THE TURN TO THE CHURCH IN THE TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURIES

A PROMISING ECCLESIOLOGY

Sjoerd Mulder

The Turn to the Church in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

> The ideal rides ahead of the real, renewing beyond it, perishing in it – unreachable, surely, but made new over and over again just by hope and by the passage of time; what has not yet failed remains possible. And the ideal, remaining undiminished and perfect, out of reach, makes possible a judgement of failure, and a just grief and sympathy.
>
> Wendell Berry,
> A Place on Earth, 72.

> Sans me l'avouer à moi-même, ce que je rêve involontairement, c'est quelque chose de très simple et très peu nombreux, ressemblant à ces premières communautés des premiers temps de l'Église… Quelques âmes réunies pour mener la vie de Nazareth, vivre de leur travail comme la Sainte Famille, en pratiquant les vertus de Nazareth dans la contemplation de Jésus… petite famille, petit foyer monastique, tout petit, tout simple.
>
> Charles de Foucauld,
> lettre à l'abbé Huvelin du 22 octobre 1898.

This book investigates the recent renewed theological focus on ecclesiology and the practices of the church. In light of the diminishing role of the church in Western society over the last century, it considers how theologians have come to view church life as essential to faith and theological thinking. The chapters analyze key works by John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas and Nicholas Healy, and bring them into conversation with an earlier phase in church history. The historical comparison focuses on the renewal of ecclesiology in Roman Catholic theology in the early twentieth century, represented by Romano Guardini, Odo Casel, and Henri de Lubac. Outlining how the present 'turn to the church' can be seen as promising, the volume provides readers with a sketch of how a church-centred theology might assist the church in inhabiting an increasingly 'post-Christian' world.

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Preface

For a long time, the church was at home in the West. But that is all gone. Communities that once sent missionaries across the world, are now struggling to find volunteers for even the most basic tasks. Places that were once familiar have turned into hostile environments. Institutions that were once intimate partners of the church have turned into estranged relatives. The church in the West has become homeless.

Losing one's home is a painful experience, and it may lead to a period of mourning and to a crisis of identity. At the same time, it can be a beneficial and even cathartic experience. Especially when one discovers that this home has over time led to unholy domestication.

The turn to the church, the subject of this study, is a theological attempt to overcome such an unholy domestication. It is an attempt to transcend the identity crisis of the contemporary church in the West and to rediscover its heart. In order to do so, its protagonists have offered various proposals. These are not identical and sometimes contradict each other. Some proposals seem optimistic and accepting of the new situation of the church, other proposals seem nostalgic or in denial of the present situation. All proposals involve a rejection of certain attitudes or ideas that the church has long held dear, and the embracing of other challenges. Clearly, as with any process of mourning, the way forward is difficult, confronting, and inherently uncertain. But according to the theologians studied here, this process of discernment is necessary if the church wants to take seriously its belief that no earthly home can ever become its final dwelling place. I hope therefore that this study will contribute to the important process of discernment which the church is currently engaged in.

This study would not have been possible without the encouragement of many dear people who for years were nothing less than my home. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the former members of what once was the community of Oudezijds 100/Spe Gaudentes. In so many different ways, they have encouraged me to pursue this research, allowed me to share my initial thoughts with them, and challenged me to explain over and over again what the real theme of my research was. Most importantly: they

shared with me a context in which I learned the praxis needed to understand what it means to turn to the church. I dedicate this study to them, praying that each of them will find a home again.

I also thank the Stichting Jan Schroederfonds, which offered me the financial means necessary to start this research; the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology, which provided the means to complete it. Henk Witte offered me his invaluable coaching, knowledge and encouragement, always allowing me to discover my own trajectory; I could not have had a better supervisor. Marcel Sarot in various ways showed his confidence in this project and helped make it possible. Many others contributed to improving the quality of my research: Peter-Ben Smit, Rick Benjamins, the other participants in the Noster seminar on Dogmatics, Ethics and Philosophy of Religion, and Rosaliene Israël, through meticulous reading of initial draft chapters; Wolter Huttinga, for his helpful insights on Milbank; Luco van den Brom, who encouraged me and helped shape my thoughts in the run-up to this study; Brian Heffernan who corrected the final draft of this work; my colleagues from 'het Atelier'; the faculty staff; and many others.

In a less direct but very substantial way, my friends and family have been the *conditio sine qua non* for this study. My friends, because they allowed me to make their theological questions and also, in excessive goodness, their beers my own; I am grateful for both. My parents, because of what they taught me and especially because of how they raised me within the praxis of the faith. And, finally, my wife Dorothea: by being my companion in our ongoing quest for a meaningful Christian life; a life that has been deeply enriched with so many unexpected gifts, above all the gifts of Lize, Jobbe, Douwe, Bent, and Elore.

Sjoerd Mulder

Introduction

The Turn to the Church in Twenty-First-Century Theology

Over the last century, the role of the church in Western society has steadily diminished. While once everybody agreed on the Christian nature of Western society, nowadays society is often labeled as 'post-Christian.' Churches still exist, yet their obvious central role in public life has disappeared, and with it frequently their central role in the lives of individual believers. And in many parts of the West, even their existence itself is in great danger. Notwithstanding the desperate effort put in 'parish renovations,' 'fresh expressions,' or 'church plants,' the truth is that many of those church communities will soon cease to exist.

In this light, it is remarkable that over the last twenty years or so, theologians have increasingly begun to draw attention to what they call the 'practices of the church.'[1] Inspired by the works of Wittgenstein, Lindbeck, and others, they argue that modern theology was wrong to locate the essence of the Christian faith in the inner life of the individual believer. Rather, they argue that somehow the Christian life itself, performed in concrete Christian communities with a specific Christian liturgy and praxis, is and must be the bearer of the essence of Christianity. These theologians stress the interdependence between doctrine and life, faith and liturgy, the individual believer and the community. Above all, they emphasize that the church with its concrete practices, in one way or another, has a value in itself rather than merely being a means toward the end of the individual believer. In a time when regular church life is not exactly vibrant and flourishing, these theologians view church life as being essential to faith and theological thinking.

Many authors have noticed this turn to the church, and they often praise it, mentioning its revolutionary and promising character.[2] In this light, it is remarkable that a clear definition of it, not to mention a thorough investigation of its history and motives, is still lacking.

In this study, I will take up this challenge by investigating this new focus on ecclesiology, this 'turn to the church,' from a systematic perspective. I will focus on key works from John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, and

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Nicholas Healy, and compare their approach with an earlier episode in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. In doing so, I will demonstrate that this turn to the church is indeed promising. Not only because it offers a better way to understand the relationship between the individual and social, but also because it offers an important and encouraging perspective on the current situation of a minority church in a post-Christian society.

The Historical Comparison: The Roman Catholic Rediscovery of the Church in the Interbellum

It might be asked how an attempt to understand the current turn to the church would benefit from a historical comparison. To begin with, we should note that, although this study will put much effort into the historical comparison, its central question is aimed at achieving a better understanding of the *present* turn. Yet, I believe that a historical comparison is helpful to give some historical context to the current turn – a context that is often lacking. Also, it enables us to see to what extent this turn is part of a larger trend in the development of the theology of the West, and to what extent it introduces new insights or methods.

To be sure, the present turn is not exceptionally unique or singular in thinking about matters of church and community. Rather, as this study will demonstrate, the current turn to the church is inspired by, and resonates with many earlier developments. One may think of the development of the Catholic and Anglican social teachings in the last century and a half, or point to the Second Vatican Council and how it has consciously reshaped catholic life through ecclesiological reflections. Indeed, this study will regularly point to broader historical and theological trends that illuminate the selected contributions.

Although many other developments might be a suitable case for comparison with the present turn, I have selected the revival of ecclesiology in Catholic theology in the years between the First World War and the papal encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* in 1943.[3] This revival took place in circumstances that were different but not too distant from the present theological context. Also, just as the recent ecclesiological developments are theologically tentative, the new ecclesiological concepts of those days were not yet fully crystallized.[4] But most importantly, even at first glance, theological developments in the early twentieth century have some striking similarities with the present turn.

At the time, Roman Catholic theologians felt that post-Tridentine ecclesiology was inadequate to answer the questions of the day. The old concept of the church as a *societas perfecta* not only appealed to a power long lost, but it also favored an instrumentalist view of the church, as if the church were no more than a vehicle for dispensing grace to the individual believer. In contrast, these theologians stressed that rather than being a means to an (individual) end, in a sense, the church itself was the fulfillment of religious life.

Through this paradigm shift, the church became an object worthy of dogmatic instead of merely apologetic reflection. This set the agenda for a new focus, away from the institutional dimension, toward the concrete liturgy and living community. A creative stream of ecclesiological thinking and writing sprang from this new self-awareness of the communal and mystical nature of the church, and the doctrine of the church returned from the margins to the very heart of Christian theology. The fruits of this earlier 'turn to the church' were harvested at the Second Vatican Council.[5]

Just as today's ecclesiological movement is opposed to an individualistic notion of faith, the earlier ecclesiological revival was opposed to an individualistic notion of salvation. It rejected the view that the church is simply an instrument to bring about a certain end for individuals. Rather, it emphasized that the life of the church itself is of 'salvific significance,' just like today's new ecclesiology wants to remind us.[6] Furthermore, this movement favored the concrete church here and now above an abstract ideal of a worldwide church, as it highly valued the liturgy and the participation of lay people in the church. It is therefore no overstatement to call this earlier development a similar theological 'turn to the church.'

On the Objective and Method of This Study

I will thus investigate the present turn to the church, first by studying some of its key works, and then by making a historical comparison with the earlier phase in church history. Consequently, I will be able to realize the objective that drives this study: gaining a better understanding of what this current turn is, what its aims are, and to what extent it is theologically innovative or promising.

This objective gives rise to three research questions. The first question (*what is the current turn*) demands a proper definition and thus also for a demarcation of the recent turn to the church. Who are its most representative protagonists; do they have common sources or a common methodology; what are their shared key insights? Can we distinguish a certain development of this turn over time? In which church traditions and contexts does this turn take place?

The second question (*what are its aims*) inquires into its diagnosis and the solutions it proposes. What are the motives of the theologians who made this turn to the church, what problems or obstacles are they trying to overcome, how do they propose to overcome them, and to what extent is this indeed a turn to the church?

The third question (*to what extent is the turn to the church theologically innovative or promising*) gauges the actual value of its theological contribution. Are there analogies with previous similar trends, and how does it differ from these? What are its theological strengths and weaknesses (considering the implications for fields such as ecumenism, practical theology, missiology, or the relationship between church and state)? What

is revolutionary, innovative or theologically promising about this turn to the church? What can we learn from it?

As regards method, I will try to answer these questions by engaging in close reading of a number of key works by important contributors to the recent development in chronological order, with the research questions in mind. I will then take a step back in order to better understand this phenomenon as it is situated in its present-day historical context. In the second part of this study, therefore, I will work toward making a historical comparison, by studying the earlier turn to the church in exactly the same way: by closely reading a number of key works by important contributors to this past development in chronological order. This past development can then function as a frame of reference which can elucidate unique characteristics of the recent turn. Finally, after having thus outlined the contemporary turn to the church, and having investigated an earlier similar development in theology, I will compare the two periods, and use the fruits of this comparison to return to my main question: *what is the current turn, what are its aims, and to what extent is it theologically innovative or promising?*

The Sample of Authors and Works

In order to study both the contemporary and the earlier turn, it is necessary to select a sample of works. The sample determines the outcome: in selecting a particular work, I make the claim that this work is representative for the whole. On the other hand, I have barely begun to define the contemporary development, so that the sample I select helps shape the definition.

This does not mean that my sample is completely arbitrary. In selecting authors, both from the contemporary and the present turn, I have tried to respect any diversity that is present in these respective turns. Thus I have taken into account that both turns to the church encompassed multiple perspectives or 'schools', and so I have selected representatives of each of these. Furthermore, in the case of the contemporary turn to the church, I have tried to select representatives from various church backgrounds; in the case of the earlier turn to the church, I have chosen both French and German authors, as most of the creative theology in those days was done in either of these two languages. One criterion for the selection of the works was whether the author explains why a turn to the church is necessary or desirable.

In view of these criterions, John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, and Nicholas M. Healy are good choices to represent the contemporary turn. Milbank is an Anglican scholar, whose work *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*[7] paints a vision of a thoroughly ecclesial alternative to modern reason, which, in his eyes, is violent in nature. Stanley Hauerwas, a Methodist, emphasizes that the church through its practices establishes something like a counterculture. One of his most explicit contributions to the turn to the church is his *With the Grain of the Universe*,[8]

in which he gives a critique of liberal theology and offers an alternative in which the church plays an essential role. Both Milbank and Hauerwas are widely read and could even be said to have founded their own schools, Radical Orthodoxy and the Hauerwasian School respectively; together, these schools more or less make up the entire turn to the church. The third contemporary theologian, Nicholas M. Healy, is a Roman Catholic. Although Healy is less influential, his contribution is highly interesting. To begin with, he was one of the first to note the theological trend of the turn to the church,[9] and he tried to critically further this trend. Secondly, he contributed to the development by encouraging empirical and ethnographical ecclesiological research. As such, he can be said to represent a second generation of scholars involved in the turn to the church. In *Church, World and a Christian Life*,[10] he critically appropriates the postmodern concept of 'practices,' emphasizing – on the basis of a Thomist perspective – that it is not the church but the Spirit who imparts grace through concrete ecclesial practices. His emphasis on 'concreteness' as an aspect of sacramental logic is characteristic for the recent turn to the church as a whole.

The sample representing the earlier turn consists exclusively of Roman Catholic theologians. Even though the earlier turn to the church resonated with renewed attention to ecclesiology in Protestantism, it was an essentially Catholic answer to a Catholic theological problem. I have selected Romano Guardini, Odo Casel, and Henri de Lubac. Romano Guardini was one of the first to observe and actively contribute to the earlier turn. As early as 1923, in *Vom Sinn der Kirche*[11] – the work that will be studied here – he famously described the turn to the church of his time as the event in which the church "awakens in the souls."[12] Odo Casel is a representative of the hugely influential Liturgical Movement, which sought a renewal of church life by focusing on its praxis of worship. His *Das christliche Kultmysterium*[13] will be read, in order to find out why he believed that a turn to the liturgy was needed. Henri de Lubac is a representative of the second theological school to emerge in those days: the mainly French *nouvelle théologie*. His work *Catholicisme*[14] set the ecclesiological agenda for many years. What makes these authors good candidates for this study is the fact that they linked their new ecclesiological insights to their present-day context and to a certain praxis, and it is precisely the emphasis on praxis that is so characteristic of the recent turn to the church.

Research Outline

To recapitulate: this study will consist of three parts. In part I, I focus on three representative contributors to the turn to the church, and on one seminal work per author in particular. Specifically, I will discuss John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* (Chapter 1), Stanley Hauerwas' *With the Grain of the Universe* (2), and Nicholas Healy's *Church, World and a Christian Life* (3). I will analyze their argument by focusing on how

the present cultural or theological situation is diagnosed, and how exactly a turn to the church is offered as a solution to the perceived problems or challenges. After doing this for each author and work, I will compare the three contributions and attempt, on the basis of these works, to define a number of general characteristics of the recent development (in Chapter 4).

In part II, I will investigate the earlier turn to the church by following the same procedure: I will closely read and discuss three influential works from that period, specifically Romano Guardini's *Vom Sinn der Kirche* (Chapter 5), Odo Casel's *Das christliche Kultmysterium* (6) and Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme* (7). Just as in the first step, I will focus my analysis on the question of how he diagnosed the cultural or theological situation of his time, and how precisely a turn to the church is presented as a solution to the perceived problems or challenges. I will conclude this step by comparing and connecting these three authors and works, in order to characterize the earlier turn to the church (in Chapter 8).

After having thus defined both the present and earlier turn to the church, I will compare the two turns with each other in part III (9), before returning to my main question and again asking, *what is this current turn, what are its aims, and to what extent is it theologically innovative or promising* (10)?

Notes

1 A few examples: Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 6; Nicholas Healy, "Ecclesiology and Communion," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3, no. 3 (2004); Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16–17.

2 They claim, for example, that ecclesiology has become the new 'fundamental theology' (Theodora L. Hawksley, "What is Ecclesiology About? The Provenance and Prospects of Recent Concrete Approaches to Ecclesiology," diss. School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh, 2012, 27–28), or the 'first theology', which provides the principles for faith's search for understanding (Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 6).

3 Jean Frisque, "Die Ekklesiologie im 20. Jahrhundert," 196.

4 Mannes Koster calls the ecclesiology of that time a "vortheologischen Stadiums der Ekklesiologie": Mannes Dominikus Koster, "Ekklesiologie im Werden" (1940), 201, in *Volk Gottes im Werden: Gesammelte Studien*, comp. Otto Hermann Pesch and Hans-Dieter Langer (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1971), 195–272.

5 Jean Frisque, "Die Ekklesiologie im 20. Jahrhundert." *Bilanz der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert: Perspektiven, Strömingen, Motive in der Christlichen und Nichtchristlichen Welt.* Bd. 3, ed. H. Vorgrimler and R. Vander Gucht (Freiburg: Herder, 1970), 192–243.

6 See Nicholas Healy, "Ecclesiology and Communion," 279.

7 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

8 Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology; Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001.
9 Nicholas M. Healy, "Practices and the New Ecclesiology: Misplaced Concreteness?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 3 (November 2003): 287–308.
10 Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
11 Romano Guardini, *Vom Sinn der Kirche: Fünf Vorträge* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1923).
12 Romano Guardini, *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, 1.
13 Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1932).
14 Henri de Lubac, S.J., *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938).

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Part I

The Contemporary Turn to the Church

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1 John Milbank and the Church as the Imagination of the City of God

Tending gardens, building bridges, sowing crops, and caring for children are in our days not commonly perceived as *religious* activities. One would probably characterize them as neutral, or to use a more sociological term *secular* activities. This does not necessarily mean that we desire the church to refrain from interfering in these activities – although some certainly would – but it means that if the church would involve itself in such activities, it would temporarily leave its proper 'spiritual' place and *reach out* into the world.

It is the contention of the Anglican theologian John Milbank (1952) that this perception is utterly mistaken. Throughout his scholarly work, Milbank rejects the nowadays prevalent separation between a secular and spiritual realm, in order to argue for a vision of a society in which the church, politics, small groups, families, and the lives of individuals organically overlap and cooperate in one single sphere.

This vision or this imagination entails Milbank turn to the church. Milbank does not long back to the days of an all-powerful church, even though he sometimes dreams of a rechristened Europe. But by revisiting the history of Western Christendom and its secularization, he recovers a crucial and different notion of the church: the church as a social praxis, a communal way of living, that precisely as praxis attempts to imagine the City of God.

Milbank's thesis gained widespread attention with his first book *Theology and Social Theory*[1] (1990), and it laid the foundation for the Radical Orthodoxy movement.[2] His later work has been consistent with his main argument in *Theology and Social Theory.*[3] Therefore, in this chapter I will retrace Milbank's steps to this alternative vision of the church in the West by focusing on his first work.

Introduction to *Theology and Social Theory*

The immediate occasion for *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1990) must perhaps be sought in the increasingly oppositional stance of the Church of England toward the neoliberalist politics of the Tory government under Margaret Thatcher. In those days, the United Kingdom was being reformed politically on basis of the values of individual

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responsibility and a free capitalist market, and the role of religion became increasingly marginal. Thatcher famously remarked before the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1988, that "Christianity is about spiritual redemption, not social reform."[4] At the same time, "a left-of-centre political position had become the reigning orthodoxy amongst the Anglican hierarchy" to the extent that some worried about Marxist influences in the church.[5] This radicalization was theologically rather thin, and was often criticized for being too Marxist or at least adhering too much to forms of liberation theology that were founded upon secular sociological theories more than upon theology.[6]

Indeed, in *Theology and Social Theory,* John Milbank seeks to rediscover a theologically sound alternative to both Marxist analyses and neoliberalism. Against the "pathos of modern theology"[7] including its "false humility," Milbank wants to reclaim theology as a metadiscourse, as a perspective that is able to qualify and criticize other perspectives, rather than being qualified by other perspectives. This perspective, Milbank believes, has been under attack throughout the whole of secular modernity. In fact, even though secular reason originated from Christianity itself, it is fundamentally hostile toward it; indeed, secular reason presents itself as an alternative for Christian orthodoxy. So the relationship between theology and social science in the eighties may be a symptom of the *pathos* of theology, but Milbank's cure lies in uncovering the hidden conflicts between Christian orthodoxy and secular reason in general. In short, Milbank aims to deconstruct secular reason by arguing that this rests upon an 'ontology of conflict,' and advances an alternative to secular reason: the Christian 'ontology of peace.'

This Christian vision of peace, according to Milbank, is not so much an idea that orients our actions, but a very particular practice. It is because of this practical aspect of the ontology of peace that Milbank turns his attention to the idea of traditioned practices, canonical forms of life, and as such, to a concept of the church. Milbank's alternative, deeply sacramental ontology which he worked out in *Theology and Social Theory* effectively fosters a theology with a strong emphasis on ecclesiology. This practical and ecclesial focus of his theology has proven to be one of the most important stimuli for the recent turn to the church, and is therefore of great interest to our thesis.

In the following pages, Milbank's argument will be analyzed, in order to better understand Milbank's contribution to this turn. We will ask three questions. First of all, what exactly is the problem that made Milbank undertake a turn to the church? Secondly, what does this turn involve; and thirdly, how does it solve the problem?

Milbank's Diagnosis

Above, we already mentioned Milbank's contention that secular reason is hostile to Christianity. But what exactly is 'secular reason'? In fact, the major part of *Theology and Social Theory* is occupied with a genealogical approach, heavily reminiscent of Foucault's historical analyses, through

which Milbank tries to show what exactly the idea of the 'secular' is and how it came into being. In short, he suggests that secular reason is the attempt to gain a full understanding of at least a part of the world without recourse to religion, revelation or any other divine ideas. Rather than offering a strict definition of the 'secular' or 'secular reason,' Milbank shows how secular reason appeared in various forms over the last centuries. According to him, secular reason often sprang from dubious theological or even heretical ideas, which became attractive because of the church's failing praxis. And sometimes, secular reason even became explicitly anti-Christian, for example in the work of Machiavelli or in Nietzsche. By showing how various forms of secular reason came into being, Milbank shows that contemporary secular reason is the unintended, contingent, outcome of a mix of independent and sometimes even opposing sources.

Milbank rejects the view that today's secular reason is the inevitable outcome of modernity. Such views are often formulated positively, for example by claiming that the secular was 'discovered' by gradually removing all superstition from society, or because humanity finally stepped out from the dark Middle Ages into the broad daylight of clear modern reason. He also rejects the negative counterparts of these views; for example the 'Thomistic interpretation' of Western history which claims that all the errors of modern society are the result of the West opting for nominalism instead of Thomistic philosophy. Against these views, Milbank holds that secular reason is more diverse and fragmented, and furthermore that there have always been many other voices that are very modern but not secular at all, and that as such represent a 'counter-modernity.' Milbank sees it as his task to bring these alternatives to the fore, showing how they can help the modern West to overcome secular reason, which in its final postmodern form is, according to him, incompatible with Christianity.

We will see that Milbank eventually takes this argument further: he will argue that secular reason has a particular merit. Especially in its postmodern nihilistic form, it lays bare a philosophical problem that has haunted philosophy from the ancient Greeks to the current day: the problem of conceptualizing true harmony between the immanent and the transcendent, the particular and the general, the human and the divine. Secular reason specifically in its radical postmodern form offers theology the opportunity to address this issue in a very direct way, and Milbank will argue that a definitive solution can be found in Christian praxis.

However, before we arrive at that point, we should take our first steps down the road that Milbank charts, and see how he describes the origins of secular reason. This road starts in the late Middle Ages, at the time that nominalism was gaining widespread influence.

The Origins of Secular Reason: From the Mendicant Orders to Nominalism

Milbank traces the roots of secular reason to the late Middle Ages, and especially to the debate concerning private ownership. At the time, rich and

powerful monasteries were often run like companies, focused to a much greater extent on the economic management of their properties than one would expect from bodies that had committed themselves to a frugal life in seclusion.[8] Mendicant orders like the Franciscans and the Dominicans quickly gained popularity by their radical critique of these forms of religious life; a critique that embraced a lifestyle of apostolic poverty. However, precisely because of their popularity, these orders themselves acquired more and more wealth and possessions. Against this background, fierce debates arose regarding what true, Christ-like poverty should be like.

Milbank notes that in these debates, the concept of *dominium* or 'control' or 'authority' underwent several great changes in meaning. Earlier, this concept was primarily related to discourses regarding self-control: just as a man should rationally dominate his passions, he should also rationally dominate his household, his family, etc. Rational control then implied that he was capable of managing *wisely*, according to (external) standards of intellect and ethics which transcended him but which he could grasp intellectually. However, in the new context of the late Middle Ages, the question arose whether human beings are even entitled to *dominium*. Does a human being have *dominium* over his property? On what basis? Or can one say that only God has *dominium* over the world? The concept of *dominium* started to be used in a new discourse, which focuses not on questions regarding wisdom, truth, or ethics, but on questions regarding jurisdiction: which objects lie in whose power? While previously the concept of *dominium* was connected with ideas concerning goodness – a person should exercise *good dominium* – now the concept of *dominium* became connected with the notion of a more or less absolute power over a property, being able to exercise one's will over an object.

The Franciscans radically reinterpreted apostolic poverty in the sense that poverty meant the absence of any *dominium*. True apostolic poverty, they claimed, meant that one should not possess or rule over anything. A person was entitled only to the *use* of things. But this gave rise to a practical problem: the Franciscan order soon gained many worldly possessions, such as libraries, schools, etc. To enable the Franciscans to attain their desired holy state of poverty, all their property was declared the pope's, so that formally speaking they did not have any property themselves. However creative the solution, it was a theoretical fiction that was of course unsustainable in the long run: the Franciscans could only achieve holiness themselves by allowing someone else, the papacy, to have property. The question of property and *dominium* suddenly proved capable of undermining the whole medieval system of authority in which the papacy was so important. The debate on property caused great social tensions and needed to be more fully resolved.

What follows in Milbank's account is a typical and exemplary move. First, he notes that this tension *could have been* countered by various ideas. He offers Thomas Aquinas as an example. Thomas held that man had

'derived' authority over the *use* of goods without having full *dominium* to which only God was entitled. As such, he reintroduced a helpful distinction between a person's entitlement to own property, and his or her duty to manage this property well; a distinction that had more or less been lost in the debates on whether one should have property at all. Thomas Aquinas' understanding of *dominium* as *dominium utile* could thus, Milbank claims, have countered the radical Franciscan interpretation of apostolic poverty.[9]

Historically, however, not this theoretical solution but another was widely adopted: that of 'natural rights theory' in which it is claimed that every subject since Adam naturally has the right to exercise authority over things. This solution differs from Aquinas' in that it implies a different and wholly new anthropology. In this, human beings do not share in God's authority when they exercise their 'derived' authority over things, which was Thomas' solution; rather, they have been given authority, and their free exercise of this authority is now part of who they are; it belongs to their essence and they are entitled to it. In Milbank's own words: this anthropology "begins with human persons as individuals and yet defines their individuality essentialistically, as 'will' or 'capacity' or 'impulse to self-preservation.'"[10]

Milbank here points to a well-known shift in medieval theology from an intellectualist-realist to a voluntarist-nominalist discourse.[11] In order to correctly understand him, we should first clarify these terms. In general, voluntarism is the view that emphasizes the will rather than the intellect (and it is hence opposed to Aquinas' intellectualism). In relation to ethics, voluntarism is the belief that God does not will things because they are good or right, but they are good or right simply because he wills them. One of the questions raised by medieval scholars was: did God give us the Ten Commandments because he felt compelled to do so by some external standard of moral goodness, or did he give them out of mere free will? Voluntarists would opt for the latter. In a broader sense, then, voluntarism emphasizes God's sovereignty and omnipotence.

Nominalism is the metaphysical position that denies the existence of universals, attributing being or 'realness' only to particulars, such as persons or objects. It was opposed by medieval and also Thomistic realism, which held that transcendentals like beauty or goodness in a sense were real. It is fairly easy to see that medieval voluntarism and medieval nominalism were closely related: voluntarism denies that goodness exists in itself because this would mean that a sovereign God would be bound by some external rule; nominalism denies it because it understands the world in terms of particulars.

The rise of voluntarism-nominalism paved the way for the new anthropology we just mentioned. Note the parallel between God and the individual in this new nominalist sense: both are free to do as they wish, not to the extent that they *are* right, but to the extent that they *have the right* to do so. Being right has become not a matter of aligning oneself to eternal

justice, but – because no such thing as eternal justice exists – it is a matter of possessing a certain power: the notion of rights, such as property rights or rights to self-preservation appear here as miniature versions of God's unrestricted power to establish his law.[12]

The new voluntarist-nominalist discourse and its natural rights theory, Milbank says, finally solved the problem of the radical and potentially destabilizing way of life of the mendicant orders. It did not claim simply that the desire to adopt apostolic poverty was wrong, but it declared "traditional apostolic poverty and paradisal community to be, as it were, 'ontologically impossible.'"[13] For individual human beings, it is simply part of their nature to have rights to certain things. This new discourse effectively neutralized the Franciscans' potentially dangerous notion of poverty.

Now that the earlier realist mode of thinking had been surpassed by the emergence of nominalism, other things also started to shift. In medieval realism, the world was held together by the common participation of all existence in real goodness, beauty, and truth: in God himself. In nominalism, however, "[n]o longer is the world participatorily enfolded within the divine expressive Logos, but instead a bare divine unity starkly confronts the other distinct unities which he has ordained."[14] In other words, the world came to be seen as a collection of singular objects and individuals who possess certain powers and desires.

Milbank claims that this new mode of thinking opened the way to various new practices. A realm in life could now be imagined where man could freely use his *dominium*. Suddenly, there was, for a certain time and place, no need to refer to God or to transcendence: in this realm of property, man was free to do as he wishes, to exercise his authority. Milbank argues that this is where the first true notion of the 'secular' arose: a sphere of sheer power without any transcendental values. Here, man could exercise his will, do and make as he wishes. A secular realm emerged which was the area of human culture, of everything that was man-made. We can already dimly see glimpses of the new sciences, the renaissance, humanism, and liberalism.

We should pause for a moment and recapitulate Milbank's argument. In a nutshell, Milbank argues that the whole idea of individuals naturally in possession of certain rights – which is one of the cornerstones of later liberal and secular thought – is rooted in theological discussions and ecclesial practices which are itself very alien to secular reason. Secular reason, Milbank argues, is at least partly an unintended result of an intra-ecclesial debate about whether Christians should have private property or not. And more importantly: it is an arbitrary result, because Milbank believes that, at least theoretically, there were alternatives which would have fundamentally changed the outcome: Aquinas' idea about private property as being derived from God's absolute lordship over the world would never have resulted in a natural rights theory, but would still have been a viable answer to the Franciscans' radical ideas.

Milbank accordingly questions the rational necessity of secular thought, not by argumentative force but by narrating its genealogy. In the following two sections, we will elaborate on the historical effects of this discourse. Historically, Milbank continues, out of this early secular discourse emerged two characteristics of modern secular reason: a rigid separation of the natural and the supernatural, and a preference for the view that the world is primarily chaotic. Two characteristics that, according to Milbank, are highly problematic from a theological point of view.

Secular Characteristic 1: Separation of the Natural and the Supernatural

As Milbank has shown, nominalism offered a language in which every individual 'possessed' his own intentions and his own goals. Medieval nominalist theologians still considered God to be a supremely powerful individual with immensely merciful intentions. But nominalist discourse destroyed the earlier realist notion of the world's participation in God. From that point on, the existence of the natural world no longer needed to be explained with reference to God.

John Milbank describes how this new discourse soon gave rise to new economic and political theories. For example, the medieval 'just price theory' held that it was unjust to raise a price simply because a buyer urgently needed the product. But now that the idea of a realm of true human freedom had become theologically legitimate, a free market could be imagined in which economy was not the exchange of goods to serve a common goal like justice, but simply the free exchange of goods according to personal desires. In the new economic theory, justice was replaced by the free market as the interplay of demand and supply. The market could now formally mediate between every citizen's private desires without recourse to morality or God. In a similar vein, a liberal state could now be envisaged, in which people would follow their sovereign desires, whether as an absolute monarch or as part of a people.

In such terms, Milbank shows that, just as the secular was not 'discovered' but theologically constructed, the free market and the liberal state were constructed. In other words: the early moderns did not *discover* that the market followed certain formal rules of demand and supply, that politics was a matter of pure formal power play and that justice or God had nothing to do with it, etc. Rather, they *constructed* the economy in such a way, that the best understanding of it could henceforth be had only by thinking 'nominalistically.' Modern economy was thus not an objective study of the mechanisms of the market, Milbank says; it was the *construction* of a market which is based on formal mechanisms. And political theory was not simply the objective study of the mechanisms of power-play, but it was also a *construction* of a new politics, a new imagination.

In the end, Milbank says, nominalism and voluntarism "completely privatized, spiritualized and transcendentalized the sacred, and concurrently reimagined nature, human action and society as a sphere of autonomous, sheerly formal power."[15] It created a rigid division between the immanent and the transcendent, between the natural and the supernatural, and increasingly made the latter superfluous to the existence and understanding of the former.

This separation between the natural and the supernatural would become a hallmark of secular thought. Meanwhile, throughout the book, Milbank keeps pointing at its arbitrary and artificial character. It is precisely because of the ubiquity and apparently self-evident logic of this separation that Milbank forcefully stresses that this separation itself is a very contingent human construction that once was not self-evident at all.

Secular Characteristic 2: Ontological Violence

As we have seen, the new secular perspective rejected the medieval ontology in which everything was understood as directed toward a transcendent good, in favor of a view that gave primacy to individual entities with private desires, impulses, and powers. This resulted not only in the separation of a natural and supernatural realm, but also in a different view on harmony in society. Harmony in society was now no longer safeguarded by a shared ideal, by a shared orientation toward a common transcendent good. Henceforth, political and economic theories had to address the question: how can an ordered society exist when all individuals have their own private desires and interests?

Some tried to redefine harmony in terms of an immanent and temporal equilibrium. For example, Adam Smith with his image of the 'hidden hand,' explained how the individuals' struggle for fulfillment of private desires resulted in a temporal equilibrium between demand and supply. Hobbes similarly argued that strong law enforcement could prevent a war of all against all. Others, according to Milbank inspired by ancient Roman paganism, more radically rejected the idea of true harmony. Machiavelli actively promoted power play of rulers, and the Scottish economist James Stewart proposed that a free market should be an *agon*, a playful alternative for physical war in which people could train and compare their skills by competing with each other: the idea of capitalism.[16]

These early liberal philosophers thus could not account for or even explicitly rejected peaceful harmony, and instead presumed a primordial situation of conflict. Once one has become aware of this hidden aspect of liberal thought, Milbank believes, one can see this 'ontological violence' everywhere. It is a consequence of nominalism, in which after all individuals are always potential antagonists, who can either be held in balance together by force, or who will oppress one another. This 'agonistic' ontology, Milbank claims, is the foundation of Marxist class struggle, the Hegelian principle

behind a synthesis of thesis and antithesis, the principle of the scarcity of goods in economy, and even the democratic rule of the majority. In all these examples, violence is an unfortunate but necessary stage toward harmony. As such, secular harmony is *always* founded on violence. All these views a priori reject the option that conflict can be resolved truly peacefully, that both parties may find a resolution that does not require one of them to surrender to the other.

In what follows in his book, Milbank contrasts this agonistic worldview with the Christian belief that individuals can always be envisaged as living in harmony. People often live in disagreement, but this is not a necessary feature of their being human, but simply a consequence of unnecessary sin. Hence, people must not be encouraged to balance their respective individual interests, because fundamentally they have the same interest: to find their own place in the divine harmony in which everyone needs to take his or her proper place. But this raises the question why this Christian idea has disappeared in the first place. It is this question that Milbank then turns to.

Theory, Praxis and the Failure of the Church

Above, we saw Milbank describe that secular reason rests on a separation of the natural and the supernatural and on a view of the world as chaotic. He traces these ideas back to nominalism coupled with a revived interest in a pagan conception of force. By unearthing the 'roots' of secular thought, he is able to argue that secular reason was not simply 'discovered' as the perspective that is capable of providing better understanding of reality. True, secular reason currently does seem able to analyze society, economy, and politics almost exhaustively, but Milbank argues that it can do so only in the case of *secular* society, *secular* economy, and *secular* politics. Only because modern society is founded on an agonistic and a 'natural' worldview, can it be explained in purely immanent terms of contest. Secular reason and a particular organization of society are thus interrelated: they presuppose, sustain and advance each other. But if secular reason is not more rational than its predecessor, we may ask why, in those early days of modernity, nominalism and a more secular society were thought to be more desirable or convincing?

We have already seen that nominalism arose in times of 'increasing inner-ecclesiastical disputes,' for example regarding poverty.[17] In general, it might be said that in the late Middle Ages, the various religious orders, the hierarchy and the pope (or popes!) were no longer able to settle their disagreements by reference to a common vision of the good. Therefore, they increasingly started to treat their disagreements as legal matters. Questions regarding the truth shifted to questions regarding who had the right to settle a dispute. Milbank makes a highly interesting remark in this regard:

> That it was first of all the church, the *sacerdotium*, rather than the *regnum*, which assumed traits of modern secularity – legal formalization,

> rational instrumentalization, sovereign rule, economic contractualism – ought to give us pause for thought. In a way, it was the increasing failure of the Church to be the Church, to preserve the 'rule of the Gospel' [...], which created a moral vacuum.[18]

The church failed 'to be the Church.' And instead of pointing the church back to its mission, theology sustained this failure and even promoted the moral vacuum, by enabling, in a nominalist way, the imagination of new practices in which agreement upon a universal good was no longer needed. Nevertheless, Milbank does not primarily blame this theory; he blames the ecclesial praxis. It is not nominalism, but the church's failure to perform the practices it should have performed. In fact, Milbank believes that Europe only survived the Reformation and the religious wars thanks to a liberal form of politics based on voluntarist power rather than on Christian ideas of virtue or 'substantive consensus', which, after all, had blatantly failed.[19] Throughout *Theology and Social Theory*, this theme of the church's failure recurs frequently.[20]

The Theology-Laden Nature of Secular Reason

Milbank's survey has shown us how the apparent neutrality and objectivity of secular reason can be unmasked, by method of what he calls a metacritique,[21] a historicist questioning of the perceived rational foundations of secular reason. This metacritique leads to the insight that late medieval intra-ecclesial disputes, legalism in the church, and the loss of a common vision paved the way for a new perspective on the world which came to be known as secular reason. This secular reason held that it was in fact universal reason, accessible to all, without needing recourse to transcendence. As such, secular reason concealed its own historically arbitrary and semi-theological foundations.

In the course of Milbank's elaboration of the modern period, this accusation of theology-ladenness recurs constantly. A large part of *Theology and Social Theory* is dedicated to telling the story of how exactly various modern theories tried to conceal their theological and thus, from a strictly rational perspective, arbitrary foundations. While liberalism was founded upon nominalist-voluntarist theories, other discourses arose in the nineteenth century which tried to overcome some of the liberal problems.

For example, Milbank argues that sociology (and positivism in general) seems to a certain extent to reach back to a kind of realism, by holding that there exist things other than particulars, for instance something like 'the social,' which is apparently able to explain the religious behavior of individuals. It is thus that positivism tried to resolve the basic theoretical problem of liberalism: how is it possible that everybody strives toward other and often contradictory goals, and yet there is in fact a certain order or harmony? Similarly, positivism emphasized that individuals not only shape

society, but that society always also shapes individuals. Milbank argues that sociology has a lot in common with theology, precisely because of its assumption that there is something larger than the individual at work in the world. In fact, he says, it is founded on typically secular, arbitrary, and semi-theological presuppositions, to which one must first adhere before the explanations of these perspectives can be accepted.[22] Milbank therefore warns that theology cannot simply use the findings of a secular science such as sociology without smuggling in latent presuppositions that are in fact alien to theology itself. As he engages in various historical debates, Milbank convincingly shows that different forms of secular rationality always ended up finding what they already covertly presupposed: that a secular space exists that is closed off from the transcendent.

