. See: Roshnee OSSEWAARDE-LOWTOO, *Recovering the Human Paradox: The Christian Humanism of Charles Taylor, Paul Valadier, and Joseph Ratzinger*. Bergambacht: 2VM, 2015, p. 39.



In sum, linking the notion of practical wisdom to that of existential truth enables us to redefine the idea of religious truth in a non-exclusivist way. These notions are attempts to discover, *in* the contingency which inevitably characterizes our ways of life, the essence of a truthful way of life.<sup>45</sup> In particular, they can help us to overcome the typically (post)modern bifurcations between subjectivity and objectivity, particularity and universality, immanence and transcendence, in other words, between a truth that can be demonstrated scientifically, as the expression of an objective state of affairs, and private, contingent opinions. In sum, religious wisdom expresses existential truth, in the sense that it shows a personal or collective commitment to something essentially worthwhile, which reveals itself primarily in and through a plurality of contextual life-situations.

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<sup>45</sup> Ricœur makes a similar point with regard to the universality of the idea of human rights and the plurality of its implementations. See P. RICŒUR, *Oneself as Another*, p. 289.

# ***Kenotic Ethics for a Servant Church***

**WILLIAM A. BARBIERI Jr.\***

## **Introduction**

Fifty years ago, when John XXIII deemed it time to “throw open the windows of the church,” *opening* became a metaphor for a new and risky stance. In unsettling times, the Catholic Church, in the Second Vatican Council, boldly opened itself to a turbulent climate. In those days, “duck and cover” were watchwords in a divided, nuclearized world that nearly came to grief in Cuba; another bomb, the so-called “population bomb,” cast its shadow over the developing world; while in Europe, “godless atheism” seemed to loom at the end of a one-way march toward secularization; and in modern culture a relativistic situation ethics seemed poised to take the day. These external threats were crucial components of the crucible in which the church cast its encounter with secular modernity. Opening, in the context of *Gaudium et Spes*, meant preparing a path for needed renovations and changes to the house of the faithful, but perhaps even more, it meant clearing paths for engagement with the world so that the wisdom and charisms of the church could help evangelize and heal others.

Today it is not opening but *emptying* that is the order of the day. The chief task for the church in the present has a fundamentally different nature from the challenge of a half-century ago: namely its inner provenance, its source within. The church has been obliged to lie in a Procrustean bed hewn from its own shortcomings and miscues. A recent history of sexual abuse of children, of dereliction of pastoral duties, of recalcitrance and failures of accountability, has damaged the Catholic Church’s standing as a teacher of sexual morality, as a trusted social authority and arbiter of probity, and

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as a reliable spiritual guide. A crisis of moral credibility has been the result, as the spotlight of public opinion has placed in glaring relief disjunctions, even fissures, between certain curial sensibilities and the sense of the people – “all people of good will” (*Pacem in Terris*) – in matters of authority and ethics. These failures have at once wounded the church and sounded a clarion call for repentance, recompense and renewal. What is required to move forward is a conversion: not a radical one, but the ongoing conversion at the sometimes forgotten heart of the church’s mission. The charge is to recover and re-energize the church’s historic commitment to kenotic love: to humility, abasement, self-limitation, sacrifice, servitude, and identification with the poor and lowly. For these are the hallmarks of the gospel call to all Christians, but especially to their leaders, to imitate the *kenosis*, the act of self emptying, through which divine love is embodied in Christ.

The appointment to the chair of Peter of an unassuming Argentinian pastor has been widely perceived as an encouraging step in this direction. From his choice of name and his humble words accepting his office, to his modest selection of vestments and abode, to demonstrative acts such as washing the feet of women and Muslims, Pope Francis has prominently displayed a kenotic sensibility. He has deliberately and decisively distanced his approach from the “sacral-kingship” model of the papacy and Magisterium to which friends and critics alike have attributed many of the church’s ills.<sup>1</sup> It is tempting to view him as striking a new tone in the presentation of the church’s stance and mission. But that, in fact, would not be fair to his predecessors, who in their own ways have also sounded kenotic themes regarding the centrality of sacrifice, humility, and service for the church. John Paul II included explicit reflections on kenosis in *Fides et Ratio*, where he asserted that the understanding of God’s *kenosis* can be viewed as the prime commitment of theology (§ 93), and *Redemptoris Mater*, in which he describes Mary’s

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<sup>1</sup> Francis OAKLEY, “Obedience and the Church’s Teaching Authority: The Burden of the Past,” in Charles TAYLOR, José CASANOVA, and George F. MCLEAN, *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*. Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012.

self-sacrifice as fully sharing in the “shocking mystery” of Christ’s self-emptying (§ 18); and the case can certainly be made that as he pushed himself to his physical limits in the later days of his papacy he embodied a kenotic spirit of self-sacrificial service.<sup>2</sup> Benedict, too, in his preaching to Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere, was an eloquent spokesman for an ethic of self-abandonment and service, and one could hardly think of a more powerful kenotic witness than his decision to vacate his office.

If the church’s chief servant-leaders have taught and in some measure embodied the imperative of the practice of kenosis, they have hardly exhausted its potential. There remain many ways in which this ecclesial ethic might be unfolded, and more reason than ever to cultivate it. What does it mean to be a self-emptying church today? In exploring this question, we will briefly revisit the scriptural source of the kenotic ideal, in order to identify some of the interlocking meanings and theological connections nesting there. I will pass over the doctrinal debates about the Christological significance of kenosis, since they are not directly material to my purposes and I am in any event unqualified to comment on them. I will proceed instead to the ethical ramifications of kenotic ethics for matters of both style and “substance in the church’s engagement with the contemporary world,” devoting some remarks to a number of areas in my own field of social ethics, including migration, ecology, inter-religious dialogue, and peacemaking. I will conclude with some observations about the historicity of morals and some of the potentialities in the present moment of encounter between the church and the forces of secularity.

### **Wellsprings of a Kenotic Ethic**

The *locus classicus* for Christian thinking about kenosis is the letter of an imprisoned Paul to the Philippians, whom he exhorts

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<sup>2</sup> George WEIGEL does make this case in *The End and the Beginning: Pope John Paul II – The Victory of Freedom, the Last Years, the Legacy*. New York: Grove Books, 2010, esp. pp. 191-400.

to, as John Paul Heil puts it, rejoice in being conformed to Christ.<sup>3</sup> In the second chapter of the letter, Paul enjoins his fellow Christians to emulate Christ Jesus and spells out the meaning of this model in hymnic form:

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,  
Who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.  
Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,  
coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance,  
he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death,  
even death on a cross.

These words present a powerful charge to followers of Christ, a charge that revolves around the manner in which he emptied (*ekenosen*) himself in becoming human. But in examining the attitudes, stances, and actions to which Paul is exhorting his audience, we must quickly become aware that the act of self-emptying – kenosis – has a deep ambiguity attached to it, rooted in the metaphor of emptying itself. For fundamentally, emptying shifts its valence depending on whether one focuses on the implied vessel, which becomes void, or the implied contents, which issue forth. Viewed this way, emptying is at the same time filling, and kenosis can lead toward absence or plenitude.

In Paul's letter, elements of the ethos he urges the faithful to exhibit can be taken to support both readings of *kenosis*. Christ's example is one of radical self-abnegation: he abases himself not only in becoming human, but by assuming the form of a slave. He humiliates himself not only by becoming subject to death, but by acceding to the most ignominious of deaths, the one on the cross. He not only sets aside his divine power, privilege, and status, but empties himself so as to serve others. In words that echo the figure of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah, Paul builds on these motifs, instructing his brothers and sisters to manifest their unity in love and

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul HEIL, *Philippians: Let Us Rejoice in Being Conformed to Christ*. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

compassion, to abjure selfishness, to embrace humility, and to consign themselves to service, viewing others as more important than themselves and looking out not for their own interests but for those of others. In these inter-locking directives, which together constitute a model for Christian discipleship, the dual aspects of kenosis are served: on the one hand, emptiness is reflected in the ideals of selflessness, of sacrifice, of humiliation, while on the other hand, an endless outpouring produces unstinting service and limitless compassion.

In Christian tradition, the idea of kenosis has run as a subterranean current, welling to the surface on occasion in the witness of mystics of various persuasions. In the late sixteenth century kenotic themes were infused into the Carmelite spirituality of St. John of the Cross and the devotions of John Donne, who wrote, "I am ground even to an attenuation and must proceed to evacuation, all ways to exinanition and annihilation."<sup>4</sup> In the twentieth century, the conflagration of World War II swallowed up additional witnesses to humility, sacrifice, and renunciation: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil, Edith Stein. It is the challenge of these lives and their implications for a truly human deportment, and not the more abstruse debates that have flared up occasionally over the past two centuries about God's self-emptying and the metaphysics of the Incarnation, that are especially important for the church's engagement with the world today.<sup>5</sup>

A lesson we can take from these exemplars is that a thoroughgoing ethic of kenosis – emptiness in its fullness, we might say – requires doing justice to the twin faces of its ambiguous structure, to its dual aspects of hollowing and egress. As ethical models, each of these aspects offers two further dimensions. For inasmuch as self-emptying implies creating a space, it evokes a *giving-up*, a relinquishing of power or privilege or substance, and the making of

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<sup>4</sup> John DONNE, *Divine Poems, Sermons, Devotions, and Prayers*, edited by John Booty. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990, p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> Some helpful efforts to sort out these and additional senses of *kenosis* can be found in the writings of Sarah Coakley.

room for something, or someone, else: in the words of Paul's letter, "humbly regard[ing] others as more important than yourselves" (Phil 2:3). At the same time, to the extent that kenosis connotes a flowing outward, it constitutes a *giving-to*, the presentation of a gift of love, once again to another, whose interests are placed before one's own (Phil 2:4). These two movements impart distinct themes to the ethics of kenosis. Thus, where the emphasis is on the internal emptiness of humility and sacrifice, the subordination of one's needs and station, a tenor of *welcoming-in* and protecting the other is established, along with a stance of *servicing* and honoring the guest. Where the focus shifts to the external dimension of outflowing and encounter, the theme becomes one of encounter and understanding, marked by deep *listening* and careful *discerning* in an attempt to know others, to see from their eyes, and to divine what gifts might benefit them most.

Listening, discerning, welcoming, serving – these can be important correctives for a church that has not always had ears for the wisdom of others, that has proclaimed its expertise at times with overweening certainty and insufficient attentiveness to the ambiguities of human experience, that has on occasion been quick to anathematize or exclude, and that has sometimes opted for the trappings of power instead of dedicating itself to the cause of the weak. These modes are elements of a kenotic ethic – a posture of self-sacrificial humility and service – that is sorely needed today in the Catholic Church's efforts to restore and shore up its moral credibility.

### **A Kenotic Social Ethic**

This stance has ready implications across the entire spectrum of the church's ethical concerns in the world. I will briefly consider four areas.<sup>6</sup> The particular field of international development and

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<sup>6</sup> One important area I do not discuss concerns sex, gender, sexual orientation, and sexuality. This is an area in critical need of a kenotic ethic. I recognize, though, that there are distinct problems and pitfalls associated with the idea of kenosis especially in

migration, for example, the dual nature of kenosis as hollowing and egress provides a kind of template for both welcoming the uprooted and serving the poor where they live. As a rule, people prefer not to uproot their lives and head into the unknown, and for that reason the first order for a Catholic ethic of human development is to pour out its energies, resources, and compassion in the difficult endeavor to ameliorate suffering, shore up civil society, and cultivate just institutions, basic freedoms, and economic opportunities in weakened societies, irrespective of creed or ideology. But when people are obliged to flee or emigrate in pursuit of sanctuary and sustenance, it is further incumbent on the church to hollow out space for them and to greet them in receiving societies with an ethic not of (mere) hospitality, but of service and acceptance, with all that that implies. Development aid and migration services are both strong suits for Catholics, and those working in these fields continue to make a valuable contribution to the fund of the church's credibility.

The moral demands of ecology present a stiffer challenge for a Catholic ethics of kenosis, and in this area it is the theme of emptying that must take precedence over outpouring. Our signal failure as humans in our interaction with the rest of the natural world is a pose of arrogance and egoism, and a sharp turn to humility and self-sacrifice is required if we are to be able to "make room" for other-kind and successfully dedicate ourselves to repairing the damage we have wrought – at least enough to ensure "our" continued survival, not just for ourselves but for the rest of creation. As for the flowing-outward aspect of kenosis, a half-hearted and outmoded ethic of stewardship will not be enough to inaugurate the process of genuine listening and discernment necessary to arrive at more sustainable patterns of living: for that, something closer to an ethic of friend-

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connection with gender relations. On this topic see, for example, Sarah COAKLEY, "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2012, pp. 3-39; and Carolyn CHAU, "'What Could Possibly Be Given?': Towards an Exploration of Kenosis as Forgiveness – Continuing the Conversations Between Coakley, Hampson, and Papanikolaou," *Modern Theology* 28: 1, January 2012, pp. 1-24.



ship with creation will be needed. We must strive to be able, with Annie Dillard, to examine microorganisms in a microscope and be struck that, “I was created from a clot and set in proud, free motion: so were they... *Ad majorem Dei gloriam?*”<sup>7</sup>

Intercultural dialogue is a third item on the agenda for kenotic ethics. The dual spirit of self-limitation and unlimited concern sets the tone for a humble, unadorned approach to interreligious exchange pairing a deep receptivity to the other’s view – even unto openness to conversion – with an unfailingly generous commitment to communicating and practicing care of the other. Intriguingly, kenosis itself appears to be a valuable concept for building bridges among traditions, for example through its resonance with the notion of *sunyata* in Buddhist thought and practice. But as an ethic, it extends beyond the religious field, and perhaps its most important application is to the encounter between faith and the skeptical or secularized sensibilities surrounding the church in the modern world. As difficult as it may be for some in the church to accept, the ecclesial ethic that is called for today requires both greater circumspection in the church’s exposition of its own teachings, and greater humility in its extolling of its own virtues. Perhaps even more important, it requires a genuine readiness to accept that non-religious and even atheistic outlooks can embody authentic wisdom – wisdom from which the church might learn and benefit. Such a readiness would be a step toward a frank reckoning with the historicity of morality, one which recognizes and appreciates the crucial role of worldly experience in the unfolding of even gospel-based apprehensions of moral truth, be it in connection with slavery, or capital punishment, or gender relations, or religious liberty.

Finally, and most centrally, an ethics of kenosis supports vigorous, nonviolent action in response to conflict, injustice, and war. This is an area in which Catholics of all stripes, from the grassroots to the leadership, have shown that the church may be, as it were, ahead of the moral curve vis-à-vis the rest of humanity. The self-emptying

<sup>7</sup> Annie DILLARD, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper, 1974, p. 123.

side of the kenotic ethic engages a special charism of the church, namely its capacity for those exercises of self-abasement and self-sacrifice that ultimately help promote healing processes of forgiveness and reconciliation in social and political life. At the same time, another gift of the church is its capacity to deploy its good offices in an outpouring of creative acts of peacemaking and peacebuilding. These are attributes that will be taxed as the church forges ahead in coming days in efforts to nudge ahead the movement toward a world free of nuclear weapons.

### **Signs of the Times**

It is a mistake, of course, to suppose that signs of the times, in the theological sense, can simply be read in an unmediated and unambiguous way from current events or social trends or prevalent mind-sets. Nonetheless, a case can be made that there are noteworthy signs today commending a renewed kenotic ethic to all who see through a gospel lens. One of these signs is the rehabilitation of the “signs of the times” method itself, a development that marks a step away from an attitude of episcopal self-sufficiency in all things toward a stance of greater epistemological humility. Other signs, though, come from a broader society which, though it continues to be deeply shaped by a secular outlook, has nonetheless in some respects taken on a post-secular cast. A striking development in recent decades has been the return of religion as a central theme and concern in the previously highly secularized domain of continental philosophy. Even more striking is the fact that philosopher after philosopher – from Agamben to Zizek, through Derrida, Levinas, and perhaps most centrally, Vattimo – has focused on kenosis as a key to recovering a connection to religion. Meanwhile, at a more visceral level, perhaps, many people in industrial and post-industrial societies from China to Europe are learning that the hunger for spiritual sustenance persists in the present *saeculum* and embarking on their own searches for religious meaning and fulfillment. For many of these seekers, it is precisely the drama of kenotic witness that exercises the

greatest attraction to them and thus represents the most likely path to Christian faith – a circumstance which may well largely account for the great worldwide popularity of the present pontiff. Such signs suggest a sort of paradox. It may well be that only by emptying itself out – through a reflexive ethic of self-humbling, self-sacrifice, self-abandonment – and, as Paul said, “taking the form of a slave,” will the church make room for those who seek its welcome.

# ***A Serving Church: An Appraisal***

**JAMES CORKERY & STAF HELLEMANS\***

We live in a time where people with regard to religion and church can easily take the exit-option. The Catholic Church, consequently, needs to convince people that when they strive for God and engage in the Church, they will get closer to living a more rewarding, ‘universal’ and ‘eternal’ life and that they will help in realizing the potential of humanity and of creation at large. That the Church is serving God, creation, humanity and individual people, is felt no longer to be self-evident.

With regard to a serving Church, an analytical distinction can be made between three dimensions: social and life-enhancing service, the crafting of felicitous conditions to enable service, religious service (in the strict sense). The three dimensions are, of course, linked. Moreover, the first type of services by Christians, say welcoming migrants or helping people to get their life going again, is also religiously inspired, yet performed in areas that are not considered religious in the first place. Adela Cortina’s contribution aims at the first dimension. Peter Jonkers and William Barbieri tackle foremost the second dimension. We will comment mainly on the third dimension.

## **Social Arenas of Service**

As a specialist in public ethics and in political philosophy, Adela Cortina looks at the potential of a serving Church and of serving Christians in the public sphere. Secularist thinkers often tend to question the legitimacy of religiously motivated public interventions. These convictions are regarded as particularistic and as endangering societal consensus on values and policies. The interesting point in

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the approach of Adela Cortina is that she reverses the argumentation. She states that the Christian comprehensive doctrine of the good, what she calls ‘the ethics of the heart’, is of vital importance for civil ethics, just because these maximalist Christian ethics go beyond the minimalist civil ethics. Minimalist civil ethics in themselves are bound to remain shallow without the ethics of the heart. Christianity, driven by the superabundant generosity of God, is thus called upon – like other movements with maximalist perspectives – to contribute to society and the good life of people. Abstaining from this call and withdrawing into its inner walls would not only mean a betrayal of God, but also signify a loss for the public good.

While Cortina exemplifies the need for Christianity in one particular arena, the public sphere, her basic argument, the overflowing of maximalist Christianity into the various provinces of private and public life, is also valid for other areas of life, for example in faith-based educational organizations or in informal help and assistance. How this overflowing is to be translated into suitable policies, how these actions by Christians in the different areas can best be performed and organized and how all this relates to other movements and perspectives are some of the follow-up issues that also need to be considered.

### **Felicitous Conditions for a Serving Church**

The two other authors do not concentrate so much on a particular area in which the Church could be of service to the world. They rather analyze the preconditions that have to be met. They focus on the renewal of the Church that has to be accomplished in order for it to remain a serving Church in our time. Indeed, the Church has lost much of its former authority and persuasiveness and hence also much of its capability to change the world.

Peter Jonkers, a philosopher of religion, proposes to revive the tradition of practical wisdom. His starting point is not the outside world, but the polarizing trends within the Church and the ensuing disconnection between Church and faithful. Inner-church polariza-

tion is a consequence of the rise of pluralism in the late modern world – and of the inevitability of its translation into the ranks of the Church. To prevent endless conflicts and the danger of schisms, the Church, according to Jonkers, has to present itself and its basic belief tenets in another way than in – dividing and general – doctrinal statements. Since “in essence, being a Christian comes down to the *imitatio Christi*,” “it is . . . important that Christian faith makes the transition from its universalist principles to the concrete situations of human ways of life.” How the translation of this approach into the ranks of the Church might/should occur, what the status of these translations should be and whether they would not become, just as doctrinal statements, bones of contention, are some of the follow-up questions that come to mind.

The ethicist William Barbieri regards a self-emptying Church, guided by kenotic ethics, as an indispensable requirement today to overcome the disjunctions and “the crisis of moral credibility” of the Church. He stresses that kenosis harbors an ambiguity, that it contains twin faces: on the one hand, self-emptying and giving up power or privilege, on the other hand, the outpouring of love, fullness and service. As Barbieri makes clear, kenotic ethics and theology can easily be translated into ethical concerns on social issues (e.g. ecology, dialogue, non-violence). While there is no doubt in our minds that kenotic ethics and theology constitute a promising perspective, we have two questions. First, does it more than merely reflect the loss of power of the Church and will self-abasement give empowering inspiration to those who are now being marginalized in society? Second, is the kenotic perspective capable of rephrasing the fundamental tenets of Christianity (God, creation, pneumatology, evil, . . .) or is it, with its focus on social relations, rather a supplement?

### **Service Through a Fitting Religious Offer**

Cortina deals with the serving Church in the public sphere – and, by extension, in other areas of social and individual life. Jonkers and Barbieri reflect on two preconditions – the move to wisdom

and to kenotic ethics and theology – that would allow the Church to remain a serving Church in our time. In our view, there is still another dimension that one should not overlook when talking about a serving Church, namely the religious offer properly speaking. Being in possession of a fitting offer and being able to convey it to a large number of people is no longer self-evident.