In the following, we will not discuss these parts of Milbank's thesis in detail, as they do not deal specifically with the questions that underlie this study. We should, however, keep in mind Milbank's conclusion that secular reason is self-delusive about its arbitrary, rationally unfounded nature, and that secular reason can only think of itself as objective and neutral by virtue of this hiddenness.

Milbank could have stopped at that conclusion. In showing that secular reason cannot be fully rationally grounded, and that it even tries to hide its own semi-theological origins, he has made a strong case against secular reason. This would have resolved the confinement of theology by social theory, at least theoretically: secular social theory and theology are both ultimately based on mere opinion, and there is no need to let the one confine the other. However, this 'fideist option' would run contrary to Milbank's project, as it presupposes an image that now suddenly appears as secular too: the view that a kind of contest exists between various meta-narratives, all claiming the same all-encompassing perspective on the world. Only by means of rhetorical force can one metanarrative appear more logical or true than another.[23]

Hence, the truly postmodern option which simply accepts that there is no universal access to truth does not satisfy Milbank, precisely because it presumes ontological violence.[24] Of course, Milbank's whole diagnosis of secular reason thus far has drawn heavily upon the postmodernist critique of Western rationality. He even consciously adopted the typically postmodern method of historical genealogy[25] to perform his metacritique that shows that secular reason is fundamentally violent and finally ungrounded. But this postmodern diagnosis, Milbank says, does not offer any solution. It correctly reveals the ultimately ungrounded aspect of secular reason, but then simply *embraces* the underlying chaotic and arbitrary perspective on the world. The postmodernism of Foucault and Derrida is, in the end, nihilism. Milbank believes that theology must move beyond this critique, and criticize postmodernism itself.

At the point where Milbank turns his critical attention to postmodernism itself, his story reaches a first climax. In overcoming the confinement

of theology by secular reason, he finds himself allied with philosophers like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Deleuze, Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida. But at the same time, he views them as embodying the ultimately nihilist form of secular reason,[26] accusing them of a virtually fascist celebration of arbitrary power.[27]

We must therefore turn now to Milbank's discussion of postmodernism. According to him, postmodernism is the most profound form of secular reason. If we are to understand the problem he tries to solve and assess the value his alternative proposal, we must first understand his description of postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Milbank discusses postmodernism in the fourth part of *Theology and Social Theory*, which is called 'Theology and Difference.' In short, he claims that postmodernism constitutes a new stage of secular reason. Postmodernism differs from earlier secular forms of reason such as liberalism, positivism or dialectics in that it fundamentally distrusts any human rationality. On the one hand, this is a liberating development for theology, because postmodernism denies that modern rationality has access to any deeper insight into the meaning of religion, thereby rejecting any reductionist view of religion. Indeed, it positively believes that Western secular thought was always wrong to think of itself as objective and neutral.

However, on the other hand, it also challenges theology. While this insight qualifies the universal aspirations of Western rationality, it has also led postmodernists to dismiss any form of rationality as simply an ingenious strategy or power trick. Any recourse to universal rationality, they believe, is simply an attempt to promote one narrative above the other by pretending it has universal significance. In their view, knowledge does not passively mirror the world, but it actively tries to force the recipient to adopt a certain perspective of the world. This goes for simple knowledge, but even more so for culture as a whole: it is an endeavor to force individuals to speak, act and think in a way that is ultimately arbitrary. Postmodernists thus read the history of the human world as one that is and has been dominated by violence. All events, all historical transitions have been arbitrary, have probably served interests of the few who either wanted to remain in power or acquire it.

Postmodern philosophy has thus unmasked the fact that Western rationality serves the powerful. However, Milbank points to the fact that in doing so, it restates a typically modern secular claim: that the true nature of society is by necessity 'a field of warfare.'[28] According to the postmodernists, this is not an interpretation but an exposure of the most profound nature of society in general. But of course, Milbank argues, the question is whether postmodernism can really *establish* this truth, or simply state it. Is this story of competing narratives itself not just "an interpretation, a more or less likely story?"[29] And if so, how should theology react?

To answer this, Milbank wants to analyze this postmodernism, which he labels postmodern nihilism. He thinks of this philosophy as being grounded on two aspects: an absolute historicism, mainly found in the works of Nietzsche, Deleuze, Lyotard, and Foucault; and an 'ontology of difference,' elaborated mainly by Heidegger, Derrida, and Deleuze.[30] In order to relate to these aspects, Milbank wants to treat their writings "deliberately [...] as elaborations of a single nihilistic philosophy, paying relatively less attention to their divergences of opinion."[31] In what follows, I will introduce these two aspects, and show how Milbank relates to each of them. We will see that Milbank uses these two aspects to finally argue against postmodern nihilism from a Christian perspective. At the same time, it should be noted that Milbank truly admires much of the critical thinking that postmodernism offers. Milbank believes that postmodernism's brilliancy lies in its ability to forge a fully and openly anti-Christian philosophy. For him, this is not simply a disqualification of postmodernism. Rather, he thinks postmodernism is only able to create such an anti-Christian philosophy because it is able to see sharply what Christianity is about. Paradoxically, Milbank feels at home with these postmodernist nihilists, because, by their criticism, they have taught him, more fundamentally than anyone else, the difference between Christianity and secular reason.

Postmodernism Characteristic 1: Absolute Historicism

In order to understand Milbank's view of the postmodern idea of history, we should first look at his descriptions of the various *modern* views on history. Milbank sketches that early liberalism, the first form of modern discourse, understood history as a more or less rational process, in which humanity progressively heads in a particularly direction. In the second and third part of *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank discusses two later and more specific forms of secular reason: positivism and dialectics. These two forms slightly differ from liberalism in their view of history.

Positivism – which Milbank associates mainly with sociology – 'posits' that history is driven not simply by the sum of all individual choices, but by a general 'social' principle. Even though societies may have various shapes, in every case the same social principle is at work. In the view of sociologists, primitive societies with their totems and strange rituals are *in fact* exactly like our society.[32]

Dialectics on the other hand, which is associated mainly with Hegel, differs from positivism in that it stresses different historical stages not simply as variants based on the same fundamental principle, but as really different from each other. In this view, new historical phases are not only continuations but also fundamental *negations* of what was before. Primitive societies are *different* from our society, although this difference is still dialectically related to our society. In this dialectical view, history is the story

of how, through necessary struggle with nature, a society forgets and then in a new and higher sense rediscovers its true origins.[33]

Milbank believes that, notwithstanding their differences, all these versions of secular reason share a similar 'linear' perspective on history. In all these views, history is understood as being closely related to the question of and search for truth; historical development parallels insight into truth. History is also always understood as the result of the working of a general principle: either the movement toward an ideal, or the alienation from and recovery of a true origin. This can take the form of thinking about Western society as the forefront of history, or about Western society being 'alienated' from its true origins and in need of overcoming this alienation (as Karl Marx did for instance). All societies can then be classified from this perspective in terms of more or less 'advanced.'

Of course, as is widely known, postmodernism radically subverts this historical perspective, and claims that any linear historical perspective is fictitious. Postmodernism views historical change as simply an arbitrary transition from one situation toward another, and denies that any ahistorical principle or goal is at work. In fact, it says, only chance and arbitrary historical facts make up history. Every grand narrative that tries to deny these arbitrary elements, by explaining why the new necessarily emerged from the old situation, simply – whether consciously or unconsciously – favors the interests of those who are advanced in the new situation. In this postmodernist view, historical developments are complex, interwoven processes of various changes within a power constellation, rather than singular movements toward a goal. A good example of this type of history is Foucault's famous thesis of how during the Renaissance, 'the mad' came to fulfill the role in society that lepers had fulfilled in earlier medieval times. After the waning of leprosy, the leprosariums still existed, together with their whole institutional, symbolic, ritual, linguistic, economic, etc. framework. In various ways then, these leprosariums, or lazar-houses, 'needed' new lepers, and these were found in the mad. It was this arbitrary fact, and not any deeper understanding of the medical condition of madness that led to the idea that the mad were neither possessed nor holy, but sick and needed to be cured. As such, the mad filled up the vacuum that leprosy had left.[34]

Following Nietzsche, Foucault called the method by which postmodern philosophy tries to narrate history 'genealogy': history develops through time like a family tree develops through time without any pre-given rationality. It simply narrates history by describing various successive phases; and it takes particular delight in questioning familiar narratives by pointing to details which subvert these interpretations that are taken for granted. As such, it tries to show that every new moment is always more complex, more ambivalent, than the perspective of the exposure of a rational driving principle or a deeper unfolding of meaning can fathom. This is postmodernism's radical historicism: its strict focus on temporal events and their

particularities, coupled with a denial of any supra-temporal or ahistorical truth that could make sense of history.[35]

It might seem that this historicism does not need any special insights into or theories of humanity or history; it simply questions narratives by pointing to other narratives that are as plausible but serve other interests. It simply narrates all the arbitrary transitions, changes, and differences through time, thereby revealing that our assumptions about the historical process are in fact founded on fiction.[36] As such, it appears as a neutral and formal method of doing history, without recourse to claims which are impossible to prove. However, Milbank notes an ambiguity in the genealogical method, as he states that this method is "not undertaken disinterestedly, out of motives of curiosity, but rather the concern is to undermine some present constellation of power."[37] The method of genealogy looks critically and skeptically for clues that show that narratives about cultural transitions are in fact simply supporting those who are in power. The presupposition here, Milbank says, is that it is a good thing to perform a genealogical analysis, to reveal that the stories we tell each other are in fact oppressive to certain groups.

This is the ambiguity that Milbank wants to expose: on the one hand, we have the genealogical method which unmasks history not as true advancement but simply as arbitrary development; and on the other hand we have the enthusiastic promotion of this genealogical method, which covertly suggests that its application does after all bring advancement. In other words: postmodernism denies that any one society is more advanced than another because there is no common measure with which to judge progress, but at the same time it assumes that the genealogical *exposure* of the violent and arbitrary nature of history is an advancement over modernism. Using our example of Foucault, his story of how the mad became the new lepers once leprosy disappeared from Europe, is apparently truer than any other story because Foucault's story at least *exposes* its arbitrariness and violence. Through the back door, a 'linear' historical principle slips in here: history is seen as the story of the *revelation* of violence.[38] All history has always been violent and arbitrary, but only now are we in a position to openly acknowledge this.

Now that Milbank has identified this aspect of genealogy, he is able to question the whole project of genealogy. Does it indeed offer the most profound insight into reality? Is the reading of history as a story of violence the truly final reading? "Is violence the master of us all?"[39] The ambiguity just mentioned suggests that the historicism of postmodernism, its focus on the contingencies and particularities of history rather than on general laws, is less absolute than it seems. It arbitrarily assumes the existence of a general 'ahistorical' principle, namely the arbitrary and violent nature of reality, and then explains how this reality can be more or less concealed in different forms of society.

Milbank concludes that postmodernism itself rests upon an arbitrary ontology. And if we recall again our earlier discussion of nominalism, it

becomes clear how familiar postmodernist historicism may now sound to us: the idea that a *particular* event in time is more real than a *general* law of history; the desire to focus on the uniqueness of historical *details* rather than to subsume these under general *categories* which deny this uniqueness. Postmodernism has undeniably nominalist tendencies: it holds that, to understand reality, one should focus on the particular rather than the general, on difference rather than similarity.

We should pause for a moment to appreciate the 'comedy' of Milbank's carefully composed argument so far. Earlier, we have seen that he traced the emergence of nominalism in the late Middle Ages back to the admiration of individual strength as a reaction to the moral failure of the nobility and the church; and to ethical formalism as a reaction to increasing disputes among the religious orders and the pope(s). It was not a deeper philosophical insight into reality, but these contingent factors that contributed to the rise of nominalism. Now, by genealogically showing that postmodernism is in fact founded on this nominalism, he exposes the arbitrary roots of genealogy itself.

However, Milbank does not question the historicism of postmodernism per se. And we will see in due course that Milbank himself fully embraces a very thorough historicism not unlike that of postmodernism. What he *denies*, however, is the idea that the historicism of postmodernism can escape from the arbitrariness of interpretation. It *chooses* to read the world in terms of power and violence, but this is no more than an arbitrary choice. For example, Foucault and Nietzsche believed that Christianity, precisely by claiming to refrain from power, in fact engaged in a power ruse. Milbank, however, argues that this conclusion is already given with the method of genealogy itself; their method of genealogy *presumes* that there cannot be something like refraining from power.[40]

Postmodernism Characteristic 2: Ontology of Difference

The second characteristic of postmodernism according to Milbank is a 'differential ontology.' Such an ontology understands reality as purely heterogeneous: everything that is, is incomparable with everything else. While Greek philosophers tried to find the one underlying principle of the cosmos, this kind of ontology denies the existence of any such single principle. Milbank found the first characteristic of postmodernism, its absolute historicism, most explicitly in the work of Foucault (but also in Nietzsche, Deleuze, and Lyotard); this differential ontology is found mainly in the works of philosophers like Heidegger, Derrida, Deleuze, and Lyotard.

Milbank's discussion of Heidegger is exemplary for his treatment of postmodernity's differential ontology.[41] Heidegger argues that metaphysics has traditionally made a distinction between Being and beings. Being is traditionally considered a-temporal, stable, always present, transcendent, eternal, etc. Beings, on the contrary, are temporal, contingent, changeable, and

immanent. From Plato to Kant and beyond, this has been the stance of metaphysics. But Heidegger points out that this kind of metaphysics tends to think Being as some 'thing,' different from other beings, and thus as in fact a being itself. Just as beings can be grasped by reason and are 'controllable,' Being is also treated as such in traditional metaphysics. On the contrary, Heidegger believes that we should think of Being as the very 'happening' that constitutes beings *as beings*, as they are constituted as temporal, contingent and changeable. Heidegger wants to refrain from metaphysical speculations about Being, about the nature of all there is, which is assumed to be stable and eternal 'behind all beings.' Rather, he focuses radically on the contingency of Being, on the very fact that beings 'are' by virtue of their temporality and contingency. In Heidegger's thought then, Milbank says, any attempt to describe the world *apart from* the temporal and changeable beings, every act of devising a 'theory,' is an undesirable attempt to escape from the temporal, contingent and changeable nature of Being.

Theorizing about the world has now become problematic, explains Milbank. A theory always has to abandon certain facts as unimportant, and privilege other facts as if they were more true, more valid, more eternal. Therefore, any theory – and this goes not only for scientific theories but also for cultures or any other attempt at metaphysical ordering – is in Heidegger's view always a 'transgression' of the character of Being. It is a transgression which may, however, be necessary and even inescapable. It is impossible *not* to participate in a culture and *not* to privilege certain contingent facts as more important or true or good than others. Apparently, Being itself, then, always tends to occlude itself. Therefore, Milbank says, Heidegger concludes that Being itself constantly transgresses itself, it 'lapses' into beings that in turn always occlude this lapse.

Milbank's analysis of Heidegger is condensed and complex, but we can summarize his most important critique as follows. To begin with, Milbank agrees with Heidegger that "if beings are entirely *constituted* by their relationship to Being, then this is not a relationship we can survey."[42] In other words, we cannot find a vantage point from which we can objectively, without bias, explain how the world *is*. Milbank therefore embraces Heidegger's focus on temporality rather than eternality, on contingency rather than on necessity.

However, Milbank is critical about Heidegger's point about a 'lapse' between Being and beings. Why does Heidegger interpret the fact that beings occlude Being as something negative and even violent? Why does Heidegger see any attempt at interpretation, at 'theorizing,' always also as a kind of violence? Is a theory – which, Milbank agrees, always amounts to exercising a preference for some facts and a disregard of others – always a *transgression*?

In order to show that an alternative approach is possible, Milbank compares Augustine and Heidegger. Augustine famously distinguished between good as being, and evil as *privatio*, as non-being or as lack of being.

Precisely here, Milbank says, Augustine gives an interpretation of being as becoming: being *should* develop in a certain direction over time, in order to supplement this lack. According to Milbank, Augustine here focuses on temporality and contingency, but without this necessarily leading to violence. Some developments are good, are an improvement of being, while other developments are bad. Elaborating on Milbank's interpretation, we might say that in Augustine, true becoming implies *improvement*, so that becoming healthy is more truly a 'becoming' than becoming ill. In Milbank's own words: Augustine adds a "hierarchy of values and a teleological ordering into his view of our becoming."[43]

Heidegger explicitly rejects Augustine's teleological ordering and any idea of possible improvement. Every being is contingent, it can cease to exist or it can change. Non-being is thus, in the Heideggerian scheme, not *privatio*, not the unnecessary lack of something good, but the necessary lack of every other possibility. Returning to our own example, in Heidegger's view, a sick person lacks health just as a healthy person lacks sickness. Becoming ill or becoming healthy are similar forms of becoming, both contingent and arbitrary changes which have nothing to do with good or evil.

So according to Augustine, improvements are possible; and according to Heidegger, only change is possible. Heidegger himself seems to believe that his version is more basic because it can do without the metaphysical notion of goodness. But Milbank argues Heidegger does not offer a more fundamental view on being at all. Rather, he only offers a more *violent* and *nihilist* view on being and becoming: violent because it assumes that becoming is always also destroying what has been, and nihilist because being and becoming are understood as absolutely amoral categories. Augustine and Heidegger "tell different stories about Being, but neither would be able to show, in neutral terms, that it embodied a more basic, a more rational ontology."[44]

Heidegger believes that his view is more fundamental because he is performing a purely philosophical analysis without theology. However, Milbank argues that Heidegger *is* doing theology, one akin to Valentinian gnosis. This early heresy believed not in a historical, but an ontological fall. The world, in this ancient gnostic view, consists of a pure original that degenerates with each 'springing off,' and our daily reality is one of the most corrupted and lowest copies. In fact, the Heideggerian version of this gnosis is even more nihilist, because in Heidegger's view even the original is not pure, as the original *is the fall itself*. Being *is* the lapsing into temporal contingent 'everydayness.' Evil and good are both equally part of being's constant violent becoming; this is the claim of Heidegger's radically nihilist gnostic theology.

We can now understand how this Heideggerian ontology is related to postmodern historicism that was mentioned earlier: the whole history of humanity is simply and inescapably the violent replacement of one cultural regime, one transgressive metaphysical ordering, by another. Heidegger

believed that this view on history precisely exhibits the temporal, contingent, and changeable, thus *differential* nature of Being.[45] But in Milbank's view, this is ultimately just begging the question.

In a similar fashion, Milbank uncovers how Derrida, Lyotard, Deleuze, and others see 'difference' as the most basic category of the world. Milbank argues that their various forms of differential ontology all imply a similar shift of attention from transcendence to immanence, from the eternal to the temporal. They all distrust any attempt to speak about transcendence or the eternal, and understand them as illegitimate attempts to synthesize beings in a way that violates their difference from each other and from the unknowable Being. More importantly, all these philosophers finally opt for a violent form of differential ontology, not because they have to, but because they arbitrarily prefer to do so.

To Milbank, the final challenge of postmodernism is not theoretical, but *ethical*. For example, postmodernism does not allow for regret for past mistakes, because regret implies a standard *above* our lives against which we could measure these. On the contrary, according to the postmodernists, we should devote ourselves to the whole process "where all is equally necessary and equally arbitrary."[46] Such a view, Milbank points out, directly denies the possibility of forgiveness. This Christian practice presupposes at least the possibility of true peace, of an ideal order that can be corrupted but also restored.[47]

Postmodernism also inevitably leads to the rejection of the idea of a common good in society, in favor of a politics which is mere power play. Even when philosophers of difference do not openly advocated fascism but fight for emancipatory causes, this is in favor of a single arbitrary group rather than the common good.[48] A Christian form of power on the other hand is idiomatically built on mutual acts of love, of trust and obedience; and importantly, on the idea of a common good as the best possible solution for everybody without exception. Pastoral rule presumes that ultimately, conflict is not in anyone's interest, and is only a result of our wrongly directed desires and our failure to notice this.[49]

In short, according to Milbank, the postmodern problem is the following. Postmodernism rightly assumes a priority of difference, but while it emphasizes the incommensurability of beings (in its differential ontology) and events (in its absolute historicism), it has no method for bringing these incommensurables into harmony. In fact, it not only *assumes* but also *embraces* the fact that different beings or events relate to each other with violence, that they are opposed to each other, because postmodern philosophy likes to think of difference *as* opposition.[50] Milbank, however, believes that a differential ontology does not necessarily lead to violence:

> [D]oes one need to interpret every disturbance, every event, as an event of war? Only, I would argue, if one has transcendentally understood all differences as negatively related, if – in other words, one has allowed a

> dialectical element to intrude into one's differential philosophy. If one makes no such presupposition, then it would be possible to understand the act of affirmative difference, in its passing over to the other, as an invitation to the other to embrace this difference because of its objective desirability.[51]

Milbank here tries to move beyond the nihilism of postmodern differential ontology. In what follows, I will show how Milbank intends to overcome postmodern violence by a new concept of harmony. In this way, Milbank hopes to find a place where he can think difference peacefully. Again, this is not simply an academic matter: it is an ontology that can be enacted. While the French philosophers of difference espouse an ontology of difference of which the final enactment is fascism, Milbank will find an ontology of difference of which the enactment is *the church*.

Milbank's Solution

We have seen that Milbank's accusations against secular reason are twofold: first, it creates a rigid but artificial division between the realm of the natural and the supernatural, thereby *apparently* closing the world off from transcendent values, religion, etc. And second, it presupposes an ontological violence.

Postmodernism seems to partially solve this problem. Its historicism and differential ontology show that secular reason was after all just as irrational as other forms of rationality, merely serving the interests of the powerful. Any form of human reason, according to postmodernism, is not in any sense universal but time- and place-bound. A closed-off secular realm in which human beings can fully understand and fully control everything is thus unmasked as a myth.

However, even when postmodernism has unmasked secular reason, it ultimately embraces what it has revealed: that there is only irrationality and violence. New insights are no better than old insights, they are just different. And they take the place of the old ones simply because they either work better for those in power, or because others have assumed power. Postmodernism's 'enactment,' its practical face, must therefore be a kind of Machiavellian or fascist politics in which the existence of a common good for society is denied, and a preference exists for the show of force. Forgiveness, charity, or pastoral care have no place in such a politics.

As such, postmodern nihilism seems a perfect anti-Christianity. But Milbank's alternative for postmodern nihilism is in no sense a purely opposite position. Rather, Milbank tries to *redefine* postmodernism by radically eradicating the idea of ontological violence. He does not want to fall back into a modernist, 'enlightened' account of human understanding. This would need the idea that nature is separate from the supernatural, and moreover that nature can be thought without the supernatural.

His solution will therefore be one that is radically relativistic, denying any objective foundation to which we have natural access. His solution will also be radically historicist: it must resist any attempt to make history appear 'logical,' as if the present is always the logical and only possible outcome of the past.

His solution can be broken down into several elements. In the following sections, I will focus on the three most important elements; this will give me the opportunity to briefly explain Milbank's ideas without having to go through every detail of every author with whom Milbank engages. These elements are the following: Milbank's concept of analogy, his view on human making, and his concept of harmony. In the end, we will put these three aspect back together in order to view Milbank's alternative ontology and ethics, and understand how this is tightly linked with *ecclesiology*.

Analogy

An important element in Milbank's ontology is the concept of analogy. This might come as a surprise, as we have said earlier that Milbank's ontology prioritizes difference, while the concept of analogy typically fits into an ontology where apparently different particulars can still be subsumed under a more fundamental sameness. In order to understand the move that Milbank wants to make, we must first turn to Aquinas and Duns Scotus as representatives of two seemingly opposed ontologies: the first offers an ontology of analogy and participation, the second an ontology of equivocity and difference. In the following section, I will not only try to follow Milbank's interpretation of these positions but also develop them further than Milbank does himself, as he seems to assume that the reader is already acquainted with them.[52]

Analogy and Traditional Metaphysics

In traditional Aristotelian metaphysics, a thing could be defined by identifying first what *genus* it belongs to, and second, what its characteristic *differences* from the other species of that genus are. We could take the following example: Socrates is an animal (his genus) who is also rational, two-legged and has a dry nose (his specific differences); therefore he cannot be mistaken for Fido the dog, even though Fido is also an animal. What Socrates and Fido *share,* therefore, is their animality; it is their common essence which relates them to each other. They can be defined, compared, and distinguished from each other precisely by virtue of their shared animality. Hence, traditional metaphysics generally claims that a common essence is needed in order to be able to distinguish or compare two particulars.

However, things become complicated when we wish to compare Socrates with God, because God and Socrates do not share a common essence. It cannot be meaningfully said that Socrates has two legs while God has zero legs;

this would be as absurd as saying that the color white has zero legs. God, the color white and Socrates all belong to different logical planes, hence a characteristic cannot be attributed to these three in exactly the same sense.

In the Middle Ages, this raised an urgent theological problem, which caused Aquinas and Duns Scotus to part ways. The problem was this: if we attribute a term to God and accept that it is not used *exactly* in the same sense as in the case of human beings, this seems to imply that it could mean virtually *anything*. For example, if we say that God is good, can we even begin to understand the meaning of this? It seems that the only thing that we know, is that God is *not* good in the sense in which human beings can be good. But if God is not good in our familiar sense, in what sense is he good? Can we even begin to trust God if he is not in any sense good like we are able to be? This is no mere metaphysics but it touches the heart of Christian talk about the good God.

Thomas Aquinas confirmed that we do not know the exact sense in which properties we attribute to God must be interpreted. But he stressed that, even though God exists in a different sense than Socrates, he is also not completely *unlike* Socrates: God exists in an infinite sense while Socrates exists in a finite sense. God's 'being' is both like *and* unlike the existence of Socrates: and it is therefore *analogous* to Socrates' being.

In order to understand Aquinas' solution, we should point not only to his doctrine of analogy but also to his doctrine of participation. Aquinas believed that, while we do not understand what it means to say 'God exists,' we know that our existence is *derived* from God's existence. After all, God is our creator. So even if God and human beings are not related by virtue of a common essence, they are nonetheless related in another fashion: by virtue of the fact that a human being's being participates in God's being. The concept of being is thus *primarily* attributed to God, and secondarily to human beings. Precisely because in reality[53] some relation between God and human beings exists which we do not fully understand, we can analogously grasp the meaning of God's existence, or of his goodness for that matter. If we cannot fully understand it, we can at least partially understand it. Of course, Aquinas would say, God is good in a different sense than we are; but as our goodness is derived from God's goodness, we may trust that this is still in some way *like* our goodness.

Duns Scotus believed that this analogous God-talk was much too slippery from a theological point of view: if we cannot say that God exists (or is good, wise, etc.) in the same way that a human being exists, we also cannot meaningfully say that God is good. His solution was to claim the 'univocity of being': even if God's existence differs from Socrates' existence, they both exist in the same *sense*. Also, God is good in the same sense as Socrates, apart from the fact that God has this goodness to an infinite degree.

Duns Scotus thus tried to establish solid ground for speaking univocally about God and human beings, for applying human concepts to God in the same sense. This made ontological concepts like analogy and participation

obsolete. Of course, an analogy could still be drawn between different things, but Duns Scotus did not think that this reflected any ontological truth: in fact, he understood analogy as just another form of equivocity. In Thomism, on the other hand, analogy reflected some mysterious but nevertheless real relationship.

Analogy and Differential Ontology

In his discussion of differential ontology, Milbank points out that the postmodern philosophers of difference are inspired by Duns Scotus' principle of the univocity of being.[54] However, they do not put it to the same use, as they have no wish to salvage God-talk. Rather, as we have seen, their aim is to stress the fact that any neat theory or categorization of the world is ultimately arbitrary. Therefore, they radicalize the univocity of being, and claim that this principle means that there is no need to categorize the world in terms of *genera* or *species* or individuals. "There are no stable genera, but only complex mixtures, overlappings and transformations."[55] We can easily see why these philosophers do not like such categorizations: they prioritize or at least suggest an idea of rigid sameness which is more important than all the various differences. According to these philosophers, similarities between different things might *seem* to describe reality but in fact are completely arbitrary. The only thing that is true, is that everything *is*: hence the univocity of being. What matters therefore is only their respective difference. Only their being different from each other really constitutes what they are.

Milbank worries about the nihilism that is implied. If everything is different everything else, this means that everything we say about the world in general is arbitrary and violates the reality of difference. In this respect, any true understanding of the world is impossible in principle. At the same time, however, Milbank agrees with the philosophers of difference that Thomist ontology overemphasizes univocity, especially with regard to truth, which is essentially participation in 'sameness'.[56] Aquinas uses analogy only as a means to overcome the impossibility of speaking univocally about God, and to be able to ultimately uphold a certain rationality. In other words, Aquinas uses analogy in order to maintain a vague sense of sameness behind the appearance of difference. To Milbank, Thomist analogy as such seems to be a stopgap measure to uphold God-speech.

Milbank thinks that it is possible to use analogy for a different purpose, which he finds in Augustine.[57] Analogy is not only able to claim that two different things are still mysteriously related to the same; it is *also* able to claim that these two things are fundamentally different. Analogy is able to speak of unity and diversity *at once*. We could, Milbank says, use the concept of analogy in such a way that it harmonizes differences while doing full justice to all particularities. Milbank claims that once "one qualifies the genera/species/individuals hierarchy in the face of a more fundamental

equality in created being, and recognizes, with the nihilists, the primacy of mixtures, continua, overlaps and disjunctions, all subject in principle to limitless transformation," then "the way is open to seeing analogy as all-pervasive, as governing every unity and diversity of the organized world."[58]

Let us try to express this idea more simply. In our own example above, classical Thomism did not need to relate Socrates and Fido *analogically*, because they were thought to have a shared essence. Thomism could speak *univocally* about their common animality, and even highlight their differences: for example the number of legs they possess. Now consider what would happen if we dismiss all genera, which is what the postmodernists propose. We would no longer have the genus 'animal.' According to the postmodernists, Socrates and Fido are now incommensurable. According to Milbank, it is still possible to opt for analogy: animality could be attributed *analogously* to Socrates and Fido.

But what does it mean to do this? Milbank argues that analogy should be explicitly viewed as a cultural *construction*. We do not need to claim that a hidden real commonality exists behind the appearance of difference between Socrates and Fido. Rather, when we say that Socrates is like Fido, it means that precisely in their difference, they belong together *in a certain culturally preferred ordering*. The very act of discovering the commonality between Socrates and Fido is a constructive act through which we propose to others that they equally understand them as being somewhat similar.

Does Milbank argue here that analogies are arbitrary and can thus be made or dismissed at will? Not really. True, analogies are contingent unities and they are certainly not "fixed once and for all."[59] If this were the case, analogy would simply be a new way to categorize the world in terms of genera and species. Still, analogies can be more or less 'stable' in the sense that they temporarily order different particulars in a specific setting, and such a setting may culturally be 'privileged.' Milbank's account in his book again lacks any specific examples, so let us try to give one of our own. In a specific culture – for instance Catholic France in the nineteenth century – Christ might be considered an image of goodness and even the ideal form of goodness. And in that same culture, Thérèse of Lisieux, who suffers to the point of *losing* her faith in Christ, might be understood *in her particularity* as an imitation or a 'repetition' of Christ. This analogy is by no means arbitrary, but it is nevertheless a cultural arrangement: without a specific 'hermeneutical' tradition it would not be possible to give meaning to this analogy between Christ and Thérèse. The idea of a culture or 'tradition' is thus essential here.

What is more, Milbank says that analogies are *creative*. Yes, they are human creations, but this does not mean that *anything* is possible: just as with any other creative act, the maker is partially bound to the material with which he or she works. Milbank therefore says that analogies convey a *rhetorical* truth: the analogy cannot be *proved* by deductive arguments, but it has to be communicated *persuasively*,[60] in a way that shows the

aesthetics of it. In our example: it is no use to try to prove that Christ and Thérèse are 'appearances' of some deeper 'reality' which can be attained by critical thinking. Rather, we should present this truth in such a way that one might come to believe that Thérèse, in her particular and unique life, indeed imitated Christ.

This argument raises all kinds of difficult questions regarding Milbank's relativism. For example, how does he escape from his own accusations of nihilism, the idea that ultimately everything is arbitrary? If every analogy, every theory or every understanding is a human construct, how can Milbank uphold any sense of truth regarding Christianity? Or does he ultimately succumb to a kind of fideism, in which we are simply asked to believe that this specific culture is right?[61] Let us try to answer these questions by looking at Milbank's idea of creativity.

Human Constructions

The second important element in Milbank's solution is his concept of creativity, which he derives from certain early humanists. In the Renaissance, human beings were placed in the center of attention. Early humanists were fascinated by people's ability to create and act, to make new things, to come up with new ideas, to change the world around them. In secular reason, the humanly created world became equated with 'the secular' or 'the natural' as opposed to 'the supernatural.' There was no need whatsoever to explain this in terms of the divine. In this view, it was not simply nature, but *culture* or *factum*, 'the made,' that became the realm in which human beings are independent of the infinite.

However, Milbank says that some humanist thinkers interpreted this human ability as something that relates us to the divine. Humanists like Nicholas of Cusa and Giambattista Vico (about whom Milbank wrote his dissertation) were full-fledged humanists, but not in any sense 'secularists.' It is in their thought that Milbank finds a route toward a theory of *making* in which he is able to be both fully relativistic and theologically objectivistic. In other words, in which he can claim that the church is 'no more' than a time- and place-bound tradition, while maintaining that this tradition is able to formulate truth precisely *as* time- and place-bound tradition.

To contrast the notion of 'making' in secular reason with this other 'countermodern' notion, it may be useful again to make up for the lack of examples in Milbank's book by giving an example of our own: that of the potter. In the first, secular notion of making, the world is seen as a finite realm which can be manipulated by autonomous human agents. From a secular perspective, a potter is a human agent who has in his mind an idea of a vessel. He is free to think of any vessel, because he is autonomous. When he creates the vessel, *he imposes his idea upon the clay.*

This example shows that in the secular conception of making, the idea is the cause and the product is the effect.[62] Also note that transcendent

notions of 'beauty' or 'goodness' are absent. Of course, it may be important that the vessel can be sold so that the potter can make a living, and therefore it has to be beautiful in the sense that it accords with a certain taste, but this instrumental notion of beauty is strictly immanent and does not refer to God or to heavenly beauty.[63] We might say (although this is not Milbank's terminology) that the prototypical form of this kind of making is 'industrial' making.

Milbank finds an alternative concept of making in the theories of the humanists Cusa and Vico, but also in later philosophers like Blondel. These philosophers start not by distinguishing and then causally relating the maker and the product, but by focusing on the creative process itself. This view emphasizes the uncertainty of the process. Making is something that happens by trial and error, an uncertain process with unintended outcomes. If we creatively make something, Milbank says, it 'proceeds from us': the result is out of our control.

In this kind of making, it makes no sense to talk about the potter's 'original' idea. Ideas, concepts, theories: they are only possible stages in the process of making. It is *in the making*, in the molding of the clay, that a potter reflects on the product, that he is able to criticize the product and say, for example: 'this is not what I intended,' which then means 'now that I see it, I am beginning to see more clearly what my initial dim idea *should have been*.' Nor does this more artistic potter have a preliminary conception of beauty or goodness which he then simply 'actualizes' by creating. Rather, as Milbank's description of making suggests, by artistically creating a vessel he tries to find out what it means to be beautiful, tries to grasp something that we do not know yet.

An idea that slowly dawns on us, grasping the unknown: this is where the notion of transcendence 'intrudes' upon the concept of the maker. It is in creatively making something, Milbank argues, that the autonomous human being surrenders itself to the infinite,[64] by an intuition of beauty or goodness or a sense of meaning. Now, suddenly, human making is no longer a secular celebration of immanent human autonomy, but rather a blurry interplay between the immanent and the transcendent, in such a way that it is no longer possible to distinguish between the two: the natural has been taken up in a supernatural process of creativity.

Just as making is open to the infinite, so too, Milbank says, is *doing*.[65] In doing, just as in making, human beings change the world around them according to a certain dim intention, the implications of which are always unknown and always exceed the intention. In this context, Milbank quotes Maurice Blondel: "God acts in this action, and that is why the thought that follows the act is richer by an infinity than that which precedes it."[66]

Now this could be taken to mean that there is a way of life on the one hand, and that there are people who perform this way of life on the other. But if we again consider the metaphor of the potter and the clay, we can now see that this is *not* Milbank's view. Just as the making of the vessel is

fundamental to forming the idea of the vessel, the performance of a particular way of life is fundamental to conceptualizing it.

This is an important difference between Milbank and other contemporary theologians who also in some way stress that Christianity is first and foremost a *praxis*. Take for example George Lindbeck. He is known for his view on the gospels as paradigmatic narratives for Christian living, and his view on doctrine as an *explication* of these paradigmatic narratives. Christian praxis comes first, and doctrine can only point out a posteriori which practices are misperformed by offering a better explication of what the gospel narrative in fact means.[67]

Or take liberation theology, with its practical emphasis.[68] Its adherents, Milbank says, read the gospel in order to find out how Christ's intentions formed a certain praxis that was fitting for that specific time and place. With the gospel as their first example of 'contextualization' of Christ's intention, they view it as the duty of every age to find the most fitting praxis that leads to Christ's intention in those particular circumstances.

Both Lindbeck and liberation theologians prioritize praxis, but they do so in a way that is fundamentally different from Milbank's. In fact, Milbank says, they prioritize a *concept* of a specific praxis which still is measured by a logically prior idea. Lindbeck and the liberation theologians do not recognize that formation of doctrine and of praxis, just like formation of an artist's idea, is not 'industrial' (to use our own word) but *creative* in nature. Against Lindbeck, Milbank holds that doctrinal formulation always changed church practice, rather than simply reaffirming something that was already implicitly present:[69] the formulation of doctrine is creative in nature. Against liberation theology, he claims that finding the right praxis is not a clear matter of 'scientific exegesis' but of creative imagination through which we hope that the Spirit of God acts.

Milbank's perspective thus differs from Lindbeck's and the liberation theologians' in that he claims that the Christian praxis is *not* fully anticipated by the gospels. The Christian praxis is always a creative and new interpretation of the historical (time- and place-bound) life of Jesus, not a weak copy of an ahistorical idea.[70] This reinterpretation is not carried out merely theoretically, but also in praxis. Just as it is a mistake to imagine a potter who has an idea in his mind which he then imposes on the clay, so too is it mistaken to imagine the church having a clear conception of the Kingdom of God which it then tries to impose upon its contemporary circumstances. Milbank says that it is *through creative praxis* that we develop the church and slowly discover what the Kingdom of God might mean.

We should point here to an interesting and illuminating concept in Milbank's ontology: that of 'non-identical repetition.' Traditionally, repetition is the copying of something 'original.' In this sense, the original has ontological priority over the copy, the cause over its effect. Every copy will of necessity be a degeneration, an unavoidable corruption of that what is prior. But from Kierkegaard Milbank learns the idea of 'non-identical

repetition.'[71] In this view, the copy is not of a lesser status than the original; rather, one might say that a copy *enables* its original to be truly original.[72] If we return to our example of Christ and Thérèse, we could say that she repeated Christ in a non-identical way. There is no need to posit any essential identity between Thérèse and Christ which guarantees that she is indeed a saint; rather, Milbank might say, the church relates the two analogously. This means: the church creatively discovers a harmony between the fundamental differences, and claims that, *in her unique way of being different* from Christ, Thérèse repeats him. She has thus, through her imitation of Christ, wrought something *new*, added a genuine innovation that was not pre-contained in Christ or in the gospel. And it was the church that creatively recognized this innovation as the creative work of God himself.