As a consequence of the power reversal in day-to-day reality from clergy to laity and of the easiness of the exit-option, every religious institution or group, even a once mighty one like the Catholic Church, now has to count on the attractiveness of its religious offer.<sup>1</sup> However, the Catholic Church is failing in just this respect. This is the main direct cause of its decline. Between 1800 and 1960, an extensive and widely used offer for the regular faithful was present. Sacraments and sacramentals, daily prayers, fasting, devotional sodalities, dedication to a saint to which one felt particularly connected, the yearly celebration of the great religious feasts as markers of the calendar, the wide-ranging field of social and cultural associations, educational opportunities, even the religious decoration of the home were all regarded as being delivered or made possible by the Church. Many of these forms have now disappeared or they have lost their appeal for most Catholics. Practicing Catholics nowadays are mostly satisfied with a standard offer comprising the Eucharist and the ‘rites de passage’. That is not enough. If the Church wants to remain a serving Church, its biggest challenge is to build up a new and diverse religious offer, in line with the Catholic tradition, that is relevant for the individual person to help live his or her life and to reach for God. Elaborating such a new, fitting religious offer is a huge task. It is, above all, a creative task and one that cannot be promulgated from on high because it has to build upon countless experiments, mostly from below, from which a small number of successful performances can be selected for fine-tuning and wider

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of what follows are adapted from Staf HELLEMANS, “Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers,” Staf HELLEMANS & Peter JONKERS (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*. Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015, pp. 153-154.

dissemination. To be fair, there has been widespread innovation, even after the waves of innovation of the 1960s withered away (World Youth Days, new *movimenti*, spirituality centers, church tourism etc.), but this has not been enough and what has been created has, in most cases, elicited limited appeal.

In order to show what is at stake here, we give two examples. The first is the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostella. Before 1980, the zest for the *Camino* was drying up already for several decades. Yet, since the mid-1980s, the number of pilgrims travelling at least the last 100 kilometers on foot (or the last 200 kilometers by bike) – and who cared about getting a certificate – has exploded. From 2,491 certificates in 1986, it went up to 74,614 in 2003 and to 237,886 in 2014.<sup>2</sup> Many of these pilgrims have no or only a faint relationship with the Catholic Church. They walk the *Camino* in search of meaning and of personal healing or growth. Yet it is important that the Catholic Church continues to invest in the infrastructure of the *Camino*, to offer religion both in a specific Catholic and in a wider sense.

Where the *Camino* is an example of an old religious infrastructure that is used in new ways, the second relates to old spirituality. Many old orders and some newer congregations are refashioning their religious spirituality in view of a wider public of lay people. A case in point is the Ignatian spirituality of the Jesuits.

Ignatian spirituality seeks to help people to develop an appreciation of how God is at work in all things. By means of *The Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius Loyola, men and women are accompanied through a series of exercises that help them to grow in attentiveness to the presence and activity of God in their everyday lives and thus to discern how they are being invited to live well and fully, serving both God and others. These exercises offer a practical way for people to discern their true path in life. In their traditional form, they were aimed principally at novice Jesuits and they were usually engaged in

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<sup>2</sup> Ian READER, "Pilgrimage Growth in the Modern World: Meanings and Implications," *Religion* 37, 3 (2007), p. 211 and, for 2014, cf. <https://goo.gl/avEbj6>.



under the wise guidance of a competent spiritual companion over a period of thirty days of intense prayer, in a setting such as a retreat-house or monastery. In recent times, however, more and more lay people, including Protestants and marginal Catholics, are taking part. Accordingly, there has been widespread development of a method of giving the *Exercises* that was also envisaged by St. Ignatius. This method involves undertaking them while remaining in the activities of one's everyday life, over a period of several months marked by daily prayer of some sixty to ninety minutes and by weekly conversations with a competent spiritual companion. All over the world, this form of doing the *Spiritual Exercises in Daily Life* has become increasingly popular, thus enabling laypeople to derive benefit from a tradition in spirituality that is nourishing and fruitful for living a Christian life at the heart of the world.

The Catholic religious offer has always been quite variegated. If the Church wants to be of service to people and the world, it must try to guarantee a broad offer for all. The elaboration of a new offer, i.e., the creation of new or renewed spiritual and devotional paths that are supportive for living a fulfilled life, for the more intensely interested as well as for the lukewarm, is thus of critical importance. Renewing the Church concerns not only inner-church renewal or commitment to social and public causes, it requires no less a renewal of the religious offer.

# Shapes of Faith Today

CHARLES TAYLOR\*

*Glaube als Option*: Faith as an option. This is the description Hans Joas<sup>1</sup> proposes for the contemporary condition of spiritual/religious life in the West. “Option” here means something different from choice. Issues of faith and non-faith are not settled lightly, like choices of menu. When one enters into or leaves a faith, one feels *called*. Those who step out wouldn’t put it this way, but they feel they have no choice in all honesty but to reject faith.

“Option” means something else: it means that for growing numbers of people in the West, or North Atlantic society, as well as some other parts of the world, there is a background understanding to their life of faith/non-faith: they know other people, equally if not more intelligent, or perceptive, who are living another option. The idea that people living within another faith are either weird, or morally deficient, or catastrophically blind, becomes less and less credible. Some of these people will be my friends, others my close kin. This is part of what it is to see faith as an option.

Another facet, which partly flows from this, is that changing my faith position is not something abnormal, or wrenching, apostasy, joining the enemy.

There are hold-outs: among some more conservative Christians, and also among “angry” atheists, who don’t/can’t see things this way, but for more and more people this is their understanding of the context in which they live whatever they have put their faith in.

How did this come about? I’d like to mention two large developments, each with two facets.

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<sup>1</sup> *Glaube als Option: Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums*. Freiburg: Herder, 2012.

*Disenchantment 1.* The first form of this has been coming about over a very long period, centuries in fact. Back in 1500, our ancestors in Europe lived in an “enchanted” (*verzaubert*) world; one filled with spirits and moral forces, some dangerous (wood spirits), some benign (relics, white magic). Over the last centuries most of us have ceased to see, or – more importantly – to experience the world this way. We are impervious to this dimension of things. We are “buffered selves.” This is one of the changes (the main one) that Weber calls *Entzauberung*.

*Disenchantment 2.* The first form of enchantment affected everyone in our civilization. The second was mainly important for the educated minority. It consisted in a notion of the cosmos as expressing and manifesting higher and lower modes of being: for instance, the stars and planets moving ever in perfect circles, versus what exists below the moon, which is changing and only partially realizes its Form. A cosmos with levels of being was the context in which societies were embedded, and these reflected the levels in the different social orders, clergy as against lay people; rulers and nobility as against commoners. This too has faded, over a rather shorter period.

*The immanent frame.* These different levels of disenchantment have brought about our present shared understanding of our world. We have different ways of ascribing meaning to this world, and particularly between people of faith or without faith; but our general understanding of the universe we share is the one defined by post-Galilean natural science: a universe governed by impersonal causal laws, which can be understood whether or not we see any human meaning in them.

As to our shared understanding of society, it is no longer a reflection of cosmic order, but rather comes about by human action (revolutions, constituent assemblies, seizure of power, or whatever) at dateable moments in history. These political structures all claim to be ethically based, and so are meant to embed certain impersonal moral-ethical principles, which have been formulated in our history.

The immanent frame is thus an order of natural and human laws, and ethical principles, which we all share, while differing in the ultimate meaning, transcendent or not, that we see in it. This shared understanding is our social imaginary.

*Bundling and unbundling:* The second big pair of changes is more recent, coming to fruition only in the last century or so. I want to speak of *unbundlings*, referring to two ways in which religious life has in the past linked certain facets of our life together (bundling), which have lately come apart.

The first (1) is this: many European societies in the last two centuries were confessional societies. The people who belonged to the national church also shared many other forms of belonging: family, parish, and nation. To belong to one was (normally) to belong to all. Belongings were *bundled*. But in the last decades this interweaving of belongings has come apart. The people I share citizenship with, or my kin, or the neighbours in my village, are not necessarily those who share my faith option.

*Unbundling 2:* Within churches in our civilization, there was an extraordinary variety of spiritual and other activities. The liturgy, of course, but also the celebration of seasonal feasts; the solemnization of *rites de passage*, but also special devotions, novenas, pilgrimages, prayers to the Virgin; and then various charitable organizations, and forms of mutual help; and more private devotions. Different people engaged differentially in these activities, but they were all seen as part of the life of the church.

In contemporary society, these activities often split off into separate, dedicated bodies. I may belong to a church, and then also *médecins sans frontières*, and practice some form of meditation, and so on; all in a different context or organization.

*Drives:* What has driven these unbundlings? In part the greater mobility, social, geographic, international of modern life; the loosening of earlier ties that this brings with it, the newer forms of individualism that it fosters. But also that particular form which we refer to as the “ethic of authenticity:” the idea that each human being has

his or her form of being human and ought to find her form of life and realize it.

This has gone along with, and intertwines with growing prosperity, the rise of the consumer society, where the gap between “disposable” income, and that required for “necessities” (themselves a moving standard) grows.

All this underlines older solidarities; not just faith-based solidarities. Think of the fate of certain social-democratic, “working class” parties. (Alas, UK Labour in 2015).

We can see in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Western society a steady loosening of closer ties to “bundled” communities, and a corresponding desire on the part of younger people to step out into the larger society and find their own path. What offsets this process for a while is the large groups of people who are immigrants, and who can only survive by holding to their bundled communities. But their children often seek to make their way in the broader society.

The ferment which has shaken many younger people out of the churches also includes the revolution in sexual mores, made possible by the existence of new contraceptive technologies.

Sexual “freedom” also intertwines with authenticity. This is clearest in the case of gay liberation movements. A powerful argument is added by the contemporary context, in which gay orientation is seen as an “identity,” and refusal to recognize it as discrimination.

There is another facet of modern individualism which may also have contributed to unbundling: the growing reluctance to inflict suffering and sacrifice on people in the name of socially established morality or standards. This has also been a force behind gay liberation. But we can also see this, for instance, in the growing trend to abolish the death penalty. Of course, abolition is often motivated on religious grounds. But this same underlying trend may also alienate people from more rigorous forms of morality.

The USA was never a highly bundled society in either way, but we can see there too the loosening of ties to the Catholic urban communities which were still very tight in the immediate post-War

period.<sup>2</sup> And other societies, like Quebec in one way, and the Netherlands in another, which were highly “pillared,” in the recent past have seen a veritable flight from these tighter identities. More and more people want to be more fully part of the broader society. This together with the ethic of authenticity has helped drive unbundling.

Some consequences: *Disenchantment* and *unbundling* have brought about a different spiritual landscape. We can see, for example, one consequence of both these changes working together in the laicization of life rituals. People will always want to have recourse to *rites de passage* to mark the important stages in human life: birth, marriage, the death of loved ones. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in many Western societies, people came very often to substitute rituals of their own devising for church sacraments. This is most frequent for marriage, and much less in evidence when it comes to funerals. Death is surrounded by mysteries which a quite secularized world has trouble taming.

Or sometimes continuing church rituals were given a quite “immanent” interpretation by many people who took part. This is a phenomenon very much in evidence in Scandinavian societies, where national and ecclesial belonging are still rather unbundled. But the meaning of Church membership changes. This is the phenomenon Grace Davie calls “belonging without believing.”<sup>3</sup>

Balancing this is the phenomenon she calls “believing without belonging,” which she sees, among other places, in England. People drop out of active participation in the national church, but yet are happy to see it there, providing on occasion rituals, but also just ensuring the continuing presence of the faith in society. This tenuous, but still subsistent relation constitutes a kind of “vicarious religion.”<sup>4</sup>

This phenomenon means that we sometimes exaggerate the degree of “secularization,” in the sense of abandonment of reli-

<sup>2</sup> See Alan EHRENHALT, *The Lost City*. New York: Basic Books, 1994, and Robert WUTHNOW, *Loose Connections*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Grace DAVIE, *Religion in Modern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

gion, in some societies, measuring it simply by the drop in regular attendance at church. In many cases, this distance from the church reflects ambivalence, uncertainty, or even something more positive, rather than abandonment of the faith.

In short, there has been in Western society in general a certain kind of “departure” from religion (what Marcel Gauchet calls “une sortie de la religion”<sup>5</sup>), by which I mean a departure from official religions which have in the past played a key role in binding societies together. But this has often not been matched by as great a decline in faith. For instance, recent polls in Scotland indicate that 54% consider themselves “Christian,” but church membership is much less.<sup>6</sup>

José Casanova points out the degree to which “secularization,” defined as the decline of faith, is in Europe an overlay, a kind of generally recognized official story of what is supposed to be happening, rather than an accurate description of things. An amusing side effect of this is that people in Europe when speaking to pollsters tend to under-report their relation to the church, whereas in America many more claim to go to church than do so. These Americans are trying to conform to their *official story*.

And of course, the older “official story” of sociology, that “modernization” ineluctably brings “secularization,” is clearly belied by the American case. It can be argued that this difference is partly accounted for by the fact that unbundling began earlier in America than it did in societies dominated by one national church, common in Europe (and in Quebec). The difference comes not so much from the fact that there is religious competition in the United States of America, as “supply side” theorists argue; it is probably due rather to the fact that the impact of the age of authenticity, where seekers try to find their own spiritual path, is different in societies where the “religious” option is dominated by one official body demanding

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<sup>5</sup> Marcel GAUCHET, *Le désenchantement du monde: Une histoire politique de la religion*. Paris, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Gordon BROWN, *My Scotland, our Britain: A future Worth Sharing*. London, 2014.

conformity, than it is in a society where faith has been irremediably “plural” for two centuries already. In the first context, “religion” is tainted by its association with power and unearned authority, in the other, it is quite without this negative connotation.

*The end of Christendom.* What we see emerging from these and other developments is the decline and eventual dissolution of Christendom.<sup>7</sup> By “Christendom,” I mean a society and civilization which has been built with the intention of reflecting the Christian faith in all aspects of its life. We emerge from one of the greatest Christendoms, the Latin one. It had its great moments and features, its “grandeurs;” but also its “misères,” if I can invoke Pascal. But the Christian faith has often been lived outside of a Christendom; and is today, in Africa, Asia, as well as de facto in Europe.

Its greatness: one thinks immediately of the rich culture of literature, music, painting, architecture, Chartres Cathedral, the *Divine Comedy*; but also the attempts to tame warrior impulses, to make a more humane society. But inevitably, there are also the dangers, the down sides: The Inquisition, the forced conformity, the abuses of power, the growth of a smug, self-satisfied “Christian” culture. Emmanuel Mounier and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were on to something important in their desire to separate the faith from the culture.

But whatever its past highs and lows, Christendom is dissolving. Those who often invoke it most strongly are secular politicians who want good grounds to exclude Muslims and other outsiders.

*Our dilemmas:* the two unbundlings, in the context of the disenchantments, produce the world of the immanent frame, in which more and more people are looking for meaning, and a great many of them are looking to reconnect with forms of transcendence. They are, we might say, trying to find a faith which will speak to them. Our church frequently doesn’t manage to communicate a faith of this kind to them.

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<sup>7</sup> See some of Emmanuel Mounier’s prescient observations in *Feu la Chrétienté*.



If I might speak autobiographically: I am a teacher, and meet a lot of young searchers. I also come from Quebec, a Catholic society which was really brought into existence by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century Catholic Reformation in France. The teaching of St François de Sales, of Marie de l'Incarnation, teaching about the love of God: that is, first, love of God for us, which engenders our love of God (1 John 4, v. 10&19); I am old enough to have heard echoes of this in earlier Quebec Catholicism. So on one side, there are young people searching; on the other is this rich spiritual deposit; and frustratingly, it seems impossible join the thirst with the source.

Searchers don't feel welcomed, invited to express what they're looking for. Instead, they hear embattled defenses of dogmas, of moral teachings which often don't connect with their experience, of a magisterium which, in spite of all the difficult dilemmas where honest Christians will almost certainly disagree, claimed (until recently) to speak with one voice. This itself was enough to undermine the charisma of heartfelt conviction which is central for the teaching of Christian faith.

Now this defensive stance meets an echo among many of the faithful today. These people feel that the essentials of the Christian faith are being whittled away, that crucial church teachings, about the importance of chastity, the avoidance of extra-marital sexual activity, of artificial birth control, of the "disorder" of homosexuality, are being abandoned.

Religious conservatives generally in our age are especially concerned about authority, loyalty and sanctity, which they see as threatened by contemporary cultural changes.<sup>8</sup>

These people tend to accentuate the positive side of Christendom. They see it as having been the basis of an order, social and moral which is indispensable for human beings. Christendom saw the most

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<sup>8</sup> See Edward VACEK, "Catholic Marriage Morality in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century" in *The Historicity of Morals: Reading the Signs of the Times*; Vacek quotes Jonathan HAIDT, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012, p. 74.

complete “bundling,” where a faith, a social order, a morality, and a civilization, were all tightly associated. Every step out of it seems to many to be a step downward. And of course they have sometimes been right. The step out of Christendom represented by Fascism and Nazism was a step into darkness, nihilism, a glorification of evil.

One might argue (certainly I would) that all the new departures in modernity are not destructive in the way Fascism was. But many people do see a whole range of changes typical of late modernity – in favor of greater individual freedom, greater equality (especially between the sexes), and greater inclusion (e.g., gay marriage) – as an attempt to flout basic constants in human nature. They see the moral standards of traditional Christian civilization as essential to a proper human life. The Church is right to uphold these against a self-destructive society which in the end will have to return to them.

Alongside Catholics of this persuasion, there are those who regret the loss of a sense of the sacred, who want to return to earlier forms of liturgy, stress the importance of a clergy set apart, make clear the high standards expected of a Christian, even if this means a less inclusive Church.<sup>9</sup>

*Dilemma:* How can we make room for the searchers of our age, and then all live together in communion, those who want renovation, and those who want above all to resist it? I wish I had the answer to this question. But perhaps it might help, if we could start a discussion in which the outlook which emerges for seekers from our present situation could exchange on a very deep level, in patience and as part of an effort to achieve mutual understanding, with that of the conservers. We need perhaps to disengage from the immediate hot issues which divide us, and which journalists love to see us arguing about, and look at the deeper frameworks that we operate out of.

I am closer to the seekers, as you undoubtedly sense, and I’d like to present some thoughts on this deeper level: on the question: how does the Kingdom of God build in history, and eventually beyond?

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<sup>9</sup> I have benefitted from the recent book of Yann RAISON DU CLEUSIOU, *Qui sont les Cathos aujourd’hui?* Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2014.

The Christendom perspective tends to a certain take on this. Building the Kingdom passes through building Christendom. The Kingdom is further extended when Christendom extends, through missionary activity, bringing new peoples, societies, civilizations and Christianizing them. Christendom expands.

There has even been a tendency in Western Christendom – perhaps more in protestant than in Catholic societies – to slide towards some quasi-fusion with the post-Enlightenment progress story. Christian societies becomes enlightened, democratic, rights-affirming, and this whole package spreads. This was a widely held view at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, but it also lingers on today.

But for people coming out of the present predicament of the immanent frame, and the search for meaning, this historic order doesn't have the same meaning. How to recover contact with the Gospel today? For most of us (I speak for myself again), we went through some period of break with the faith we were brought up in (if we were brought up Christian at all), before returning through a different route. We are “believing again,” rather than “believing still” (W. H. Auden). We are very aware of the fragility of historical constructions supposed to resolve the problems of mankind once and for all, supposed to resist the forces of decay and loss of direction, whether these be communist or liberal, or whatever.

Many younger people today don't feel that they live in a Christendom, and to the extent that this is invoked by churches as a past model, its negative features tend to be salient, especially the demand for conformity which preempts the readiness to listen.

In the wreckage, how to hear the Gospel again? The image of the kingdom which has power for us is that of the mustard seed (Matthew), the tiny seed which grows hidden from sight into a great tree. The mustard seeds are the points at which acts happen which break the ordinary course of things and show the love of God, like the conversion of St. Francis, or the work of Jean Vanier, or the courage of non-violent resistance which brings not just liberation but peace with the former oppressors. The stance of faith behind this intuition

is that these acts sustain and inspire each other across history, even when we don't know about them, but all the more when we do. The kingdom is not built so much in lasting structures as in the network of these seeds, which radiate power to other potential seeds.

This doesn't mean that we start from scratch, ignoring the history of the Church. On the contrary. But that history is rich for us because of these points of breakthrough, each of which works for us and for the kingdom, even if unknown, but all the more powerfully if we do know about it.

The background understanding here is that our horizontal, irrevocably pluralist society, where we live together in the immanent frame, amounts to a new human predicament, one in which the church must find a different voice, analogous to its "acculturation" in non-European civilizations. But that doesn't mean that the Christendom past is irrelevant. Its saints and their acts form part of the network that sustains us. Through this network we connect to all ages and all *loci* of Christian life.

Even what seem like failure in the Christendom perspective counts here. Entire Christian churches have been wiped out in history. The rich history of Syrian Christianity was to a large extent absorbed into Islam, and the remnant in the Middle East is in danger of being forced out.

So the history of our Christendom is important to us not because we want to continue its structures, or repeat all its solutions to our ethical problems, but rather because it is a rich field of seeds which are still working in us, and the more so the more we are familiar with it.

And besides we can't really continue its structures, because we are more and more in the predicament of our fellow Christians in Asia and Africa: we share (in our case) a society of the immanent frame with people of all religions and none. We live side by side with an immense variety of others and will more and more do so with time.

All the above is an attempt to articulate some of the sense of background out of which seekers today emerge in our society. I throw it

out in the hope that we can find a way to talk about our differences at this level of depth, and come to some better understanding of each other, across our divisions.

*Coda.* But a few words more might help. The mode of faith which emerges from the above understanding of the background is new in some ways, but it also recuperates facets of our historical faith which have been relatively neglected: 1. Instead of mounting on the battlements to defend the whole existing package (Pius IX); we can step out with confidence to plant more seeds (Francis). 2. The new mode recuperates the notion that faith is a journey (Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine) not a point of arrival from which we have keep from being displaced – as if we already knew what it is to be a Christian and just have to stick to it. 3. It therefore recovers the value of doubt. Doubt is the motor which makes us continue the journey. The journey always involves some trouble and darkness, but it can take the form of doubt, and frequently does in our time. 4. Oecumenism of friendship. The mustard seeds sometimes fall outside the Christian Church (Mullala Yuzufzai). And seekers can recognize each other and share. This can intensify one of the great achievements of the contemporary world: the oecumenism of friendship. 5. There are two great facets to salvation: the universal salvation of a fallen world, on one hand, and the individual salvation (or damnation) of each human being, on the other. Latin Christendom tended to put the emphasis on the second: almost as though the general salvation was secured by the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ, needing no further human collaboration, and the only field for human action was the salvation of individuals, oneself or others. The structure of salvation/damnation could be seen as an immense vertical order, deeply and brilliantly articulated in *The Divine Comedy* of Dante. The remaining open issue concerns who will end up where. So that the great issue which shattered the unity of Christendom in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century turned on the route to personal salvation, faith alone or works. Arguably, this was always too one-sided a view. But today, it seems more and more a thing of the past. On one hand, is the “decline of Hell,” a lessening of the terror of damnation,

so well represented in the images on which generations of young people were catechized.<sup>10</sup> Along with this, the spread of a universalist hope, originating in Origen, and taken up among others by Balthasar. In this context the motivation to the Christian life becomes more and more following Christ, planting mustard seeds in his wake.