In this light, Milbank can say that making is the way in which human beings participate in God. Not through contemplation, as medieval mystics sought to do, but by being creative, by discriminating between good and evil, by discovering intentionality, harmony and proper goals in the world.[73] In this view, human understanding is not arrived at through 'internal' and individual contemplation, but it is a matter of *making,* i.e. acting and, only in the act, also thinking. Thus tradition is regarded not as blind loyalty to a past, but the ongoing creative process of moving toward an unknown, mystical goal. Hence when it comes to human creativity – whether in the form of an artistic potter who makes a vessel, in the form of Thérèse who tried to follow Christ, or in the form of language – it is impossible to draw any boundary between the natural and the supernatural.

We can now begin to understand how Milbank can uphold the postmodern conviction that our culture and language, our whole body of knowledge and religion is a human construction, without nihilistically inferring that this makes it worthless and arbitrary. The value of a culture can lie exactly in the fact that it was constructed by human beings, in the fact that it is the result of effortless attempts to construct itself as something beautiful. And as with all aesthetics, it is impossible to give merely rational arguments, but neither can one simply fideistically accept an aesthetic truth: one has to *grasp* it, one has to be convinced of the beauty of it.[74]

In this view, a culture does not possess truth by virtue of a certain amount of true knowledge; rather, it possesses truth by virtue of how it aesthetically orders the world. In order to understand what Milbank means when he speaks about an aesthetic ordering, we must now turn to the third element of Milbank's solution: his conception of harmony.

Harmony, Order, and Telos

We have seen how Milbank connects the concept of humanly created analogy with the concept of creativity that *transcends* human ideas. In doing so, he opens up a world that is constructed by human beings, without the implication that this amounts to arbitrariness. Creations, thoughts, and

other actions can now be understood as objectively preferable innovations, even though they cannot be logically deduced from one single principle.

We should note that the idea of 'innovations' here can have a double sense: innovations can be improvements in which the new is better than the old; but it can also mean simply that the new is *adding* to the old. We probably would not say that Thérèse is better than Christ, but we might say that her perfection *adds* to his perfection precisely by being different yet in harmony with it.

It is this consequence of Milbank's ontology that causes us to focus on Milbank's concept of harmony. Milbank's idea of harmony is closely related to the idea of *telos*, the idea that things have a historical or ontological purpose or end. In postmodern nihilism, the concept of a common *telos* has been abandoned; the only thing that can be conceived as a *telos* is every individual impulse or will. Conflicting ends simply keep competing with each other, so difference of ends implies absence of harmony.

In modernity, the relationship between different ends and the lack of harmony was less clear. We have already mentioned that political economics sometimes understood harmony as a temporal equilibrium between the various competing demands and available supply (for instance Adam Smith's hidden hand), and that liberalism thought of the law as ensuring order by restraining all too deviant wills. And then there was Hegel and, following in his footsteps, Marx, who saw the course of history as a dialectical process toward perfect harmony in which humanity will finally be free (philosophically, according to Hegel, and materially, according to Marx). In performing his postmodern critique, Milbank has exposed all these images of harmony as fundamentally oppressive, as allowing some unifying process to have forceful priority over the variety of reality. These modern images of harmony, Milbank has argued, are all based on the assumption that violence is inevitable. Harmony is therefore always a kind of compromise between the various ends; the common good for society always also violates certain individual wills.

Milbank says that the suggestion of primordial violence is not limited to modern ideas of harmony. Traces of it can already be found in antique philosophy. In fact, Milbank believes that the failure of the Greeks to account for true harmony is one of the roots of modern agonistic ontology, and it is helpful to briefly discuss his analysis.

Plato thought that the harmony of the *polis* was a true harmony that reflected the order in the *cosmos*. However, as Milbank points out, a *polis* was always a refuge from the natural tribal and familial violence outside the city walls. The peace of the *polis* could only be upheld by military guards standing at the gates. And even within the *polis*, disorder constantly loomed. The threat originated from the households. Every household, every *oikos* potentially endangered the *polis*. The *oikos* was a seedbed of irrational family ties and individual preferences, in which true justice could not be found.[75] Paradoxically, however, the *oikos* as a place of birth was also

necessary to sustain any *polis* over time. The peace of the *polis*, reflecting the rational and eternal order of the *cosmos*, was thus always of necessity compromised by irrational blood ties. A city could participate in eternal peace only by both trying to ignore the natural kinship and 'particularity' of its individual citizens and by pulling up walls against the natural *agon* outside; but at the same time it needed the *oikos* in order to survive over time.

In reaction, Aristotle tried to understand the concepts of justice and order as belonging more to the realm of the temporal and practical than the eternal. This made it easier for him to see harmony between the realm of the *oikos* and the realm of the *polis*. Familial and tribal harmony was now similar to political harmony: both involved practical reasoning, to ability to wisely and cunningly try to make the best out of a situation. Depending on the situation, Aristotle thought, harmony could assume many different forms and it often involved having to get one's hands dirty. But this practical harmony of the *oikos* and the *polis* was more difficult to relate to the perfect order of the *cosmos*.

Both Plato and Aristotle, Milbank concludes, were caught in an antinomy between eternal truths and earthly particular situations. They were apparently unable to think true, all-encompassing harmony, and they could not conceive of eternal harmony as something that was distributed without loss into different temporal forms. Difference was *always* understood as jeopardizing cosmic harmony. Modern ontological violence finds its roots in this ambivalence of Greek thought.[76]

As we have seen Milbank wishes to prioritize difference. He wants to acknowledge the unicity of every event and every particular, as being constitutive of one's identity. But he also wishes to combine it with an ontology of harmony, with a view on differential reality as capable of being perfectly and unreservedly harmonious. Hence, the question he poses to the Greek philosophers is: why should true harmony always necessarily be endangered by difference? Milbank finds another ontology in Christian theology (especially in the thought of Augustine and pseudo-Dionysius) which understands harmony not as a logical order, in which everything logically follows one principle, but rather as a preferable order in which everything *aesthetically* follows from a principle of love which is the triune God.[77]

Milbank's favorite metaphor for this kind of harmony is Baroque music. Drawing on Augustine's metaphor from *De Musica*, he argues that music is both harmonic and transitory. It evokes a sense of eternal beauty precisely in the temporal arrangements of the tones. In a way, every individual tone can be said to reflect the great musical harmony; but this is only possible precisely because this tone has its place in the harmony (the individual tone derives its meaning from the series).[78] Whenever there is a dissonant, the sense of harmony is temporarily disrupted. But while this inhibits the harmony for a short period, the dissonant is soon forgotten and has no effect on the development of the harmony. Moreover, especially in Baroque

music, what first sounds as a dissonant can be taken up in an even more complex harmony in which what appeared to be dissonance becomes a recurring theme.

This conception of harmony does not imply a 'logic' to which everything can be reduced. Harmony can be 'seen' or 'heard' or 'grasped,' but not logically explained, and in this perspective it is not a dialectical or rational but a fully aesthetic category. Finding harmony amid differences is not therefore a matter of proper reason, but is a creative act. This has immediate consequences for the concept of time. A musical arrangement of tones is open to the future, and precisely because musical harmony is not logical, one cannot predict how the music will unfold. Yet at the same time, the musical notes are not simply arbitrary: they are directed toward an aesthetic end (namely, a beautiful composition) which is not yet known to us and can only be revealed in the course of its unfolding. At the same time, therefore, the course of its unfolding *is* the *telos*. The ultimate *telos*, the end to which everything is finally oriented is not something that is still invisible and far away, but, Milbank says, it *is* the harmony.

But if harmony is creative and aesthetic rather than logical, how must we understand disharmony? Disorder can no longer be seen as the result of difference, as the consequence of different principles opposing each other. Milbank points here to Augustine's view on evil as *privatio*. Disorder, disharmony or evil is now no longer the inevitable opposition of something that resists harmony. Nothing conflicts *essentially* with harmony; but there may be a *lack* of harmonious order.

If we put this musical analogy to the test in history, we can see that it suggests a perspective that fully acknowledges the hallmarks of postmodernity: historicism and relativism. If history is like a musical piece, we can see that every new time is truly new, truly able to add something to the harmony which was not already pre-contained in what was before. But we can also see how such a view on history 'fits' the previous section in which human construction is understood as the interplay of the natural and the supernatural, of God and humankind. Human beings can co-create, are able to further the harmony of history; just as they are capable of losing track, to inhibit the harmony by their wrongdoings.[79] Every new just act fits into the harmony of justice, not by virtue of some underlying principle which can identify every just act, but by virtue of its being related *analogically* to the preceding harmony.

Milbank found this analogy of Baroque music in the work of Deleuze, one of the postmodern nihilists whom he both admires and contests. According to Milbank, Deleuze appreciates that in Baroque music, "dissonance and atonality are here 'held back' or 'not arrived at'."[80] In other words, Deleuze still sees disharmony as fulfilling an essential role in this music, as that which allows the music to be ultimately in harmony. Harmony in this view is the constant 'deferral' of the final truth of disorder, it could be said. Milbank disagrees, stating again that dissonance can always be resolved

in new, unexpected twists of Baroque harmony. For Milbank, this is not merely a musicological discussion. Is harmony only possible as the temporary delay of final disintegration into disharmony? If this were the case, disharmony or evil is essentially not a *privatio* but a real substance: it is necessary for harmony. Milbank makes an important comment in this regard:

> Between the nihilistic promotion of dissonance, of differences that clash or only accord through conflict, and the Baroque risk of a harmony stretched to the limits – the openness to musical grace – there remains an undecidability.[81]

This undecidability is typically an aesthetic undecidability, it could be said. Or, in Milbank's words: it amounts to non-provable belief.[82] There is no definite, logical response that can be offered, but there are arguments to give, stories to tell, and lives to live that can change someone's opinions on this subject, arguments that are 'aesthetic' or rhetorical, arguments that appeal to one's imagination.

As such, Milbank contrasts an ontology of harmony or peace with the modern and postmodern ontology of violence. It is possible, he argues, to understand harmony in such a way that it does not diminish but celebrate difference, precisely by putting difference in *order*. This understanding holds that difference can take the form of conflict or opposition, but this is never necessarily the case. Reality *can* be harmonious, even though we must admit that this harmony has often been tragically absent.

The Church

In the previous sections, we have seen that Milbank adopts and adapts a postmodern idiom. On the one hand, he seems to operate within the boundaries of what he calls postmodernism: he adheres to differential ontology and a radical historicism. On the other hand, he rejects what he considers postmodernism's most fundamental assumption, its voluntarist belief that everything strives for its own ideal and that, therefore, everything is in conflict with everything else. Using his concepts of analogy, creativity and harmony – the three elements that we have distinguished – Milbank has created his own version of a postmodern ontology in which difference can contribute to harmony rather than to conflict.

The ontological approach of Milbank should not obscure its practical meaning. Christianity, Milbank claims, in its *praxis* assumes a harmonious order. True, this order has *in theory* been declared "ontologically impossible"[83] by postmodern nihilism, and Milbank offers a *theoretical* alternative. But additionally, Milbank argues that it cannot be decided on a *theoretical* basis which of these two ontologies is true. Instead, only if human beings succeed in truly and convincingly turning the other cheek,

being humble, loving others, forgiving past errors, exerting pastoral oversight rather than legal rule, etc., could one be convinced to adhere to the alternative Christian ontology of peaceful harmony. That is why he writes:

> [T]he ontological question is only seriously posed and answered in practice, and only the practice of a tradition like Christianity can now assume all the traditional tasks of philosophy as metaphysics.[84]

Of course, Christianity does not deny that the world is full of violence, and neither does it believe that human beings are already living in a state of perfect peace. However, its practices always presume that true harmony is somehow possible. *Pace* the postmodern nihilists, Christianity does not presume that there is a superpower who supersedes all other powers, one supreme deity who violently takes away all otherness. Rather, in trying to imagine the Kingdom of God, that *altera civitas*, it tries to imagine how all conflicting desires, all people with different capabilities and needs, can be orchestrated into a beautiful harmony in which all creatures find their own true desirable goal in the common *telos*.

Nietzsche and his postmodernist followers attempt to deconstruct the Christian praxis by showing that its logic of love is simply an antagonistic trick to hide the underlying violence. Milbank argues that this attempt fails precisely because Christian harmony is ultimately not grounded in the logic of love but in the aesthetics of love, in its "non-antagonistic social practice."[85] Christianity offers a different 'reading' of society, a "coding"[86] that is different from postmodernism, but it does not offer any 'foundationalist' argument for its truth. There is only one argument, Milbank says:

> [T]he story of the development of a tradition – for example, in the case of Christianity, a story of preachings, reflections, visions, speculations, journeyings, miracles, martyrdoms, vocations, marriages, icons painted and liturgies sung, as well as of intrigues, sins and warfare – really is the argument for the tradition (a perilous argument indeed, which may not prove persuasive at all).[87]

Hence, despite the fact that Milbank has written an intellectual book on theory, reason, and ontology, in the end he points back to praxis. Milbank's harmonious order of beauty is not a celestial idea, always out of reach of the inhabitants of earth. It is a practical idea that is reflected in every instance where harmony is made available 'socially,' by acts of forgiveness, caring, love.

Milbank's Ideal Form of a Concrete Church

One might say that the picture sketched above is indeed a wonderful image of the church. But, evidently, it is not the way in which the church on

earth actually functions. No matter how often Milbank points to church *praxis*, his description of this praxis sounds like a very idealistic theoretical abstraction of concrete church praxis. At this point it would be helpful to see where his ideas lead him *concretely*. What type of church does Milbank's work suggest? What model of the church would best accord with his emphasis on the church as a society? What does his emphasis on concrete, local and historical reality mean in practice?

As we have seen, Milbank affords a major role to creative imagination. In the contingent sublunary community that is the church, the 'heavenly city' is constantly communally imagined, both in theology and in all of its practices. For Milbank, the imagined heavenly city as an eschatological reality is not simply the final goal, which lies in a distant future, but it is also the *way* of the church.[88] It is creative imagination that allows Christians to enact or envisage the heavenly city. This kind of creativity is not specifically theological, theoretical, or conceptual. In everything that the church does, it constantly must try to imagine what the outcomes of its actions are, and whether these are fitting for the greater glory of God. This is an imagination that takes the form of an artistic, practical imagination, a kind of *phronesis*, a sense of trying to do what needs to be done in the light of the gospel.[89]

For what must be done in the light of the gospel is not obvious. First of all, every circumstance and every time is different. But there is another important aspect that makes it difficult to know what must be done: the world does not freely recognize and accept the good that Christianity offers. Therefore, the church must somehow be in a state of 'resignation': it must accept that, even though the violence of the world will never be able to deliver any benefits, it must constantly deal with it. For example, the church can protest against the nihilism and the injustices of capitalism, but it still must deal with it. Of course, the church should try to become a "space where truly just economic exchanges occur,"[90] but even then, the church will also suffer the consequences of sin (and precisely as such echo God).[91]

In the midst of a world that is not itself the church and does not recognize the church, Milbank desires the church to be a "parochial existence of small local groups, constant adjacent mediations, plural membership of many different, inter-involved and overlapping corporations."[92] Three aspects are important here: the church must be small, local, and interrelated. Let us take a closer look at these three aspects.

To begin with, church communities should not be too big. Precisely in small communities, a 'pastoral rule' can prosper; that type of "governance that may not wish always to coerce its subjects, but can never leave them alone, because it expresses an ultimate concern for their total well-being and happiness."[93] Small communities can therefore more easily avoid the modern pitfalls of "legal formalization, rational instrumentalization, sovereign rule, economic contractualism."[94] In fact, Milbank here argues for subsidiarity, the idea in Catholic social teaching that emphasizes that decisions must be taken at the lowest possible level.

Small communities also tend to keep the material and the spiritual connected. Milbank rejects any fundamental distinction between the church and the world.[95] "[T]ending gardens, building bridges, sowing crops, caring for children"[96] are as much ecclesial activities as taking care of the poor or of souls. This is why Milbank simultaneously rejects contemporary liberation theology when it reduces all ecclesial activities to politics, and applauds its characteristic base communities in which "the lines between church and world, spiritual and secular are blurred, and relative independence and mutual nurture within small groups is pursued."[97] Smaller communities, then, are more likely to have very "hazy boundaries," in which the spiritual and the material remain inseparable and in which "social, spatial and temporal life" is a "continuum which shades off into infinity."[98]

Secondly, Milbank argues that the church consists not only of small communities, but small communities that are *local*. The notion of locality, of the church being bound by a concrete place, is an important feature that corresponds with Milbank's stress on concreteness and particularity. It is *place* rather than anything else that makes one church community different from another. Elsewhere, he writes:

> [T]he logic of parish organization is simply the logic of ecclesiology itself: the way for the Church to include all is to operate the cure of souls in such and such a specific area. Only pure geography encompasses all without exception. Equally, only the located place, situated round the buried bones of the martyrs, or even upon the site of obscure pagan anticipations of the coming of Christ, extends this embrace back into the mists of historical time and forward into a trusted future.[99]

Finally, Milbank wishes these communities to be related to each other. For Milbank, the "unity and inter-communion of Christians is not just a desirable appendage of Christian practice, but is itself at the very heart of the actuality of redemption,"[100] precisely because this practically demonstrates the harmony the church represents. Such a harmony cannot be forced oppressively, by a straightjacketing hierarchy, and therefore Milbank prefers a form of horizontal communion rather than a vertical, hierarchical one. This is not to say that Milbank's ontology would regard hierarchy as something inherently bad or violent,[101] but hierarchy should not be so rigid as to become a uniforming rather than harmonizing power.[102] Hierarchy should serve an educative, pedagogical goal rather than the top-down exercise of mere organizing power.[103]

In general, we might say that Milbank wants the church to consist of small local communities in which pastoral rule can be exercised over households; communities that are related more organically than structurally to each other, and this micro model should also be transferred to the macro level. He prefers dynamic hierarchies that serve a pedagogical goal to an

authoritarian hierarchy in which roles are fixed, and wants to balance (vertical) authority by (horizontal) synodality.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have followed Milbank in his endeavor to trace the secular from the early Middle Ages up to contemporary postmodernism as an embracing of the idea that the world is violent in nature. According to Milbank, this worldview is a reaction to the failure of Christianity to envisage the world as a place where different ends can be positioned in harmony; a harmony which itself is the common destiny of the world. Secular reason is thus a response to the loss of credibility of the church praxis that upheld this idea. The medieval church failed to make its idea of harmony credible through its deeds, and as such paved the way for cynicism and a more radical embrace of violence. But Milbank refuses to accept that this is a *fait accompli*, and turns again to the church. He believes that the church is still capable of offering another praxis, a praxis which shows in real life that harmony is possible and as such contradicts the nihilistic ontology.

At this point, we seem to have answered our initial questions. We wanted to know what problem underlay Milbank's turn to the church, what this turn involved, and in what way this turn solved the problem. We know now that the immediate problem which required a turn to the church is nihilism. Not only postmodern nihilism, although that is the most open and radical form there is. But Milbank believes that nihilism has – first latently and later manifestly – always silently been the foundation of secular reason. Or, at least, the major part of Western rationality generally assumed the nonexistence of a common good to which everything could be directed. This is so deeply entrenched in our modern culture that it has affected theology to the point where even theology itself *a priori* assumed an agonistic ontology that was in fact alien to the Christian praxis. In a way, then, it was the *accurate* postmodern diagnosis that modernity and in fact *every* rationality is always violent in nature that prompted Milbank to advocate in a turn to the church.

It is in what he labels 'Catholic theology,' from Augustine to Blondel, that Milbank finds a different kind of rationality which is not dialectical in nature, unlike the rationality as it has been envisaged from the Greek philosophers onward. This theology is not a strict and logical reasoning that starts from one single principle, but it offers an aesthetic way of harmonizing difference that starts from a loving God who is already difference within himself. This aesthetic reason is first and foremost a *practical* reason that is performed in the daily life of the church, and that is handed down from one generation to another the setting of examples, the telling of stories, and so on. But it can also take the form of an alternative ontology, as Milbank has explored and expounded it. The turn to the church thus implies adopting a different form of theological reasoning, a different ontology, and the acknowledgement that these forms of reasoning stem

from church praxis. Accordingly, it is a turn to the practices of local communities, rather than to a new model of ecclesiology.

Ultimately, Milbank's turn to the church solves the violence and nihilism implied by dialectical rationality, not by producing some rational argument against it, but by engaging in what could be called an *aesthetic praxis* against it. The Christian way of life should contradict the nihilist assumptions of secular reason precisely in the beauty of its performance, and in the end it questions dialectical rationality itself. By pointing to this possibility of countering nihilism, Milbank seems to offer a way out of the captivity of theology, thereby reclaiming a theological self-esteem and creativity in service to the church.

Notes

1 John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). A second edition appeared in 2006 (Oxford: Blackwell), with some minor modifications and a preface in which Milbank reflects on the reception of the first edition. Quotations and references in this study are to the first edition unless stated otherwise. The work will be abbreviated as TST.
2 John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward, eds., *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).
3 His more recent work consciously intends to reprise and further the argument. See John Milbank, *Beyond Secular Order: The Representation of Being and the Representation of the People* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), together with its planned sequel *On Divine Government*.
4 Margaret Thatcher, "Speech to General Assembly of the Church of Scotland," Margaret Thatcher Foundation, May 21, 1988, https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107246.
5 Liza Filby, "God and Mrs Thatcher: Religion and Politics in 1980s Britain" (dissertation, 2010), 15, 70–71.
6 See Liza Filby, "God and Mrs Thatcher," 133–134. Also: Malcolm Brown and Jonathan Chaplin, *Anglican Social Theology Today* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), 9–11.
7 TST, 1.
8 TST, 16.
9 TST, 16.
10 TST, 14.
11 See Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology.*
12 TST, 15.
13 TST, 16.
14 TST, 14.
15 TST, 9.
16 TST, 37.
17 TST, 15.
18 TST, 16.
19 TST, 17.
20 A few examples: TST, 95 (on the rise of canon law in the Middle Ages), 292 (on the decline of the earlier pastoral confessional practice and the rise of confession manuals, mainly under the influence of a still pagan-heroic Anglo-Saxon society), and in general terms, 381–382.

21 TST, 23.
22 TST, 139–140, 178–180.
23 TST, 295.
24 TST, second edition, "Preface to the second edition," xxii.
25 Or 'deconstruction,' which is essentially the same according to Milbank, 308.
26 TST, 280.
27 TST, 318–319.
28 TST, 282.
29 TST, 282.
30 TST, 260.
31 TST, 278.
32 TST, 51–143, see esp. 92–93.
33 TST, 147–203.
34 Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison: Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Plon, 1961).
35 TST, 280–281.
36 TST, 261, 287–288.
37 TST, 281.
38 TST, 260.
39 TST, 276.
40 TST, 280–294.
41 TST, 296–302.
42 TST, 300.
43 TST, 302.
44 TST, 302.
45 TST, 299.
46 TST, 314.
47 TST, 397.
48 TST, 313–321.
49 TST, 292, see also 98.
50 TST, 310–311.
51 TST, 289.
52 The following section in fact offers the basic introduction to metaphysics that I would have needed to be able to immediately grasp what Milbank tries to explain in the form of scattered remarks throughout the book and especially on TST, 303–305. I do not claim that this introduction is historically or philosophically fully adequate; I believe, however, that it offers enough information to understand Milbank's argument.
53 Milbank seems to follow the classical Thomistic interpretation that the analogy tries to say something about the world 'out there,' it reveals an ontological relation. However, some authors argue that this classic Thomistic position in fact misrepresents Thomas; cf. Ralph McInerny, *Aquinas and Analogy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 152.
54 TST, 303.
55 TST, 303.
56 TST, 304. Neoplatonistically speaking, difference is a lesser form or lower 'emanation' of the One. Milbank prefers the trinitarian theologies of Augustine and Dionysius who, he says "went further by situating the infinite emanation of difference within the Godhead itself." TST, 426–427.
57 TST, 426–427.
58 TST, 304.
59 TST, 305.
60 TST, 430.

61 Those who accuse Milbank of fideism fail to see that he does not pit faith against reason, but puts *praxis* above theory. Cf. Matthew Sharpe, "'In the Beginning Was… the Story'? On Secularization, Narrative and Nominalisms," in *Secularisations and Their Debates: Perspectives on the Return of Religion in the Contemporary West*, ed. Matthew Sharpe and Dylan Nickelson (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2013), esp. 125.
62 In fact, the view of imposing an idea on matter is discussed in the context of antique Aristotelian thought on page 355. However, for our purposes, it is fitting for a description of Milbank's view on secular making in general. See also TST, 40–42.
63 TST, 34.
64 TST, 251.
65 On the identity of making and doing, see TST, 356.
66 TST, 210. Milbank's source is: Maurice Blondel, *Action (1893): Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*, trans. Oliva Blanchette (Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1984), 371.
67 TST, 387.
68 TST, 237.
69 On the radical innovation of the doctrine of incarnation, see TST, 384.
70 Milbank calls this idea the "ahistorical, gnostic Christ," TST, 387.
71 Milbank refers to: Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).
72 See TST, 295; 309; and esp. 354 on a 'reversed Platonism.'
73 I am indebted to Wolter Huttinga for clearly pointing out the parallel between Milbank's making and traditional contemplation: Wolter Huttinga, *Participation and Communicability: Herman Bavinck and John Milbank on the Relation between God and the World*, PhD diss., Theologische Universiteit van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Kampen), 2014 (Amsterdam: Buijten en Schipperheijn, 2014), 164.
74 TST, 430. Also TST, second edition, "Preface to the second edition," xvi.
75 TST, 368.
76 TST, 332–376.
77 TST, 428.
78 TST, 404.
79 TST, 431.
80 TST, 429. Milbank refers to: Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli: Leibniz et le Baroque* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1988), 164–189.
81 TST, 429.
82 TST, 381.
83 TST, 16.
84 TST, 217.
85 TST, 398.
86 TST, 304.
87 TST, second edition, 349. The first edition omits "reflections, visions, speculations," TST, 347.
88 TST, 431.
89 TST, 359–362.
90 TST, 422.
91 TST, 422.
92 TST, 408.
93 TST, 292.
94 TST, 16.
95 TST, 17.

96 TST, 407.
97 TST, 408.
98 TST, 408.
99 John Milbank, *The Future of Love*, 273.
100 TST, 403.
101 See TST, 429.
102 TST, 407.
103 TST, 199.

2 Stanley Hauerwas and the Witness of the Church

Milbank's intellectual effort to countering secular reason helps theology to recover the sense that Christianity is not a theory, but first and foremost an aesthetic *praxis*. The American theologian Stanley Hauerwas (1940) claims something similar, by saying that Christianity is not a position to defend, but a way of living; a way of living through which one's character might be formed.

As a virtue ethicist in the tradition of Alasdair MacIntyre, Hauerwas strongly emphasizes the importance of traditioned practices, of character formation, and of a community in which such virtues can be acquired. But he uses this approach to his theological advantage: according to him, Christians are called to be a particular community. A community that forms believers into virtuous, patient characters who practice a nonviolent 'cross-bearing' life. This is the lens through which Hauerwas is able to recover the fundamentally practical nature of the church.

His early works already express this stance, most notably *The Peaceable Kingdom*[1] (1983). But it was in 2000 and 2001, just before *Time Magazine* declared him "America's best theologian,"[2] that he delivered the prestigious *Gifford Lectures* in which he most fundamentally clarified this emphasis on the church. These lectures, which he had been preparing for four years, were published under the title *With the Grain of the Universe*.[3] In this chapter, we will focus on this work in order to ask why and how Hauerwas' turn to the church took place.

Introduction to *With the Grain of the Universe*

When Hauerwas delivered his *Gifford Lectures* at St. Andrews in Scotland in 2001, he had already for quite some time made a 'turn to the church.' The first clear appearance of such a turn can be found in his introduction to Christian ethics, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, published back in 1983. *The Peaceable Kingdom* claims that any ethics, and especially Christian ethics, if it is not to distort the nature of moral experience, needs a community to form characters. In other words, Christian ethics presupposes a church.

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This central role of the church was virtually absent in his earliest work, his published dissertation *Character and the Christian Life*.[4] Much happened between *Character and the Christian Life* and *The Peaceable Kingdom*: he encountered the writings of the Mennonite scholar Yoder, read MacIntyre's groundbreaking *After Virtue*, and became thoroughly influenced by the Catholic ecclesial atmosphere at Notre Dame where he taught moral theology. Effectively, those years at Notre Dame made him discover the church, both personally and academically. The "centrality of a particular community called the church" has remained a feature of his work since then, and *The Peaceable Kingdom* continues to be the foundation of his thought.[5]

Nevertheless, his *Gifford Lectures* are a better source for our research. We are not primarily concerned with the origins of the turn to the church in Hauerwas' life, but want to gain an understanding of what the turn to the church in contemporary theology is. This is a systematic question, and his *Gifford Lectures*, collected and annotated in *With the Grain of the Universe*, offer us exactly what our research is looking for: a systematic argument for a turn to the church.

Characterizing this work as a 'systematic argument' could give the impression of a carefully developed argument for the turn to the church. Hauerwas himself claims that he is telling a story in which he hopes an argument can be found. And indeed, Hauerwas tells a story in the sense that he sketches a very broad development from William James to Reinhold Niebuhr and onward. But it is also true that Hauerwas' narrative powers sometimes inhibit the exposition of his argument. This makes it easy to read *With the Grain of the Universe*, to be enthusiastic about its striking one-liners and lucid remarks, and still to miss the main thesis of the work.

Yet despite the absence of one clear line of thought, Hauerwas offers an argument, and, as we will see, a pretty consistent one too. I will therefore treat this work as an argument in the following sections. My aim is first to simply summarize this argument, to ignore what is not immediately related to this argument, and wherever Hauerwas is unclear press harder to understand what he means.

Hauerwas' Diagnosis

The *Gifford Lectures* are a series of lectures by a variety of speakers held annually at various universities across Scotland, and are meant to promote the study of 'natural theology.' Now, the promotion of natural theology is not something Hauerwas is particularly well-known for. In fact, Hauerwas would be the last person to defend any form of neutral, universal knowledge of God without recourse to revelation. At the same time, the *Gifford Lectures* have a strong tradition of speakers questioning the whole project of natural theology; suffice it to say that Karl Barth, who delivered the most famous criticism of natural theology, was one of the past speakers (1937–1938).

We will see in the following sections that Hauerwas also criticizes the very idea of natural theology that he was asked to promote. By trying to secure the truth of theology, he claims, natural theology has erroneously treated the truth of Christianity as *philosophical position*. By discussing the works of three past famous Gifford lecturers, James, Niebuhr, and Barth, Hauerwas argues that Christianity is not a position that can be philosophically defended because Christianity is unintelligible without a specific ecclesial praxis in which the conditions for knowing God are present.

The Domestication of Christianity in Liberal Societies

Hauerwas begins *With the Grain of the Universe* with a discussion of Lord Gifford's view on natural theology. In his last will, Lord Gifford stated that he wanted science to attain certain knowledge of God. Hauerwas points out that Gifford did this out of concern for the fate of theology. He attempted to secure the value of theology at a time where Christianity was becoming more and more invisible. Yet Hauerwas argues that this was a *misplaced* attempt.

Hauerwas argues that the rise of natural theology has everything to do with the history of modernity. Modernity, Hauerwas claims, rests upon the conviction that humanity has "something in common more determinative than our particularistic convictions about God,"[6] namely reason. This idea of a universal rationality enabled Western societies to cope peacefully with religious pluralism. However, once it was assumed that this more determinative truth is in principle accessible to anyone (rather than only to those who have acquired wisdom), it was a small step to arguing that this new epistemological principle should be used to secure the truth of Christianity. The content of faith now became no more than the result of prior metaphysical inquiry.[7] In other words, in modernity, Christianity is understood as a set of convictions or a 'position' rather than a way of life.

The project of natural theology is a prime example of such a modern reduction of Christianity. It rids it off its emphasis on moral transformation and its need for radical witness to acquire true wisdom and turns Christianity into a provable philosophical position. This is problematic, says Hauerwas: when epistemological questions regarding the truth of Christianity are given priority over the *content* of its truth, the effect is *domestication*. Christianity is not able to perform its critical role in society anymore, and is reduced to a set of beliefs about the world that must fit in a larger pre-given cultural framework.

We can better understand Hauerwas if we take a closer look at the American context. As is generally known, the public and political sphere in the United States has a very particular religious dimension, which has been famously described by Robert Bellah as 'civil religion.' This civil religion allows US Presidents to speak about God and pray in public – or even sing 'Amazing Grace' – but not to mention, for example, that God is the Father of Jesus Christ. The latter doctrine is not considered to have any public

function but to be of private importance only. In Bellah's words, the symbols of American civil religion are "Christian without having anything to do with the Christian church."[8]

On a sociological level, this seems to result in the unique way in which American people identify themselves as Christian. Up to recently, empirical studies based on surveys recurrently suggested that church attendance is in decline in Europe, but stagnant in America, and stable around 40%. However, a remarkable survey carried out in 2011 used time diaries over a range of time. It found that actual church attendance is similar to that in Italy – around 25% – and is similarly in decline. Apparently, US and Canadian citizens are far more likely to exaggerate their attendance to surveyors, and the survey concludes that "American religiosity as an outlier is a concept that may be better applied to identity and self-concept rather than behavior."[9] In other words, when Americans say that they attend church regularly, they want to communicate not their actual church attendance but the fact that being Christian is very important to them. Similarly, when Americans personally strongly identify themselves as Christian, it is often "without having anything to do with the Christian church."

This cultural background sheds some light on Hauerwas' remarks about the domestication of Christianity. American religiosity presumes that being Christian is the same as self-identifying as such, whether or not one behaves in a Christian way. *With the Grain of the Universe* can therefore primarily be understood as a book that directly opposes American religion because this actively interprets Christianity as a *position*, so to speak. In this light, it also makes perfect sense that Hauerwas discusses about William James and Reinhold Niebuhr, both of whom greatly influenced public religious discourse in America, and who, Hauerwas says, "offer accounts of religion and Christianity, respectively, that make the existence of the church accidental to Christianity."[10] On the contrary, Hauerwas wants to argue that Christianity cannot be understood without church praxis.

This is the problem that Hauerwas attempts to solve: the domestication of Christianity in America and modern societies in general. From the very start, Hauerwas is clear in what direction he seeks to find his solution: by moving the church from the periphery of Christianity back to its heart. In the following sections, we will see that this 'turn to the church' for Hauerwas has everything to do with the word 'witness' and also with Karl Barth. Before we address Hauerwas' solution, however, we must look at his account of James and Niebuhr. In discussing their influence, especially by asking why their views were so attractive to so many, Hauerwas tries to deepen his analysis of the problem.

William James, Liberalism, and Religion

In the second and third chapter of *With the Grain of the Universe*, Stanley Hauerwas reads and comments on the work of William James and especially

on his famous *Gifford Lectures*: *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It is a kind and sympathetic reading of James, even if it is ultimately also rather critical. Hauerwas defends James against some common misinterpretations, and he states that he appreciates the fact that James tried to salvage religion for the 'average man' against the scientific elites.[11] Hauerwas equally recognizes his own sensitivity in James' work that character formation is needed in order to be able to understand certain theological claims. Yet, Hauerwas also exposes a hidden presumption in James' work that traditional Christianity is incompatible with modern democracy. The question why this substantial aspect of James' thought is not commonly acknowledged will occupy us in our next section.

Discussing *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Hauerwas shows that William James refused to contribute to the Gifford project of natural theology in which scientific explanations were expected to offer the feeling of significance that religion previously provided. On the contrary, influenced by Darwinism, James held that mere natural sciences could not describe human beings as more than accidental, arbitrary consequences of an aimless universe. James argued that the feeling of human significance could be found not in science or natural theology, but in religious *experience*: experience itself points human beings to the recognition that their lives ultimately matter. Religion, built on this experience, is able to offer us another source of knowledge "crucial for discovering the way the world is."[12]

Now James, says Hauerwas, did not intend to escape from the empiricism of the natural sciences. Rather, he argued for the validity of religion precisely because he believes in the empirical 'fact' of our religious experience. In fact, sometimes faith is necessary to be able to see the deepest truths about our lives. Our human condition is such (and this can be empirically shown, James holds) that we find ourselves forced to acknowledge religious truth. Morality is only one example: we human beings simply cannot *not* perceive the world as moral.[13] This is James' famous 'will to believe': "not some irrational effort on our part to make the world what it is not, but the rational acknowledgment that we are part of that which makes the world what it is."[14]

According to Hauerwas, William James here struck a chord that resonates with modern readers even to this day. Modern people are sensitive to the existential feeling that they are in the end merely arbitrary and meaningless beings in a disordered world. James wants to overcome this feeling of insignificance, not by denying the modern naturalist view of the world, but by pointing out the persistent validity and legitimacy of our religious experience. "Even in a world of chance, we matter."[15]

As sensitive as James was to the modern attitude to life, Hauerwas says, he lacked similar sensitivity to Christianity. To begin with, James did not conceive of himself as a Christian in any traditional sense; he believed neither in theism nor in a Creator God or the createdness of human beings.[16] Even more importantly, Hauerwas says, James's knowledge of Christianity

was minimal and even “rather crude.” It never “extended much beyond the limits of New England” where a “desiccated Calvinism” was thriving.[17] Whenever James speaks about Christianity, he seems to have only this rigid and legalistic puritanism in mind.

This lack of knowledge, Hauerwas argues, allowed James to take a highly reductionist stance toward religion in general, even if James thought that his pragmatist method would *prevent* a reductionist view on religion. James did not set out to find a hidden essence in Christianity and reduce everything else to it but simply wanted to look at religion and ask whether certain ideas have practical meaning. It was not some fundamental principle, he thought, but simply this pragmatic outlook that made him distinguish between essential beliefs and ‘over-beliefs,’ beliefs that are non-essential for actual life. For example, James believed that prayer is at the heart of Christianity and religion in general,[18] but he characterizes ideas such as the Trinity, Christ, etcetera, as over-beliefs; unnecessary theoretical ideas that do not essentially change religious praxis.[19] Hauerwas quotes James speaking about the attributes of God:

> I cannot conceive of its being of the smallest consequence to us religiously that any one of them should be true. Pray, what specific act can I perform in order to adapt myself the better to God’s simplicity? Or how does it assist me to plan my behavior, to know that his happiness is absolutely complete?[20]

In itself, there is nothing reductionist in distinguishing between beliefs that have pragmatic significance and those that have not, and Hauerwas in fact finds this pragmatic method an interesting way of looking at religious meaning. However, Hauerwas points out that the idea of ‘pragmatic significance’ itself can be applied in various ways. For James, it seems to mean that ideas are over-beliefs if they do not immediately stem from or point to religious feeling. Therefore, according to James, the notion of forgiveness is essential to religion, while belief in Christ is a non-essential over-belief. But, says Hauerwas, Christians could just as easily say that what God has done in Christ has immediate pragmatic consequences, namely that they are forgiven.[21] We could summarize Hauerwas’ critique as follows: James is able to separate the feeling of forgiveness from Christ, not because of his pragmatism, but because of his *a priori* reductive account of Christianity and religion in general as being essentially about ‘feeling.’

This raises the question as to why James felt the need to do so. Hauerwas points to the fact that, even before James, a new liberal order was emerging that stressed the infinite possibilities of human individuals. One of the biggest protagonists of this ‘American dream’ was the so-called ‘transcendentalist’ Ralph Waldo Emerson, who firmly believed that traditional Christianity with its dogmas and institutions inhibited the sacred freedom of the individual. Christianity could only be salvaged in the shape of a kind

of romantic mysticism without any focus on doctrine, the person of Jesus, or other social constraints advanced by the church.[22]

As William James' own religiosity was heavily influenced by Emerson's, Hauerwas suggests that James' philosophy should be viewed as a contribution to the same Emersonian project.[23] In this view, James' philosophy offered the necessary theoretical legitimization to relegate traditional Christianity to the private domain of mere feeling.[24] James' pragmatist method enabled and encouraged the privatization of Christianity, which would ensure it no longer prevented individuals to spread their wings.[25] Hence, James was not only rescuing religion from a materialist worldview but also simultaneously reinterpreting it, allowing people to participate in a public life that favored the American idea of human individuals who have infinite possibilities while enabling them to remain Christian in their private lives.