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, James JOYCE, *A Portrait of the Artist*.



# ***The Porosity of Being: Towards a Catholic Agapeics. In Response to Charles Taylor***

**WILLIAM DESMOND\***

## **1.**

It is an honor and pleasure to respond to the reflections of a rightly honored thinker whose wide influence is undeniable and earned. His work witnesses a thoughtfulness about perplexities, sometimes against the grain of what the professional philosophers have approved. Needless to say, he has made an immense contribution to the issue of secularization and its complexities, both to the riches of the notion and its sometimes slippery complications. I offer these responses in the spirit of friendly ecumenism. The purpose is less to be critical as to add to an already rich contribution.

Let me first make some remarks about the themes of which he treats in his paper. Generally, I see a certain doubleness at work in his account of things: something has been lost, negated perhaps; yet even in what looks like negation, there is also something new that is seeded in the process of unfolding. In some ways, this doubleness corresponds to an element central in Hegel's notion of sublation (*Aufhebung*): a limited position is transcended, and in the process of transcendence something of the older position is retained, even while at the same time being subject to transformation, and in all this, new formations of possibilities for humanity emerge. The point is not to say Professor Taylor is a Hegelian, and even if he is, he is a reformed Hegelian, but to indicate his recurrent attentiveness to this doubleness, in the guise of an ambiguous mingling of worthwhile and questionable developments in the modern unfolding of secularization.

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The *first* theme briefly noted is that of *disenchantment* and modernity, coupled with the notion of *the immanent frame*. Disenchantment refers to the loss of porosity to powers beyond ourselves, powers perhaps spiritual beyond nature itself, powers perhaps at work in nature and intimately resonating with our own spiritual and moral condition. The world is more neutralized in the modern picture of things. The magic of things is dispelled. We come to know the mechanism, and the spell of more mysterious things is dispelled. If this seems negative it is accompanied by a more constructive formation of our position in the world, namely, as inhabitants of what Professor Taylor calls the immanent frame. Transcendent powers do not then straightforwardly enter into the spheres of life, perhaps they are entirely excluded from it. All this allows us to direct our energies and powers within the immanent frame and especially by methodical and technical means we seek to perfect our powers here and now.

A *second* doubleness I see concerns the theme of *bundling and unbundling*. The process of unbundling refers to the weakening of loyalties, loyalties previously invested in a more total picture of things, a bundle wherein to accept loyalty to one thing means to accept all the loyalties that are part of the package. There is no allowance for “pick and mix” in a fully bundled picture of human life. By contrast, now with “unbundling” it is possible to accept or not accept diverse loyalties; we do not have to accept a whole package; we can pick and mix. This is, of course, connected with our belief in more extended possibilities of autonomous choice. This extension brings with it the slackening of the hold of a more holistic repertoire of loyalties wherein previously all of diverse loyalties went together.

The *third* theme is that of the *seekers*, and the doublet here would be the contrast of seekers and conservatives, as perhaps they might be called. The seekers are those who are not settled in one fixed set of commitments; they are closer to the condition of the nomad rather than the settled person. By contrast, what I am calling the conservatives reflect, so to say, the settled community. The disposition of the seeker seems more widespread in our time. The implication, in a sense, is that we all find ourselves now in the position

of *homo viator*. Those who insist on being settled, do not do justice to the richness of diversity and the new treasures of possibility that are released by our more unsettled condition. In a way, we return to what the Church has always been, namely a Church in *via*, the Church itself as a *via*. And yet, there has to be acknowledged the sense of a set of settled views, normally called doctrines, that define an accepted historical tradition.

A *fourth* theme goes under the heading of *authenticity*, a title Professor Taylor thinks ought to be ascribed to the genuinely seeking Church today. I will come back to this in some comments below, but generally one can think of authenticity as a being true to oneself, a being oneself without betrayal of oneself. One could ask if the words “fidelity” more truly reflects the complexity of what it means to be a Church, particularly when it is not only a matter of being true to oneself, but also being true to what is other than oneself. This need not entail any betrayal of oneself; rather to be oneself is to be defined in relation to what is other than oneself, whether immanently within the community itself, or externally in relation to other communities that are different to the Church itself. In Professor Taylor’s plea for a richer notion of authenticity I take it that this relation to the other is not lacking.

A *fifth* theme concerns the significance of *doubt*. Professor Taylor is acutely sensitive to difficulties that some people have of believing without question, believing without questioning, believing at all, in a world wherein all certainties are said to be fluid, a world wherein certain certainties are dissolved in uncertainty. I have hesitations about the word *doubt*, in that *doubt* does have a certain negative edge to it that harbors suspicion in relation to what is other, suspicion that, ungoverned, can easily mutate into hostility to what does not appear self-evident to oneself. Sometimes the problem may lie with oneself. I would rather speak of *perplexity than doubt*, since *perplexity* can be in *doubt*, and yet its troubled mindfulness is also seeded with a genuine searching for truth that one might not presently and more immediately comprehend. Would it be better to speak of a perplexed Church, rather than a doubting Church, or a

Church that doubts itself? Perplexity can dissolve all false fixations on unwarranted claims to truth; but perplexity can also be the mark of those birth pangs out which a new affirmation can come to be.

A *sixth* theme, very important to Professor Taylor, is the *end of Christendom*. Again we find the doubleness of which I speak. Christendom refers to a historical conjunction of religious and political powers, refers to a kind of collusion between the spiritual and the temporal authorities. While it seems that the spiritual authorities gain from association with worldly power, in the long run they risk being corrupted; risk losing what makes them truly distinctive as spiritual authorities. The end of Christendom can be seen as the loss of prestige for spiritual authorities in a world progressively more secularized and no longer calling on the prestige of spiritual authorities to buttress its own powers. There will be some who lament the weakening of the public position of those spiritual authorities because of this. But the matter can also be seen as a release of the spiritual authorities from a potentially counterfeiting relation to the powers of politics. The difference of the two is full of promise for just those spiritual powers whose power is not, and never was or will be, defined by the will to power of the political order. A weakening at one side can be the release on the other side. The release itself can be a strengthening of what was, in fact, weakened by its association with strong political power.

*Finally*, the paper ends on a positive note by invoking the image of the mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed: very small in the beginning, though in time capable of growing into a majestic tree in which the birds of the air can make their home. We live in a time when we are to plant such seeds. We live in a time where such seeds are already planted and growing, though we do not know that this is so very often, precisely because they do not possess the more evident social power of the previous form of Christendom. There is needed an act of trust and faith that the burgeoning power of the seeds is at work now in the present and that in due course it will grow into fuller form. I recall a certain ambiguity in the image of the seed, for as the parable of the Sower in the Gospels already

tells us, some seed can fall on fertile soil, while some seed can fall on rocky ground. And we cannot erase from mind the perplexing image of the dark one who under cover of night sows the danel.

## 2.

Given our theme, and in line with some of Professor Taylor's remarks, I would like to come to the kenotics of the matter by way of the following (in)direction. I would like to make some brief remarks which link up with an important notion in the work of Professor Taylor but which take us in a slightly different, though not irrelevant direction. I am thinking of what Professor Taylor calls the *buffered self*, which plays an important part in the transition from the medieval to the modern world and its immanent frame. My emphasis is less on telling the story of modernity, offering hermeneutical narratives of the complex unfoldings of multifarious impulses, inspirations, trends, dreams, excesses, rational sobrieties, and so forth, defining the shaping of modernity. My interests have a certain metaphysical character to them. I know that metaphysics is a word not in good odor in some quarters today, whether among some technical virtuosi of the analytical persuasion, or among the hermeneutical mandarins of the Continental persuasion, to say nothing of the dithyrambic textualists among the deconstructionists. I am a metaphysician and will remain so unrepentant. We need to ask the question of being; we need to ask the question of the human being; we need to ask the question of the being of God.<sup>1</sup> All these questions, which converge on each other, make metaphysics a member of the same family as philosophical anthropology and theological anthropology. My remarks are not simply historical or sociological or hermeneutical or genealogical, but refer us to do something about the ontology of the human being, especially and how that might have implications for how we think about a kenotic Church and an ethics of agapeic service.

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Being and the Between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1995; *Ethics and the Between*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001; *God and the Between*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

The buffered self is introduced at the beginning *The Secular Age* and is a very suggestive notion.<sup>2</sup> The contrast is between the porous self and the buffered self. The modern self comes to be the buffered self; the pre-modern self is more truly described as porous. The movement to the buffered self goes together with the disenchantment of the world and the construction of the immanent frame. This construction leads through circuitous ways to *default atheism*, as I would put it. I have argued that there is a primal ethos of being which itself is an irreducible given. In it we participate and participation presupposes the receiving of being, but it is not a simple receiving, since our being is also to be endeavoring beings, and in our endeavoring we construct a second ethos of being, itself a reconfiguration of the primal ethos. It is in this reconfiguration that the notion of the social imaginary central to Professor Taylor's work gets some of its significance. The social imaginary is not now the same as it was in the time of the non-buffered self and the enchanted world. The buffered self tends to close down the primacy of receiving, and reconfigure the endeavoring as related primarily to itself. There is a buffered sense of world, and a buffered sense of community, and not only a buffered self. We do not have to identify the primal ethos of being either with a more porous world or with a more buffered world, though a more porous world is closer to the threshold of a more original receiving of being, less cluttered by the constructions we have made according to the desires of our own endeavor to be. That there is a reconfigured world means that the modern world we have so configured has a relative character: it may reveal some potencies of the given ethos but it also may hide or repress or cover over other potencies. The reconfiguration of the primary ethos *must occur* to some degree in so far as we are endeavoring beings. Our more modern endeavoring has tended to shape the powers of freedom as autonomy, and in accord with the immanent frame. I want to suggest something prior to this, namely, an original porosity of

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<sup>2</sup> Charles TAYLOR, *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 35-43, 134-142, 262-264, 300-321.

being, and a *passio essendi* or patience of being, prior to our *conatus essendi* or endeavor to be. They are not always understood or even acknowledged, much less treated with the truthful mindfulness that they deserve.<sup>3</sup>

First to remark on the porosity: this refers us to the more original given field of the between, the *metaxu*; to being as a milieu of openness and communication; to ourselves as given to be in an opening of being and as an opening to being. My point now is that this porosity of being is ontologically constitutive, not just historically relative, though it may be true that some epochs exhibit a feel for it, while others reconfigure the ethos of being, and human being, and the porosity is driven underground, say, or out of mind, say, or warped into forms not true to the promise of the original givenness.

In the development of a person this porosity is perhaps more evident with early stages of life, but a person always remains porous, and suffering and joy as they happen to us can keep it more or less open, as can ethical disciplines and practices of mindfulness and contemplation. Here are a few examples that give witness to the porosity. Think of the power of *music* to reach places of the human heart, even when the heart is hardened; music touches the porosity and opens it again. One goes about the grim work of this disenchanting world and a melody or air is sounded, and suddenly we are elsewhere, something in our lost souls resonates with the beauty we have forgotten or betrayed. Even the stiff body becomes less rigid and porous, evident spontaneously in that it is tempted to dance.

Or consider the example of *the blush*. It is as if we cannot hide ourselves behind the wall that our bodies seem to become in time. Children think one can see right through them; in the blush the sense of being seen, of being self-consciously in the presence of another's gaze, surfaces in the very skin of the body itself. The soul is there on

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<sup>3</sup> These ideas are central in my work, for instance in *Is There a Sabbath for Thought?: Between Religion and Philosophy*. Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005; *God and the Between*. Malden, Mass., 2008; see also *The Intimate Strangeness of Being: Metaphysics after Dialectic*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2012.

the surface of the skin. In a way, there is no soul, there is no body, there is the passage between them, and the soul is the blushing body. There is the transition between the surface of the body and the soul in a dynamic passage of something that cannot be reduced to a determinate matter or a disembodied spook, indeterminately evaporating.

The blush is strangely social, communal. Without the look of the other looking at one there is no blush. Of course, the ultimate other may be God and if there were no God, we would not blush, we should not blush, and yet we blush. The porosity of being manifested in the blush reveals also something about the ontological constitution of the human being as a religious being. Though it shows the flush of blood circulating closer to the surface of the skin, it is more than that, and the blood of life has a life of its own that happens to us before we reconfigure ourselves as, in some measure, masters of the appearance of our own bodies. When we realize that we are not seen through entirely by human others we make our bodies into masks. We become more adept at being liars. There is a positive side to this though, since there is a kind of modesty and *ontological politeness* that here is communicated as part of the promise of our embodied being.

*Laughter* also reveals something of this more original porosity of being. We are stiff and ungainly and someone cracks a joke and we break up, we crack up (literally). We are returned to an energy of being, or an energy of being returns us to a kind of festive affirmation in our being cracked up. This would not happen if we did not participate in the porosity of being. And it is notable that jokes and laughter generally do make reference to something more elemental in our being, often prior to our determinate forms of selving, and perhaps exceeding such determinate forms. There is a kind of indeterminate energy but it is not merely a lack but rather a surplus. In laughter something overdeterminate rather than indeterminate passes through the more original porosity. Interestingly, laughter shows a contagious side and the contagious side manifests the *being together* of human beings at a very *elemental* level. We are touched by laughter but touched by the communal contagion of this festive

affirmation. None of this would make sense if we did not participate in the more original porosity of being.

I think the most important manifestation of the porosity is connected with the meaning of *prayer*. Religious porosity would be the most intimate awakening of this porosity of being. Prayer at heart is not something that we do, prayer is something that we find ourselves in, something that comes to us as finding ourselves already opened to the divine as other to us and yet as in intimate communication with us. The porosity of prayer is the original site of communication between the divine and the human. The moments of grace happen to us in the most intimate and exposed porosity. Of course, we fill the original openness with many determinate things, desires, ambitions, aspirations and so forth and religious attention is needed not to be fixated on these determinations. The disciplines of prayer and contemplation are forms of askesis which allow the uncluttering of the original porosity. Perhaps it is the case today that many people have difficulty praying because we have a diminished feel for this more original porosity of being. Of course, if it is true as Professor Taylor says that we have become buffered selves, this should not be at all surprising. In the process of buffering ourselves we have not more truly realized our promise, in fact, to the contrary, we have reconfigured ourselves in forgetfulness, if not in mutilation, of the communication of the original porosity.

This is to offer a picture very different to an ontology that stresses autonomous self-determination. Before determination and self-determination, there is this given porosity of being. If one objects that this seems very indeterminate, this is not so. For this reason, we need also to distinguish the *passio essendi* and the *conatus essendi*. *Passio essendi* refers to a certain ontological patience signaled by the fact of our first being recipients of being, our being received in being, before we flower as being active. There is ontological receiving before there is existential acting. As something ontological, the receiving is constitutive of our being but it is not self-constituted. To call it *passio* is not to imply a mere dead thereness, devoid of its own energetic life. Its own life is not first owned by it; it is given



to be its own on the basis of a giving that is not its own. The nature of this giving and this receiving is such that the being that is thus received is freed into its own being for itself. The *passio essendi* shows given being as mine, but it is not given to me by myself.

When we think of *passion* in a more usual sense we think of our being moved by source(s) immanent in ourselves, movement that can carry us beyond ourselves. We are thrown on the surge of life, thrown beyond ourselves on its wave. There is the element of the involuntary that is not antithetical to all self-mastery but rather an energy at work in us prior to our taking control through choice. The *passio* first moves as an affirmation of being in us and it is not that we decide to affirm but that we are first given into being as an affirmation of being.<sup>4</sup> Think of this at a very elemental level. Consider of how on coming to the world the child cries, cries out. We might be inclined to see this as a howl of dismay, but it is the lust of life itself, and there is something inexpressibly good about it that conquers dismay. That is why we are relieved on birth when we hear the crying out, the outcry of life. It shows the very health of life giving expression to itself before any interventions of itself or of others. The howl makes us thankful for this first lived affirmation of the offspring. There is an implication with regard to what is beyond ourselves, revealed in the unself-conscious anticipation that our crying-out will be met by something of hospitality in the world beyond us, be this the world of (caring) others, or the world of sustaining material resources.

The *passio* tells against every autism of being. In it is already an intimate mark of being in community. That communicability surges up in our passion of being means it is already given as an active promise of being in relation in our very being at all. The doubleness of relativity (self-relation never being without other-relation) is expressed in the fact that we are *conatus essendi* as well as *passio essendi*. We are an endeavor to be as well as a patience of being.

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<sup>4</sup> On first affirmation and second, see my “Pluralism, Truthfulness and Patience of Being,” in *The Intimate Strangeness of Being*, chap. 7.

In modern political thinking the *conatus* has a side turned to the intimate, a side turned to the more public and universal. I am thinking of how in early modern thinkers like Hobbes and Spinoza beings *are* their *conatus*, their particular self-assertion that knows no limit except a countering *conatus*. This is matched by a sense of the social whole as coming to be – whether by contract, the over-aweing of the dominant *conatus*, or otherwise – as the (resolved) sum of forces of such particular endeavors (Spinoza). Kant’s duality of heteronomy and autonomy is not unrelated to the doubleness of *passio essendi* and *conatus essendi*. One thinks too of Hegel’s “free will that wills the free will,” and Nietzsche’s sovereign self-affirmation. The sense of this striving self-assertion also haunts the dominant forms of liberalism and economic capitalism where rational self-interest and enterprising exploitation shape the public space of the commons and insinuate themselves into the reserves of privacy.

Our freedom is an *endowed* freedom, given to us as promise before we cooperate in the realization of its promise. The above views hide the meaning of being endowed, and tend to project us forward, close off retreat into significant reserves of ontological intimacy, and produce a mutilated picture of self-interest. Self-interest: *inter-esse* is a being between; hence self-interest too is also a being-between, qualified to be sure by selving, but as an *inter-esse*, necessarily more than just selving. Self-interest is parasitical on the surplus endowments of the community of being; but it is taken as original, not derivative. *Co-natus*: properly speaking this is not an endeavor to be but a being “born with.” *Conatus* refers us to a more original birth (*natus*), a being given to be, which is always with or from another (*co, cum*). The pluralization is there but occluded in the ordinary way of thinking of self-interest and *conatus*.

Nevertheless, the endeavor to be is the evident and often more noted aspect of our being because it defines us as a *doing of ourselves*. Selving in community with others is being in act, is activity. But notice a fertile doubleness about the endeavor to be. This is covered over by the modern usage of *conatus* as expressing the *self-affirmation* of a being’s will to be. More truly, in the *conatus* we

are referred back to the patience of being, and indeed to a coming to be, a birthing. And while this might be the birth of selving, it is not a simple self-birthing – it is a being from an other, and in relation to another. In the patience there is an extremity of receiving; and indeed secreted in any forward movement of the *conatus*, its becoming, there is reference to an awaiting. There is a “receiving from,” that is to say, a birthing; and there is an “awaiting on” that secretly anticipates a fullness of realization, and in this also a coming to an end, perhaps a coming to be in the end.

### 3.

In light of this detour on the porosity of being, I return to offer a thought or two in relation to the different themes that I summarized above as central to Professor Taylor’s contribution.

First of all, I remark on *the immanent frame* and the question of *freedom*. It seems to me that in modernity freedom has come to be seen as the only uncontested value. All of our substantive values have been questioned, God, for instance, the family, the common good, happiness and so forth. But freedom seems to be a value that all affirm, even though what exactly they do affirm when they affirm freedom is not at all clear. One of the default positions, perhaps the default position, in answer to this last consideration is our very quick identification of freedom with autonomy. I think that this is deeply problematical because in the very notion of autonomy, the law of the same or the law of the self is inscribed (*auto-nomos*). The relation to the other (*to heteros*) is made secondary at best, at worst it is the opposite of freedom as autonomy, seen as a potential, if not actual hostile power over against self-affirming autonomy. This has to be a problematic position for any metaphysical or theological view that sees the being of the human being as porous to the divine source. If the latter is the case, there is no immanent frame that can be closed entirely around itself. There is also no freedom as autonomy that can be entirely self-legislating. The immanent frame of freedom can no longer be merely immanent if it is more than *auto-nomos*.

The primordial porosity of our being tells against every effort to curve freedom back into an entirely self-determining circle. Freedom must be something more – if there is a porous community, not merely a porous self: porous community that is what it is precisely in virtue of this permeability to what is other than self, whether that other is the divine other, or human others who are to be embraced within the space of sanctifying love. Just as in some quarters there is a certain default atheism at work, so there is a default version of freedom passing under the banner of autonomy. If either is a default position we fall back on them when put under a certain stress, but when we look at them more closely they are less convincing than at first sight. Lest I be misunderstood, the point is not an attack on freedom; it is a questioning of the univocal identification of freedom with autonomy. I believe that freedom is a plurivocal notion. There are many kinds of freedom. There is the freedom appropriate to the child, the freedom appropriate to the adolescent, the freedom appropriate to the middle mature years of a human lifespan, there is the freedom appropriate to our older time when as aging we face into death and our imminent departure from the immanent frame. I have treated this plurivocity of freedom in *Ethics and the Between*.