According to Hauerwas, this interpretation can help to understand a number of complacent remarks that James made about Christianity. Despite James' sympathetic understanding for all various other forms of religious thought, "James does not extend the same sympathy to those who claimed and continue to claim that following Christ might require […] a sacrifice."[26] James was unsympathetic to many Christian doctrines, and believed that the Christian theistic concept of God was morally weak because it favored a juridical relationship (an echo of the 'dessicated Calvinism' which shaped his knowledge of Christianity) above a more intimate and individual mysticism. It seems, Hauerwas suggests, that James' biggest problem with Christianity was similar to Emerson's objection:

> What really bothered James was not that Christianity seemed to entail false views about the world, but that Christianity challenged the moral and political arrangements necessary to sustain the human project without God. James was profoundly right to see Christianity as the enemy of the world he hoped was being born.[27]

This brings James' true significance for Hauerwas' argument to the fore. Hauerwas' intention is not simply to expose the hitherto hidden reductionism in James' philosophy so as to acquire a better understanding of James. Rather, by linking James' reductionism to a broader cultural movement that viewed traditional Christianity and democracy as incompatible, Hauerwas shows that the reduction of Christianity that James performs serves the agenda of a new liberal social order. In other words, William James saves precisely those aspects of Christianity that do not interfere with this liberal order. We might take this argument further by saying that Hauerwas has revealed how James' philosophy effectively *domesticates* Christianity.

Reinhold Niebuhr and the End of Christian Culture

Hauerwas found that the thought of William James was built on the 'Emersonian' presumption that orthodox Christianity and the new liberal

social order were incompatible. His philosophy, especially his distinction between essential religious beliefs and over-beliefs, enabled American Christians to fully – even religiously – participate in public life as long as they held their typically Christian convictions private. There is a distinction at work here that is similar to the one that Bellah described 50 years later: a distinction between American civil religion, which is able to speak of 'essential religious beliefs' such as sacredness and God, and private religion which can speak of 'over-beliefs' such as Jesus and the church.

Hauerwas wonders how it is possible that William James, who was not a Christian, had such an impact on American Christianity, for, notwithstanding James' sympathetic account of religion in general; his own religious views were wide of the mark from an orthodox Christian point of view. To answer this question, Hauerwas discusses Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971) was a liberal protestant theologian who was influenced by James' pragmatism but simultaneously believed that the truths of orthodox Christianity still bore meaning today. In fact, he was convinced that these truths could be salvaged precisely through a kind of Jamesian pragmatism. But Hauerwas claims that by using James for a Christian agenda, Niebuhr brought a Trojan horse into theology. The question remains why Niebuhr was blind to the downsides of James' philosophy.

In *The Nature and Destiny of Man* but also in his other works, Niebuhr developed his own version of pragmatism, in which he tried to interpret theological convictions as having meaning precisely in their practical consequences. Hauerwas points out that this method fitted within the tradition in which Niebuhr was educated; the tradition of German liberal Protestantism in which scholars like Ernst Troeltsch viewed biblical narratives such as the creation story, or religious speech about God's providence, as myths that convey meaning even though they can be scientifically proven to be false.[28] Niebuhr believed that the meaning of these myths could be found most eminently by, as Hauerwas calls it, "plumbing them for their insights into the human condition."[29]

In other words, according to Niebuhr, Christian narratives were meaningful precisely as stories about the human condition. Hauerwas says that the particular way in which Niebuhr depicted this condition shows the great influence of James. Just as James, Niebuhr viewed the world primarily from a naturalistic perspective, trying there to find a space for morality and purpose.[30] And more importantly, Niebuhr adopted from James the conviction that religious beliefs had to be validated pragmatically.[31] Hauerwas provocatively summarizes this as follows:

> Like James [...] Niebuhr assumed [...] that theology was first and foremost an account of human existence. Niebuhr's project was not natural theology, if by that you mean the attempt to 'prove God'; rather, he sought to naturalize theological claims in a manner that

would make them acceptable to the scientific and political presuppositions of his day.[32]

Hauerwas gives a few examples of how Niebuhr in his *Gifford Lectures* tries to account for the continuing *practical* meaning of Christian doctrine. This is most clearly the case in Niebuhr's famous interpretation of sin. Sin or human evil, Niebuhr claimed, stems from anxiety, an anxiety that is inherent in our human nature. This anxiety is rooted in the fact that we are both finite and free, both animal and spirit who stands outside nature. Human beings are aware of the limitless possibilities of life, but also of death that will take us before we have tried them all. According to Niebuhr, it is possible to escape from this anxiety either by forgetting our finitude (for example, in pride) or our freedom (in sensuality). The orthodox Christian concept of sin, says Niebuhr, accordingly tells us something important about how our human condition suffers from a paradox.

Hauerwas praises Niebuhr for his sensitivity to how sin often works. But he also wonders whether Niebuhr has really succeeded in explaining why we need the Christian concept of sin. Niebuhr's pragmatism leads him to 'verify' that the Christian doctrine of sin means something in the light of the human condition. But, as Hauerwas points out, it is finally persuasive to modern people only because it denies that church formation is needed to be able to see the nature of sin and salvation in the proper light. In other words, knowledge of sin is now something perfectly accessible to everybody, without going through the hassle of going to church or having to believe certain credal statements. This is comforting news especially for 'people formed by a liberal social order' in which true church formation is no longer present.[33]

Hauerwas thus argues that Niebuhr's defense of orthodox doctrines – original sin, the two natures, the Trinity, and so on – finally proves to be incapable of saying more than we could already know through the kind of worldview that we acquire in the liberal schools and universities.[34] This leads Hauerwas to complain that Niebuhr tries to restate orthodox Christian theology in existential concepts but in doing so merely adapts Christian theology to modern presuppositions.

Niebuhr's ethics hits a similar nerve with Hauerwas. Niebuhr defends the law-like character of love: to him, love is the basic requirement of every relationship we have. But because of the always conflicting interests between our various relationships, says Niebuhr, we are never capable of perfectly fulfilling this law. We should therefore acknowledge the imperfection of our lives. Hauerwas points out that this sounds very Protestant: justification not through self-righteousness but by faith alone. Hauerwas would have preferred Niebuhr to have used this insight to plead for a transformation of heart, or something like that. But instead, Niebuhr argues that, as we are all imperfect, Christians should not think that they have a higher moral standard than others. This leads Hauerwas to conclude once again that Niebuhr

uses this idea of justification to subject Christians to the "liberal game of tolerance," by making them devaluate their own moral convictions.[35]

In Hauerwas' perspective, this is deadly criticism because it means of course that Niebuhr's theology essentially domesticates Christianity. His final verdict about Niebuhr's theology is correspondingly harsh:

> His theology sought to make Christian belief intelligible within the naturalistic presumptions that he thought were a prerequisite of modern science. His ethics sought to make Christian belief intelligible and even useful within the presuppositions of political liberalism.

We should, however, note something remarkable about Hauerwas' depiction of Niebuhr. Hauerwas is not sparing in his praise of Niebuhr. On the contrary, he lavishes praise on Niebuhr for his faith, his love for people, his intellect, and his pastoral abilities. This is important because Hauerwas thinks that precisely this offers a clue as to why Niebuhr was so influential in his days:

> Exactly because he was such a vital Christian believer, Niebuhr felt free to provide an account of our knowledge of God that seems little more than a pale theism. In short, Niebuhr's practice, his use of Christian speech, prevented him, as well as those influenced by him, from seeing that metaphysically his 'god' was nothing other than a Jamesian sense that 'there must be more.'[36]

This is what Hauerwas intended to demonstrate from the beginning: Niebuhr's theology required a specific culture to 'work.' Niebuhr's theology made sense only in a culture that was still Christian. Niebuhr and the other participants in that culture were unaware of the fact that their Christian practices were richer than their "naturalistic convictions should have allowed,"[37] and they could not see that their practices and their theologies rested on different, incompatible foundations.

The Christian culture within which Niebuhr still made sense is now gone, Hauerwas says. Nobody 'needs' Niebuhr any longer, nor any of the other Protestant liberals who tried to save Christian concepts for a modern world. Meanwhile, James remains attractive: "why go through Niebuhr's verbal gymnastics to save the 'symbols' of Christianity when James can give you everything Niebuhr wanted in a less confused way?"[38] The failure of Niebuhr's theology, Hauerwas believes, shows the final bankruptcy of Protestant liberalism in general. It worked only as long as Christian practices were still there. But now that these are gone, Christian theology needs an alternative to Protestant liberalism in order to survive.

A final but important question remains. What is so wrong about the liberal worldview that it meets with such fierce opposition by Hauerwas? Even if we accept his conviction that a liberal worldview is ultimately

incompatible with Christianity, we could still wonder why we should in fact opt for Christianity. Hauerwas does not directly raise this question in the lectures, although he suggests what he thinks is most problematic about liberalism. This suggestion is made in the context of his discussion of James' pragmatism. Hauerwas argues that James preferred pragmatism precisely because it enabled him to avoid conflict: rather than choosing sides in a fight about the truth, his pragmatic method seemed to offer neutral ground. Once, James compared the various conflicting particular convictions with different hotel rooms, and his pragmatic method with the hotel corridor. Hauerwas then writes:

> James assumed that the hotel corridor he imagined could be maintained nonviolently. Yet we have learned that no such corridor exists, even in universities. All corridors require patrols. Such patrols, particularly in universities, often claim to be nonviolent, and those who have been victors in the last war often claim to be on the side of 'peace.' To expose the arbitrary power that pretends to be nonviolent is no easy task.[39]

This reminds us immediately of a motif from Milbank: liberalism, notwithstanding its friendly and neutral appearance, is ultimately violent or manipulative in nature. We may conclude that at least in rough outline, Hauerwas agrees with Milbank in his view of liberal modernity. Liberalism is wrong because it systematically introduces a concealed violence into the foundation of our society.[40]

In short, then, the romance between liberalism and Christianity, illustrated in particular by Reinhold Niebuhr's use of William James, has in our days come to an end. It is only now that Christian culture has disappeared that we can see that it was meant to fail from the start: liberalism subtly but manipulatively domesticated Christianity, and thereby robbed it of its most fundamental convictions and practices. From now on, says Hauerwas, any "concordat with liberal social and political arrangements"[41] must be rejected, and Christian theology must find again its own proper speech. It must no longer accept any external epistemology, but rather remain truthful to its own praxis, which, as we shall soon discover, is *the church*.

Hauerwas' Solution

In the section above, we have seen that Hauerwas complains about the domestication of Christianity about the liberal attempt to make Christianity 'at home in the world.' In the beginning of his lectures, he describes this domestication as follows:

> As a result of the attempt to make Christianity anyone's fate, the truth that is God is assumed to be available to anyone, without moral transformation and spiritual guidance.[42]

By discussing James and then Niebuhr, Hauerwas shows that in the last century, it was increasingly believed to be possible to understand the truth of Christianity without recourse to any such ecclesial moral transformation or spiritual guidance. James believed, following Emerson, that traditional Christianity was ultimately incompatible with the new social order. Niebuhr thought that traditional Christianity could be understood as supporting this new social order. More so than James, Niebuhr appears to be blind to the fact that Christianity and the liberal order are incompatible. Hauerwas himself is clear about this incompatibility: the liberal order does not allow for any *particular* formation apart from the universal liberal formation of character.

Niebuhr's neo-orthodox attempt to restore the Christian faith in Jamesian terms was ultimately unable to persuade anyone not already immersed in Christian praxis, says Hauerwas. Therefore, Niebuhr has become the symbol of a "culture that has now passed."[43] The analysis of this failure convinces Hauerwas of the final bankruptcy of any theology that tries to reconcile Christianity and liberalism: Christianity needs another praxis, another formation, another order to sustain itself.

In between the lines, Hauerwas has already revealed a lot about the direction in which he looks to find a solution. Nowhere in his discussion of James and Niebuhr did he attack the idea of pragmatism itself – the idea that the meaning of religious convictions can be found in praxis – he only pointed out that James and Niebuhr gave a reductionist account of this praxis. Also, Hauerwas has repeatedly pointed out that James and Niebuhr rejected the idea that a certain kind of church formation is necessary to understand the practical meaning of religious convictions. In the following section, we will see that these lines enable Hauerwas to sketch the outline of a pragmatic theology that tries to account for formation in epistemology, or rather, of a theology that does not separate our epistemology from the way we have been formed through historical praxis.

Witness and Narrativity

Hauerwas uses James and Niebuhr to tell the story of how Protestant liberalism was unable to counter the domestication of Christianity in a liberal social order. In a similar vein, he uses Karl Barth to tell the story of how theology can overcome this domestication. In the following pages, we will leave aside his depiction of Barth, and move on immediately to the way he appropriates Barth. Central to this appropriation will be the notion of 'witness.'

His choice for Karl Barth is not surprising in the light of Hauerwas' opposition to liberal theology. At the same time, however, Barth is sometimes accused of having constructed a theology which is entirely self-referential: every concept derives its meaning from another concept in the same framework. Considering that Hauerwas wishes to argue for a pragmatic meaning

of theology and reject the idea that theology should occupy a position, Barth is an odd choice.[44] So how does Hauerwas read Barth?

To a certain extent, Hauerwas thinks that Barth has been misunderstood. For example, he notes that Reinhold Niebuhr, being a pragmatist, vehemently argued against Barth's theology and accused it of being unintelligible. Hauerwas argues that this is the result of a misinterpretation of Barth, and claims that these misinterpretations are prone to arise because Niebuhr and Barth "occupy different worlds." Hauerwas believes that Niebuhr was explicitly trying to operate within the boundaries of a liberal worldview, whereas Barth tried to break free from these. In fact, says Hauerwas, the main reason why Barth makes for difficult reading is that even Barth himself did not really understand what he was doing. Having been formed by the same philosophical background as Niebuhr, he ended up doing what had never been done before, and so Barth often seems to be groping in the dark.[45]

Hauerwas is not uncritical of Barth's theology. He wishes to focus on the historical and the practical, on the concrete way in which our characters are shaped in such a way that we can arrive at knowing God. Karl Barth, however, in emphasizing that our liberal formation is of no help in understanding God, seems to leave no room for any other formation that might help a person to acquire knowledge of God. Therefore, while Barth acknowledges that we need to be formed by the gospel, Hauerwas says he fails to account for the need for a concrete, embodied community that offers the prerequisites for the proper proclamation of the gospel.[46]

That said, Hauerwas is not interested in offering a complete analysis of Barth's theology. Instead, in the chapter called "The Witness That Was Karl Barth," he claims that Barth should be valued not for the precise content of his theology but for the way he did theology:

> In his life and in his work, Barth sought nothing other than to be a witness to God's reconciling and redeeming work in Jesus Christ. He therefore did not try to 'explain' the truth of what Christians believe about God and God's creation.[47]

The notion of 'witness' is important here, and this word is crucial to Hauerwas. But what does it mean? In the previous quote, he contrasts 'to be a witness' and 'to explain.' Hauerwas clearly takes the concept of 'being a witness' from Karl Barth himself, and it is illuminating to take a short look at the origins of this concept.

In the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics*, when discussing the vocation of the Christian,[48] Karl Barth asks what the most fundamental aspect of a Christian life is. He reviews various important aspects of the Christian life, such as every Christian's unique vocation and task in the world, which also involves a particular Christian ethics (which liberal Protestants regarded as the most fundamental aspect); strong attachment to Christ ("he is in Christ

and Christ in him"[49]); the aspect of being set apart from the world; being the recipient of grace, etcetera. All these characteristics are important and true, Barth acknowledges, but they are not satisfactory as a final denominator of the Christian life. His proposal then is to view the essence of the Christian life as *witnessing*. Just as a witness testifies to something that he or she has seen, so Christians testify to God's action in the world.

> Those who are called [...] are men to whom, in the event of their calling, He has made Himself known as this Emmanuel, whose eyes He has opened to Himself [...] He is concealed from the rest, from the majority, from all men normally and in themselves. His activity certainly takes place before their eyes and ears. But they do not see, nor hear, nor perceive. [...] The called [...] are shown it by God. Hence they are made by Him His witnesses, i.e., those who are not blind and deaf as His will is done, but are present with open eyes and ears.[50]

We should note that Barth speaks about sensory notions (seeing and hearing) rather than intellectual understanding. This is related to his strong rejection of any kind of 'propositional revelation' in which the intellectual content of revelation must be regarded as the most important element. Witnessing God is all about having seen God's *actions*, and testifying to these "in action and conduct, and then by word and speech."[51] At the same time, in Barth's theology, *action* is closely related to *being*: God makes us witnesses of His being *in his action*, and we witness with our own being and action. To put it bluntly, witnessing is not about doing isolated good deeds, but about actions that flow from our fundamental transformation into witnesses.

This all is very similar to Hauerwas' claim that Christianity is not a philosophical *position* that Christians have come to adopt, but it is a transformation of their whole life, their conduct as well as their intellect. Yet, the concept of witness carries an extra dimension: that of *narrative*. So when Hauerwas speaks about 'witness,' he immediately also uses terms such as 'story' or 'participation in revelation,' etcetera.

Hauerwas does not explain why the concept of 'witness' implies a focus on narrativity, but it is clear that, at least for him, this is automatically the case. This makes sense when we note that the witnessing described above is *responsive* in nature. Christians are *made* witnesses through divine action. God opens their eyes. But what do they see? They see that God opened their eyes, but they also see the things to which God opened their eyes: all the other divine actions that have taken place, from God's promise to Israel to the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, they see that God has been at work, from the moment of creation up to the very instant that their eyes were opened and they were made to be witnesses. As Hauerwas puts it "when we participate in God's revelation, we find ourselves involved in a story."[52]

Importantly, to witness is to tell what has happened. Clearly, it does not need to be a story that the witnesses themselves fully understand. This is

related to the claim made by Barth as well as by Hauerwas that the individual witness is always "part of the larger witness of the church."[53] The story to which individual Christians witness is not their own story. It is a story that is carried by the whole church, it is the "cause of the church" to witness (and not only verbally express) the story of God.[54] For Hauerwas, understanding that Christians are witnesses and understanding that the church is a witness amounts to understanding the primacy of narrative above the argumentative structure of theology.

There are still important questions that Barth has left unanswered, Hauerwas says. *How* is our life transformed? *How* does God make people into his witness? Before we turn to Hauerwas' own answer to that question, there is one further obstacle that must be discussed. Does this all not amount to irrationalism or fideism? If Christianity is not a philosophical position, does this not mean that intellectual understanding is no longer important? Is theology no longer a rational endeavor?

Pragmatism

Barth not only spoke about witness. As we have mentioned earlier, Hauerwas claims that Barth was a witness himself. This is so especially because of the typical method of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*: rather than first laying the foundations and then putting a theological building in place, *Church Dogmatics* attempts to *show*. It displays the language of faith by repeating it over and over from endlessly varying perspectives. Hauerwas claims that *Church Dogmatics* aims to achieve a practical rather than an intellectual effect. It is, he states, a "training manual for Christians, a manual that would instruct us that the habits of our speech must be disciplined by the God found in Jesus Christ."[55]

Witnessing is not a matter of disciplining one's speech alone. It also affects one's morality and intellect.[56] Hauerwas says: "Christian speech about God requires a transformation not only of speech itself but of the speaker."[57] Unlike offering a rational account of the truth of Christianity, witnessing is *displaying* something in order to challenge our common perception and our behavior. It is displaying what was first displayed to us.

This all may sound hopelessly irrational: as if anyone could stop being rational and from now on simply follow the words and actions of the church. But Hauerwas stresses that this is by no means an escape into irrationality. As an example of how this account can still be rational, he discusses Barth's concept of analogy, a typically metaphysical and thus seemingly rational idea, and claims that this is not *constitutive to* Barth's account of Christian speaking but *flows from* it. In other words:

> Barth's development of the analogia fidei was not an attempt to develop a theory or method of analogy based on prior metaphysical claims but an attempt to display the metaphysical claims intrinsic to theological

> speech. […] We speak, and in speaking we discover that we are caught up, together with that about which we speak, in an endeavor that must be described as 'metaphysical.'[58]

For our purposes, it is not necessary to understand Hauerwas' somewhat enigmatic discussion of Barth's concept of analogy perfectly.[59] Rather, it is important to note that Hauerwas is now able to clarify the difference between Barth's theology that *displays* the faith, and any theology (read: liberal theology) that simply tries to *explain*. Instead of molding the content of Christian revelation to the schemes of some pre-given modern metaphysics, Barth *witnesses* and in doing so discovers an alternative metaphysics. A metaphysics in which our universe is *not* closed and our existence is *not* ours: this is where Barth leaves behind the modern presumptions which James and Niebuhr held as undoubtedly true.

We might say that Hauerwas' point here is the following. He rejects the idea that there is a pre-given rationality to which faith must conform. Barth has shown that the language of faith can be *exhibited*, and that this does not lead to irrational fideism but to the discovery that the earlier rationality is not able to account for how the world *is* according to faith. Therefore, rather than lapsing into irrationalism, this kind of 'witnessing theology' is able to *transform* rationality, to propose new metaphysical schemes, and to suggest a whole different outlook to the world.

But if Hauerwas is right and truthful Christian speech is fundamentally different from liberal speech, simply *clarifying* Christian speech already counters modern epistemology with the human person as neutral spectator. If religious speech constitutes or presupposes a particular metaphysics, then the whole project of metaphysics as the science of being and the whole modern epistemology cannot dictate theology, but instead theology dictates metaphysics. In other words, our concepts must closely follow the way God has shown himself to us, rather than vice versa.

We can understand now why Hauerwas needs Barth: this German theologian offers him a 'method' of escaping from the liberal domestication of Christianity. If every metaphysical claim indeed rests on theological presumptions, we cannot objectively and generally argue how we must acquire knowledge of God. Instead, we must first know who God is before we can say how we can know him.

But we must ask whether this a convincing escape. At first glance, it appears to be a fideistic strategy: by simply declaring that theology alone is capable of defining truth about first principles, it closes itself off from arguments from other sciences. Barth himself has often been interpreted as such, as a 'revelational positivist,' which sounds much like another way to say he is a fideist. But the point that Hauerwas (and, according to him, Barth) wishes to make is not that theology should close itself off from other disciplines; rather, he wants to argue that knowledge of God is rooted in a way of life rather than in a theory.[60]

In short, Hauerwas finds in Barth a way of doing theology that is not restricted to a certain pre-given rationality. Moreover, this theology is not simply invented out of nowhere: it is built upon a praxis, upon a certain way of life. Whereas liberal theology lets metaphysics set the limits to what theology can say and then derives an ethics from it, Hauerwas wishes to turn this order of "epistemic priorities"[61] around: a certain praxis implies a certain theology, and this in turn implies a certain metaphysics.

As has been seen, James' pragmatism also in a way tried to turn epistemic priorities around. James' (and also Niebuhr's) pragmatism held that the truth of a religious conviction was its practical consequence. However, Hauerwas demonstrated that James' pragmatism had a hidden premise that ultimately leads to reductionism: the premise that valid practical consequences of religion must always be on the level of feeling. This was related to James' view on religion as something 'interior' and individual. Notwithstanding James' reductionism, Hauerwas thinks that a kind of pragmatism is a very helpful way of thinking about the meaning and truth of religion. To work, however, it must be built on an idea of religion that is not reductionist. For Hauerwas, this means that it must be built on an idea of religion that takes the praxis of Christianity seriously. And, as we have seen, in his version of this praxis, the concept of witness is crucial.

As we have seen, according to Hauerwas, the idea of witness suggests that Christians should not understand their religion as a philosophical position. Rather, being Christian has to do with participating in a story, with being transformed by having observed something. The idea of witness says something about the way that Christians *are* and *act*: they are and act in a way that suggests that they have been transformed by God. This is important: not theology or any other verbally expressed view on the world, but primarily the fundamental being of Christians implies that there is a God to whom everything is related.

This has far-reaching consequences. According to Hauerwas (and Barth), Christians see themselves as witnesses, as recipients of an event of redemption by the God of Israel that changed them fundamentally in their being and acting. Hauerwas thus believes that Christians in their being and acting carry a huge metaphysical implication. Their praxis means that the God of Israel, the creator of the earth, exists and is relevant also for anybody who is not a Christian. In Hauerwas' own words:

> For Christians [...] "witness" names the condition necessary to begin argument. To be a witness does not mean that Christians are in the business of calling attention to ourselves but that we witness to the One who has made our lives possible. Witness, at least the witness to which Christians are called, is, after all, about God and God's relation to all that is.[62]

It could be replied to Hauerwas that he cannot prove this claim. Why would anyone regard the very being of Christians as proof of God's existence? Clearly, this claim is completely unconvincing to anyone who is not a believer. But this is to miss the point that Hauerwas makes. His point is not *apologetic* but *epistemological*: it suggests that a merely philosophical argument about the existence of God overlooks the fact that Christianity *in its praxis* holds that certain people have access to a truth while others are blind to it. Therefore, this praxis *is* the rejection of any epistemology that presumes that truth is accessible to everybody.

In fact, Hauerwas believes that Christians will never ultimately be able to prove philosophically that God exists, precisely because if Christians were able to prove a god, this would not be the God that they believe has opened their eyes. On the other hand, he also believes that Christians will always ultimately be able to counter any future philosophical argument for the non-existence of God, simply because God does in fact exist.[63]

Hauerwas' point is not intended to rationally 'prove' anything, even if he sometimes confusingly speaks about proofs: "the proof of one's theology [...] must be made in the living."[64] Hauerwas instead wants to argue for a pragmatism that is sensitive to the metaphysical implications of Christian praxis, and his idea of 'witness' offers a direction in which Christian praxis can be understood on its own terms. He says:

> Christianity is unintelligible without witnesses, that is, without people whose practices exhibit their committed assent to a particular way of structuring the whole. That such witnesses exist, however, cannot and should not be sufficient to compel others to believe what Christians believe. Witnesses are not evidence; rather, they are people whose lives embody a totality of beliefs and, accordingly, make claims about "how the world is arranged." To understand what the church believes is to know what the world is like if these beliefs are true.[65]

This quote reveals an important aspect of Hauerwas' pragmatism: only the *totality of beliefs* can be said to have pragmatic meaning. It is not possible to claim, as James did, that over-beliefs (which he defined as beliefs that do not carry pragmatic meaning) are obsolete. Rather, says Hauerwas, some beliefs are pragmatically true only in relation to other beliefs, so that you cannot, for example, abstract the "Christian understanding of God" from "what it means to pray to Jesus."[66]

Pragmatism for Hauerwas is thus a name for his attempt to turn the 'epistemic priorities' around. It is a radical application of James' contention that the meaning and truth of religious convictions must be found in praxis. Hauerwas acknowledges that James was right. But he says that it is necessary to take the *totality* of religious convictions and find its meaning in the *totality* of religious praxis. This totality of religious praxis is not solely the whole individual, his or her being, feelings, and actions, but it

extends beyond him or her: individual believers can only be understood in the context of the story in which they find themselves placed. The story that is also the story of the church.

The Church as Epistemological Necessity

Hauerwas' pragmatism enables him to move beyond Barth. As we have seen, Hauerwas agrees with Barth that the church is no optional extra of Christianity. Both Barth and Hauerwas believe that individual witness is always "part of the larger witness of the church,"[67] and this is visible already in the title of his major work. But Barth, says Hauerwas, does not explicate the relationship between the church and the individual believer. He seems caught between two extremes: on the one hand, he wanted to argue that the church is Christ's body. On the other hand, he was very hesitant to consider the theological significance of the empirical aspects of the church.[68]

Hauerwas suggests that Barth was hesitant to do so because of the German Christian context in which he operated. Barth knew the possibility of apostasy: the church could stop being a witness, and this destabilizes any ecclesiology that wants to see Christ's body at work in a particular church.[69] According to Hauerwas, Barth also suffers from a "Zwinglian view of the sacraments" which inhibits him to "maintain the bond between the Spirit and particular church practices."[70]

Hauerwas does not argue for a more sacramental view and neither does he solve the question of the possibility of apostasy. Rather, he argues for another perspective. According to him, the church offers the pragmatic context in which the individual witness acquires meaning. This leads him to consider the epistemological importance of praxis, and therefore he understands the church as a "configuration of practices."[71] Hence, according to Hauerwas, the church is not only a sociological necessity, as a device to continue existing over time, but also first and foremost an *epistemological* necessity.[72] In his words:

> Creation and redemption constitute the story necessary for us to know who we are. Such knowledge comes only through the telling of this story.[73]

The church, as the telling of this story, is a praxis that gives Christianity its meaning and constitutes its truth. And even if Hauerwas does not spell this out, we can see how this somehow overcomes Barth's dichotomy. While Barth sharply distinguished between the theological concept of the church and the concrete church, Hauerwas is unable to separate them. To distinguish between Christ's body and any particular form of the church, it is necessary to separate the theoretical perspective and the practical perspective. But in Hauerwas' pragmatist thought, it is reductionism to consider the church as an empirical reality apart from its theological significance;

just as it is reductionism to view the theological significance while forgetting the particular shape of any particular church. The totality of belief, the whole theology of Christianity is meaningless if the praxis of the church is not considered and vice versa.

In short, Hauerwas has – through his discussion of Barth's work – argued that any metaphysical claim rests on theological presumptions. This has implications for our knowledge of God: we cannot objectively and generally argue how we must acquire knowledge of God; rather, we must first know who God is before we can say how we can know him. But Hauerwas goes further, inspired by a critical re-appropriation of James' pragmatism: theology is meaningless without the witness of the church. When asked what the meaning of a particular Christian conviction is, the answer ultimately has to be to point to the whole of the Christian narrative which in turn acquires its meaning in the praxis of the church.

Hauerwas' Ideal Form of a Concrete Church

We have seen that Hauerwas turns to the praxis of the church, precisely because his pragmatism forbids him to consider a theoretical ideal apart from its practical shape: this would render it meaningless. But Hauerwas is not only performing an epistemological exercise. Rather, he wants to argue that the church in the liberal age has far too often treated its own teachings precisely as that: as theory without practical meaning. His turn to church praxis is at the same time a *critique* of contemporary church praxis. So what is this church praxis that needs to be prioritized? Can it be it simply any church praxis? Does he provide an ideal?

To begin with, this church praxis is a form of *pacifism*. Hauerwas sometimes refers to the pacifism for which he is well-known in *With the Grain of the Universe* but does not give it a great deal of attention. I believe, however, that his idea of pacifism is in fact the ethical face of his main argument in *With the Grain of the Universe*. To understand this, we must see that Hauerwas' pacifism has nothing to do with a naive political theory that simply refraining from war means there will be peace. Hauerwas learned the notion of pacifism from the Mennonite theologian Yoder. Mennonites or Anabaptists are known to be conscientious objectors, but Hauerwas once said of them:

> "Pacifism" does not simply name their refusal to go to war, but rather is an aspect of their practice of resolving disputes and conflicts through confrontation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Put in a somewhat misleading fashion, the Mennonites made the Catholic practice of penance the character of their relation with one another and the world.[74]

This gives us a glimpse of what this pacifism for Hauerwas entails: it is primarily a *praxis* that tries to put the demands of the gospel into practice.

As such, Hauerwas can say that the Anabaptists, through their practice, *witness* to the meaning of non-violence.[75] This is not simply a nice way of combining his pacifist stance with his witness vocabulary, but rather, it shows that Hauerwas believes that we do not need a theory but we need *examples*. And not any ecclesial example will do: we need specific examples that witness to this pacifism that is, Hauerwas is convinced, at the heart of the gospel.

There is another, even more important aspect of the Anabaptist witness that answers Hauerwas' concerns. Where Niebuhr tried to salvage orthodox beliefs such as sin and atonement through existential categories, saying they carried meaning only insofar as they affected one's individual feeling, the Anabaptists show that these beliefs can impact a *communal* praxis. The Anabaptists, according to Hauerwas, have found a way to make the idea of 'forgiveness' central to their communal life. In doing so, they are able to discern the pragmatic meaning of forgiveness and thus they witness to the forgiveness of God.[76] Hauerwas discovered through the Anabaptists that the concepts of sin and forgiveness can have *political* meaning. It is a politics that Hauerwas describes as pacifism, but that – so much is now clear – extends far beyond a naive political optimism about questions of war and peace. This pacifism means not an individual retreat from political negotiation, but a very demanding communal exercise that seeks to actively discern and interfere in politics. Again, Hauerwas shows that it is far from being the case that 'anything goes' as long as it is a church praxis. A church praxis must be directed toward a discernment of the meaning of the gospel for today's circumstances. Here, in this communal endeavor to discern the gospel's meaning for today, lies the vocation of the church.

In short, Hauerwas' pacifism is thus the ethical face of a commitment to an evangelical non-violent praxis even when this sometimes is apparently irrational. 'Apparent irrationality' is of course no argument for Hauerwas, who resists the domestication of Christianity into any foreign rational scheme. "There is no standpoint external to the practice of Christianity for assessing the truth of Christian convictions,"[77] he reminds us, and it is precisely therefore that he is able to challenge the 'realistic' politics that was reinforced so strongly by Niebuhr's theology.

The praxis of the church that needs to be prioritized over theology thus has to do with *pacifism*, with practices that counter violence by being 'cross-bearing' in nature. This is related to another theme that strongly determines his view on church practice, which can be summed up in the word 'obedience.' This virtue is not among the most highly regarded virtues in modern societies, but it is needed to exercise precisely the kind of reconciliation practice that Hauerwas has observed in Anabaptist churches. Such a communal enterprise stands in strong opposition to James' individual religious feeling; Hauerwas' stress on communal discipline is only the other side of the coin of his emphasis on witness.

What this all means in practice can be seen in *Hannah's Child*, where he explains why he loved the Methodist congregation in Chapel Hill named 'Aldersgate.'

> There was absolutely nothing obviously impressive about Aldersgate. I think that is one of the reasons I liked it so much. This small church took responsibility for cooking the Sunday evening meal at the homeless shelter. This small church had three people called to the ministry. This small church studied and discussed for a year whether we should become a 'reconciling congregation,' that is, a church that welcomed gay people. This small church had a softball team on which our best player was a woman and on which I played. This small church observed the liturgical year and celebrated the Eucharist most Sundays. This small church had moved to a full Holy Week set of services.[78]

This shows us the praxis that Hauerwas has in mind when he thinks of a church: there is charity, there is communal discernment, there is a regular parish life, and there is a sense of liturgy.

But it also raises attention to the last characteristic of Hauerwas' ecclesiology that we need to mention: notwithstanding his catholic sensibilities, Hauerwas seems to presuppose a congregationalist church. When he speaks of a community, he always has a *local* community in mind. Hauerwas nowhere develops any idea of a supra-local church community. There is a vague sense of a global church and Hauerwas never opposes ideas of worldwide catholicity,[79] but he does not explain what this means for the form of the church, either theologically or practically. Clearly, his ideas on community, on mutual obedience, authority, reconciliation, and even his liturgical taste could offer fruitful ground for the development of a more supra-local ecclesiology that includes practices like pastoral oversight. As such, this remains an unnecessary lacuna in his ecclesiology.

To summarize these various reflections on Hauerwas' idea of a church, we can at least say that according to Hauerwas, a church is first of all a local community, related to God through its praxis. This communal praxis is characterized by forgiveness, mutual reconciliation, etcetera, and as such, it witnesses to its faith in God's love. Such a praxis requires hard work: it needs discipline embedded in traditions; it also needs strong and virtuous characters, people who through the years have been shaped precisely by this hard work and by these traditions. The church, as Hauerwas likes to see it, is a local congregation with a strong ethos, performing a countercultural praxis that is focused on peace, thereby opposing misdirected and violent trends in liberal society.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to closely examine Hauerwas' 'story' of *With the Grain of the Universe* in order to lay its argument bare. In doing so, we

have answered our research questions. We wanted to know what problem led Hauerwas to make a turn to the church, what this turn involved, and in what way this solved the problem.

The immediate occasion for Hauerwas to engage in a turn to the church is what he calls the domestication of Christianity by the liberal order. Hauerwas argues that Christianity is always in danger of being domesticated, of being used to sustain the contemporary social order rather than to witness to the radical life that Jesus exemplified. His concern is mainly about one very specific form of domestication: the modern effort to turn Christianity into a philosophical position that can be proven or disproven, without it demanding any moral transformation.

Hauerwas has shown how James and Niebuhr in their own ways both contributed to this domestication. The case of Niebuhr is especially instructive because Hauerwas believes it suggests that a certain kind of theology could for a short time 'prove' the relevance of Christianity in terms of its surrounding modern culture, but as soon as it was no longer supported by a truthful church praxis, it became a sign of the victory of the liberal social order, precisely showing the *irrelevance* of Christianity.

Theology must therefore turn to church praxis, says Hauerwas. The truth of the gospel must be shown not through sound, scientifically defensible modern theology, but through a praxis that reveals the meaning of the gospel. This does not amount to irrationalism; rather, it takes seriously the Jamesian demand that religious convictions should have pragmatic meaning. Yet, it does adapt James' pragmatism. First, by arguing that religious convictions cannot be singled out, but that instead the whole *narrative* must be valued pragmatically. Karl Barth plays an important role here in exposing the narrative character and inner coherence of Christian speech. And second, it gives pragmatism a more communal focus, giving space as such to communal notions of narrative, virtue, and traditions. This is where Hauerwas appropriates MacIntyre, but also the theology of Yoder and the example of the Anabaptists.

Hauerwas turns to church praxis as a reaction to the domestication of Christianity by the liberal democratic order. This liberal order presupposed that Christianity has meaning primarily for the individual and relegated or even completely dismissed its meaning for other areas of life. However, according to Hauerwas, a strong ecclesial praxis such as that of the pacifist Anabaptists reveals that Christianity in various ways is at odds with this liberal political order. Christianity, as performed in the praxis of the church, practically understands itself as a response to God's activity in the world, and it can therefore never accept the final primacy of the state, the market, the individual, or anything else. Hence, theology must turn to praxis: not to become an empirical science but to discover that the ultimate meaning of Christianity, if Christianity is to have any meaning at all, must be found in a particular – present or future – configuration of practices that is the church.

Notes

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3 Stanley Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology; Being the Gifford Lectures Delivered at the University of St. Andrews in 2001* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2001). In what follows, the work will be abbreviated as *WGU*.
4 Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975).
5 Stanley Hauerwas, *Hannah's Child: A Theologian's Memoir* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2010), 136.
6 WGU, 31.
7 WGU, 37.
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9 P.S. Brenner, "Exceptional Behavior or Exceptional Identity?: Overreporting of Church Attendance in the U.S.," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75, no. 1 (2011): 19–41.
10 WGU, 39.
11 WGU, 52.
12 WGU, 51.
13 WGU, 50–61.
14 WGU, 59.
15 WGU, 50.
16 WGU, 73–74.
17 WGU, 73.
18 WGU, 66.
19 WGU, 71.
20 WGU, 75; the reference is to James, *Varieties*, 370.
21 WGU, 72.
22 WGU, 81.
23 "Emerson founded this new American religion, but James, in rising to its defense, became its first theologian," 82.
24 WGU, 83.
25 WGU, 85.
26 WGU, 66.
27 WGU, 78–79.
28 WGU, 109–110.
29 WGU, 111.
30 WGU, 97–111.
31 WGU, 104.
32 WGU, 114–115.
33 WGU, 138.
34 WGU, 120.
35 WGU, 136.
36 WGU, 122.
37 WGU, 138.

38 WGU, 139.
39 WGU, 86.
40 Hauerwas believes that Milbank offers the metaphysics that his own project lacks, and also usually aligns himself with Milbank, except maybe on the topic of pacifism. Stanley Hauerwas, "Creation, Contingency, and Truthful Nonviolence: A Milbankian Reflection," in *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: WestviewPress, 1997), 188–189.
41 WGU, 139.
42 WGU, 36.
43 WGU, 96.
44 WGU, 206.
45 WGU, 144.
46 WGU, 145.
47 WGU, 146.
48 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, 3.2, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1962), §71.4, 554–576.
49 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, §71.4, 555.
50 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, §71.4, 575–576.
51 Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.2, §71.4, 575.
52 WGU, 191.
53 WGU, 199.
54 WGU, 199 n. 54.
55 WGU, 179.
56 WGU, 184.
57 WGU, 176.
58 WGU, 189.
59 Hauerwas tries to show that the doctrine of *analogia fidei* offered Barth the possibility to appreciate those kinds of 'natural theology' that were properly embedded in Christian speech, such as the famous five ways of St. Thomas. This allows him to drive home his argument that Barth is a natural theologian, worthy of serious consideration in the context of the *Gifford Lectures*. WGU, 158–167.
60 WGU, 190–191; 205–213.
61 WGU, 210. Hauerwas quotes Bruce Marshall using this term. Reference is to: Marshall, *Trinity and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 181.
62 WGU, 207.
63 WGU, 207–208.
64 WGU, 193.
65 WGU, 214. Hauerwas quotes Bruce Marshall, *Trinity and Truth*, 182.
66 WGU, 67. Hauerwas argues here that James was aware of this possibility but ultimately failed to take it into account. The whole quote: "That some ideas are true only in relation to other ideas is an extremely rich suggestion [of James], and it helps us see how, for example, the Christian understanding of God cannot be abstracted from what it means to pray to Jesus [...] My point is that on his own grounds James has no reason to dismiss theological claims simply because they seem to have no immediate pragmatic significance."
67 WGU, 199.
68 WGU, 192. Also 202.
69 WGU, 199 n. 56; 215.
70 WGU, 199 n. 55.

71 WGU, 192. The term is Joseph Mangina's and Hauerwas refers to him: Joseph Mangina, "Bearing the Marks of Jesus: The Church in the Economy of Salvation in Barth and Hauerwas," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2, no. 3 (1999), 278.
72 See WGU, 137.
73 WGU, 207.
74 "Why Truthfulness Requires Forgiveness: A Commencement Address for Graduates of a College of the Church of the Second Chance (1992)," *The Hauerwas Reader*, 307.
75 WGU, 225.
76 "Why Truthfulness Requires Forgiveness," *The Hauerwas Reader,* 311.
77 WGU, 231.
78 *Hannah's Child*, 221.
79 E.g. *Wilderness Wanderings: Probing Twentieth-century Theology and Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: WestviewPress, 1997), 185.

3 Nicholas M. Healy and the Dangers of Ecclesiocentrism

After our discussion of two influential figures of contemporary theology, we now turn to Nicholas M. Healy,[1] a less well-known but very interesting theologian for this study. For one, unlike Milbank and Hauerwas, Healy is a Roman Catholic and his work breathes a post-Vatican II spirit, especially in his depiction of the relation between the church and the world. More importantly, Nicholas Healy's theological contribution is more or less part of a 'second generation': he reacts to the turn to the church, tries to critically further it by systematizing and puts it into a broader perspective.

For our thesis, one of the more interesting features in the work of Nicholas Healy is his attentiveness to theological method and church critique. In *Church, World and a Christian Life*, published in 2000,[2] he rejects theologies that depend on overly abstract notions of a perfect church, and searches for ecclesiological methods that are better equipped to take the concrete and often messy praxis of the church into account. His argument has been quite well-received, particularly by a group of theologians who attempt to use ethnographic methods for congregational studies.[3] In this chapter, we will discuss *Church, World and a Christian Life*, again in order to discover what exactly is the problem that requires a turn to the church, what does this turn involve according to Healy, and how does it solve the diagnosed problem? In a short excursus, we will also investigate to what extent his more recent book *Hauerwas. A (Very) Critical Introduction*[4] might be helpful.

Introduction to *Church, World and the Christian Life*

Church, World and the Christian Life carries a subtitle: "A Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology." Contrary to Milbank and Hauerwas, who can be said to operate in the fields of metaphysics and ethics respectively, Healy explicitly wishes contribute to the theological locus of ecclesiology. Not necessarily by proposing a new theological understanding of the church, but by focusing on the methodology of ecclesiology. In his introduction, he explains that he wants to "clear a space within the discipline of theology for some new and more challenging forms of ecclesiology."[5]

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A change of methodology may not immediately sound challenging. But Healy adds that proposing a new methodology amounts to proposing a different perspective on the church, and that it is therefore a constructive endeavor as well. We will see that, despite Healy's focus on methodology, his main concern is in fact theological: there is a certain understanding of the church that he wishes to challenge, precisely by proposing an alternative ecclesiological method.

In the following sections, we will see that Healy accuses modern ecclesiology of spiritualizing the church too much, thereby inhibiting critical reflection on the concrete church. This spiritualizing tendency is closely linked to the method of systematic theology which, he will claim, often lacks empirical sensitivity. His methodological proposal tries to offer an alternative way in which ecclesiology is considered a practical rather than a systematic discipline, more related to ethnography than to fundamental theology. In general, he argues for an ecclesiology that is less prideful and humbler, less boastful about the abstract perfection of an idealized church and more accountable for its concrete sins.

Healy's Diagnosis

Ecclesial Pride

In the first chapter of his book, Healy points out that, according to Christianity, the church is unique. The church is considered to be distinctive and even in various ways superior to other communities, and this is not because of what the church is in itself but because of its unique relationship to God. Just think, for instance, of the common characterization of the church as the Body of Christ: the church is unique and superior because it alone has Christ as its head. However, Healy says, this superiority has often assumed problematic forms. For one, the Catholic Church has historically been unwilling to acknowledge its own sins: it accepts that its individual members commit sins, but contends that the church itself is sinless. This belief in the sinlessness of the church is closely linked to its superiority: how can the church sin, if it is the Body of Christ?[6]

Healy does not wish to challenge the uniqueness or the superiority; and he is aware of valid theological arguments that can be offered to sustain a language of the church as being without sin. For instance, he points to how Paul characterized the believers of Corinth as 'saints.' It is perfectly clear that Paul was not implying that these believers did not commit any sins; yet he claimed that in another very real sense, they were now no longer sinners. In a similar way, Healy says, the church can also be called sinless.[7] Yet, Healy observes that in much contemporary theological discussion of the church, this sinlessness of the church is treated in a very specific way that cannot theologically be justified: as an *essential perfection*. And this is particularly misleading:

> Claiming an essential perfection suggests too easily, to those within the church as well as to those looking on from the outside, that the church thinks there is something deep down within itself – something about who we are – that is worth at least a little bit of glorying.[8]

The church, when it contemplates its own superiority, may be tempted to forget that its superiority is derived from its unique relationship to Christ, and instead start to think that it merited its superiority itself. Such misplaced feelings of superiority may become visible, Healy says, in the form of "biblicism, triumphalism, or integralism, as well as in more subtle ways."[9] As such, the church may start to think that it has all the answers, or that it alone possesses all the necessary powers to save people. In such forms, Healy argues, ecclesial pride amounts to idolatry, because it draws attention to the church's own identity rather than to its relationship with God.

Against this idea of essential perfection, he places 'Paul's rule,' which he derives from Paul's letter to the Galatians: "Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).[10] This, Healy contends, must be the principle of every ecclesial self-understanding. Any good ecclesiology must conform to this rule, by making very clear that, first, it cannot boast in itself, and, second, it can only boast in its relationship with Jesus Christ crucified. Without reference to Christ crucified, the church can claim no perfection whatsoever.

Now it is clearly wrong to attribute to the church an 'essential perfection' without relating this in any way to Christ. And, certainly, there have been numerous occasions in history in which Christianity has fallen into this temptation. But is all theological language about the church's superiority really idolatrous? Is it not often presupposed, maybe only implicitly, that this superiority is finally fully dependent on Christ? Healy admits that this is often the case. But even without misplaced idolatrous pride, he says, a theologically valid emphasis upon ecclesial superiority may raise eyebrows from those outside the church. The church may truly be idolatrous, or it may only *appear* to be so. Whatever the case, says Healy, the church will end up appearing arrogant, thereby harming its witness to Christ.

In the next section, we will see that Healy does not simply want to apply 'Paul's rule' to distinguish between good and bad ecclesiology, but he wants to change the function of ecclesiology. Ecclesiology as the church's attempt at self-description should not simply offer a systematic exposition of the church, because even if this results in true statements about the church, it is not necessarily helpful to its witness. Rather, he wants ecclesiology to take the aspect of 'not boasting in anything' seriously by becoming a kind of communal introspection, a self-critical ecclesial practice that lays bare the church's corporate failures and weaknesses.[11] It is precisely by acknowledging all our individual and communal faults, Healy says, that we discover how our ecclesial superiority is truly grounded only in Christ crucified.[12] But as these are already steps toward a solution, we will return to them later.

First, we have to follow Healy in his diagnosis of why modern ecclesiology is unhelpful in the analysis of ecclesial mistakes. While Healy warns against an oversimplified rejection of modernity in general, he also argues that modern reason often prevents ecclesiology from performing its function properly. As he points out, modern ecclesiology has some very problematic methodological traits. He distinguishes five: the supermodel approach, the bipartite structure, a normative ecclesiology, an abstract ecclesiology, and an idealized ecclesiology.[13] For our purpose, these traits overlap too much to justify separate treatment, and therefore the following section will explicitly discuss only three of the five traits, so as to offer a rough outline of his critical description of the method of modern ecclesiology.

Systematizing the Church

Ecclesial Supermodels

Modern theology, Healy says, differs from premodern theology in that it generally prefers univocal language, favoring "linear and rigorously systematic"[14] argumentation. As a result, it often has a tendency to attempt to find a most basic principle, upon which a whole conceptual framework can be built. This is typically seen in modern ecclesiology, which often tends to turn a single metaphor of the church into a supermodel that structures the whole of our understanding. Following Avery Dulles, Healy shows that modern theologians have subsequently tried to understand the church primarily as a society, as a mystical body, as a sacrament, a herald, as communion, and so forth.[15]

According to Healy, there are inherent difficulties with this 'supermodel' approach. For one, it is difficult to decide precisely which model should be the most basic. Whereas, for instance, Jean-Marie Tillard described the essence of the church as 'communion,' Karl Barth argued that only 'Body of Christ' can adequately structure ecclesiology. Surely, every theologian has his or her own favorite metaphor, but there is a great lack of consensus as to which of these should serve as supermodel, structuring the whole of our thought about the church.

Furthermore, Healy contends, it is not clear why any theologian should even have to choose one model as the most basic model that governs all further ecclesiological reflection. This would certainly enable a more systematic account of the church. But is this a valid theological goal? Healy does not think so, and gives two arguments for this. To begin with, the New Testament authors do not favor one ecclesial model as logically prior to all the others. We cannot simply collect all the pieces of truth from Scripture and Tradition, and then

> piece the bits together into a set of doctrines and precepts and call the epic product, say, "The Definitive Ecclesiology" or "The Definitive

> Christian Morality." But to attempt to do this would be mistaken, in part because, as I noted earlier, the Scriptural witness to the truth is too rich and multifaceted to be mapped out into a single internally coherent and complete system, and in part because it is always situated by the Spirit within a particular ecclesiological context.[16]

According to Healy, the church has traditionally explicitly rejected any effort to deduce theology from one comprehensible single perspective, and the doctrine of the Trinity proves this. This central doctrine's function is clearly to systematize our thinking, but it does so without choosing one single conceptual account: in fact, it instructs us to think about God from multiple perspectives.

Should we then completely reject the use of models and simply abandon the notion of one core essence of the church? Healy does not think so, but suggests that instead, we should interpret them as rhetorical instruments, intended to kindle our imagination about the church. We may try to enforce a certain perspective by singling out one metaphor and making it more or less normative in a certain context. However, Healy says, we should always be sensitive to the fact that it is 'just' a perspective and that Scripture and tradition have not offered a multitude of other models for nothing.[17]

Bipartite Structure of the Abstract and the Concrete

A feature related to the quest for one ecclesiological supermodel is the general tendency of modern ecclesiologies to suggest a "bipartite structure of the church."[18]

> One of its aspects, the primary one, is spiritual and invisible, often described as the church's "true nature" or its "essence." The other aspect is the everyday, empirical reality of the church, its institutions and activities. The relation between the two aspects is often described by saying that the primary one "realizes" or "manifests" itself in the subsequent one, or that the visible church is the "expression" of its invisible aspect. Thus a genuine understanding of the expression is contingent upon a grasp of the basic, primary core.[19]

Modern ecclesiology, Healy argues, tends to focus on the abstract essence of the church, describing it in terms of perfection. If the church is thought of as being, in its most fundamental understanding, 'community,' – to name just one example –, it is precisely this basic and abstract metaphor that is partially realized or manifested or expressed in the concrete congregation.

Healy thinks that the modern quest for a proper description of the 'true nature' of the church can be helpful in some ways. As an example, he points to the fruitful ecumenical dialogue that has been enabled by ecclesiologies that suggest "that underneath concrete denominational differences there lies a

shared substratum of what is most essentially ecclesial."[20] It can also be helpful, he says, to understand that ecclesial sins are a *distortion* of the church's essence: such mistakes are a failure to realize the church's true nature. Or, in the case of Rahner, Healy understands that speaking of the church as a sacrament, signifying God's presence in the world, may be helpful to understand the world and the church as allies rather than opposites.[21]

However, this focus on abstract and idealized accounts of the churches misdirects the attention of the theologian away from everyday reality. Modern theology can easily attribute all kinds of characteristics to the church (sinlessness, being the Body of Christ, etcetera). But this comes at the cost of having to be extremely vague about how these attributes are related to concrete church praxis.

There is something in this analysis that resonates with John Milbank's aforementioned analysis of the relationship of the harmony of the *polis* with the harmony of the *cosmos*.[22] Milbank argued that both Plato and Aristotle, although they had different ideas about the relationship between eternal truth and particular situations, were caught in an antinomy between these two things. Either you conceive of social harmony in an idealized way, and fail to find this harmony in a pure form in the concrete city – Plato's option; or you can think about how harmony is always incomplete and always different, thereby giving up the pure ideal – Aristotle's option. Whatever the perspective, earthly harmony is always and of necessity compromised. It is interesting to keep in mind the question whether Healy with this emphasis on the daily reality of the concrete church, is opting simply for a more practical and less idealistic approach to ecclesiology, or whether he is suggesting a solution along Milbankian lines, where the antinomy between the eternal and the concrete is overcome by the creative imagination. This is important for our analysis of the turn to the church in general, because the antinomy and the notion that Christianity can supposedly overcome it is crucial to Milbank's understanding of the relationship between the concrete church and the eternal City of God, and therefore to his turn to the church.

Blueprint Ecclesiologies

The tendency to single out one church metaphor and the bipartite structure come together in the typical mode of modern ecclesiology, which Healy characterizes as 'blueprint ecclesiologies.' Such ecclesiologies abstractly and idealistically describe the nature of the church, often based on deduction from one single perspective, and claim a normative status for this description: whenever the concrete church does not fit the abstract description, it fails to reveal the true ecclesial essence and must therefore change.

Apart from the objections that we have already mentioned before, such as that there is no consensus on which church metaphor should be the principal one, or the more theological objection against deductive theology, Healy's main problem with this modern ecclesiological approach is that it is

simply not helpful for the church *in via*. Healy wants to maintain a proper distinction between the 'church militant' and the 'church triumphant,' not because they are ontologically unrelated, but for a pragmatic reason:

> The church in via has characteristics of its own that are quite different from the church triumphant and which prevent it from being described predominantly in terms of perfection. The pilgrim church is concrete in quite a different way from the heavenly church. It exists in a particular time and place, and is prone to error and sin as it struggles, often confusedly, on its way. If these characteristics are ignored, or relegated to a secondary concern, the temptation arises to set up false goals that cannot be realized, which may lead to depression for those who try to realize them, and cynicism in those who compare the ideal vision with the reality.[23]

Healy's opposition to blueprint ecclesiologies is ultimately not rooted in any theoretical objection. He simply claims that these ecclesiologies are insensitive to the everyday struggle of the church, and are therefore not helpful. Healy does not forbid theology to reflect on the heavenly church; he just believes that it is not helpful for the church *in via* to reflect theoretically on an abstract notion of the heavenly church.

In the following part of his book, Healy makes another, more subtle point. He claims that any ecclesiology is in fact a reaction to the ecclesial context, and gives Barth as an example, who focused up on the metaphor of the Body of Christ, thus putting the church onto a more Christocentric path; or Tillard who derived normative ecclesial proposals from his claim that 'communion' is the basic aspect of the church. Healy argues that both opted for their preferred metaphor not because of abstract speculative reasons, but because they believed that the church here and now *needed* to take this direction.[24] Their perception of what was needed was rooted, he says, in their theological imagination, formed by their personal life and character just as much as their evaluation of contemporary culture and their understanding of Christianity, etcetera. Their ecclesiology, notwithstanding the abstract blueprint-form that it finally took, was rooted in a much more complex process of contextual interpretation, and carried with it a practical agenda.

Healy even claims, more pertinently, that without knowing the ecclesial context, any particular church model will always be "surprisingly underdetermined."[25] As an example, he shows how the currently popular 'communion' ecclesiology seems to suggest that there is a consensus on the nature of the church. However, closer investigation shows that this communion ecclesiology serves a wide array of ecclesiological proposals: from orthodox to free church, from liberation to liberal ecclesiologies.[26] In fact, Healy argues that if all these theologians were to agree with each other on the fact that 'communion' offers a good model, we should start talking

about another subject in order to understand where their enormous differences come from.[27]

In a nutshell, Healy's argument goes like this. Modern ecclesiology tends to think of the church in terms of perfection, thereby abstracting from the actual praxis of the church. This perfect essence of the church, often expressed in a model, is then postulated as a theoretical ideal against which the concrete church can be judged. Such a blueprint description of the church suggests that it is eternally valid, but in fact it is built upon a contextual analysis and aims to advance a concrete agenda. It would therefore be far more transparent simply to disclose this contextual analysis and agenda. By doing so, theologians would resolve the artificial "disjunction between theoretical and practical reasoning"[28] and ecclesiology would again become a form of practical knowledge.

Healy thus fully accepts that ecclesiology makes normative claims about which direction the church should take. But while doing so, it must not deny or obscure its own situatedness. In the next section, we will see that Healy proposes a different ecclesiology that is not a theoretical form of reasoning, but is very practical, situated in the midst of the life of the church. But before we end our diagnosis, we must take a look at Healy's concepts of *epic* versus *dramatic* theology. He uses these concepts for a more or less similar goal, to distinguish between theoretical and practical theological reasoning.

Epic Theologies

Drawing on a distinction made by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Healy claims that modern ecclesiologies are often *epic* rather than *dramatic*. This distinction follows from Balthasar's famous analogy in which he described the relations between God, the world and the church in terms of a *play*. Healy suggests that plays can either be dramatic, following the perspective of a "participant in the drama, of one who lives entirely within the movement."[29] Or they can be epic, if the story is told from the perspective of an outsider to the story. According to Healy, an ecclesiology is epic when its style suggests an ahistorical vision of the church, as if the church can be grasped in its totality from a point of view outside time.

> The epic horizon can be seen especially in church documents, catechisms, and those large-scale systematic theologies in which the Christian life is laid out as a whole, as if nothing further needs to be done or known. By distancing itself from the confusions of the struggle, epic theology is able to develop a "tidy" account of Christian doctrine.[30]

Such an approach, Healy says, is not necessarily wrong. But there are certain risks involved. For instance, "it may assume, incorrectly, that the play runs along mechanically according to principles that can be known to us in advance of the action."[31] We can translate Healy's concern by saying that

an epic theology tends to offer a 'grand narrative,' which is insensitive to the struggle, lack of clarity and confusion that are inherent in day-to-day ecclesial life.

According to Healy, all modern theology tends toward the epic, precisely by its tendency to find an overarching narrative in the form of one principle from which the rest of theology is then deduced. Premodern forms of theology, however, reveal both epic and dramatic styles of theology, and Healy gives various examples. For instance, he understands Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* as a directly "anti-epic move" against Eusebius' epic church history, one which opts instead for a perspective on the church as remaining a pilgrim until the eschaton. And contradicting certain modern interpretations of Thomas Aquinas, Healy claims that Thomas also offers dramatic theology.[32]

Healy acknowledges that epic theology can be very useful. However, he is concerned that the strong epic tendencies in modern theology make it insensitive to "tensions inherent in our existence as Christians" and may "fail to recognize new developments" in history.[33] But his greatest concern is that in epic theology, the understanding of the nature and function of the concrete church is *structured* upon a prior understanding of the abstract church.[34] But it is harmful for any structure to be forced upon ecclesiology. In two chapters, he offers an extensive analysis of two epic approaches in contemporary theology: pluralism and inclusivism.[35] It is interesting to take a look at these as they offer examples of how, according to Healy, these are detrimental our understanding of the church.

Pluralism, as the idea that "the great world religions have equally valid claims and that each is culturally relative,"[36] has the implication for ecclesiology that the church cannot understand itself as unique. It can understand itself as one particular instance of the universal religious reality, but it cannot claim that it is better adapted to this reality than any other religious body.[37] The only thing that matters from a pluralist perspective, as Healy shows from the example of pluralists like John Hick and Peter Hodgson, is that religions offer humanizing possibilities. Healy offers various objections to such an approach, and for our purposes, the following is important:

> The pluralist metanarrative encompasses everything, drawing it into a totalizing discourse that makes it difficult to acknowledge, let alone to promote, the genuine diversity of those communities that do not fit into its structures or meet its standards of what counts as normal religion.[38]

Healy points to the bipartite structure of this proposal: of course, according to pluralists like Hick and Hodgson, there can be concrete flawed forms of religion. But these forms of religion simply fail to express the more fundamental, universal and abstract essence of religion. Pluralist discourse is totalizing and therefore epic: without having to look at the particular instances of religions, it already knows in advance that it is essentially humanizing. It is this fundamental indifference to the concrete that Healy rejects.

Inclusivism is the other major theological approach that Healy discusses. According to him, this is the systematic attempt to understand the truth that can be found in other religions as "in some way embraced within the church's reality."[39] He discusses Rahner's theology as an example of this approach, where

> the church is the expression of what is hidden and already present in the world, namely the salvific grace of God. Thus the concrete church is based upon the "prior reality" that is the People of God, and this priority is both temporal and theological.[40]

Again, Healy points to the clearly bipartite structure: a prior abstract reality in which the concrete church participates or which it manifests. This immediately also makes it epic in nature, as it knows beforehand that all people of good will belong to the "People of God" because they have "access to God's transcendental self-offer in grace."[41]

Healy is aware of Rahner's contextual concerns as he operated in a rapidly secularizing society: Rahner sought a way of thinking that would not immediately raise panic about the salvation of non-believers, while also upholding the belief that there is no salvation outside the church. He wanted to teach the church a certain open-mindedness that resonated with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. Healy believes these are laudable objectives.[42] But his main concern is that Rahner's "universalizing and spiritualizing epic move is brought into ecclesiology as a system-structuring principle."[43] In short, Healy does not dismiss the epic style of Rahner's theology per se, but he warns that the systematization it involves tends to obscure the contextual agenda that his theology is trying to advance. And we can easily understand how this happens: while there may be initial contextual reasons to adopt a particular systematic view of the church, sooner or later such a view will begin to derive its credibility from the fact that it is well-structured rather than that it is contextually appropriate.

On a critical note, the form of Healy's own argument might also be characterized as epic rather than dramatic. First, Healy distills a number of 'basic principles' which every good ecclesiology should follow. He then argues that there are basically two contemporary forms of ecclesiology, 'pluralist' and 'inclusivist,' and that these both fail to incorporate the basic principles outlined before. And finally, he offers his own solution of a practical-prophetic ecclesiology which we will discuss below. As such, Healy treats historical traditions of faith and particular theologies as universally valid heuristic devices which can be rationally evaluated without reference to the particular cultural and conceptual context. At the same time, he does not explicate how his own alternative approach is valuable precisely because of the current context in which the church finds itself. This shortcoming is a serious flaw in Healy's otherwise valuable argument.[44]

This must not distract us from Healy's important thesis, that any systematization of ecclesiology that is too rigid runs the danger of harming ecclesiology. This is not because Healy dislikes systematic theology, but because he believes that a lack of explicit assessment of the contemporary ecclesial context inhibits its function of guiding the faithful to a better understanding of themselves and their context. This concern about ecclesiology being too systematic makes Healy attentive to the advantages of dramatic theology. Later on, we will see that he uses Balthasar's idea of theo-drama to propose an ecclesiology that is more sensitive to the contemporary context and the practical struggles and tensions that, Healy claims, simply belong to our situatedness in time and place.

On Hauerwas: Ecclesiocentricism

It might be suspected from the above that Healy would regard Hauerwas' oeuvre sympathetically. However, in a recent work, entitled *Hauerwas, a (Very) Critical Introduction*, Healy claims that Hauerwas idealizes the church too much.[45] According to Healy, Hauerwas' ecclesiology inhibits the church to be open to other traditions, and leads to 'ecclesiocentricism.' Unfortunately, Healy bases his criticism on a superficial reading of just a few works, as such attacking a straw man that bears little relation to Hauerwas' real position.[46] Nevertheless, it might be helpful to highlight some of Healy's own viewpoints.

In this work, Healy accuses Hauerwas of seeing the community as the single determinant for the individual's behavior.[47] Healy believes that this is extremely problematic. It runs the danger of distorting the whole of theology by explaining everything in terms of its relationship to this perceived formative function of the church, something that he characterizes as "ecclesiocentricism." This ecclesiocentricism does not result from a systematization in the rigid modern sense, but Healy seems to think that, under the surface, a similar process is taking place: the centrality of the church becomes the one central overarching theme that structures the whole of Hauerwas' theology.

This ecclesiocentricism leads to some serious theological problems. For example, Healy says, Hauerwas cannot conceive of the notion of divine action through a human agent. If a Christian shows courage, this is merely the result of cultural, rather than divine, influences.[48] And whereas Hauerwas thinks that the church is different from other communities because only the church embodies the story of Jesus, Healy on the contrary argues that the church is different not by what it does of itself, but by what God does.[49] Where Hauerwas is *ecclesiocentric*, Healy wants theology to be *theocentric*. This resonates with what he said earlier in *Church, World and a Christian Life* about the need for the church to acknowledge that it has no essential perfection, but that its perfection lies only in its relationship to Christ crucified.

Furthermore, Hauerwas – still in the interpretation of Healy – locates the church's identity in its most contrasting practices. But those highly demanding contrasting practices, Healy says, are exceptional and not part of the daily life of the church. In his own words: the "elephant in the room is the actual state of the church, which is only infrequently able to measure up" to Hauerwas' high standards.[50] In fact, the actual church is not a separate group or community or tradition, with separate values and stories and its own formation. Rather:

> The church is made up of liberals and conservatives, wingnuts and the more thoughtful, Americans and everyone else, all of whom are in the world and of the world. But they are also Christians, in often wildly different ways.[51]

The empirical church, therefore, is less often a contrast community than Hauerwas suggests, and theology should therefore be hesitant to speak of 'church identity' as something that is clear and easily distinguishable from other identities.

In short, Healy thus argues that the church *in reality* does not function as the formative community that Hauerwas thinks it is. Ecclesiology must therefore be a practical and empirical discipline, able to account for the way that the concrete, empirical church functions, in order to guide and advance its praxis. Theology should not draw attention to the church; it must point to God, and acknowledge that the church always fails to live up to its own ideals.

Healy's Solution

Healy's diagnosis in *Church, World and a Christian Life* and also in *Hauerwas* is fairly straightforward. His *theologically* motivated rejection of the idea of an essential perfection in the church is intrinsically linked to his *methodologically* motivated rejection of an approach to ecclesiology that is too systematic. Modern ecclesiologies offer normative ideas about the church in the form of an overall blueprint, while they tend to suggest, in different forms, that these norms are deduced from abstract principles. As such, modern ecclesiologies hide their particular agenda and reading of the contemporary context, while, Healy says, this particular agenda and reading of the contemporary context is in fact crucially informative for ecclesiology.

In *Hauerwas*, Healy finds a similar tendency to think from one single perspective: his ecclesiocentricism tries to reconstruct the whole body of theology by explaining everything in terms of its relationship to the church. Also, Hauerwas' construal of ecclesiology is still governed more by his ecclesial *ideals* than by how the church functions in reality. Hauerwas may not offer a blueprint approach of the church such as modern ecclesiologists

did, but, Healy says, his ecclesiology is still very normative without sufficient consideration of the concrete reality of the church.

The above contains two important sensibilities that theology should take to heart. First of all, Healy wants to ensure that ecclesiology does not start from anywhere else than 'God-speech.' The church, Healy keeps reminding us, is the result of the saving work of the triune God. The church should therefore not be described in terms of its own being, but always in terms of this divine agency. Secondly, and this point is related to the first, Healy claims that we cannot offer normative accounts of the church separately from the contemporary context, simply because there is no eternal 'norm' which could describe its essence. Rather, as the saving work of God always takes place in our temporal and spatial world and amid our human activities, ecclesiology must always take the situatedness of the church into account.

Therefore, Healy wants ecclesiology to become a different *method* that is explicitly aware of its own situatedness. In doing so, ecclesiology will be more clearly at the service of the church, by reflecting on its context and its present needs:

> The church's response to its ever-shifting contexts should not first-and-foremost be to formulate theoretical constructions, be they doctrinal or moral systems, but should be to reconstruct its concrete identity so as to embody its witness in truthful discipleship.[52]

Ecclesiology done in this way becomes a practical form of reasoning, because it is more about discernment than about the systematic application of more or less objective knowledge. In Healy's words, it must become *prophetic*, raising attention to what the church needs here and now to be a better witness. Less systematic, more ad hoc, and always trying to discern how the present, concrete situation of the church must be understood.

In the following section, we will see that Healy tries to adopt a theological paradigm that furthers an understanding of the church as being dependent on divine agency and at the same time encourages attention for the concrete situation of the church. To examine this constructive proposal, we will return to *Church, World and a Christian Life*.

Theo-Drama

In *Church, World and a Christian Life*, Healy has shown how the modern approach to ecclesiology has often been *epic*. In order to more explicitly take the context of the church into account, Healy suggests that ecclesiology must opt for a *dramatic* perspective. More particularly, it must adopt the horizon of the *theo-drama*. Healy derives this concept from Hans Urs von Balthasar, and adopts it to suit his particular needs.[53]

Balthasar understands history as a complex, nonlinear struggle between the church and the world, from the creation of the world up to its redemption

by God. By means of analogy, he describes it as a play in which God, the world and the church have their own role. Healy goes on to show how this play is understood by Balthasar in a Trinitarian sense, where God the Father is the author of the play, God the Spirit the director, and God the Son the main actor on the stage. We human beings are not spectators, but fulfill our own role and are also *free* to play our role in the way we want to. At the same time, this view suggests that

> everything is located within the sphere of God's creative and redemptive activity. All human activity is dependent upon the prior activity of God, yet because of our location within the theodrama, we are truly free to play our own part in ways that are in some sense really independent of God. That is, we can and do choose to act in ways that are contrary to God's will, yet those decisions are made within and become part of the theodrama.[54]

In this sense, our whole life with its dramatic struggles can be understood as a small part of a cosmological post-resurrection struggle between the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in this world and the opposition it encounters.[55]

Healy finds this perspective attractive. For one, it suggests that, as we are participants in this play, we cannot step out of this context and get an 'epic' overview from beginning to end. Rather, our perspective is radically determined by the particular position that we are in: the time and place we occupy within this play. Healy never uses the term, but there are some similarities with the historicist perspective that Milbank favors. As we have seen, Milbank in postmodern fashion rejects any linear idea of history in which a universal principle is thought to guide history dialectically to its end. Healy is not concerned with ontology, but the concept of theo-drama invites similar attention to the contingencies of history rather than to any general laws behind it.

Secondly, Healy welcomes this perspective because it allows for *concursus*, for the idea that human agency is really free without diminishing the fact that divine agency is fully constitutive of it. The struggle that we experience is real, while at the same time it is fully under the guidance of the Director of the play. This is especially important for ecclesiology, Healy suggests, because it allows us to look at the church from the perspective of human and divine agency at the same time. The church is composed of human agents, but it is also God's work.

Moreover, in this perspective, not only the church is God's work. Non-ecclesial and non-religious bodies are equally locations in which God the Spirit is "creatively and redemptively present."[56] This implies not only a positive stance toward institutions other than the church; it also implies that theology is a metadiscourse. The best way to look to *any* institution or human action is to understand it from its function or role in the theo-drama.

Again, the similarity with Milbank's radical option for a theological metadiscourse is clear.[57] But, not unimportantly, Healy uses this insight not to oppose secularism, but to acknowledge that the church must also look for truth outside its own confines. "The tension that should always exist between church and non-church is thus not only something to be endured, but also something to be acknowledged as a gift,"[58] Healy says. It is a quote that would certainly not be rejected by Milbank, although it needs someone like Healy to say it in this way.

Healy does not wish to claim that, ultimately, all world religions are the same, and distances himself from inclusivist and pluralist views. According to Healy, the problem with an inclusivist approach to religion is that it treats conflicts as things that must be overcome rationally, rather than used productively.[59] Healy is not afraid of conflicts and tensions, because they are valuable and even necessary consequences of the fact that we simply do not know the truth. It is only through often tensive encounter with genuinely other ideas that we can slowly start to discern the Spirit in others. As such, Healy seems to favor a very 'Milbankian' postmodern ontology:

> With a theodramatic horizon we have strong reasons for denying a final unity underlying all conflict and difference. What binds all things together is not an ontological ground, a shared subjectivity or a humanist goal, but the location of all action under the directorship of God.[60]

For Healy, this approach means, very concretely, that all differences between religions and ideologies are *real* differences. But at the same time, he wants to circumvent a kind of incommensurability. The proper way to speak about the various religions, he believes, is not in terms of a common denominator but in terms of God's harmonious activity in the world. It is not a hidden common ontological substrate, but the 'script of the theodrama' (which is unknown to us) that links everything together.[61]

Here, Healy introduces the concept of 'traditions of inquiry' which he takes from Alasdair MacIntyre.[62] According to MacIntyre, a tradition of inquiry is a particular tradition that tries to acquire truthful knowledge, not by simply positing its perspective on the world, but by offering certain arguments, methodologies, an epistemology, etcetera, by which the tradition tries to discern the truth. Now, MacIntyre's argument was primarily focused on showing that liberalism, notwithstanding its conviction that it was tradition-independent, is itself also a tradition. But Healy puts this typically MacIntyrean understanding of tradition as the embodiment of a particular quest for knowledge to other use: he claims that religions can also be understood as traditions of inquiry.[63]

This approach enables Healy to do two things at once: he claims that the church, itself a tradition of inquiry, can rationally uphold its own commitments to certain truths, simply because "the Christian tradition and its central commitments have not as yet been falsified by any rival tradition."[64]

At the same time, however, he claims that the church must take seriously other religions and ideologies, because these traditions of inquiry are also as yet unfalsified. And this MacIntyrean approach to knowledge in general is of course supportive of a more 'dramatic' understanding: it promotes the idea that in history truth is always only partially found, and rejects the idea that we can simply and rationally grasp eternal truths.

Unfortunately, in appropriating MacIntyre, Healy also appropriates a stance toward truth that forces him to attempt to safeguard *a priori* a kind of rational discourse between different traditions. This becomes apparent when Healy claims that the truthfulness of a tradition could theoretically be demonstrated, although he acknowledges that in practice "it may take the rest of time to do so."[65] Different traditions, including the Christian one, might be more or less truthful, but we human beings cannot escape our historic confines and check our partial and incomplete truths against any eternal standard of truth. Therefore, we cannot know for sure whether our tradition of inquiry is the most truthful one. We can, however, have a rational discourse about it, says Healy, as we can judge traditions on the basis of their internal coherence and their explanatory power. A tradition must be able to show that it is internally consistent, not necessarily in a doctrinal sense, but at least it must offer a consistent narrative. And it must be able to explain and respond to new challenges of its view of reality.

> If any tradition, religious or not, can do both these things satisfactorily, then it can reasonably claim to be true. And if it can do so demonstrably better than rival traditions, then it can reasonably claim to be superior to them.[66]

Healy thinks that this highly rationalist approach enables us to have justified beliefs, even if we acknowledge all the relativism of postmodernity.[67]

In *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank criticizes MacIntyre for being not relativist enough. In fact, Milbank rejects even the slightest notion that there could be objective criteria on the basis of which we can assess truthfulness, because, he believes, this would reintroduce a typically modern nature-supernature distinction. Healy, on the other hand, seems to suggest that there is, amid our historical finitude and local situatedness, a neutral ground on which we can in fact stand. On the basis of this neutral ground, formed by concepts of consistency and rational explanation, we can partially grasp whether our beliefs are justified or not. Healy suggests that we can make this judgment without recourse to our own tradition, so he certainly believes that there is natural reason at work. Clearly, in doing so, Healy makes himself extremely vulnerable to the postmodern critique of any notion of rationality. What is more, notwithstanding his own emphasis of the opposite, in doing so he reintroduces an *epic* element, which allows him to escape at least partially from human conditions of finitude.

Does Healy really need to presume such an *a priori* minimum requirement of rationality in traditions of inquiry? In the light of Milbank's project, Healy's attempt to defend a more or less critical-realist position surely seems to weaken his effort to embrace a theo-dramatic horizon. Nevertheless, Healy seems to believe that this position is necessary to safeguard the theological enterprise against the postmodern challenge that any quest for truth is merely a quest for domination; and especially the theological enterprise of conversation between different traditions of inquiry.[68] At the same time he acknowledges that the answer he offers is also intended to be partial and not eternally valid. Indeed, he claims that "I am not attempting a normative, cross-traditional account here. The theory is meant as a first step in getting debate going among these religious bodies."[69]

In sum, while his understanding of the church as a more or less rational tradition of inquiry seems to weaken this proposal, we should focus on his agenda: he wants to answer the contemporary challenges that the church has to face in the context that Healy is familiar with. Specifically, he wants to challenge the church to discern the Spirit in other traditions. He also wants the church not to understand itself as a unified body that adheres to one single truth, but as a necessarily tensive tradition in which discernment is a constant and often difficult process, in which truly different voices must be heard. The church, in Healy's proposal, must understand itself as the "embodiment of its struggle to follow, reject or ignore the movement of the Spirit in its midst."[70] It must be described theologically as the story of God and men, and for that it needs 'thick' and theologically laden descriptions of the human congregation that the church is. This is not merely descriptive: ecclesiology must be a tool to advance the discernment of the Spirit's activity. Here, we come to the second and most influential part of Healy's proposal: the ethnographic shape that ecclesiology must have.

Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology: A Theological Ethnography

His understanding the church as the ongoing struggle to discern the Spirit leads Healy to reject, as we have seen, all theological attempts to harmonize tensive ecclesial realities. Instead, Healy wants to account for true otherness, for the acknowledgement that other opinions are really different, and should precisely for this reason be taken seriously. As such, the church's struggle is a struggle for discernment. As we have seen, Healy has argued that the ecclesiology of the last century has been a very theoretical exercise, and is therefore of little help to the daily life of the concrete church. Healy does not fully reject it, but as a method it is too rough; according to him, it deals with the concrete context and its particular problems only in a very indirect way.[71] In the following section, we will see how this leads Healy to propose a concrete new form of ecclesiology, one that uses the insights of *ethnography*. It is this proposal that has made *Church, World and a Christian Life* fairly influential among a number of theologians.

To begin with, his 'theodramatic horizon' enables Healy to understand that it is precisely the concrete context in which theologically important discernment takes place. Therefore, he wants ecclesiology to radically change its function. It must once more become an ecclesial praxis, a constantly reenacted practice in which the church evaluates itself and explicitly addresses its failures and sins. As such, it can become a kind of institutional counterpart to existing individual confessional practices. Just as the practice of individual confession manifests a believer's wish to be dependent on God rather than on his or her own merits, such an ecclesiological confession can "embody and make public the church's belief in its corporate sinfulness, whereby it could witness to its dependence solely upon the Cross of Jesus Christ."[72]

According to Healy, ecclesiology could benefit from critical methods derived from the social sciences. For example, a historical perspective on the church can assist the church in facing its own historical shortcomings, and a sociological perspective might open it up to new possibilities of action in the hope of furthering the theo-drama.[73] Such secular approaches must be met with considerate theological care, he says, and should never be reductionistic. But they can allow theology to become more empirical, to be concerned more with the *concrete* church.