What about the theme of *bundling and unbundling*? I wonder if unbundling is not related to, perhaps even a weaker variation of the theory of secularization as a matter of subtraction. This is a theory that Professor Taylor has insightfully criticized and rejected because it is not adequate to the full complexity of what has happened in secular modernity. To subtract is to take something away, but we need an account in which something positive has come to be and this has to be acknowledged if we are to do justice to modernity. He is right about this; nevertheless, unbundling does call to mind the idea of a weakening of our commitments, a contraction of our loves, a dissociation of one form of love from another form. Perhaps this is appropriate in some instances, but it is not necessarily so in other instances. Unbundling makes one worry about the emptying out of the self, and not necessarily in the more saving mode of kenotic emptying which is full of generosity. There seem to be unbundlings

that are forms of *homelessness*. These may be without nostalgia, but only because no sense of “home” haunts them. I am thinking that as our pieties, or loves, or commitments become unbundled they lose deep roots in the nature of being itself, in the families from which we have come, from the particular communities in which we have grown up and to which we owe much more than we can know or acknowledge. Without deeper loyalties unbundling produces the empty soul of the consumer society, and the only religious salvation for that emptiness seems to be the religion of shopping at the nearby tinsel temple of the mall.

Let me mention a theme familiar to students of Professor Taylor as a student of Hegel, namely how philosophy in modernity feels urgently the need to renew itself in the face of the fragmentation of life, when the unity of life is felt as dissolving and as divided against itself. (The condition of *Zerrissenheit*, torn-ness or “being torn” was experienced by some of Hegel’s generation. It may be so widespread now that it passes notice as a condition. It might even be re-baptized as “multi-tasking.”) Hegel spoke of the impulse to philosophy as beginning in *Entzweiung*: the word might be literally translated as an “en-doubling,” though it is more familiarly translated as “division.” Doubling and division articulate the sense of separation wherein one side of reality is set off from another, without mediation, without relation. We end with difference without the possibility of a *metaxu*, a between. Hegel’s claim is that philosophy’s impulse is to renew a sense of the wholeness of things, to rethink again all things from the standpoint of the whole.

I am not advocating a kind of Hegelian totality here; nevertheless, there is something right about Hegel’s refusal of sheerly fragmentary difference. We do not have to have a totalizing whole in order to seek for some fruitful wholeness in our existence. I would speak of an open whole, and indeed connect it with the sense of the catholic as *kath’holon*. The open wholeness of the catholic universal cannot be described in the language of instrumental globalizing, tending towards the closed totality of treating all creation as a matter of serviceable disposability. And perhaps there is a sense of

the divine also that cannot be reduced to any immanent whole, since God is beyond every whole and the creator of all finite wholes. These reflections may seem like high falutin' metaphysical proposals, but what seems high falutin' in the metaphysical sense stalks the streets of everyday life with the specter of existential meaninglessness or meaning. The power of religion itself is tested in its confrontation with these specters. If religion has absolutely no sense of the whole, then its armory for the exorcism of these specters is sorely deficient. And even less so does it have the resources to approach in its thought the God beyond the whole.

Let us turn again to *authenticity*, proposed by Professor Taylor as an appropriate word to describe the Church today.<sup>5</sup> His plea for a richer notion of authenticity is not opposed to relation to the other, nevertheless, I think the point is worth stressing. My hesitation concern ambiguities in the reference to “*to auto*,” the same, the self, in the very word itself, in the idea of the authentic (*authentikos*). Think of authenticity as *Eigentlichkeit*, so important, say, in the early Heidegger, and we see the sense of “own-ness” coming to the fore. A number of illustrations might help. I am thinking, for instance, how authenticity is a very important notion in the determination of the identity of an artist, when the authenticity of an art work is being judged. Is this painting an authentic Rembrandt or not? The experts will look at the defining marks of singularity, the true signature of the artist. Having finesse for what marks the authentic Rembrandt, they will make their determination about authenticity with respect to a singular identity and its distinguishing marks. The authentic Rembrandt will be distinguished from the fake; hence the contrast between the authentic and the fake is central to the very notion of authenticity itself. What is suggested here is not misplaced in relation to what distinguishes a community. A religious community can be authentic in the sense of being true to itself, true to what it holds

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<sup>5</sup> See Charles TAYLOR, *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991, chap. III “The Sources of Authenticity” (pp. 25-29); also chap. x “Against Fragmentation” (pp. 109-121).

most dear, true to what singularly defines it in distinction from other communities. Without those distinguishing marks the community might look like what it claims to be, but in fact it would be counterfeiting itself or counterfeiting the true community said to possess these singular marks. The notion of authenticity is close to the heart of Professor Taylor's own work since he has been influenced importantly by expressivist currents of aesthetic culture, which we have inherited from around the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and continuing right into our own time.<sup>6</sup> The expressive ideals that go with the notion of authenticity have certainly in the past been highly individualistic by nature; one thinks of the cult of the Romantic genius. I am not saying that Professor Taylor endorses that particular cult; nevertheless, there is a family relation between the contemporary stress on authenticity and that particular cult. If one is talking about the Church, it cannot be adequately described in a language that is potentially compromised by such associations.<sup>7</sup>

One thinks today of an equivocity connected with the new univocalization of authenticity as an ideal. By the latter I mean the pervasive talk about "being oneself and being all one can be." But being oneself means being like everyone else. The rhetoric of difference produces clones. Tolerance of difference produces intolerance of difference. As already suggested, I think that the better word to describe the Church today, an old word used in other times and places, is fidelity. Lest I seem merely reactionary against Romantic modernity, fidelity itself contains within itself a certain authenticity in the following respect: fidelity is a being true to what one receives, true to what one has been given, true to what has been entrusted to one, true to that to which one has committed ones loyalty, true to

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<sup>6</sup> See Charles TAYLOR, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, especially pp. 368-390.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles TAYLOR, *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, pp. 5-8, 22-29, where significant questions are raised about the more individualistic (rather than corporate or communal) side of James's take on religion or religious experience. Is it relevant that James himself, in his earlier years, was taken with the possibility of being a painter?

what has been handed over to one, true to what in turn one has to hand over to others. This “being true” is as much a matter of being true to oneself, when one is a committed member of the community, as it is a matter of being true to what is other than oneself. The more individualized version of authenticity with which we are very familiar in our own time does not do justice to the complexities of diverse *intermediations* between oneself and what one has received, *intermediations* between oneself and others who have enabled one to be what one is. If one takes the work of art as fake or as authentic, one has to acknowledge that the authentic work of art is the end result of many *intermediations* between the artist and what is other to himself or herself in the community of human others, between what is other to his or her own self-determination and the immanent recesses of his or her own enigmatic creative powers.

The word fidelity is saturated with the sense of a *spousal binding together* – something intimately ingrained in the Church’s self-understanding. Authenticity is singular, at least on the surface. Yet there is an intimate side to us that opens out to something more universal, something more universal within the singular self, universal beyond the singular self, beyond every self as a singular. Here I would speak of the *intimate universal* as trying to name the more original porosity of our being: this is deeply intimate to us on the one hand, but on the other hand inseparable from our being implicated with the universal, with the catholic, in the etymological sense of the word.<sup>8</sup> A great work of art that is authentic, a great artist who does not fake his artistry, both are participants in this intimate universal. Art and the artist’s very authenticity cannot be separated from a more deeply mysterious and enigmatic fidelity. Again if I am not mistaken, Professor Taylor’s own thinking about authenticity harbors many of the suggestions I am now making in connection with fidelity.

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<sup>8</sup> See my *Is there a Sabbath for Thought?*, pp. 1-32, on the intimate universal and religion; also “Neither Cosmopolis nor Ghetto: Religion and the Intimate Universal,” in P. LOSONCZI and al. (eds.), *The Future of Political Theology: Religious and Theological Perspectives*. Burlington, Ashgate, 2011, pp. 87-113.



## 4.

Can we relate previous reflections on the porosity of being with the agapeics of the Church? Here one could raise the possibility not only of buffered selves but of buffered communities. If buffered selves have become as widespread in modernity as Professor Taylor suggests, it should not be surprising that forms of community have also taken shape in the reconfiguration of the ethos of being wherein one buffered community defines itself over against another buffered community. We are not too far off from the dialectic of master and slave in Hegel, with the logic of the enemy that we find, say, in the political theology of Carl Schmitt. If the Church itself was to become a buffered community like this, then surely its relation to everything other than itself could also be only a matter of hostility or domination. This surely is not the kingdom of God. It looks more like the social embodiment of the generalized *conatus essendi* that has betrayed its own *passio essendi* and become treasonous to the more original porosity of being.

How relate the porosity to the kenotics of the divine? We often think of kenotics as the emptying out of the divine: its pouring itself forth, and for the good of the other. There is here, of course, the death of God theology, particularly indebted to what is claimed to be the kenotic God of Hegel. This kenotic orientation is not unpopular among some postmodern thinkers of the moment, as the death of God theology undergoes a sort of resurrection. At issue here is the nature of the emptying of God, the difference between what has been termed the kenotics of *substance* and the kenotics of *form*. The kenotics of substance claims the entire emptying out of God's being, resulting in the voiding of divine transcendence, and the proclamation of an entirely immanent divinity (if divinity is the right word to use for the immanent successor to the old transcendent God). By contrast, the kenosis of form indicates that God takes on the form of a servant or slave, but the intrinsic being of God remains God, without any compromise to the absolute transcendent fullness of the divine being itself. In the case of Christianity, the divine kenosis

manifests the paradoxical conjunction of fullness and emptying, the paradoxical conjunction of absolute transcendence and radical immanence. The post-Hegelian philosophies of the kenotic “God” stress the immanence at the expense of the transcendence, stress the voiding of divine substance rather than the revealing form of agapeic *disponibilité*. They stress the emptying of the divine at the expense of the fullness, given that divine fullness is reductively interpreted as a kind of heteronymous, even tyrannical omnipotence. The matter looks different if we think of God in terms of the agapeics of the divine: the giving from fullness already real, and for the other qua other, and not from lack that needs the other to enable its own self-fulfillment. This is a giving from fullness to fullness, and precisely because of this, the giving can take on the form of a servant or a slave. In the radical emptiness of the lowest the fullness of divine generosity and goodness is communicated into and in the porosity of the immanent world itself.

The kenotics of God, thus conceived, puts us in mind of the porosity, in the sense that it looks like almost nothing, and yet it is the enabling opener of all spaces of communication. It makes a way by making way. It is most intimately there so that it seems not to be there at all. Its transcendence is not an elsewhere nothingness, but rather an overfulness more intimate to immanent beings than they are to themselves. Jesus Christ would be the incarnation of the absolute porosity between the human and divine, being both, and opening up the purest space of communication between human beings and the superlative yet intimate otherness of God.

When we turn to the human being, porosity to God is often marked by *our being clogged*, clogged with the idolized determinacies of finite life and the forms of self-determination on which we are fixated. Part of the mission of the kenotic Church would be the unclogging of our fixations on these idolized determinacies and on false forms of self-determination; and this, not to undermine our freedom but rather to witness to a “being free(d)” that is more than simply our own self-determination. In the unclogging of the porosity, the release of freedom is offered again, not simply alone into its

own self-determination, but into its promise of being beyond itself in agapeic service of all others.