The method that Healy favors most is a postmodern form of *ethnographic* approach. Generally speaking, ethnography is the methodical analysis of a group or a culture by means of participatory observation, and it is especially renowned for being used in cultural anthropology. In the past, it described cultures as static systems based on general socio-religious laws, but it has in recent times moved to a more postmodern ad hoc analysis of cultures.[74] Nowadays, it no longer tries to describe cultural identity in terms of fixed concepts, but attempts to reveal the inner struggles of a culture, the conflicts of meanings, the organic developments and the dialogical relationship with its surroundings. It does so by means of 'processual analyses' and 'thick descriptions,' descriptions of cultural practices and patterns "with rigorous attention to detail, nuance, process and relationship."[75] A thick description – the term is Clifford Geertz's – attempts to communicate the meaning of a practice to the reader, by describing not only the practice but also its interpretation. As it always involves interpretation, it is called 'thick.' Such a thick description never presents itself as objective, but always as an effort to understand what is happening.

Healy believes that this postmodern ethnographic approach can be applied to the church, as its sensitivity to process and change resonates with a view of the church as the embodiment of a struggle for discernment. Yet, says Healy, it must be appropriated theologically. Therefore, he wants such ethnographic ecclesiology to include *theologically* 'thick' descriptions. This means that the ecclesial ethnographer should not be afraid to offer his or her theological interpretations.[76]

The ethnographer, then, is not a neutral bystander. This corresponds with current postmodern ethnography, Healy says, because it has abandoned the modern idea that the researcher is impartial and therefore more objective; and it is aware of the individuality of the ethnographer and the subjective choices that he or she makes when researching and describing a culture. This is also helpful in practical-prophetic ecclesiology: it *matters* where a theologian stands. Their individual biography and context enables them to take a particular perspective on the church, and they should therefore make their personal agenda and perspective explicit.

Etnographic methods might also make us more sensitive, Healy thinks, to the experience of members of the church who are not theological specialists: they may not have the theoretical apparatus to share their insights, but it might well be the case that they "have clearer insights into its sinfulness and inadequacies, into the challenges it faces, and perhaps as to how it should be reformed."[77] By means of ethnograpy, the experience of minorities and marginalized groups could be given a stronger voice.

Concretely, then, Healy would like to see more theological ethnographic research into particular parishes. Particular parishes have their own special way of being church, their own communal taste, and their own contextual challenges to which they seek to respond. More often than not, all this goes without saying, but ecclesial ethnography could make these aspects explicit, so that a parish finds it easier to reflect on its own particular situation. This reflection could also point out which aspects of a parish are particularly unsuited to or unhelpful in its mission. And, of course, it could be a way to recognize real distortions or even sin in in the life of the parish before "things get obviously bad."[78]

In sum, Healy believes that the social sciences offer tools that can be very helpful for theology, if they are understood against the horizon of the theo-drama. Especially ethnography, as the analysis of the culture as a process, is suited for practical-prophetic ecclesiology, as this type of ecclesiology aims to analyze the church as the ongoing process of discerning the Spirit.

Healy's Ideal Form of a Concrete Church

In sketching the outlines of a practical-prophetic ecclesiology, Healy has not offered academic theology a merely neutral theology. Rather, he has outlined his own ideal of how the church should proceed, and how theology could support this. According to Healy, the church should be very clear in that it does not glory in itself but only in Christ. And it should do so at least partly by being more aware of its own failures and by trying to overcome these by constant self-evaluation and explicit discernment.

Healy's church is always *in via*, a pilgrim underway to an as yet unknown destination. It has no stable identity of its own, except for its truthful or less truthful relationship to Christ. It must constantly discern the Spirit, seek its

way through time, and prophetically discover which aspects need revision, reform or rejection.

> The church's identity is constituted by a wide range of elements, all of which are on the move: by the actions of the Holy Spirit; by the beliefs, valuations, feeling and experiences of its members; [...] it is a community within which its members are socialized, less or more successfully, into various forms of its distinctive way of life; it is a place where religious experience of one kind or another is made possible; it is a force for peace and justice in the world as well as a force for much less laudable things; it is a communal experiment in following Jesus Christ which sometimes succeeds, at other times fails; and so on.[79]

In fact, Healy comes close to concluding that whereas abstract or systematic ecclesiologies prioritize their systematic theory above dynamic praxis, ethnographic ecclesiologies are able to present the church as it really is: in its concreteness. In the final analysis, in this understanding the church is nothing more than its contextuality, its 'situatedness' in a place and a time.

Even though Healy refrains from systematically describing the identity of the church in ideal types, his understanding of the church as a pilgrim does lead to normative claims about how the church should behave. For example, Healy wants the church to become a *listening* church. The church must listen to the world, in order to discern the works of God in the world.[80] Theology, therefore, must not be totalizing even as it is a metadiscourse. Theology cannot evaluate every scientific inquiry or religious tradition *a priori*. It has to listen to these voices to attempt to discern if the Spirit is moving there, and if so, this could be something new, something that Christianity was not yet aware of.

Of course, it may also happen that the church has to prophetically reject certain aspects of the world. But whatever the case, Healy believes that the world is never simply irrelevant to the church, as if the church were a *societas perfecta* and possessed all the necessary means to achieve its salutary end. On the contrary: theologically, the church does not possess anything apart from what the Spirit gives; and empirically, all the faithful are always also part of the world. Healy explicitly warns us not to draw any too precise borders between the church and the world, as if these were "neat conceptual packages,"[81] and he wishes to illuminate our understanding of 'world' by distinguishing between the theological concept of the world as 'anti-church' and the concept of the world simply as 'non-church.' Rather than falsely boasting in its own spiritual resources, then, the church should be on the lookout, always attentive to the movement of the Spirit in the world that is non-church.[82]

Healy characterizes this process of the church listening, discerning, prophetically accepting this or rejecting that, and of allowing itself to be changed by the world for its own good, as 'ecclesial bricolage.'[83] The church

borrows practices from the world, imaginatively mixes them with its own earlier practices, and as such transforms and Christianizes them. In fact, the whole present state of the church, all its forms and institutions, are the result of such past bricolage. A theologian, then, is a 'bricoleur,' who purposely tries to look for new practices, suggests changing older practices, and modifies practices from other traditions in order to use them for the church.[84]

In using the word 'bricolage,' Healy clearly has in mind the open-ended, imaginative and creative character of the process of tradition, in a way not unlike Milbank. We should note, however, that Milbank offers a kind of 'ecclesial constructivism' in which human tradition can be really innovative. Healy, on the other hand, because of his understanding of the church as a 'tradition of inquiry' seems to believe that there is something 'external' which the church *in via* inquires into by means of *bricolage* and experimentation, and as such he opts for a critical realism. In other words, for Healy, bricolage serves less to *create* and more to *explore* truth. This points to an aspect of Healy's understanding of the church that is problematic from Milbank's point of view. Take the following statement:

> The church's concrete identity is never static; as the embodiment of a tradition that is inherently conflictual it is constructed over time by way of argument about bricolage and by experimentation and reform, as the church engages with its various challengers, internal and external, and as it is led by the Spirit towards the Father through the Son.[85]

In this quote, Healy claims that the identity of the church is both 'inherently conflictual' and led by the Spirit. This makes sense, because if the church is a 'tradition of inquiry,' error and confusion are simply steps to a deeper understanding of the truth. However, does this also mean that all the pains and conflicts in church history are necessary, and led by the Spirit? If this is what Healy means, he would be positing an 'agonistic' element in the heart of the church. And this raises the question of whether Healy's embrace of a church in which debate and open disagreements are stimulated, does not unwittingly introduce a liberal aesthetic ideal in which an agonistic ontology plays a foundational role.

These are important critical remarks, but they also go beyond Healy's own focus. For sure, Healy offers enough resources to argue against any rigid systematization of the church based on one single model; and, therefore, his own model of the church as a 'tradition of inquiry' should not be used as such either. For Healy, this model enables him to explain why openness to other traditions, different opinions and even the absence of credal unity may be beneficial for the church. His view of the church as a 'tradition of inquiry' certainly is problematic, but he is not wrong in arguing for a listening church. This is not because a church full of debate offers the best chances of producing valid truth claims, but simply because

attempting to discern the Spirit through listening is a charitable and very Christian response to differences. In this perspective, an ecclesial conflict is not the product of the Spirit, but a *failure* to practically discern the Spirit.

In general, then, Healy's ideal church is in the midst of the world, and is unique not primarily in its contrast practices, but in the fact that its practices are oriented to God. It is aware of its full dependency of God, and wants to testify to this by removing all false suggestions that would give the impression that it has something to boast in itself. From this awareness of being dependent on God follows the ability to be very self-critical. The ideal church would be ready to acknowledge its own failures and even sins, because it knows that this will only contribute to its orientation to God. In a similar way, it would not be afraid of confusion, uncertainty, difference of opinion and even arguments, because it knows that these do not threaten the unity that is given by the Spirit. And, finally, the ideal church would be curious, open to the world and without clear and definite borders: because notwithstanding the evil and sometimes anti-Christian tendencies in the world, it knows that the Spirit is also active there.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Healy makes his own turn to the church in a very characteristic way. His aim is not to oppose liberalism, although he sympathizes with the critiques of liberalism by Milbank and others. Rather, he tries to counter the theological tendency to speak about the church in terms that are too abstract. First, because an idealized concept of the church quickly suggests that the church is good in itself, rather than being good only because it stands in a relationship to Christ. And second, because it does not help us any further in our thinking about how the church should function in real life.

Our initial questions were: what problem led Healy to make his turn to the church, what did this turn involve, and in what way has he solved his initial problem? We can now summarize that his theological project is driven by the problem that modern ecclesiologies are often not helpful in accounting for the actual, messy and sometimes sinful reality of the church. They address the church in ways that are too abstract, do not clarify why the present ecclesial context must be addressed by such abstract concepts, and are even detrimental to a proper understanding of the church by their reductionist systematization.

In response to this problem, Healy proposes the following. Ecclesiology, he claims, must not lose itself in staring at the essence of the church *in abstracto*, but it must primarily consist of thinking about our present state of affairs and how this relates us to God. He proposes using Balthasar's idea of theo-drama as a theological horizon in which our present ecclesial context can be read as part of the whole of salvation history, as a place in which human and divine acts meet. This, in turn, enables a more empirical

approach to ecclesiology: ecclesiology may ethnographically describe actual congregations and understand them both as social groups or cultures and as participants in the divine drama. This is not simply objective description: this is active *discernment*, the attempt to read the present context in the light of God's history with us. Healy's turn to the church is thus mainly a turn to the *concrete* and *empirical* as the primary location to start theological thinking.

Healy's most important contribution to the turn to the church seems to be methodological. His appeal for a more empirical ecclesiology that actively tries to advance good discernment in the churches corrects any tendency that theologians may have to concern themselves with questions that are difficult to relate to in real life; and he has certainly paved the way for interesting new genres of ethnographic ecclesiology.

But his important theological concerns should not be dismissed either: his emphasis on the church as a pilgrim, which inspires him to reconsider the theological value of the world; the need for an open and listening church, and his belief that theology must not ignore but account for the failures of the church and the failures of believers whose discipleship of Christ is not so clear. In expressing these concerns, Healy offers an important addition to the sometimes too polished ecclesiologies of Milbank and Hauerwas.

Notes

1 Nicholas M. Healy (United Kingdom, 1953) is professor at St. John's, New York. Not to be confused with another theologian, Nicholas J. Healy, who is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Culture at the John Paul II Institute and has published on various similar topics including ecclesiology, and on authors such as de Lubac, von Balthasar, and Thomas Aquinas.
2 Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Henceforth abbreviated as CWCL.
3 This approach has been espoused especially by a network of theologians called 'Ecclesiology and Ethnography.' See Pete Ward, ed., *Perspectives on Ethnography and Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); Christian Scharen, ed., *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).
4 Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).
5 CWCL, 1.
6 Readers may wonder why Healy never directly refers to the sex abuse scandals in the Roman Catholic Church. But the full scope of the problem did not come into the public eye until 2002, when The Boston Globe published its story about how the abusive priest John Geoghan was consistently protected by his superiors. Jim Davis, "Spotlight Church Abuse Report: Church Allowed Abuse by Priest for Years," *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2002, https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/special-reports/2002/01/06/church-allowed-abuse-priest-for-years/cSHfGkTIrAT25qKGvBuDNM/story.html. This episode in the recent history of the church only adds force to Healy's argument, that speaking of the church in an overly idealized manner endangers the mission of the church.

7 CWCL, 10.
8 CWCL, 11.
9 CWCL, 13.
10 CWCL, 7.
11 CWCL, 12.
12 CWCL, 21.
13 CWCL, 25–36.
14 CWCL, 26.
15 CWCL, 27. He refers to Avery Dulles, S.J., *Models of the Church*, expanded ed. (New York: Image/Doubleday, 1974/1987).
16 CWCL, 105.
17 CWCL, 36.
18 CWCL, 28.
19 CWCL, 28.
20 CWCL, 30.
21 CWCL, 132–140.
22 See page 39.
23 CWCL, 37.
24 CWCL, 42.
25 CWCL, 44.
26 In a later article he phrased this more strongly: "And since the word 'communion' has been applied to virtually any and all kinds of loving relationships, and is said to be embodied in a wide variety of polities and practices, it is difficult to see how the concept can do any critical work at all, aside from valorizing community." Nicholas M. Healy, "Ecclesiology and Communion," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 3, no. 3 (2004): 275.
27 CWCL, 45.
28 CWCL, 36.
29 CWCL, 53.
30 CWCL, 54.
31 CWCL, 54.
32 CWCL, 54–58. See also his later work: Nicholas Healy, *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian of the Christian Life*.
33 CWCL, 54.
34 CWCL, 136–137.
35 Healy does not consider the third obvious model, exclusivism. According to him, "Exclusivism is sometimes taken as the contrast position to pluralism, though it has largely died out in its traditional form in the mainline churches," 78; and "most people no longer believe that exclusivism is a Christian possibility," 137, although he also claims that "Karl Barth could be understood as an exclusivist" 131, n. 4.
36 CWCL, 83; he quotes: Peter C. Hodgson, *Revisioning the Church: Ecclesial Freedom in the New Paradigm* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 94.
37 CWCL, 84.
38 CWCL, 100.
39 CWCL, 130.
40 CWCL, 135.
41 CWCL, 137.
42 CWCL, 138–139.
43 CWCL, 137–138. CWCL, 132.
44 I have further developed this analysis in my "Practical Ecclesiology for a Pilgrim Church. The Theological Motives behind Healy's Ethnographic Turn." *Ecclesiology* 14, no. 2 (2018): 164–184.

45 Healy, *Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction*.
46 See the thorough analysis of the argument between Healy and Hauerwas in: Paul S. Fiddes, "Versions of Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 12, no. 3 (October 13, 2016): 331–353. Also note Hauerwas' response: Stanley Hauerwas, "Postscript: By Way of a Response to Nicholas Healy's Book, Hauerwas: A (Very) Critical Introduction," in *The Work of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015).
47 Healy, *Hauerwas*, 97. In fact, Hauerwas, throughout his career, extensively discussed topics concerning intentionality, agency and character formation.
48 Healy, *Hauerwas*, 126–129. The example stems from *The Hauerwas Reader*, 294. In fact, Hauerwas in this contribution argues that "true courage, as opposed to its semblances, is a gift of the Holy Spirit." *The Hauerwas Reader*, 300.
49 Healy, *Hauerwas*, 129–131.
50 Healy, *Hauerwas*, 97.
51 Healy, *Hauerwas*, 98.
52 CWCL, 22.
53 CWCL, 53.
54 CWCL, 66.
55 CWCL, 60–66.
56 CWCL, 67.
57 When using the word 'metadiscourse,' Healy refers to page 1 of Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory*. CWCL, 67, n. 26.
58 CWCL, 69.
59 CWCL, 146.
60 CWCL, 67.
61 CWCL, 67.
62 CWCL, 117. In the following pages, Healy discusses and refers to: Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988).
63 CWCL, 117.
64 CWCL, 126.
65 CWCL, 124.
66 CWCL, 124.
67 CWCL, 125.
68 CWCL, 125.
69 CWCL, 127. See also *Hauerwas*, 109, where he claims that MacIntyre's model in which different cultural traditions compete with each other is agonistic and not suited for understanding the church as created by God. His critique of this model, notwithstanding his (incorrect, I would say) assumption that Hauerwas uses this model, is insightful.
70 CWCL, 68.
71 CWCL, 149.
72 CWCL, 12.
73 CWCL, 164.
74 In CWCL, 174, n. 47, Healy refers to the cultural theories of Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*, and James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).
75 CWCL, 180.
76 As Elizabeth Phillips has observed, regular ethnography as performed by anthropologists 'is an extraordinarily comprehensive and holistic study of a culture that usually requires several months, if not years, spent inside that culture' (Ward, *Perspectives*, 102). Healy is clearly thinking of a far broader range of research, not necessarily limited to such extensive projects.

77 CWCL, 178.
78 CWCL, 185.
79 CWCL, 167–168.
80 CWCL, 69.
81 CWCL, 73.
82 CWCL, 68. We may confidently say that Healy's depiction of the relation between the church and the world, and between theology and other sciences, echoes Vatican II.
83 Healy appropriates this term from, and refers to: Jeffrey Stout, *Ethics After Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 74ff, and remarks that Stout derived the term from Claude Lévi-Strauss.
84 CWCL, 110.
85 CWCL, 173.

4 The Contemporary Turn to the Church

Thus far, we have seen three different authors perform three versions of what might be called a 'turn to the church.' We have seen how Milbank in his *Theology and Social Theory* turns to the church as the vague but divinely inspired idea of a perfect social harmony that can trigger our imagination. As such he tries to overcome a postmodern nihilism that simply presumes that every ideal is a power ruse. Hauerwas in *With the Grain of the Universe* turns to the church as a communal praxis that is necessary to know the truth of Christianity, thus correcting the idea that religion can be an optional add-on to a liberal mode of living and knowing. Healy in *Church, World and the Christian Life* makes yet another proposal: he turns to the messy everyday life of the local parish, in order to overcome arrogant and unhelpful ecclesial tendencies to reflect on the church exclusively in ideal terms. These three examples differ much from each other, and this raises the question whether we can really put them together under the same denominator as 'the turn to the church.'

In the second part of this research, we will address three other turns to the church, made at the beginning of the twentieth century. Only after we have made this historical comparison can we really begin to see unique characteristics that these three contemporary turns have in common. In this chapter I would nevertheless already like to make a number of preliminary observations on the most striking differences and similarities between the three contemporary turns that we have just examined. I will start by comparing the different theological and ecclesial contexts of the three turns. This will enable us to better understand the differences and similarities that have most clearly come to view, and by discussing these, we will better understand where the three authors diverge and where they agree with each other. I will conclude by assessing the question whether we can reasonably speak of a single turn to the church, and what its most important characteristics are.

Differences and Similarities of Context

A comparison of the differences between Milbank's, Hauerwas', and Healy's contexts is helpful to understand the different agendas each of these

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theologians has. And, importantly, it honors their own desire to do contextual theology. That in itself is already one similarity worth mentioning: they unanimously claim that the context in which theology is done should influence the content. Theology is not an ethereal activity but is affected by and reflects upon the historical, particular life that we live. Therefore, it is not only helpful but also particularly appropriate to try to understand their theologies from the perspectives of their own contexts. Our present question is therefore: can their respective contexts shed light on their theological proposals, and how has this context contributed to these proposals? To answer this question, it is useful to distinguish a number of types of context. I will therefore first discuss the influence of their different ecclesial backgrounds, then sketch a more or less general overview of their social context, and finally describe their theological sources and dialogue partners.

Ecclesial Contexts

John Milbank is a member of the Church of England and rooted in Anglo-Catholicism. His theological proposal is clearly influenced by this context. The Anglican Church, especially in its Anglo-Catholic version, has traditionally understood itself as rightfully existing precisely because of its *catholicity*, its valid participation in a worldwide Christian tradition. This catholic Christian tradition, it was often claimed, consisted of various branches, in particular the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Churches, and the Church of England. The catholicity of each of these particular churches was neither dependent on the Protestant idea of an invisible universal church, nor on visible communion with one center of unity such as Rome. Rather, in this way of thinking, catholicity implied a 'federal' structure in which various particular territorial churches upheld aspects of the apostolic order, both through apostolic succession and apostolic doctrine. Therefore, in High Church Anglicanism, the idea of catholicity was immediately juxtaposed with the notion of independent local churches.[1] Milbank's theology echoes this view that is so crucial to the Anglo-Catholic self-understanding. His ontology, with concepts such as 'harmonious difference' and 'non-repetitive identity,' favors difference that nevertheless does not undermine unity and harmony. As such, it enables an understanding in which identification with the Christian tradition implies a particular and authentic identity, formed by a specific time and place. In this sense, his theology supports the Anglo-Catholic understanding of the relationship between catholicity and local particularity.

Another aspect of Milbank's theology can also be understood against his Anglican background. The Anglo-Catholic tradition has historically been highly critical of the liberal British state, and it even originated in part because of dissent from the state's policies. But, importantly, it was not founded on the conviction or principle that civil government ought to be religiously neutral. Rather, it levelled such fierce criticism against the state

precisely because it felt that the state deviated from its Christian vocation. Therefore, in spite of the critical stance of the Anglo-Catholic tradition toward the liberal state, Anglo-Catholicism does not immediately contest the more general Anglican ideal of a sacred bond between the Church of England and the British state. This means that generally, in Anglicanism, even though religion and politics may nowadays be separate, this separation is not considered ideal. Anglicans cherish the fact that the Church of England is still the established church with the Queen as its governor: these are the nostalgic remnants of an organic unity that once existed, or at least should have existed. So when Milbank tries to undo the arbitrary distinction between the religious and the secular, and immediately envisages a new harmonious unity between religion and politics, he is propounding a typically Anglican ideal.[2]

In a sense, the rediscovery of this Anglican ideal was not new. We have already noticed that John Milbank wrote his *Theology and Social Theory* at a time during which neoliberalism seemed invincible. Under Thatcher's guidance, Great Britain increasingly became organized along ideals of individual liberty and free market capitalism, and the Church of England publicly voiced its worries about the effects of this neoliberal policy for society as a whole and specifically for the poor. From a sociological point of view, it is interesting to see how this church, which has been in strong decline in terms of membership since the sixties, could become one of the most explicit voices of political dissent. Grace Davie has argued that the Church of England, after a period of retreat and isolation under the influence of modernity, increasingly became aware that it represented not only its own members, but also all those who were 'believing without belonging.'[3] This awareness of a more or less latent belief in the moral imperatives of Christianity offered the church a "renewed sense of national purpose."[4] In other words, exactly when the Church of England was increasingly experiencing membership decline, it rediscovered the typically Anglican idea of a Christian nation and the idea that the church had something to offer to society as a whole. Similarly, even though Milbank generally was very critical of the way in which many theologians opposed neoliberalism with the use of secular social theories, a rediscovery of such a 'national purpose' for Christianity can be sensed in his own theology. This sheds an interesting emancipatory light on Milbank's theological proposal: in a way, this could be understood as an attempt to offer Christians a sense of relevancy in the absence of cultural power.

Stanley Hauerwas' different social and ecclesial context has invited him to engage in a wholly different project. His Methodist upbringing was not concerned with the tension between tradition and innovation, and no nostalgia for a lost harmony between the church and the state was ever instilled in him. Rather, Hauerwas' first concern is quite opposite to that of Milbank: he wants to redeem true Christianity from an unhealthy entanglement of church and the American state which, he claims, is merely supportive of a

liberal order. Christianity, he discovered, is not a private conviction or a relatively harmless philosophy which, when properly tamed, is perfectly consistent with belonging to the liberal and political elite. But nor is it a philosophical or ethical *position* that must necessarily engage in a culture war with the liberal order. The church does not have a social ethic which it seeks to advance, it *is* a social ethic. It is a communal praxis that might sometimes be better upheld by a radical minority than by a merely nominalist Christian majority that fails to offer the formation necessary to expose the arbitrariness of the liberal regime.

His discovery of Christianity as a communal praxis, coupled with his daily encounter of Roman Catholicism at Notre Dame, led him to a third discovery: there is a close relationship between the tradition of the church and God.[5] Milbank simply took this for granted, but for Hauerwas it means a radical break with his congregationalist background, in which God's acts used to be found in the inner lives of the believers rather than in the communal life of the church.[6]

Hauerwas' theology consists of an ongoing critique of every individualist conception of religion and ethics. But his theology entails a strong political critique as well, because suddenly faith has to do with a communal praxis that sometimes runs *counter* to the liberal social order. Yet, this does not cause Hauerwas to fantasize about a new unity between politics and religion: his experience with American liberal Protestantism makes him all too aware of the danger that comes with having influence in this world, the danger of domestication. Therefore, by contrast with Milbank, Hauerwas gladly recommends the margins of society as the place where the church of the future must dwell, witnessing to its Lord through its countercultural, cross-bearing praxis.

While Milbank is a typical Anglican and Hauerwas more of a Methodist who rediscovered elements of a catholic Christianity, it may be helpful to add another perspective. Milbank was raised in a rather zealous Methodist family. And although he became an Anglican at a young age, he himself claims that his 'conversion' to Anglican Catholicism was in fact a very natural journey, in which he simply rediscovered the catholic roots of Methodism. Roots that he found in John Wesley, who appeared to him far more catholic than other Reformers, for example in the way in which he kept grace and works closely together.[7]

Of course, Milbank's Methodist background cannot be used as a causal explanation of his theology, if only because the historical overlap between the anti-liberal and socially engaged Anglo-Catholicism and Methodism[8] makes it impossible to distinguish clearly between the two influences. But if we think of Milbank as a Methodist who rediscovered a more catholic form of Christianity, we may be able to account for some parallels with Hauerwas' theology: their shared focus on praxis rather than theory, their ideal of holiness and perfection, their mistrust of liberalism, and their preference for a countercultural understanding of the church. The advantage

of such a perspective is that it allows us to understand why Milbank and Hauerwas could, notwithstanding their differences, end up with theologies that have such great affinity with each other.

How did Nicholas Healy's Roman Catholic ecclesial context influence him? This is somewhat more difficult to say, because Healy's focus is ecclesiological in a narrower sense: he tries to advance our understanding of the nature of the church by shifting the ecclesiological focus from abstract and contextless church ideals to the *concrete* church and especially (although not exclusively) the concrete *parish*. Despite his plea for a more contextual theology, Healy is the one who is most directly concerned with "intra-theological" questions without bringing the broader social context explicitly into the picture. Yet, his turn to the church cannot be understood apart from the new ecclesiological directions that the Second Vatican Council has pointed out: the church must be open to the world, the church is *in via*, and the church as a whole – thus including the laity – takes part in the process of discerning the truth. These directions resonate with Healy's plea for ethnographic descriptions of local congregations, thus trying to make more or less 'secular' scientific approaches fruitful for the religious quest for truth.

His Catholic background also implies that, contrary to Hauerwas, he does not need to discover that God works in the church, as the Roman Catholic Church is perfectly confident about its divine origin and sustenance.[9] Maybe it is even too confident, in fact, for Healy's taste. Therefore, while Hauerwas discovered that God acts in the church, Healy discovered that God's work does not necessarily coincide with the Catholic Church, or with any other church for that matter. First, the church is not perfect and sometimes even acts sinfully against God, and second, God also works through what is non-church. Moreover, the scope of God's activity in the church cannot be restricted to the hierarchy of the church. The daily life of the community and the laity in general must be taken fully into account. Healy's turn to the local church thus differs from Milbank's and Hauerwas' in that he does not compare a liberal social order with an ecclesial social vision. Instead, he compares older Roman Catholic and other similar ecclesiologies that tend to think of the institutional church in a highly idealized and romanticized fashion, with the concretely visible local parish.

Sources and Dialogue Partners

Notwithstanding the different ecclesial backgrounds of these three theologians, they use fairly similar sources in their theologies. First of all, all three are very much indebted to Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre has been fundamental to Milbank's, Hauerwas' and Healy's understanding of the epistemological importance of traditions, and of their strong suspicions of the liberal idea of a universal, neutral reason. MacIntyre enabled them, and probably a whole generation of theologians, to understand that theology must be contextual rather than contextless.

Hauerwas and Healy also share their postliberal education at Yale. Broadly, this postliberal heritage could be described as an attempt to connect the theology of Karl Barth with the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. And although they both relate differently to this heritage, it always provides the background to their work. The influence of Barth is clear in both, especially in their constant stress on the absolute primacy of God's action. It is central to Hauerwas' claim that the church has been made a witness by God, and it is equally central to Healy's rejection of any ecclesiology that supports a church that boasts in itself or that suggests that God's work is dependent on the actions of the church.

Their adherence to Barth, however, always has a Wittgensteinian twist: while Barth is often understood as pointing away from the world toward God, Hauerwas and Healy claim that God can be found in the concrete church in this world. This typical view relies on the philosophy of Wittgenstein, who insisted that meaning can never be understood separately from a *Lebensform*, a 'form of life.' So when Barth rejected natural theology because he wanted theology to focus on God, Wittgenstein's philosophy suggests that the meaning of this Barthian claim must still lie in a particular Christian form of life. To put it differently: precisely in order to find out the meaning of what Barth wanted to say, it is necessary to assess the form of life in which Barth's theology obtained its meaning.

In this typically postliberal interpretation of Barth, his rejection of natural theology paradoxically implies that theology must attend to the concrete form of life. For Hauerwas, this focus on praxis implies a turn away from individual *beliefs* toward communal praxis; for Healy, it implies a turn away from *blueprint ecclesiologies* toward the concrete church. When it comes to assessing church practices, both Healy and Hauerwas claim that these practices cannot be described on their own. Instead, they must be described in the light of the perceived intentions of the relevant agents (including God) and the whole web of meaning that is implied in the praxis. A description of praxis is thus never neutral: it requires a 'reading' of the situation that is hermeneutical in nature. This leads Hauerwas to make theological claims about church congregations, and Healy to favor an ethnography that uses thick, theology-laden descriptions.

John Milbank's scholarly context is completely different. Wittgenstein plays no visible role in Milbank's theology, except indirectly via MacIntyre, and Barth is also virtually absent.[10] In general, Milbank is more oriented to continental philosophy, especially to the postmodernists, and to the *nouvelle théologie* as represented by Balthasar and de Lubac. Whereas Healy and Hauerwas discovered through Wittgenstein and MacIntyre that our reason is always place- and time-bound, Milbank reached the same conclusion by reading the postmodern philosophers. And whereas Healy and Hauerwas moved beyond the idea that a naturalistic nontheological account of the world is self-sufficient through their exposure to Barthian theology, Milbank did so with the help of the *nouvelle théologie* and Blondel.

Of course, intellectual influence does not work in a one-dimensional way, but this analysis can nevertheless shed light on the question why Milbank on the one hand, and Hauerwas and Healy on the other, correspond with each other while at the same time functioning in different academic contexts. And, secondly, it helps to identify some of the major differences between them. For example, Milbank's engagement with continental philosophy enables him to focus on ontology and metaphysics. Wittgenstein and analytic philosophy would not have prompted him to go in this direction. And had he been influenced by Barth rather than by the *nouvelle théologie*, he would probably not have reached the conclusion that the human and the divine meet in the process of creative making.

However, the most crucial difference between the three theologians is unrelated to this difference in philosophical and theological traditions. Instead, it is with regard to the appropriation of MacIntyre that Healy fundamentally parts ways with the other two. As we have seen, Milbank criticizes MacIntyre for lumping together Christian and antique virtue, on the presupposition that beneath these particulars there is a general philosophical concept of virtue without specific theological content.[11] Hauerwas criticizes MacIntyre in a similar vein, accusing him of defending an artificial division between nature and grace by arguing for philosophy as practical reason without the need for revelation or theology.[12] They both claim that MacIntyre in doing so endeavors to find neutral ground to stand on, thus betraying his own attempt to oppose the liberal notion of universal rationality. This brings Milbank to claim that MacIntyre should be more of a historicist and a relativist than he actually is.[13] Healy, on the other hand, finds an ally in MacIntyre, precisely because MacIntyre keeps his distance from pure relativism. According to Healy, it is evident that relativism must be avoided at all costs, as relativism would make different religious traditions incommensurable. And when religious traditions are incommensurable, rational inter-traditional conversations about truth are impossible.[14]

Differences and Similarities of Agenda

In spite of their differences, Milbank's, Hauerwas' and Healy's ecclesial and academic contexts share some significant similarities. If we look at the content of their theologies, especially from the perspective of our own attempt to understand the turn to the church, it is clear that Milbank, Hauerwas and Healy engage in a similar endeavor. All three argue that theology should turn to church praxis, because it is only there that it can be understood what it means to be a Christian. Their motives for engaging in this endeavor differ: Milbank and Hauerwas do so because they believe that the modern idea of religion has obfuscated or domesticated important aspects of Christianity, while Healy does so because he holds that theoretical reflections on the church tend to be both arrogant and unhelpful for the practical life of the believer. We cannot meaningfully compare the

various proposals for a turn to the church, however, without also assessing the question to *which* church must we turn. What are the characteristics of the church that we need to rediscover or revalue, according to these three theologians?

In what follows, we will see that we cannot answer this question without also assessing their respective theological agendas. Clearly, the aims of their theologies differ, and these differences have to do with their different church ideals and different understandings of the relationship between the church and the world. However, we will discover that, even though they do not share one single theological agenda, they are united by a more fundamental aspect of their theologies. Before we can reach this conclusion, we must first clarify some of their ecclesiological concepts.

Ecclesial Ideals

To which church must we turn, according to Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy? It is obvious that their ecclesial ideals diverge. Milbank shows a preference for small local communities because in his view it belongs to the nature of charity to have pastoral rather than bureaucratic rule; and it belongs to the nature of a pastoral rule that this can be enacted most easily in small communities. According to Milbank, these communities should be inter-independent, always related to each other in varying, fluid network-like structures. Importantly, these local and small communities, whether parish congregations or monasteries or even social cooperatives, in their praxis imagine the City of God, and together form a political alternative to the liberal state which lacks any transcendent common good. Clearly echoing Anglo-Catholic ideas about catholicity, this is where Milbank tries to envisage what it means for a community to be *catholic* in the midst of a secular world.

Whereas Milbank reflects on the catholicity of the church, Hauerwas is concerned with another mark of the church: its *holiness*. Hauerwas seems to share with Milbank a preference for small local communities, but he does not immediately describe these in terms of contributing to a *polis* that functions as an alternative to the bureaucratic liberal state. Instead, with the example of the Anabaptists in mind, he seems to favor small communities because these are able to keep a healthy distance from the temptations of worldly power. Christian communal praxis can be exercised in communities on the margins of Western society; that is where people can unlearn liberal attitudes and begin to learn again what it means to be truthful disciples of Christ. This does not mean that he wishes the church to retreat from the world in all circumstances. In fact, he wants the church to be a strong witness, but he is ready to a greater degree than Milbank to accept a minority position for the church. This difference between Hauerwas and Milbank has everything to do with how they read their context and what stance they think is most helpful for the church today: must the church

reject its false humility and bravely oppose the liberal order with its own superior praxis? Or must the church resist its temptation to play a powerful role in the present world order, thereby downplaying the radical message of the gospel, and instead acknowledge that it is not of this world? Must the church conquer the world or retreat from it?

Whereas Milbank and Hauerwas reflect on what it means to be church, Healy simply focuses on the visible organizational structure that characterizes itself as church, and of this structure especially on local congregations and parishes. He wants theology to stop making normative claims about how these congregations and its believers can lead a good Christian life, and start assisting them in interpreting the concrete daily challenges in terms of the theo-drama. Healy therefore resists any exaggeration of the countercultural praxis of the church. Such high standards tend to disqualify most concrete ecclesial practices as insufficient. On the contrary, Healy holds that it is because of God's grace and not because of our perfect performance that our practices become God's work.

It is as noteworthy as it is obvious that our three authors do not explicitly favor any particular denomination or tradition. To be sure, Healy's ecclesiology, which attempts to take into account the fact that people have different forms of participation and religious zeal, probably reflects conditions in any average Catholic parish. And Hauerwas' ideal of a small countercultural congregation probably favors an Anabaptist community above a liberal Protestant church. But the turn to the church, at least as it is proposed by these three theologians, is not explicitly Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Protestant in character. On the contrary, their call for an ecclesial turn is clearly addressed to all these different churches. The turn to the church is, we might say, post-confessional.

The Church and the World

Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy want theology to turn to the church. But how do they conceive of that which is *not* the church? In other words, what do they think about the *world*? According to Healy, the church should not seek to be countercultural, but should accept that it is fully part of the surrounding culture. That is not a bad thing, he believes, because God also operates through cultures. In a nutshell, not everything that belongs to the world is bad, and not everything that belongs to the church is good. In fact, "neither church nor world can be reduced to clearly defined positions."[15] He accordingly distinguishes between the world as non-church and the world as anti-church. He uses this distinction to keep the possibility open of speaking about 'the world' as the opposite of 'church,' while at the same time acknowledging that much of what happens outside the church is worthy of appreciation.

At first sight, Hauerwas seems to maintain a much stronger opposition between the church and the world. In his terminology, the world stands for

everything that is not church: the world goes against the grain of the universe, while the church goes with it. Often, when Hauerwas speaks of 'the world,' he seems to mean the Western, post-Enlightenment world. However, this does not mean that Hauerwas thinks that the world is indiscriminately evil. Hauerwas has repeatedly claimed that "the first task of the church is not to make the world more just but to make the world the world."[16] He means by this that the church and the world have different roles to play, and that the task of the church is not to change the world, but simply to stick to its own story and its own language, thus constantly exposing an alternative way of living to the world. Elsewhere he explains it thus "The 'world' so understood remains under God's providential care, but exactly what makes it the world is the inability to acknowledge and worship the source of all that is."[17] In other words, the world may have much goodness to offer, but it needs the church to discern this. Despite the oppositional language, then, Hauerwas believes it is the task of the church to reveal and acknowledge the source of the world, which is God.

For Milbank, things are a little more complicated. To begin with, when Milbank speaks of the church, it is never immediately clear whether he means the actual earthly church or the imagined heavenly city. His terminology enables him to say things like "the failure of the Church to be the Church,"[18] which implies a difference between the actual church and its ideal. What is more, he is eager to blur the distinction between the religious and the secular aspects of life, thus rejecting attempts to rigidly distinguish between the church and the world. For example, the church can appropriate from the world whatever it recognizes as just or capable of being placed in a new harmonious order. As such, Milbank resembles Hauerwas who suggests that though the world is not bad in itself, it needs the church to properly acknowledge worldly goods as originating from God.

Do Milbank's and Hauerwas' accounts of the relationship between the church and the world differ from Healy's? We have seen that Milbank and Hauerwas use antagonistic or 'countercultural' language, while Healy stresses that the church is always part of its culture. On the other hand, Milbank and Hauerwas clearly allow for a positive appropriation of the 'world.' I would suggest that we must understand this rhetorical difference in the light of their wholly different agendas. Milbank and Hauerwas emphasize, against a church that almost completely identifies with or is even subdued by the status quo, the unique alternative perspective that the church has to offer. Healy, on the other hand, believes theology should acknowledge, against a church that tends to arrogantly dismiss the world, that God is at work in that very world. The difference between them seems to be based not on a fundamentally different understanding of the church and the world, but on a different answer to the question which temptation is the more dangerous at present. Is it the danger of retreat, the danger that the church boasts in itself and arrogantly rejects the world? Or is it

the danger of adaptation: the danger that the church will lose its uniquely divine vision by conforming to the powers of this world?

Characteristics of the Contemporary Turn to the Church

One Single Turn?

What is the greatest temptation for the church nowadays? The different answers that our three authors would give to this question do not reveal a crucial difference in their understanding of what the world or the church essentially are. What it reveals, however, is that these theologians have different readings of their contexts; different agendas, so to speak. Healy wants to prevent the church from becoming too arrogant or inward-looking, while Milbank and Hauerwas want the church to maintain its vision of the Kingdom of God. Behind these different concerns lurks the most fundamental difference between these authors, that of diagnosis: Milbank and Hauerwas claim that there is something in the modern worldview which is extremely corrosive of Christianity, while Healy focuses on the question how to make our thinking about the church more fruitful for specific parishes.

We should ask, then, whether we can still describe these three theologians as contributing to one and the same 'turn to the church.' Milbank and Hauerwas share similar concerns, but Healy deals with fundamentally other things. Milbank turns to the practical ecclesial imagination of the City of God in the hope of finding an answer to the liberal and ultimately nihilist social vision. Hauerwas similarly turns to contrasting practices of the church in order to find an answer to a Christianity that is domesticated by liberalism and that is in the final analysis obsolete. Both reject liberalism and point to a specific form of ecclesial praxis as constituting a healthy antidote. However, Healy turns to the study of the concrete church so as to escape from ecclesiologies that are too abstract and idealistic to be helpful for the daily life of the church. Therefore his 'turn to the church' is not an overall rejection of a 'modern' or 'liberal' theology or Christianity, but the specific rejection of a methodology of modern systematic ecclesiology.

Notwithstanding these differences, we should note that the problem that Healy wants to solve – the fact that idealistic theoretical reflections are unhelpful for the messy life of the church – is in fact a concrete symptom of what Milbank and Hauerwas believe is wrong with modern theology. In other words, the problems of modern ecclesiology as diagnosed by Healy are directly related to the factors that contributed to a domesticated Christianity and a false theological humility as Hauerwas and Milbank diagnosed this. When we begin to see that this is the case, we can understand the real differences between Healy, Milbank, and Hauerwas, as well as how the structural similarities of their ecclesiologies nevertheless enable us to speak of one single turn to the church.

Let us put it this way. We have seen that Milbank revealed that liberal and universal criteria of rationality are in fact arbitrary, theology-laden and thus not so objective at all. Milbank rejects these criteria and suggests that, from a Christian point of view, reason is always grounded in praxis. Not *a priori* criteria of rationality, but daily ecclesial discernment and construal – the creative imagination – of the good in the created order, must provide the criteria for our understanding. Hauerwas takes a different route but ends along similar lines, claiming that truth cannot be discerned by universally disengaged rationality, but only through the praxis of the church that trains people in the epistemological habits needed to understand the ultimate truth of the gospel. If put in this way, we can more easily see how Healy fits into this. While Healy is not concerned with liberal reason as such, his denunciation of blueprint ecclesiologies reveals a similar concern: the proper way to be church cannot be decided *a priori* on the basis of rational and systematic models, but must be discerned *in via*, in the process.

The three theologians thus meet each other in their rejection of any *a priori* scheme to structure the theological ideal. They all claim that theology must follow the praxis of the church, because there are no criteria external to this praxis that can tell us in advance what is right or wrong. Their concerns differ, just as the quality of their proposals. But they share the implicit or explicit embrace of a certain epistemology that seeks to theologically read the concrete and visible aspects of reality. As such, the turn to the church now appears first and foremost as an *epistemological* turn, which might even be called an attempt to achieve a *sacramental* understanding of the world and the church. We will now describe the most important characteristics of this epistemology.

A Shared Epistemology

The first characteristic of the epistemology underlying the turn to the church is the claim that theology is a *metadiscourse*. According to Healy, any human institution or action can only properly be valued from the perspective of the theo-drama, of the historical narrative of the salvation of the world by God. Milbank suggests that, ultimately, all discourses are based upon theological convictions. Discourses that have tried to replace Christian theology are therefore simply alternative theologies. And Hauerwas claims that if we fail to understand this, and allow other perspectives to define what theology can or cannot say, this amounts to domestication. In general, then, the turn to the church claims that a metadiscourse is always rooted in non-rational concerns, and furthermore, that there is no compelling reason to prefer a modern above a Christian theological perspective. Moreover, they criticize the modern perspective for its suggestion that the world is self-explanatory, and instead propose an explicitly theological alternative. The turn to the church must therefore be understood as an attempt to liberate theology from a modern secular

rationality that suggests that the world or the natural can be sufficiently explained on its own terms.

Behind this move lies a rejection of modern reason, in favor of a more postmodern view on human reason in which the conditions of our knowledge fundamentally transcend us, and are thus unknown. Milbank and Hauerwas actively and rigorously address such epistemological questions throughout their work, while Healy is less explicitly concerned with them. Actually, as we have seen, Healy sometimes sounds very 'modern,' both in his tendency to emphasize the need of rational discourse in inter-religious debate and in his more general rejection of rational relativism. This is related to the earlier-mentioned difference in the way they receive MacIntyre. Nevertheless, Healy at the same time tries to take the uncertain conditions of our knowledge seriously and is aware of the fact that human beings cannot acquire a more than fragmentary understanding of the world and God.

This basic epistemological uncertainty leads to a priority of the temporal over the eternal, the concrete over the abstract, praxis over theory, difference over similarity, the particular over the universal, etcetera. Such 'unmodern' epistemic priorities already suggest that our human knowledge should not seek to arrive at the eternal truth, but should be satisfied with a practical understanding of the world surrounding us. Hauerwas stresses that Christianity can only be intelligible through particular forms of life, through concrete people with specific practices and their beliefs. Healy's fierce resistance to abstract blueprint ecclesiologies reveals a similar sensibility: we cannot understand the life of the church 'in general,' by means of deduction or speculation, but we must analyze and advance it in its context, through discernment, contextual analysis, and tentative evaluation of the actual dilemmas and challenges of particular parishes. Of the three, Milbank is the one who most explicitly tries to overcome modern epistemology, when he suggests a 'reversed Platonism' in which the particular, historical, and concrete are not dependent upon the transcendent, but are the 'form' of this transcendence, and when he suggests a differential ontology of harmony. As such, he attempts not only to reverse the order of epistemic priorities, but also to resolve the antinomies between them.

These preferences for the temporal over the eternal, etc., notably imply a rejection of any 'safe ground,' any comprehensive and stable summary of Christianity. There is no ahistorical or universal single center, core or basic principle which can function as an absolute criterion for theological truth. Healy therefore claims that we must not deduce the whole of theology from one singular perspective, but instead allow our theology to reflect the rich and multifaceted truth – which the doctrine of the Trinity puts into practice. And Hauerwas claims that the whole package of Christian narratives, practices, beliefs, etcetera, provides the criteria by which its truth can be assessed, and he speaks of *truthfulness* to show that truth cannot be distinguished from its performance, from its form of life. Again, Milbank is most

radical in rejecting any notion of a stable summary, offering a baroque vision of church history as an ever-unfolding truth in which it is impossible even to distinguish between central and peripheral truths. It is the beauty and divine appreciation of the ever-unfolding harmony, rather than any logical relation to a core principle, that grounds truth. Truth in this view is fundamentally *aesthetic*. Something is not true because it follows some pre-defined logical rules for truthful speech, but because it harmoniously 'fits in' with the rest. Truth is therefore a matter of imagination and persuasive vision, rather than of logic. Just as there is no plain, logical argument that determines whether a particular piece of art is beautiful, or whether a particular law is just, there is no plain, logical argument that can demonstrate whether something is true. Instead, this needs constant and tentative discernment.

The discernment of truth is also *constructive* or *creative*. Precisely because truth is not something eternal that lies waiting to be uncovered, the discernment of truth is indistinguishable from its construal. Again, Milbank's reflection in developing his concept of analogy is the most profound. As we have seen, he claims that any analogy, any relation that we see between different objects or events or persons, any shared identity, is a cultural construction. Yet, relating everything in the world is not simply an arbitrary affair. Some analogies appear to us as more convincing, more persuasive, than others. Our activity in relating the world and our being convinced by particular cultural constructions is itself a creative activity; an attempt to imaginatively grasp or rhetorically uncover the truth. But that it is constructed does not mean that its form is arbitrary or that it can be constructed in any form whatsoever. Rather, our creative imagination, our effort to construe, is a participation in God. Healy does not offer any ontological reflections of this kind, but he does echo a similar belief when he suggests that we use ecclesial models as instruments to kindle our imagination, and when he understands the history of the church as ecclesial *bricolage,* a creative process in which the Spirit leads the church.[19]

It must be clear that this ecclesial bricolage is not simply a theoretical, theological exercise, but that it is very practical. In fact, this bricolage is precisely the daily life of the church. This lies at the heart of the present turn to the church: *the church is both the process and the outcome of its practical imagination of truth.* Hence Hauerwas' emphasis on witnesses: Christian truth must be displayed by people who have been formed by Christian truth. Hence also Milbank's claim that there is no other argument for a tradition than its development. It is the church and its practices that can persuade someone that the perspective that the church offers is indeed truthful. Importantly, this does not imply that, if Christianity is true, the church is always right. All three theologians are pretty clear that the church has often failed in its witness. But sins can be forgiven and failures undone, and the ecclesial practices of forgiveness and restoration contribute to the church's witness to the truth. Healy has the most directly helpful method to

offer: an ethnography that tries to analyze the messy and sometimes sinful life of the church in the light of the theo-drama, in the hope of overcoming its failures by acknowledging these before God.

According to these theologians, theology is not a speculative but a practical science because it must reflect upon church praxis. Furthermore, the speculative moment of attempting to imaginatively grasp the truth is not the exclusive domain of the theologian, but rather has its place in church praxis in general. Theologians are people who perform explicitly what every believer does implicitly: to reflect critically upon their own situations with their particular problems and challenges. Healy puts it thus "All Christians are to participate to some degree in the church's constructive response. All engage the tradition in light of their own background and concerns, informed by which they make judgments as to which aspects of the tradition are authoritative, which secondary."[20]

Finally, we should note that this common epistemology explicitly promotes what we might call a sacramental understanding of the church: according to Healy, Hauerwas, and Milbank, the life of the church renders the God who made the church present. Milbank, with his participatory ontology, can make such claims most explicitly, especially through his idea of human making as participating in God's creation. According to him, the human and the divine cannot even be neatly separated. It is also present in Hauerwas' belief that the church witnesses to God in its praxis while it is also *made* a witness by God in its praxis. And it is fundamental to Healy's claim that the church encounters God not only in its idealized form, but precisely in its messy and sometimes sinful participation in the theo-drama.

Concluding Remarks

Despite fundamental differences between Milbank, Hauerwas. and Healy, we have claimed that they have enough in common to speak of one 'turn to the church.' Milbank and Hauerwas endeavor to force theology to turn around radically and argue for a paradigm shift, a true ecclesial turn. This is much less the case for Healy. Healy, notwithstanding his plea for a contextualized approach to ecclesiology, is more concerned with how we should do ecclesiology than with addressing our contemporary culture. But he, too, clearly operates in this new paradigm.

Most fundamentally, this new paradigm rejects any suggestion that we can arrive at truth about God by any other means than by practically discerning this truth in the daily life of the church. It redirects theological attention away from Christianity as an abstract idea about God and the cosmos, to Christianity as a sacramental way of life, whether in practice this way of life is performed perfectly or imperfectly in the church. This way of life, which includes but is not limited to constant theological and other reflection on it, is the practical creative imagination of which the church is both the process and the outcome.

Notes

1 For an overview of the ecclesiology of High Church Anglicanism, see Peter B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760–1857* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146–183; on the branch theory, 153–154.

2 For the traditional High Church view on the relationship between state and church, see Matthijs Ploeger, "High Church Varieties: Continuity and Discontinuity in Anglican Catholic Thought," §1.1. Also for a historical overview Hervé Picton, *A Short History of the Church of England: From the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015).

3 See for this paradoxical phenomenon: Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1994), 29–44.

4 Liza Filby, "God and Mrs Thatcher," 50.

5 See Stanley Hauerwas, "A Homage to Mary and to the University Called Notre Dame," in *Catholic Lives, Contemporary America*, ed. Thomas J. Ferraro (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 229.

6 See for example: Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 6. For his reasons for leaving the Methodist congregation, see *Hannah's Child*, 278–279.

7 On a Wesleyan motif in Milbank's work, see Anthony D. Baker, "Violence and the Trinity: A Wesleyan Reading of Milbank's Augustinianism," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001): 113.

8 Hervé Picton, *A Short History of the Church of England: From the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 98.

9 Such is the claim of Stanley Hauerwas in his response to Healy in *The Work of Theology*, 277.

10 Ruppert Shortt, "Radical Orthodoxy: A Conversation," in *The Radical Orthodoxy Reader*, ed. John Milbank and Simon Oliver (London: Routledge, 2009), 30.

11 TST, 330–332.

12 Stanley Hauerwas, "The Virtues of Alasdair MacIntyre," First Things, October/November 2007, http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/10/004-the-virtues-of-alasdair-macintyre.

13 TST, 327.

14 CWCL, 23.

15 CWCL, 175.

16 See for example: Stanley Hauerwas, *A Better Hope: Resources for a Church Confronting Capitalism, Democracy, and Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2000), 157.

17 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 29.

18 TST, 15.

19 CWCL, 173.

20 Healy, "Ecclesiology, Ethnography, and God: An Interplay of Reality Descriptions," in *Perspectives on Ethnography and Ecclesiology*, ed. Pete Ward, 198.

Part II

The Early Twentieth-Century Turn to the Church

In this part, we will go back in time and study three theologians of the early twentieth century: Romano Guardini, Odo Casel, and Henri de Lubac. At first sight, these three theologians seem to engage in a similar turn to the church. They also argue that Christianity is not first and foremost about doctrine, but about a communal way of life that in a sense embodies or represents the salvation of the world. However, their historical context is very different from that of the contemporary theologians. It will be interesting to find out to what extent the earlier and contemporary contexts are comparable, and whether, upon closer inspection, their theological ideas indeed resemble those of the contemporary turn. Most importantly, however, this comparison will offer us some historical depth which can help us understand the current turn better. Thus, after this comparison, we will be able to see to what extent the contemporary turn is part of a larger trend in the development of the theology of the West, and to what extent it introduces certain novel insights or methods. In part III, after having studied these three earlier theologians, we will more systematically compare the two turns and then return to our main question: *what is the current turn, what are its aims, and to what extent is it theologically innovative or promising*?

Just as in the first part, we will adhere to the now familiar pattern of starting with a general introduction to the author; followed by an analysis of the selected work with a special focus on the argument the author uses to convince his readers to make a turn to the church. As in the first part, we will again discuss the three theologians in chronological order. As Romano Guardini was the theologian whose work first argued for a turn the church, we begin by introducing him.

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5 Romano Guardini and the Awakening of the Church

In the early twentieth century, no one wrote more vividly about a 'turn to the church' than Romano Guardini.[1] This Roman Catholic priest and theologian (1885–1968) famously wrote the following sentence, the first in his *Vom Sinn der Kirche* (1923):[2]

> A religious event of immeasurable scope has begun: the Church awakens in the souls of men.[3]

'The church awakens in the souls': these words of Guardini have often been repeated in quotations by other authors. At the time, his observation was recognized by many as accurate and as making explicit what had been going on for a while. Later, with the benefit of hindsight, his remark was interpreted prophetically, as if foreseeing the fundamental events that would eventually lead to the Second Vatican Council, that Council in which the Roman Catholic Church fundamentally re-described its self-understanding and relation to the world.

Guardini's sensitivity to an 'awakening of the church' was due to his involvement in the Liturgical Movement and his chaplaincy to the Catholic youth movement. And more than simply observing this phenomenon, he sought to actively promote and advance it with his theological activities. Against the speculative academic climate of his days that he encountered in the defensive neo-Thomist theology but also in the German Idealism, Guardini wanted to reclaim a theology of the living, multifaceted reality. This led him to approach liturgy as an act in which the liturgical participants with their whole being, including their bodily and sensory experience, participate.[4] And it led him to locate the truth of the catholic faith not in the doctrine of the church, but rather in the communal reality of the church itself.

In this chapter, we will try to understand what exactly Guardini meant when he observed that the church was awakening in the souls. What did he see, and more importantly: what argument led him to embrace this development?

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Introduction to *Vom Sinn Der Kirche*

Vom Sinn der Kirche is one of Guardini's earliest works. In fact, it consists of a collection of five lectures that he held in Bonn in 1921, for the national conference of *katholischen Akademikerverbandes*, the Catholic Association of Academics. In these lectures, Guardini passionately argued that the awakening of the church in youth was a good thing that needed to be embraced and promoted. As such, this work is our best point of departure for discovering why and how Guardini turns to the church.

Before we turn to the message of the book, we must first shortly sketch the context of the time. It was the aftermath of the German defeat in the First World War. The immense population loss – more than 2 million Germans died in the war – and the oppressive terms of the Treaty of Versailles were ruining the German economy. Violent clashes between communists and right-wing paramilitary groups were a daily occurance. Politically motivated assassinations and coup attempts fed the general feeling that structures of society, once taken for granted, were on the verge of collapse.[5]

None of this caused Guardini to embrace a kind of fin-de-siècle attitude in *Vom Sinn der Kirche*. On the contrary, amid the visible decay of modern society, Guardini sensed a new optimism. He observed a youth movement open to new forms of mysticism, craving for a new social order, trying to claim new philosophical ground to stand on. In the midst of this crisis, he noticed that people were starting to search for new sensible forms of community and authority, weary as they were of the arid rationalistic individualism of the past age. And he embraced these as authentic opportunities to discover the Catholic Church anew.

The idea that the Catholic Church was able to offer an alternative to the situation was not some private idiosyncrasy of Guardini's. Rather, it was the result of a long historical development in Catholic Germany, a history of marginalization, retreat, and emancipation. In the nineteenth century, Catholicism was increasingly seen as outdated, reactionary, and irrational. And when in the 1870's Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of the German Empire, introduced a series of anti-Catholic laws and policies, this *Kulturkampf* stripped the Catholic Church of its power.

Yet this marginalization of the Catholic Church paradoxically led to a strong self-awareness among Catholics. Increasingly, the church understood itself as a necessary bulwark against the errors of modernity, against liberalism, rationalism, and materialism. This took the form of a defensive ultramontanism, fueled by the 1870 dogma of papal infallibility and later the anti-modernism of Pius X (1903–1914), but also of very constructive community building activities, especially through the development of the Catholic social ideals laid down in *Rerum Novarum* (1891). So when the liberal Weimar Republic in the early twenties seemed on the verge of collapse, this confirmed what Catholics had been telling themselves for years: that the liberal state lacked the communal resources that the church could offer.[6]

Even though Guardini makes no direct reference to the political situation of his days, he echoes this sentiment when he, in *Vom Sinn der Kirche,* argues that Catholicism is a viable alternative to the social order. According to him, only the church offers a way out of the bankruptcy of the modern social order. Only the Catholic Church can deliver true personal freedom without anarchy, because only she offers true community: a communal structure that is not based on sheer power, but on the blossoming of the individual without harming others, on obedience without oppression, and on freedom without denial of finitude.

Guardini's Diagnosis

Guardini starts his *Vom Sinn der Kirche* with the observation quoted above: 'The church awakens in the souls of men.'[7] Guardini does not make a plea for a turn to the church as a response to some kind of philosophical or theoretical problem, but he first of all *observes* a turn to the church. What is more, this turn to the church is not a shift in theological or philosophical fashion, but an existential movement, an 'awakening,' which is happening 'in the souls,' affecting the way people experience themselves and the world around them.

Guardini is not only an observer. He also actively embraces this turn, trying to advance it and direct its flow. As he sees it, this awakening of the church is a welcome and overdue answer to various typically modern problems that previous generations suffered. It helps to rediscover an understanding of the church, of community, personhood, and transcendence, which, to our detriment, has long been lost to modern society.

In the following section, we will examine Guardini's observation of this turn to the church, and ask from what it turns away. Simultaneously, we will try to find out why Guardini embraces this turn to the church. To do so, instead of neatly following the argument of his lectures, we will sometimes jump from one lecture to another and back again. This is necessary, because the five lectures do not represent a single carefully built argument, but rather offer Guardini's perspective from various viewpoints. Every lecture offers slightly different observations and directions. Only in this way will we get Guardini's full diagnosis in view.

The Modern Experience of Reality

Guardini starts his first lecture by describing how the modern era – he speaks in the past tense – has been detrimental to the human experience of reality. From the era following the Middle Ages up to the last century,[8] he observes a trend which he characterizes with three words: subjectivistic, individualistic, and rationalistic. For Guardini, these three concepts signify the way in which modern human beings increasingly experienced themselves and the world around them. This existential mode of being

had its counterpart in the German idealist philosophy of those days, which also tended to be subjectivistic, individualistic and rationalistic. However, Guardini focuses not on philosophies but on the 'feeling' and 'consciousness' of humankind in those days. Therefore, while Guardini sometimes mentions that the philosophy of Kant and the later idealists corresponds with these trends, his main focus is on the experience of modern existence.

Guardini describes how modern individuals felt enclosed in themselves. They experienced a distance between themselves as subject and the 'external reality' as object. They distrusted their senses and found certainty only in their own subjectivity. As such, they experienced objective reality as 'thin.'[9] Somewhat paradoxically, this subjectivistic distrust of the empirical was coupled with a rationalistic stress on the same objective reality. In the natural sciences and in technology, reality was described in objective, formal concepts and universal laws, and the relationship with the observing subject was consciously omitted from the description. Guardini says that this preference for purely objective descriptions encouraged an image of the individual as detached from the world, as if unaffected by it.

This existential experience of the self as a detached subject was thus coupled with the world as something external to the self. The world was experienced as foreign, possibly even as untrustworthy, as a reality that had to be approached with caution. It had to be mastered, and it could be controlled by means of conceptualization and rationalization in abstract terms. Such an experience of the world, Guardini notes, left no room for immediate and obvious meanings of reality.

According to Guardini, this modern experience of the self has had consequences for the religious life as well. Any aspect of religion whose function was not immediately understood, either psychologically or logically, was rejected. For example, the concept of the soul was reduced to that of psychological processes, and the meaning of the church was understood merely in instrumental and individual terms. Even the sacrament of communion, of *Gemeinschaft*, Guardini notes with astonishment, was increasingly experienced as a purely functional means to purely individual salvation.[10]

In the first lecture of *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, Guardini thus sketches a rather grim image of how modern people were alienated from reality. Remarkably, he does not do this by offering a genealogical account of the emergence of this modern mode of existence. To Guardini, the question of origin, for example whether modern philosophy or the modern mode of existence came first, is not really important. What is more important is his existential description of this basic attitude of modern human beings toward themselves and toward the world. It is also remarkable that Guardini describes this modern existential attitude in the past tense. Apparently, it is disappearing in his days. Indeed, according to Guardini, there is an awakening in the souls of human beings not only toward the church, but toward

reality as a whole. Somehow, in his thought, the fullness of reality is related to the reality of the church. Before we flesh this out more, however, we must focus on a number of other ways in which Guardini describes the earlier modern attitude.

The Absence of Community

In his first lecture, Guardini claims that the modern existential attitude resulted in an instrumental understanding of the church. But there is more to this. In general, the modern experience conceived only a person's individuality as a given, and only the individual was felt to be 'original.' On the other hand, communities, as collections of individuals, were conceived as 'secondary' and thus less real. He expounds on this observation especially in the fifth lecture, entitled *Gemeinschaft*, where he writes:

> It is not so long ago that a person experienced himself as a self-enclosed world. What related him to others, state, family, or affinity of ideas, easily appeared to him as mere illusions, as institutions for instrumental or safeguarding ends. Only the I, the being-in-oneself, was certain to him; he experienced the You, the being-with-others as dubious and shadowy.[11]

Only the self was able to offer a secure ground to knowledge. Community was not understood as a given, as a fact of life, but as something purposefully made. And whether it was the family, the state, or the church, all these forms of community were conceived as a product of the individual's will.[12] What is more, in practice, says Guardini, community was not even seen as a voluntary but worthwhile addition to the individual's life. Rather, it was seen as a corrupting or inhibiting force working against the individual.[13]

Elsewhere, in the second lecture, Guardini compares the modern understanding of community with that of the Middle Ages. At the time, he says, the objective reality of the community was immediately present. A person's character was simply part of the community, and the community was seen as necessary for the growth of an individual particularity. It was only in the Renaissance, Guardini claims, that a person was thought to develop his character precisely in being independent of society. Subjective personality became opposed to objective community, and it was forgotten that persons are intrinsically related to the whole.[14]

Just as community was increasingly understood as standing over against the individual, so also the church was increasingly experienced as something that opposes the individual, to the extent that one might even speak of a modern hatred between them.[15] This leads Guardini to claim that something must have gone fundamentally awry in the course of modern history, and it encourages him to explain his view of how precisely an individual can reach fulfillment through the church.

Relativism

In the third lecture, Guardini describes how in more recent times the modern existential attitude has slightly altered. Whereas this attitude was previously marked by subjectivism, individualism, and rationalism, Guardini describes its current successor with the word *relativism*. Just as the other terms, Guardini uses this word in a broad and existential sense. It refers to modern human beings' existential mistrust toward the transcendent and the absolute.

In earlier modern times, it was simply expected that the state, the social order, and the sciences would last: they were somehow perceived as timeless and stable realities. But recent years – we should remember that Guardini witnessed great social upheaval in Germany – have revealed that they are no longer stable and self-evident. People are starting to experience reality as always changing, always in flux.

> The soul is overpowered by the feeling of perishability and relativity. With horror it perceives how everything flows. Nothing stands firm any longer. Everything can be considered from a thousand different perspectives.[16]

This new experience of the contingency of everything is paralyzing, Guardini says. The awareness that we are only finite beings is forced upon us and makes us lose all confidence in ourselves, weakening us. Moreover, it erases our personality: we are no longer capable of acting, of making a moral judgment, of distinguishing truth from falsehood or taking up responsibility.

Guardini notes that his generation deals with this feeling of relativism by paradoxically absolutizing relative values. People try to become rich, smart, or cunning and are willing to sacrifice everything for this goal. And political parties no longer seek the common good but act only out of partisanship and selfishness. Apparently, he observes, this new modern experience of uncertainty forces people to exchange infinite values by finite ones. This causes him to complain: "Man is pathologically insecure and pathologically conceited."[17]

In Guardini's own ecclesiological proposal, we will see that Guardini does not suggest that this uncertainty must be overcome. On the contrary, and this is highly relevant, he wants us to *embrace* it. Modernity tries to escape the confines of finitude, he claims, but in doing so, it fails to teach human beings how to properly value it.[18]

The End of the Modern Era

In the previous three sections, we have seen Guardini describe the modern experience of reality in various ways. We could summarize his diagnosis as the claim that modern human beings have been alienated in various ways. They have been alienated from an original experience of the reality in which they are situated, including community life and all forms of

transcendence. This alienation has sometimes taken the form of a strong and egoistic individualism, but also of great uncertainty. It has led to a mistrust of everything that is not the individual him- or herself, but also to the idolatry of relative values.

However, as we have already noted, Guardini recognizes that this modern experience of reality is quickly vanishing in his days. He observes a broad transformation of human existence, an awakening of the church and community, but even more: an awakening to reality in general. Guardini speaks of a movement that "wants to view the concretely real as the only given and to tie the abstractly valid to it."[19] In other words, the immediate experiences of concrete reality are suddenly preferred above abstract and rationally valid truths. Concrete realities other than the 'subjective self,' such as the church and the community, are suddenly experienced again as real.

Guardini offers various examples of this awakening. For instance, he mentions the increasing popularity of anthroposophy and occultism in his day and concludes that individuals are apparently no longer hesitant to put their trust in something other than themselves. He also points to the emerging philosophical interest in Platonism, in which ideas are not viewed as structures of our consciousness but are considered real. And there are so many other examples: among young people, the soul is no longer a contested concept; people seem to understand easily that they belong to each other in an original sense; the concept of a 'people' (*Volk*) suddenly strikes a chord as "the original interrelatedness of men, who share their life and fate in their common customs, country and historical development."[20]

Interestingly, Guardini believes that it was impossible to anticipate this awakening. Neither had the earlier modern experience of reality been logically refuted, nor had the concepts of 'soul' or 'reality' been experimentally proven. Guardini therefore claimed that there is no explanation for this awakening, and that we can only *observe* it as a phenomenon that is happening to us. Of course, this only emphasizes the point that Guardini is making: the very fact of this unanticipated awakening already betrays the modern tendency toward rationalism and subjectivism. Contrary to what we always thought would happen, reality suddenly and immediately appears to us again in the form of this awakening.

Especially in the first lecture, Guardini uses telling and poetic words to describe this shift toward a new consciousness: it is an awakening; the spell of modernity has been broken[21]; the new awakening is a life-giving current; it is a stream of community feeling[22]; it is reality showing itself in its fullness; to give just a few examples. He also frequently uses the adjective 'vital' (*lebendig*) to oppose the deadly and empty world of the past era:

> Life is a real self-actualisation, a walk among things, a having communion with realities, mutual giving and taking. That extreme critical restraint, which was formerly considered perfected intellectuality, is becoming more and more incomprehensible to us, as a burdensome

> dream, which imprisoned men in an empty, dead world of concepts, cut off from the flourishing abundance of the real.[23]

Such almost religious language helps Guardini to express his conviction that this transformation is not neutral, not simply a shift from one mode of existence to another. Rather, it is a movement that should be enthusiastically embraced as a redemptive departure from the sins of the past and as a possibility to start anew.

This optimism of the first lecture is maintained throughout the other lectures. Yet, in the last lecture he adds an interesting second perspective:

> This desire for community is so strong [...] that it almost drags man towards others. We are starting to perceive the disintegrating powers of an exaggerated desire for community. It can deform characters.[24]

Suddenly, Guardini seems to realize that the awakening of a sense of community can thwart the social order just as much as the earlier individualism could. He points to the fact that the new sense of community is often totalitarian, and claims that community in his day is often allowed to overshadow the freedom of the individual. Maybe, he suggests, it is time to examine in what ways the individualism of the past age was valuable after all. And, more importantly, perhaps we can find a way to hold together the individual and the community in harmony.[25]

Guardini's Solution

In the previous sections, we have seen Guardini sketch the modern stance vis-à-vis reality and community. This older individualistic and rationalistic attitude had already lost most of its cultural force at Guardini's time, because there was a growing sensitivity to immediate experiences and the idea that communities establish the individual rather than the other way around. However, this new approach also has its own risks, as it seems to substitute an overemphasis on the community for the earlier overemphasis on the individual.

According to Guardini, the Catholic Church possesses the means necessary to truly solve these problems. In his lectures, Guardini shifts from describing the problems of modernity to describing in various ways why and how the church can offer a solution. As we are interested in the turn to the church, the following sections will examine what this turn involves and how it solves these problems.

We should begin by making one remark. Guardini does not try to systematize his thoughts in *Vom Sinn der Kirche*; ideas that are central in one lecture sometimes do not reappear in other lectures. For example, the notion of the 'Kingdom of God' is developed as a more or less systematic principle in his second lecture but does not function as such in other

lectures. And his idea of a hierarchy of being is more or less presumed rather than argued for. These lectures do not have much explicit systematic rigor – which simply belongs to their creative character – but the following sections will reveal that Guardini does, in fact, propose a number of ideas that can help us to systematize our understanding of the church.

God's Action in the Church and the Individual

In the second lecture, entitled 'Church and Personality' (*Kirche und Persönlichkeit*), Guardini lays the theological framework for his idea of the church. Central to his exposition is the phrase 'Kingdom of God' (*Gottesreich*).[26] In speaking about the Kingdom, Guardini touches on a highly sensitive point, because the heated controversy surrounding modernism in the early twentieth century explicitly revolved around the theme of the Kingdom of God. It is interesting to see where Guardini positions himself in this debate, and in order to properly understand Guardini's treatment of this subject, we will begin by giving some background information.

For some centuries before the controversy arose, the common Catholic interpretation of the Kingdom of God in the gospel was that this referred at least partially to the visible Catholic Church. The Catholic Church as the *societas perfecta* represented the Kingdom of God on earth. So, for example, Pope Pius IX could write in 1874 that "the kingdom of God on earth is a perfect society, which is held together and governed by its own laws and its own rights."[27]

On the other hand, liberal Protestants, direct opponents of Catholic theology in those days, understood the Kingdom of God as pointing to a particular moral and religious order that was fulfilled in the individual – especially the enlightened, liberal individual. For example, in 1900, Von Harnack wrote that "the Kingdom of God comes, when it comes to the *individual*, enters his *soul*, and is embraced by it."[28]

Although there are of course fundamental differences between the two viewpoints, Catholics and liberal Protestants had one thing in common: they both unproblematically linked Jesus' Kingdom of God to a reality already fulfilled in the present. According to Catholics, this was fulfilled in the church, while according to liberal Protestants this was fulfilled in individuals.

The turn of the century saw the blossoming of historical-critical exegesis. Protestant exegetes like Johannes Weiß and Albert Schweitzer focused on Jesus' own proclamation of the Kingdom. It was an attempt to break away from previous ecclesial or ethical interpretations, instead concentrating on the historical meaning of Jesus of Nazareth's proclamation of a Kingdom. This new perspective led to greater sensitivity to the eschatological context of Jesus' message, and it contested the views of other contemporary liberal Protestants such as Von Harnack who identified the Kingdom of God with an earthly reality.

In a way, this new exegesis also questioned the unproblematic Catholic equation of the Kingdom of God with the church, and it became especially controversial when Catholic exegetes became involved. The Catholic theologian Loisy used the new exegesis to oppose Von Harnack, by showing that Jesus' proclamation suggested a certain sociological and historical dimension, and he argued that the Roman Catholic Church could be understood as an appropriate and justified effect of Jesus' Kingdom proclamation.[29]

Notwithstanding the fact that it was Loisy's intention to refute liberal Protestantism and to justify the Roman Catholic Church as the direct result of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom, he became the center of a heated theological debate. The fundamental presupposition of his exegesis denied that Jesus' proclaimed Kingdom could simply be equated with an earthly reality, and it thus contradicted the belief that Jesus was the founder the Roman Catholic Church. Regardless of his intentions his work was thus received as shockingly liberal.[30]

Rome reacted vigorously in the 1907 decree *Lamentabili* in which all 'modernist theologies' that suggested that Jesus had not intended to found the church were condemned. A year later, Loisy was excommunicated, and in 1910 all clergy and professors of theology had to swear the anti-modernist oath before receiving ordination or taking up a new post, which included the promise to uphold the claim that "the Church [...] was personally instituted by the real and historical Christ."[31]

Guardini was studying theology in Tübingen at the height of this debate. It is interesting therefore to note precisely how Guardini explains the meaning of the Kingdom of God in his *Vom Sinn der Kirche*. He says:

> The Kingdom of God means that He draws His creature to Himself, and makes it capable of receiving His own fullness; and that He bestows upon it the desire and the power to possess Him. It means [...] that the boundless fecundity of the divine love seizes the creature and gives us new birth into participation in God's own nature and a new life that springs from Himself. In that rebirth, the Father makes him His child in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit.[32]

According to Guardini, this is the Kingdom: God who seizes his creature, leading him or her to final fulfillment. Precisely in this sense, the church is indeed *das Reich Gottes in der Menschheit*: the Kingdom as it is present in humankind. It is noteworthy in Guardini's explanation of the meaning of the Kingdom of God that he uses dynamic rather than static language. God's Kingdom is not simply the present situation in which God rules over his creation in the form of the church, but it is the process in which God actively establishes his rule, by drawing his creatures toward himself and by filling them with his love. Guardini's explanation suggests a kind of Neoplatonist *reditus*, in which the human person and humanity as a whole are taken up into the divine Trinity. He clarifies that this does not

mean that the church consists only of that part of humankind that has been taken up into this movement. Rather, the church is the true form of humankind, humankind as it is destined to be. Hence he can claim that even the first small ecclesial community at Pentecost still represented the fullness of humankind.[33] In this way, Guardini opens up a sacramental understanding of the church as something that points beyond itself.

Thus, rather than denying that the Roman Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God, Guardini broadens the meaning of the Kingdom. He moves from a narrow focus on the visible hierarchy toward the whole of humanity and its heavenly destiny. We might say that he introduces an eschatological perspective that points beyond the merely institutional. Along these lines, Guardini thinks, we can claim that the Roman Catholic Church is the Kingdom of God not by virtue of the fact that its hierarchy was directly instituted by Christ (although this is not denied) but by virtue of the fact that it sacramentally represents the fullness of humankind and its heavenly destiny.

Guardini broadens the meaning of the Kingdom of God in a second way, by claiming that the Kingdom of God has two aspects. While the church is the presence of God's Kingdom among humankind, there is another aspect of the Kingdom of God: a subjective aspect, in which the individual is seized by God's grace. An individual, with his or her inner world, freedom, responsibilities, unique character, etcetera, is taken up into Gods Kingdom. According to Guardini, this is not a second instance of God's Kingdom in addition to the church, but is a different aspect of the same reality. The individual does not stand in opposition to the church, but is simply the 'opposite pole' (*Gegenpol*[34]) of the same divine movement. In other words: God's Kingdom is indeed present in this historical reality, as a new humanity in the form of the church, and as a new human being in the form of the individual believer. As such, the church and the individual believer are both aspects of the same profound reality of God's Kingdom.[35]

Guardini claims that it is precisely this mutual empowering of individual and community that distinguishes a true Catholic community from any individualism or anarchism in which the community is understood as perpetually threatening the interests of the individual. And it also distinguishes the Catholic community from totalitarianism or communism in which the individual is seen as perpetually threatening the interests of the community. In a truly Catholic view, Guardini believes, community and individuality belong together intrinsically. They presume and promote each other, as they are both different aspects of the same Kingdom.[36] God, he claims, takes up human beings both in their individuality and in their being part of the whole, both in their subjective life and in their objective life. This implies that the church should not in any sense harm the individual, nor the individual harm the community: both have their own value, both spheres need to be respected for what they are. Guardini also articulates this more strongly, when he claims that a human being can become a true character

(*Persönlichkeit*) only if he or she surrenders to the true community, the church. And a church fails to be the objective aspect of the *Gottesreich* if its members do not direct their inner life toward God.[37]

We must appreciate the innovative nature of Guardini's approach to the church. Scholastic ecclesiologies of those days tended to overemphasize the visible hierarchy and were generally defensive and legalistic.[38] Yet, we should note that it was not unprecedented, and that Guardini was most likely influenced in this respect by the early-nineteenth-century Catholic Tübingen School. This school, especially the works of Drey, Hirscher, and Staudenmaier, made the notion of God's Kingdom central to theology. These scholars found that, in the philosophical environment of the Enlightenment, morality was increasingly being understood ahistorically, as something 'untraditioned,' the result of mere rational speculation. By contrast, these Tübingen theologians attempted to show how dogmatic theology and moral theology were mutually dependent, linked by the notion of God's Kingdom as a drama in which God's love unfolds in history, through the dynamic tradition of the church. Any morality, they insisted, should be derived from the notion of the Kingdom of God.[39] This older Tübingen approach seems to have offered Guardini a way to overcome the pitfalls of the modernism debate. Similarly to their understanding of the Kingdom of God as an ongoing tradition in development, he argued that it is not in spite of, but precisely in the historical aspects of the church that the church is the Kingdom of God.[40]

Without explicitly addressing the theological sensitivities surrounding the notion of God's Kingdom at the time, Guardini accordingly attempted to find a way to think God's work in the individual and the community together, and to hold on to the belief that God's Kingdom is present in our reality, while also being sensitive to the eschatological character of this presence. On the basis of the notion of the Kingdom of God, Guardini crafts a perspective that we can characterize in line with Healy's distinction as 'dramatic': a perspective in which the individual – precisely as individual vis-à-vis the tradition of the church community – is a unique locus of God's ongoing revelation.[41]

But is it dramatic? Despite the above, Guardini never actually *describes* the church in dramatic or historic language. Although he seems to create scope for a historical approach to the church, he does not use this scope but rather approaches the concept of the church as a kind of archetype: *der Kirche* in general confronts *der Mensch* in general, but it is never, for example, the twentieth-century German Church that confronts a particular person. Guardini creates scope for a more historic and dramatic understanding of the church, but this aspect always remains an abstract notion.[42]

Freedom and the Hierarchy of Being

In the previous section, we have seen that Guardini attempts to reconcile the communal and the individual via the notion of the Kingdom of

God. But Guardini is well aware that, in real life, the individual and the community not always live in perfect and peaceful agreement. Therefore, he raises the question how exactly the responsibility and freedom of the individual and that of the church as a community should relate to each other.