I would say that such an agapeics also points one towards the unclogging of what I call default atheism. Recall how default atheism is now becoming a position widely present among intellectuals who think of themselves as advanced in cultural and scientific studies. A default position is something that the system falls back on when the system is subject to pressure and that holds the system in a certain safeguard mode and in a certain equilibrium when it is disturbed. There was a time when theism was the default position, so to say. Reference to God as the ultimate ground of all being and knowledge defined the final point of reference, the original point of reference, the default position in this respect. Default atheism is not sustained by any theological grounds or origins; to the contrary, it rejects such a ground or origin. Indeed, it rejects often the very notion of origin and grounding, though in actual practice the default position at work tends to be either a version of humanistic self-determination or naturalistic reductionism or determination.

The default position is taken as a presupposition, perhaps even taken as what Collingwood called an absolute presupposition. It seems to allow the system to function but is not itself an element within the system, and so becomes easily taken for granted as enabling the system as such. I would say that such a default atheism is itself indebted to the more original porosity of being which opens up our access to truth; though this more original porosity is not the focus of determinate attention within the system, nor is it, in fact, the product of our own self-determination. The sense of the kenotic calls into question the taken-for-granted presuppositions of default atheism. It brings to mind the emptiness, the nothingness that ultimately lies at the basis of default atheism as such. This can appear like an entirely negative result, but it can be a kind of unclogging of unquestioned presuppositions of an atheistic character that produce the seductive appearance that atheism is to be taken as self-evident by the truly advanced intellectual. There is a more positive meaning to be attributed to the unclogging of the porosity of being: it connects

us with the purgation of falsely fixated selves, counterfeit forms of communication, with the exorcism of counterfeit images of the divine, counterfeit doubles of God. Perhaps something of the turbulence of being a believer today has to do with our struggle between being tempted by default atheism as the counterfeit double of the self-evident, by our being disturbed by this temptation, and by our being purged of counterfeit doubles of God. I think the latter is the most hopeful possibility, even if it is also very painful.

To return to the image of the seed remarked on by Professor Taylor, one has to ask about the field in which the seeds are planted. One has to wonder also about how these seeds are planted in the intimacy of our being. Do seeds grow in the desert? Do they not need a fertile field? The porosity of being is relevant here in this sense that the field of planting in this intimacy looks like almost nothing. This is not just surface ground, so to say; it is more like an *underground* of our being where demons as well as angels can visit, and perhaps come to take possession. It is worth recalling that there are seeds of monstrosity. Fascism and totalitarianism were originally sown in the intimacy of our being and grew to monstrous communal expression in the not-so-distant past. Equivocity attends what is seeded in our souls, as the parable again indicates in terms of the wheat and the darnel. Notice, however, that here too we are enjoined to a patience of being, a willingness to wait, lest in trying to pull up the darnel we also pull up the wheat. An eschatological patience is asked of us.

Reopening the porosity of being can sometimes look like a return to zero – we seem to experience being as nothing, our own being as nothing. This might be taken as nihilistic, but my suggestion is that it can also be kenotic in a paradoxical affirmative sense. It can look like a *voiding* but it need not be an *avoiding*. It can be a return to zero that is not nihilistic. It can be an agapeic return to nothing wherein in reopened porosity something newly good comes to be. Porosity opens the space allowing communication, enabling the community. One can see the liturgies of a community as keeping open, or keeping unclotted the porosity in an intimate and a communal sense. The porosity seems almost nothing, but it is not nothing; almost

nothing, it is yet something – a place of passage, a threshold permeable to influence; an original openness to an otherness not of our self-determination. If one were to speak theologically, one could connect this porosity with the notion of creation: out of nothing, something incontrovertible comes to be there, and yet it is transient as time bound and passing in the between; given to be, not giving itself to be. A kenotic Church would have to be a community which remains true, or returns to being true to the porosity. It would call the Church to be a non-buffered form of community, and non-buffered in the shape of the community of the *compassio essendi*.

A porous Church: what could this mean? We sometimes think of the universal claim of the catholic, but sometimes we forget the intimacy of being, which is not at all autistic. The intimate is not opposed to the universal: an agapeic catholicity would point to the Church itself as participating in the intimate universal. Would not a porous Church mean: no walls. Yes. And yet, one remembers the elemental insight expressed in the poem of Robert Frost, full of country wisdom, “Mending Fences:” “good fences make good neighbors.” Mending fences – a way of wording our being reconciled with each other, and marking boundaries at the same time. After the winter the neighbors are mending the fences of their holdings, their property, and it is over fences that they communicate, knowing where to stand, knowing where the other stands, and in the difference defined by the boundaries of their holdings, they communicate. In the porosity of being we require the delineation of such enabling boundaries. These would be peculiar boundaries since their very power is not to disempower the other or cramp what is on the other side as an opposite, but the empowerment of communication across a difference that is not reconfigured as the space of hostile opposition. The Church would be a common space of permeability, of communal passage in the mortal between, with all the rights, and rites of passage that are part of our mortal condition: being born, coming to maturity, passing through the middle of life, being constant in a commons of patience where suffering is not meaningless, where suffering is also the space where our solidarity with transience is generously com-

municated, and we pass at the end beyond determinate life now into exposure to the promise of posthumous porosity, going into death in the hope of resurrection.

Inevitably, we experience disquiet at what is more than our determination and self-determination but we also become ready for released freedom. This would be a Church of the patience of being, a Church of the *passio essendi*, not simply a Church of the *conatus essendi* in the modern sense. It would be more faithfully a church of agapeic service rather than erotic sovereignty. This is not to deny the endowed power of *conatus essendi*, but this is brought back to what it is, namely, a “being born with” (*co-natus*) that communicates being in arising from an other, and that in its striving goes towards an other. This is not the self-circling *conatus* that seems to be the heart of modern idolizations of autonomy. The Church of an agapeic catholicity would be Church of the *compassio essendi*. *Passio-cum* – once again one would have to say that this is not unrelated to the kenotic poverty of the highest that gives for the lowest. We would have to see the divine kenosis as an agapeic *compassio essendi*. Would not an agapeics of the catholic have to be a Church more intimate with the *compassio essendi* as this is poured out more universally? And would not this be something more intimate with the divine kenosis: a poverty of highest fullness that empties itself in porous creation and gives itself for the good of the lowest?



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**MENAMPARAMPIL, Thomas** – Archbishop Emeritus of *Guwahati* (India). From 1986 to 1992 he was chairman of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences office of Evangelization and a promoter of the relationship among

different Asian cultures. He was also Special Secretary for the Asian Synod (1998) and acted as mediator in the conflict between the various ethnic groups in the Indian State of Assam where he coordinates the “Joint Ecumenical Peace Team,” an initiative committed to dialogue in Northeast India that has been proven an effective organization in resolving local conflicts. He is the author of numerous articles on subjects such as evangelism, culture, ministry, education, religious life and prayer.

**RAVASI, Gianfranco** – Card. and President of the Pontifical Council for Culture; principal promoter of the *Courtyard of the Gentiles*, an international forum created by Benedict XVI for fostering dialogue between Christian believers and agnostics or atheists. Before coming to the Roman Curia, he served as a professor of exegesis of the Old Testament at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy in Milan. Between 1989-2007 he was prefect of the Ambrosian Library, one of the most important cultural institutions of northern Italy. Among his books we find the following: *Breve storia dell’anima* (2003); *Chi oserà dire: io credo? Navigazioni nell’orizzonte della fede* (2013); *Di generazione in generazione* (2014); *I comandamenti: [nelle antiche dieci parole è scritta la via maestra]* (2002); *I monti di Dio: Il mistero della montagna tra parola e immagine* (2001); *I Salmi: Introduzione, testo e commento* (2006); *I salmi nella Divina Commedia* (2013); *I Vangeli del Dio risorto* (2010); *Il seme della parola: Mattutino* (2004); *La Bibbia in un frammento: 200 porte all’Antico e al Nuovo Testamento* (2013); *Le pietre di inciampo del Vangelo: le parole scandalose di Gesù* (2015); *Le sorgenti di Dio: Il mistero dell’acqua tra parola e immagine* (2005); *Maria: La madre di Gesù* (2015); *Miserere: Il più celebre salmo penitenziale* (2016); *Pregchiere: L’ateo e il credente davanti a Dio* (2000); *Ritratti di Chiese: Splendori e miserie delle comunità del Nuovo Testamento* (2000); *Sulle tracce di un incontro: Soglie del mistero per credenti in cammino* (2013); *Le beatitudini: Il più grande discorso all’umanità di ogni tempo* (2016).

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**SCANNONE, Juan Carlos** – Professor-Emeritus of the Facultades de Filosofía y Teología de San Miguel (Argentina), he also taught at Frankfurt, Vienna, München, Salzburg, México and Roma. He is author or co-author of the following books: *Interpretación de la doctrina social de la iglesia: Cuestiones*

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**TAYLOR, Charles** – Professor-Emeritus of Philosophy at McGill University (Canada), he also taught at Oxford, Jerusalem, Frankfurt, Berkeley and North Western (Chicago). He has been engaged in politics and public life and was a member of the Canadian New Democratic Party running for the Canadian Parliament on different occasions. He co-chaired (with Gérard Bouchard) the Québec government Consultative Commission on issues of reasonable accommodation, particularly in relation to religious differences (2007-8) and was involved in the public debate around the *Charte de la Laïcité* in his country. He is author or co-author of the following books: *The Explanation of Behaviour* (1964); *Hegel* (1975); *Hegel and Modern Society* (1979); *Social Theory As Practice* (1983); *Human Agency and Language* (1985); *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (1985); *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989); *The Malaise of Modernity* (1991); *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1992); *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism* (1993); *Philosophical Arguments* (1995); *Varieties of Religion Today: William James Revisited* (2002); *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004); *A Secular Age* (2007); *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (2011); *Retrieving Realism* (2015); *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity* (2016).

**VILA-CHĂ, João J.** – Teaches Political and Social Philosophy at the Pontifical Gregorian University and his President of the COMIUCAP – Conférence Mondiale des Institutions Universitaires Catholiques de Philosophie (since 2013) and member of the Editorial Board of *Concilium*. He is the author or co-author of the following volumes: *A idade hermenêutica da Filosofia – The Age of Hermeneutics: Hans-Georg Gadamer* (2000); *Religião, Violência e Sociedade: O Contributo de René Girard* (2000); *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Significados da sua Obra* (2002); *Filosofia e Psicanálise: Perspectivas de diálogo* (2003); *Sapientia Dei – Scientia Mundi: Bernardo de Claraval e o seu tempo* (2004); *Herança de Kant. I: Razão, Sociedade e Crença* (2005); *Amor Intellectualis? Leone Ebreo (Judah Abravanel) and the Intelligibility of Love* (2006); *Filosofia e Ciência: Science in Philosophy* (2007); *Horizontes Existenciários da Filosofia – Søren Kierkegaard and Philosophy Today* (2008); *A Civilização da Economia e as Respostas da Filosofia: Sobre a Pertinência e a Praxis do Saber – Philosophy and the Sphere of Economics: Arguments for a Theoretical Praxis* (2009).



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