Guardini answers this question by claiming that the church has authority (*Befehlsgewalt*) over the individual, as such visibly representing God's authority. At the same time, however, he claims that the individual is immediately related to God and thereby free from any external pressure.[43] According to him, both claims are true and they should not be played off against each other. The key to understanding this paradox is his idea of 'freedom.' According to Guardini, freedom is not simply the possibility to choose between various options. Rather, it is the situation in which the individual is the person he or she is destined to be by God; in which his or her whole life is ordered, with every aspect assigned its proper place. Hence, this freedom is not something that can be attained simply by removing all external pressure from an individual, as if the inner world of the individual would be perfectly balanced if it were not distorted by external realities. Rather, Guardini believes that the individual has to be liberated from false ideas and prejudices. Individuals can be confined to themselves, and need a power over against themselves to be freed from themselves. Hence it is only in relationship to a true community that they can become true persons. So for Guardini, accepting the authority of the church does not imply blind obedience, but it implies that one understands and takes up one's own role and position in the whole.[44]

Earlier, we noted that Guardini worries about the prevailing relativism of his days: the idea that nothing is absolute and everything is in flux, the feeling that there is no order in the cosmos, etcetera. This relativism leads to the paradoxical situation that relative things are absolutized. People are stuck in competition for money or power as if these had eternal value, and they are confined to their particular viewpoints or desires, treating them as absolute truths.

We must keep this observation in mind to understand why Guardini highly esteems the ability to see one's own proper place, and the proper place of other things. In the previous section, Guardini sketched the individual and the community not as two mutually exclusive entities but rather as two realities tied together: when individuals take their proper place in the church, this benefits both the individuals and the church. This is precisely the opposite of relativism: it is the individual who accepts that there is a certain hierarchy in the world, in which a special place is designed for him or her. The acceptance of one's own proper place here goes hand in hand with the understanding of the other positions: there are other persons, finite creatures just like him or her, and there is God, who is Creator. Here, in embracing the finite position of human beings, a person can begin to understand his relationship to the whole and to God. As such, paradoxically, the

acceptance of one's finitude makes it possible to have a relationship with the infinite:

> Being free means that a man is able to see the great as great, and the small as small; that he sees the worthless as worthless and the valuable as valuable. That he correctly sees distinctions, can differentiate between this object and that, this condition and that; correctly sees the relations between and measure of objects. That he recognizes the order of objects with an incorruptible look; the hierarchy of values, its lowest and its apex, and each intermediate point in its proper position. That he grasps the idea in its purity, but contemplates the whole of reality in its light. That he sees everyday life with all its hardships and shortcomings, but also the eternal in it.[45]

According to Guardini, this hierarchy of being is celebrated and brought to light in the church. The church does this by its doctrine, which confronts the individual with eternal truth; but also by its moral guidelines; its absolute image of perfection that is Christ; its community order; its liturgy, in which individuals become aware of their createdness before their creator.[46] The church, precisely by being the embodiment of all humankind, is able to make individuals aware that their perspective on the world is not everything. In the church, a person's blind spots are corrected and at the same time, his or her unique point of view is embraced. Hence the church, by its authority, restores individual persons to what they truly are: this specific person, this particular individual with his or her own particular point of view, in a very specific hierarchy of being. The church prevents individuals from suggesting that their point of view is the absolute truth, or that their experiences are normative; it puts individuals into perspective, into their right place, and honors them for what they are: this particular individual. The church helps individuals to become aware of, and embrace what makes them so unique: their own particularity, their finitude. As such, the church is able to liberate individuals from the confinement of their times and culture without destroying their individuality.[47] And it assists individuals in assuming their proper finite position from which they can be and in fact are drawn to the infinite God:

> That a man sees what he is with perfect clarity: a creature; but that he begins to rejoice in this fact, and recognize it as the starting point of his ascent into the divine; that he becomes humble, but strives after the highest; genuine, but full of confidence, and so for the first time truly human, that is the high asset of the Church.[48]

Tradition, Truth, and Catholicity

The above argument could be read as meaning that the church already possesses all the truth and simply requires individuals to blindly accept that the

church is always right. But this is not quite what Guardini means. Elaborating on the relationship between the authority of the church and the freedom of the individual in the fourth lecture, Guardini explains how the tradition of the Catholic Church works: communal norms, morals, and institutions are developed on the basis of what people have learned to perceive as good. They in turn, shape the character development of the next generation of individuals. This new generation will not simply adopt these norms, morals and institutions, but will also adapt them toward what it sees as right or just. As such, the tradition of the church is an ongoing process of discernment in which individuals build upon the works of their predecessors.[49]

This means that the full Catholic truth is not yet present: we try to discern what it is, but we often fail. The church often fails to be what it should be. Guardini uses this awareness to qualify, or rather to balance, his own comments about the church as well. He explains that he, just as we, has never experienced the fullness of Catholicity, and he acknowledges that his thinking is probably corrupted by the spirit of the age just as anyone else's at the time: by individualism and liberalism. The best that he can do, he says, is to express his ideas, in order to hopefully allow the next generation to build upon them, enabling them to approach the Catholic ideal slightly more closely.[50]

At the same time, he believes that the truth is in some sense intrinsically tied to the church. Truth is something that we strive after, but at the same time, the church itself, as this tradition of striving toward the truth, is the truth. This dialectic is upheld by fundamentally redefining the idea of 'truth':

> "The truth" of Christianity does not consist of abstract sentences and values that are "tied to the church," but the truth, on which my salvation depends is a being, a concrete reality. Christ and the Church is the truth.[51]

Guardini thus locates the essence of truth in a concrete historical reality, that of Christ and his mystical body, the church. The process of the discernment of truth is not simply the ongoing discussion between theologians who are trying to formulate the right doctrine. Rather, it is the process of the generations that try to live the Kingdom of God and partially succeed in doing so, thereby setting boundaries and objectives to help the next generations to answer even more faithfully to the demands of the Kingdom. The tradition of the church is true, not because it provides a set of eternally valid statements about God and the world, but because it is a living reality in which the individual can participate by surrendering him- or herself to it.

Precisely this stance, this way of living, is 'Catholic'[52] according to Guardini. To him, true Catholicity means the fundamental embrace of the totality of life. This can have different aspects. For example, Guardini claims that it is Catholic to accept the church together with its failures.[53] But it is also Catholic to value the divine and the human,[54] to love the

particular and relate it to the whole, to see the historical and relate it to the eternal.[55] It is Catholic to be close to people, but not so close as to harm them[56]; to be obedient not out of weak self-negation but as a free act of strength[57]; to see the fundamental equality between confessor and priest, but also the fundamental difference;[58] to be open to the world without losing an ordered perspective.[59] Catholicity as Guardini understands it is not simply the property of belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it is the absence of contradictions, effected not by violently choosing one perspective, but by dialectically holding various perspectives and views together in a permanent equilibrium. Only a life that is able to do justice to all the various experiences of reality, in theory and praxis, and that is able to see the deeper divine order behind this, is a truly Catholic life.

This interpretation of tradition, truth, and Catholicity enables Guardini to move beyond the rationalism of modernity. And we can see that it is actually not very far removed from, for example, Hauerwas' pragmatism, which understands Christianity as a way of life that implicitly carries an alternative epistemology within it, another more truthful way to relate to God and the world. Just like Hauerwas, Guardini tries to locate 'truth' in the life of the community; and just like Hauerwas, Guardini offers the life of the church as an alternative to other epistemologies.

Yet, Guardini seems more confident to speak about the truth, also – at least in principle – apart from this community. See for instance the introductory words to his fourth lecture:

> When the Catholic Christian grasps a vital issue theoretically or practically, it should actually be altered. It should be like when something is suddenly brought out from a false light into the clear and full light; as if it was liberated from a violent hand and passed into a respecting and appreciating hand. Every object should under the influence of the Catholic spirit revive towards freedom and the fullness of its nature. [...] Yes, if only we would be truly Catholic! Then that sure goodness, that sees everything correctly and liberates it, would be in us! And in our realm of being, life, which everywhere suffers violence, would respire and all things would be made new![60]

Two things are important here. Firstly, according to Guardini, Christian truth is not only about cerebral understanding but it is the grasping of an aspect of life by thinking and acting. We could label this as the 'pragmatic' aspect of Guardini that we just addressed: understanding is more than rational activity, it also involves action. But Guardini suggests that there is a second aspect as well: a proper understanding of something implies that it truly comes to life, as if liberated from a 'violent hand.' In other words: the more something is 'alive,' the truer it is.

With regard to this second aspect, Guardini is not making a merely epistemological point, but he reveals a specifically theological sensibility: truth

has to do with the bringing to life of reality. Guardini imagines truth as something dynamic, related to growth, to liberation from a confinement, and to bringing things into an ever-growing relationship with other things. This approach to truth is clearly the opposite of any idealistic struggle to rationally arrive at the 'thing in itself,' separated from all temporal and causal relations as far as possible. And this approach encompasses a fully theological concept of truth, intrinsically linked to what we could describe as the *reditus* motive in Guardini: the return of reality toward the living God. Here again, the church is understood as that form of life that remind individual beings of the absolute, thus giving everyone and everything its proper place. People can flourish here precisely because they embrace their finitude and particularity without seeing these as defects, as they are related to all others and to the infinite in a harmonious, life-giving way.[61]

In sum, then, Guardini tries to overcome the rationalism of his age. Firstly by proposing a dynamic view on the tradition of the church, in which discernment takes place in thinking and acting. And secondly by proposing an alternative concept of truth in which truth is not 'passive' correspondence with the external reality, but rather an active return to the abundant life of God's creation.

Guardini's Ideal Form of a Concrete Church

In the previous sections, we have followed Guardini in his description of the church as a community in which the individual finds its proper place in relation to the absolute. Such a community enables us to transcend the modern dichotomy between individual and community and the paradoxical situation that modern relativism leads to the idolization of finite values. But where does he find this church?

Guardini himself raises the objection – and rejects it – that no such community can be found in real life. He is convinced that it can: this is the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, he is aware that the church often fails in its task, and considers this a big tragedy. Precisely because life-giving, salvific truth can only be found in the concrete church, the failures of the church are all the more bitter. When the church fails to be the community that it should be, it disturbs the only form of truth in which its members can find salvation.[62] The failures of the church thus immediately affect the extent to which its members are saved.

For Guardini, this is an immensely tragic fact, but there is no alternative. Either one embraces this concrete church, this *vorhandene wirkliche*[63] church as it is, or one embraces an ahistorical ideal type of a church in which there are no flaws. But if we were to embrace an ideal but non-existing church, we would have to accept the unacceptable: that God has apparently abandoned the concrete church. And this goes against everything Guardini believes in. In Jesus Christ, he is convinced, God himself has entered human history, and God continues to enter into the reality of the church. In doing

so, God has embraced a great deal of tragedy, and has borne this without simply solving it.

Guardini pushes this tragedy to its limits by conceding that, at least from our limited understanding of it, even the final consummation of the church in heaven will not resolve this problem. For, he asks, how can the triumphant church in heaven be blessed if it knows that its failures have caused real losses? This tragic aspect, Guardini says, must not be resolved by simply denying it and embracing the idea of an invisible but pure church. Rather, this tragic aspect must be endured, and it can only be relieved by our faith and hope in God's love:

> Perhaps the tragedy of humanity will only be an opportunity for God's love to work the inconceivable wherein all defects will be swallowed up. It has already allowed us to call Adam's guilt "blessed." And that the love of God is beyond measure and surpasses all justice is the substance of the Christian hope.[64]

Returning to the concrete church, this may lead to the paradoxical effect that, by the sacraments of confirmation and ordination, we are called to be holy. Yet, says Guardini, the holier we become, the more we perceive how the church fails, and the more we have to suffer and endure the sins of the church. We cannot resolve this, but can only cling to God's promise that in the end, "the wheat will not be choked by the thorns."[65]

As such, Guardini seems to embrace the concreteness of the church not simply because it suits his anti-idealistic epistemology. His choice is also motivated theologically, by his belief that a flawed church is still God's church. In other words, the holiness of the individual is not caused by the holiness of the church; but the holiness of both is caused by God's grace working both in the church and in the individual.

Meanwhile, even while he encourages us to abide by the church as it is, Guardini of course offers ideals for the church. For example, the church should not pretend that it is perfect, and for Guardini, this implies a rejection of an 'aesthetic' church in which the focus lies exclusively on the perfect performance of the liturgy or on sublime architecture, for example. Nor should the church try to make itself dependent on a theoretically pure construction. Such a 'blueprint', as Healy would call it, would almost be offensive, and Guardini suggests that this is similar to evaluating whether an actual, living friend complies with the perfect idea of a friend.[66]

The church should simply be "a people-church; fully divine, but also with everything that belongs to the realm of humanity, mind and body, indeed earth."[67] For Guardini, the church must embrace the whole world, including all of human culture, devotion, etcetera. Tellingly, he rejects the kind of Catholicism depicted by the novelist Joris Karl Huysmans. This nineteenth-century French-Dutch author pictured a high-culture

Catholicity focused on aesthetic sophistication, at the same time despising every expression of popular religion.[68] Guardini wants precisely the opposite: the church must consist of extraordinary and common people, embracing both sophisticated liturgy and the simple rituals of popular devotion.

Guardini also wants a church that is receptive to new ideas. The more the church embraces the whole world, he believes, the more Catholic it will be. A Catholic viewpoint sees everything in its proper value, and as such positions everything according to its rightful place. For Guardini, this implies an open-mindedness that is at the same time strongly aware of its own special role.[69]

Finally, we should note that Guardini focuses less on the ideal community and more on the ideal believer. Guardini does not seem to find any ideals of the church very interesting or helpful. Rather, the real challenge in his eyes is faced by the believer who must be so holy that he or she is able to perceive the errors of the church, to bear these as his or her cross, and still wholeheartedly love the church.

Excursus: A Turn to the Concrete in Der Gegensatz

We have so far offered an analysis of how Guardini tries to overcome modern rationalism by reflecting upon the tradition of the church as an ongoing process of theoretical and practical discernment. We have also noted that he views truth not as passive correspondence with external reality, but as an active return to living reality. It is interesting in this light, to look at his philosophical work *Der Gegensatz*,[70] published in 1925, only two years after *Vom Sinn der Kirche*. This book lays out the philosophical framework of his thought, and we will see that it mirrors his theological proposal in *Vom Sinn der Kirche*. The initial question of the book appears in the title of its first section: "The concretely-living, and how it can be grasped knowingly."

In this work, Guardini argues that reality is a living and complex whole that can be described only by speaking in terms of polarities or contrasting opposites ('*Gegensätzen*'). Throughout the book, he offers various examples of such polarities, including the one we are by now familiar with, the polarity between individual and community. In this particular example, in order to describe what it means to be human, it is necessary on the one hand to describe a person's individuality, and on the other hand his or her being part of a community. Both aspects, says Guardini, cannot be reduced to each other. Yet these aspects are not in conflict with each other in the concretely living person, but they are instead united and ideally even strengthen each other. In a similar way, Guardini claims, the entire living human existence is dialectical ('*gegensätzlich*') in nature. This certainly does not mean that it is the result of conflicting forces that need to be resolved (like Hegel's dialectics) or that human existence is a contradiction

in itself ('*Widerspruch*'), but rather that its living unity can never be grasped in a unifying conceptual scheme.[71] In his own words:

> The relationship [between two opposites] cannot be contradictory. But neither can it be logically comprehended, because it is concerned with living. The great temptation for thinking is precisely to smooth out this tangle of what cannot be comprehended, either towards the rational or towards the intuitive side. I consider it a special duty to avoid precisely this. Probably its fulfillment must be paid for with a remaining lack of clarity.[72]

To be clear, Guardini does not wish to dismiss abstract thought, but instead in order to avoid the trap of modern rationalism, raises awareness of the fact that any theory is a reduction of living reality.[73] In *Der Gegensatz*, he offers various descriptions of how living reality always exceeds our theories; for our purposes, I will distinguish two reasons of why this is always the case.

First of all, according to Guardini, reality itself is 'supra-rational' (*über-rational*): its fullness cannot be exhaustively grasped in formal concepts but also needs an intuitive grasp. Moreover: both a rationalist and a strictly intuitive mode of knowledge reduce the supra-rational reality to either its merely rational or its merely intuitive aspects; hence, only in contemplation (*Anschauung*) can these two aspects be held together.

Secondly, Guardini argues that any vision or thought of the world, whether rational or intuitive, is necessarily reductive because it is always an *individual* and thus one-sided attempt to describe the mystery of life. When individuals engage with living reality, they must resist the tendency to regard their own one-sided perspective as the final truth. Rather, they must acknowledge their own unique position in the whole of humanity, and try to integrate their perspective within the whole. It is not easy to respect these tensions, and it is far easier to fall back into a superficial apparent objectivity, which in fact simply amounts to absolutizing one's individual position. True engagement with reality requires 'discipline and self-conquest' (*Zucht und Selbstüberwindung*[74]). He calls this an attitude of universalism.[75]

Even if Guardini does not speak of the church here, we can easily see the fundamental complementarity of *Der Gegensatz* (1925) with *Vom Sinn der Kirche* (1923). The turn that he endeavors to make in *Vom Sinn der Kirche* from a bloodless rationalist theology to the living reality of the church, now appears even more clearly as related to an epistemological conviction that life always exceeds rational theory. Also, his definition of Catholicism is clearly the theological counterpart of his philosophical universalism which holds that individual persons should integrate their own beliefs into a plurality of thoughts in order to do full justice to the mystery of life.

Guardini's turn to the church is thus fundamentally related to epistemological insights which are elaborated in *Der Gegensatz*: Guardini draws the attention of theology to the life of the church, but immediately understands

that this means a qualification and reorientation of epistemology in general. For theology, it means that the task is not to reflect on propositional truths but on a living reality, namely the church. And it means that theology must actively contribute to the Catholicity of the church, which is not a tension-free doctrinal synthesis but rather a living integration of a multitude of individual perspectives.

Unmistakably, then, the theological rediscovery of the church in *Vom Sinn der Kirche* on the one hand, and the philosophical embrace of an alternative epistemology that prefers the concrete above the abstract and the living praxis above theory in *Der Gegensatz* on the other, must be understood as a single movement in Guardini's thought.

Conclusion

We have read Guardini's *Vom Sinn der Kirche* in order to discover why he thought it was necessary to engage in a turn to the church, and what solution he proposed. After our examination of three contemporary authors who made a turn to the church, it is interesting to see that their major concerns often resonate with Guardini's work. Although a full comparison must be postponed, we can already note some resemblances. To mention just a few: Guardini's opposition to modernity with its individualism and his rejection of infinite values, as well as his Neoplatonist quest for a harmonious relationship between the individual and the community – coupled with a certain nostalgia for the Middle Ages – remind us of Milbank's work; his emphasis on the influence of the concrete church on the formation of individual characters underlines an important concern of Hauerwas's; and his attempt to locate the salvific value of the church not in its own holiness but rather in God's grace, is repeated in Healy's work.

Needless to say, the turn to the church as it is made by Guardini, a child of the nineteenth century, is also very unique in its own sense. As we have seen, Guardini turns away from the detached and bloodless experience of the world that he associates with previous generations of Germans. It is not primarily a German idealistic philosophy that he rejects, but the whole way of living that came with it: the basic experience that individuals are enclosed within themselves, unable to reach out to discover that they belong to other people. The young Guardini was optimistic, happy to observe that this bloodless experience of reality was already disappearing, and he actively embraced the revival of community life.

Guardini's turn to the church can only be understood against the background of this cultural turn away from individualism and rationalism toward community and a more direct experience of reality. According to him, it is only in the church, properly understood as the objective aspect of God's Kingdom, that the community can blossom without encroaching upon the integrity of the individual believer, who is the subjective aspect of the same Kingdom. Only in the church can the individual be fully free,

in the sense that he or she can find his or her true eternal destiny by being taken up precisely as the specific finite individual they are into the ecclesial order that is oriented toward the infinite. And just as the church is able to incorporate every human being precisely in his or her particularity, the church can also incorporate everything that is good in any particular age and culture: the truth of the church is not complete or finished, but, as a *catholic* church, the church always embraces even more realities.

This does not mean that Guardini is overly optimistic about how the church actually functions. He is well aware that the church in practice often fails in its task. This means that people may be lost whereas they would have been saved if the church had not erred. This is the tragedy of the church, a tragedy that cannot be solved on human terms. The only thing that we can do is to bear this tragedy. In fact, the holier we are, the more we will have to bear. But Guardini warns us that we should never try to formulate an ideal church and use this ideal as the starting point of our deductions, because this would amount to a denial of the living reality and a return to the errors of modernity. We have to accept this concrete church as the God-given community through which God mysteriously draws humankind to himself

Notes

1 For details on Guardini's life, see Hanna Gerl-Falkovitz, *Romano Guardini, 1885–1968: Leben und Werk* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1995); Robert Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997). For a complete overview of all his works: Hans Mercker, *Bibliographie Romano Guardini: (1885–1968): Guardinis Werke, Veröffentlichungen über Guardini, Rezensionen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1978).

2 Romano Guardini, *Vom Sinn der Kirche: Fünf Vorträge* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1923), henceforth cited as VSK. I will translate the quotations in English. As I sought the most literal translation, translations are usually mine. However, my point of departure was often Ada Lane's translation: *The Church and the Catholic & The Spirit of the Liturgy*, trans. Ada Lane (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935).

3 VSK, 1.

4 See especially Romano Guardini, *Vom Geist der Liturgie* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1918).

5 Robert A. Krieg, *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 2 and 3.

6 See for an overview of the history of the Catholic Church in Germany in the late nineteenth century: Ronald Warloski, *Neudeutschland: German Catholic Students, 1919–1939.* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), xv–xxviii; Ulrich Bröckling, *Katholische Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik: Zeitkritik und Gesellschaftstheorie bei Walter Dirks, Romano Guardini, Carl Schmitt, Ernst Michel und Heinrich Mertens* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1993), 23–31; Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 46–51.

7 VSK, 1.

8 VSK, 2.

9 VSK, 3.
10 VSK, 5.
11 VSK, 74–75.
12 Guardini elaborates here on a distinction by the nineteenth-century sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, between community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*). Whereas a community was bound by affective ties, a society was bound merely by economic ties. In Guardini's day, this distinction was used to explain why Germans distanced themselves from the Weimar republic (regarded as a *Gesellschaft*), while longing for communities with which they could identify. See also Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 49.
13 VSK, 75.
14 VSK, 32.
15 VSK, 32.
16 VSK, 44.
17 VSK, 45.
18 VSK, 45.
19 VSK, 6.
20 VSK, 8.
21 VSK, 7.
22 VSK, 10.
23 VSK, 6.
24 VSK, 77.
25 The idea of the dawn of a new era became crucial in some of his later works, e.g. *Das Ende der Neuzeit: Ein Versuch zur Orientierung.* (Basel: Hess, 1950), and *Die Macht: Versuch einer Wegweisung* (Wurzburg: Werkbund, 1952). Both are available in English translation: *The End of the Modern World: A Search for Orientation*. Trans. Joseph Theman and Herbert Burke (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1956); *Power and Responsibility: A Course of Action for the New Age*. Trans. Elinor C. Briefs (Chicago: Regnery, 1961).
26 VSK, 22.
27 Pius IX, *Vix dum a Nobis* (1874). This identification was unproblematically repeated in 1925 in the encyclical *Quas primas*: "the Catholic Church, which is the kingdom of Christ on earth." See Ton van Eijk, *Teken van aanwezigheid: Een katholieke ecclesiologie in oecumenisch perspectief* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000), 41–46.
28 Adolph von Harnack, *Das Wesen Des Christentums* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1902), 36.
29 His famous claim that "Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom, and what arrived was the Church," is often misunderstood as implying a critique of the Roman Catholic Church but was in fact aimed at liberal Protestant ecclesiology. Loisy, *L'Évangile et l'Église* (Bellevue: Chez l'auteur, 1902), 111.
30 See for an excellent introduction to the controversy surrounding Loisy's work, Alexander Roper Vidler, *The Modernist Movement in the Roman Church: Its Origins & Outcome: Being the Norrisian Prize Essay in the University of Cambridge for the Year 1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934).
31 Pius X, *Sacrorum insterstitum* ("The Oath Against Modernism"), 1910. Accessed February 13, 2018. http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius10/p10moath.htm.
32 VSK, 21.
33 VSK, 21–22.
34 The word *Gegenpol* could imply a more mutually exclusive relation, and then it should be translated as 'contradiction,' but in a footnote, Guardini clarifies that he is thinking more of a kind of dialectical relationship (*Gegensätzlich*)

than a contradictory relationship (*Widerspruch*). We should add that what we call dialectic here, unlike for example Hegelian dialectic, is not waiting for final resolution or a synthetic moment. Rather, Guardini believes that in order to do justice to living reality, both poles should always be maintained and one should never be reduced to the other. See his explanation on p. 24, no. 1; this is also elaborated in his *Der Gegensatz*, as we discussed on pp. 139–141.

35 Guardini seems to have never been satisfied with this idea of the Kingdom. In the preface to the third edition of VSK, he suggests that he did not sufficiently take the historical dimension of the church into account; *Vom Sinn Der Kirche*, 3rd ed. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1933), 16. And in his later work *Der Herr* (1948), Guardini completely abandons this concept of God's Kingdom in favor of a more historically sensitive language of divine action: the church and the individual are now related, not because they both represent the Kingdom, but because Christ works in both. He also separates the church and the Kingdom more strongly, claiming that the church is on its way to the Kingdom. *Der Herr: Betrachtungen über die Person und das Leben Jesu Christi* (Aschaffenburg: Paul Pattloch Verlag, 1948), esp. 584–590.

36 VSK, 27–28.

37 VSK, 28–31. On the relationship between this idea and Guardini's own conversion experience, see Markus Zimmerman, *Die Nachfolge Jesu Christi: Eine Studie zu Romano Guardini* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2004), 236–238.

38 See Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 57–59.

39 Bradford E. Hinze, "Roman Catholic Theology: Tübingen," in *The Blackwell Companion to Nineteenth-century Theology*, ed. David Fergusson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 193–195.

40 I have found no references to these theologians as important influences on Guardini. Krieg claims, but without reference, that Guardini studied the ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler, another important contributor to the Catholic Tübingen School, in courses taught by Wilhelm Koch. Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 52–54.

41 Zimmerman argues that this dialectic between the individual and the church allowed Guardini to overcome the modernism debate; this dialectic could accept the strong authority of Rome without diminishing the individual quest. Zimmerman, *Die Nachfolge Jesu Christi*, 227–230.

42 Guardini would later acknowledge that he was not initially aware of just how strongly the ideal depiction of the church in VSK contradicts the ecclesial reality, and would note that the awakening of the church brought enthusiasm but simultaneously fierce church criticism. *Die Kirche des Herrn: Meditationen über Wesen und Auftrag der Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1965), 13–17.

43 VSK, 29.

44 VSK, 54–57.

45 VSK, 56.

46 VSK, 48–50.

47 VSK, 68.

48 VSK, 50–51.

49 In a long note, spanning several pages from p. 88 up to 93, he explains how tradition shapes what might be nowadays called a 'social imagination.' Using the example of marriage and celibacy, he shows how these two lifeforms mutually influenced each other and shaped an approach to sex which views it as relatively but not ultimately important. VSK 88, no. 1.

50 VSK, 52–53.

51 VSK, 37–38.

52 Contrary to the convention in English, Germans write 'katholisch' in lowercase. Guardini was not forced therefore to distinguish between two meanings of 'Catholicity,' between Catholic as in pertaining to the Roman Catholic faith and as in the church's catholic i.e. universal aspect. Evidently, when Guardini speaks here about Catholicity, he uses the latter meaning. However, he also presupposes that the Roman Catholic Church is the church that is or should preeminently be marked by this Catholicity. In this chapter, I have opted to consistently capitalize the adjective 'Catholic' and 'Catholicity.'
53 VSK, 38.
54 VSK, 39.
55 VSK, 43.
56 VSK, 87.
57 VSK, 89.
58 VSK, 88, no. 2.
59 VSK, 94.
60 VSK, 52.
61 VSK, 80.
62 VSK, 38–40.
63 VSK, 40.
64 VSK, 38–39.
65 VSK, 40.
66 VSK, 94.
67 VSK, 40.
68 VSK, 18. Huysmans wrote three novels in which he narrates his own conversion to Catholicism through the story of the decadent Durtal who converts to an aesthetic Catholicism: *Là-bas* (1891), *En route* (1895), and *La cathédrale* (1898). Whether this aesthetic Catholicism as Huysmans portrays and advocates it was really much different from decadentism is an interesting question which Guardini would probably have answered negatively.
69 VSK, 94.
70 Romano Guardini. *Der Gegensatz: Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten*. (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1925).
71 The opposition between *Gegensatz* and *Widerspruch* seems to have been taken directly from Möhler and especially from his *Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Princip des Katholicismus, dargestellt im Geiste der Kirchenväter der drei ersten Jahrhunderte* (Tübingen: Laupp, 1825).
72 *Der Gegensatz*, 92.
73 E.g. *Der Gegensatz*, 187–188.
74 *Der Gegensatz*, 201.
75 *Der Gegensatz*, 187–202.

6 Odo Casel and the Church as Mystery

The German Benedictine monk Odo Casel (1886–1948)[1] was a remarkable man. Although he belonged to the rather intellectualist and elitist Abbey of Maria Laach, he lived the greater part of his life with the less sophisticated Benedictine sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Herstelle. Initially, the daily office of these sisters was focused on private devotional exercises regarding Mary and the Blessed Sacrament, and any regular psalm-reading was lacking. Odo Casel, as their chaplain and spiritual director, saw it as his lifelong task to challenge them to abandon their subjectivist ceremonies and lead them toward a more robust liturgical-monastic spirituality.[2]

Even though Casel almost never left the convent until his death in 1948, through his many writings he managed to become not only the mystagogue of these nuns but also one of the leading figures of the early-twentieth century liturgical movement. Especially in his *Das christliche Kultmysterium* (1932),[3] Casel challenged the Catholic theology of his days to abandon the typically post-Tridentine individualistic and rationalistic conception of salvation, and lead it toward a more robust understanding of the idea of mystery in theology.

Although Casel's theology and especially his appreciation of ancient pagan cults often met with great suspicion, Casel's ideas strongly influenced Vatican II's constitution on the liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.[4] Hence, Casel's so-called *mystery theology* is often studied from the perspective of ritual and liturgical studies. However, as we will discover in this chapter, Casel did not simply argue for a new understanding of liturgy. At the heart of his theology lies a turn to the church.

This chapter aims to discover how *Das christliche Kultmysterium* proposes the mystery theology as a solution to a problem in the study of the liturgy, but also as a solution to a problem in society. What was Casel's motive to advance this idea of mystery theology, what does his solution involve, and what are its implications for his understanding of the church?

Introduction to *Das christliche Kultmysterium*

Just as in his other works, Casel in *Das christliche Kultmysterium* argued that the Christian liturgy and sacraments must be understood in the light of

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the antique Hellenistic mystery cults.[5] The rituals of these antique religions consisted of a sacred reenactment of divine drama that enabled the participants to enter into a relationship with the godhead. Through a communal, dramatic mystery play, indeed – as it was believed – through the cooperation of the divine and the human, human beings could gain salvation.

In a similar sense, Casel believed, should we understand the meaning of Christian sacraments and liturgy. Through the ecclesial cultic act, of which the sacrifice of the Mass is the apex, the divine drama of salvation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is constantly made present again to the believers, offering them salvation. According to Casel, the liturgy is not simply a pedagogical tool to instruct the believers about the timeless truths of Christianity. Rather, the liturgy itself is somehow efficacious, as Christ works directly through the liturgical works of the church. By using the (originally Greek) word *mysterium* rather than the Latin *sacramentum*, Casel attempted to stay away from contemporary neo-Scholastic explanations of the meaning of sacraments. As such, Casel offered his mystery theology as an alternative to the contemporary Roman Catholic theology of the sacraments.

But Casel was not only concerned with the theological understanding of liturgy and sacraments. In a turbulent political time in Germany, in which many believed that the old structures had become bankrupt, Casel similarly believed that neo-Scholastic theology was no longer capable of responding adequately to the challenges of those days. What makes *Das christliche Kultmysterium* so interesting for our research is his emphasis upon a possible new answer that his mystery theology might offer the world. As he argues, only an alternative theology and an alternative spirituality based on a radical return to the mystery of Christ could offer Catholicism the necessary equipment to deal with the nearby future.[6]

In the following sections, we will follow the same method as we did in the other chapters. We will analyze Casel's 'turn' by concentrating first on what problem he intends to solve or what barrier he attempts to overcome, and then review his proposed solution and its implications for the understanding of the church.

Casel's Diagnosis

According to the passionate opening of *Das christliche Kultmysterium*, the world is on the brink of "a transformation of worlds, such as perhaps never has passed over the earth before."[7] After a time in which the distance between humanity and God has reached its farthest point, Casel believes that the first dawn of a new day can already be seen. Amid this godless era, in which humanity has turned away from God and delivered itself up to atheism and death, Casel prophesies that human beings will soon again be open to God and his salvation.

In such a way, Casel rather bombastically argues that modern individualism and rationalism are bankrupt. Like Guardini, he senses a growing

desire for true community, objectivity, and transcendence. And in this growing desire, he sees the direct hand of God.

Casel proposes his mystery theology as a twofold support to this new dawn: first of all, according to Casel, his mystery theology is a corrective to modern anthropocentrism; secondly, it is a corrective to a modern conception of religion. His mystery theology can therefore be understood as a direct response to these two characteristics of his contemporary situation. Let us take a closer look at these characteristics.

The Modern Anthropocentric Worldview

According to Casel, humanism started as a noble attempt to liberate humanity from tyrants. But in the wake of this liberation, Casel explains, everything that was experienced as mysterious, everything that seemed to transcend human nature was understood as a threat to this newly found autonomy and was violently dismissed. For instance, in earlier days nature was perceived as symbolic, as mysteriously offering a perspective to spiritual realities. But the modern natural sciences have robbed nature of its mysteries, and now exploit it exclusively for humanity's instant gratification. And instead of being sensitive to the mystery of our mortality, attention is now devoted solely to combating disease, hoping once to conquer death itself.

This destruction of all things mysterious was meant, Casel says, to liberate the individual. But the forces it unleashed have rebounded on that very individual. Once seen as image and instrument of God, the individual now lacks a transcendent goal. Psychoanalysis has begun to lay bare the mysteries of the soul, reducing the individual with his love, friendship, ideals, and religion to a tangle of desires or nerve convulsions. Seeking liberation from all tyrants, the individual tragically ends as a slave of impersonal powers. But where in the past slaves could at least hope for ultimate freedom in God, modern men have destroyed this last resort. It is "a pitiful end to the age of individualism that started so promising and alluring."[8]

The promising and tempting call of modernity has had an impact on religion as well. It has affected theology, which is trying rationally "to explore the divine mysteries and to dissect them, in order to 'demonstrate' their truth."[9] It has also affected the religious life, in which people experience themselves as free, independent individuals seeking God, rather than as persons who are elevated by God's grace. In this atmosphere, Casel claims, the 'mysterium of the church' has receded into the background. People reject anything that demand their surrender, that require them to give up their hard-won independence, and that they cannot grasp with their intellect. And so, finally, Casel arrives at his conclusion that "humanism and mystery are incompatible."[10]

For Casel, then, the modern era is a package deal. Modernity, individualism, rationalism, and humanism are different names for something essentially similar: the pushing back of a sense of mystery in favor of human

understanding. A package deal that at first sight looked promising, but that ultimately leaves us in the cold, alone without a God who can save us.

Casel thus opposes modernity with the notion of *mystery*. But what is this mystery that he speaks about? We will return to this question later, but, in short, for Casel, mystery is not simply something secretive or something that exceeds our intellect. According to Casel, Christianity is about God who reveals Himself to us. It is not what we do, but what the mysterious God does to us. Therefore, the heart of our religion is mystery: God who communicates himself to us. When Casel speaks of mystery, then, he speaks of a *theocentric* worldview, in which something that exceeds us is still in some way or another presented to us. A worldview in which awe, a sense for the divine majesty and a feeling of dependence and frailty are essential to proper human understanding. Such a theocentric worldview is clearly opposed to the modern anthropocentric worldview, but Casel is optimistic that the days of anthropocentrism are nearly numbered.

Religion as a Doctrinal and Moral System

Casel opposes the modern anthropocentric worldview in the first chapter of *Das christliche Kultmysterium*. However, in the remainder of the book, it becomes clear that Casel also contests the notion of religion as it is generally held in his days. According to him, after the Renaissance and the Reformation, Christianity and especially Catholicism have increasingly been understood as moral and pedagogical institutes.[11] This has ultimately resulted in the idea that a Christian life is a life lived according to a set of doctrinal and moral rules, incidentally strengthened by God's grace through the sacraments.

According to Casel, this conception of Christianity is a very poor and shallow version of what Christianity actually means. For example, in the second chapter, after assessing the idea of mystery in the Pauline epistles, he writes:

> Christianity, therefore, in its full and original meaning as 'the gospel of God' or 'of Christ,' is not simply a worldview with a religious background, nor a religious or theological doctrinal system or moral code, but it is 'mysterium' in the Pauline sense: a revelation of God to humanity through acts of the Godman [...], and humanity's passage to God made possible by this revelation and communication of grace [...].[12]

This aspect of religion was once experienced and realized through the splendor of the Christian liturgy in its many forms. The celebration of the Mass, the various sacraments, and even the daily office were all forms through which individual believers could partake in this mysterious passage of the whole church to God.

However, there is a second aspect of the modern conception of religion which Casel contests. As the original sense of the liturgy was lost in the

church, individuals with their deep religious desires were left to their own devices. The church, after the Reformation and the Renaissance, became a 'mere legal institute,'[13] and consequently, the liturgy was experienced as a 'duty'[14] and individual believers went elsewhere to look for religious fulfillment. German Protestants turned to an inward religion of piety, Casel says, while Catholics turned to private devotions and subjective spiritual exercises such as Ignatius's. In a broader sense, this resulted in modern people being increasingly interested in occultism, theosophy, eastern spirituality, etcetera. Once the domain of the church, says Casel, the sense of mystery is now isolated from the rest of religion.

This is not the first time in history that public religion and private devotions have parted ways, according to Casel. On the contrary, these two religious planes always seemed to be somehow in tension. This was especially the case in late antiquity and in Judaism. At the time, as a reaction against the one-sided focus of antique religions and Judaism on public liturgy and sacrifices, the notion of 'sacrifice' became increasingly spiritualized. More and more, exterior acts of religion were seen as dispensable, while individual devotion was understood as the more perfect form of sacrifice.

> The danger arose that the entire worship would withdraw into the interior of the people, that finally all religion would perish in boundless individualism and subjectivism, revolving around men rather than God.[15]

It was Christianity, says Casel, that finally harmonized the public and private aspects of religion. It was Christianity that claimed that precisely its public rite, the Mass, was an *oblatio rationabilis*: not a physical but a rational and thus, according to Casel, in fact a spiritual sacrifice. This aspect of the Christian religion as spiritual yet public has been neglected in modern times, and by consequence, religion is once again succumbing to boundless individualism, subjectivism, and anthropocentrism. Early Christianity wrought harmony between the subjective and the objective, and therefore Casel looks to early Christianity for a solution. Only this, he claims, can help us once again to view correctly what it means to be a Christian.

Casel's Solution

Casel finds an alternative for modern society's conception of religion in the theology of the early church up to the council of Trent. The early church, says Casel, spoke of *mystery* when they described how Christ works with the church and the individual in the liturgy. And only this turn to the mystery of the church, Casel believes, is able to conquer the modern anthropocentrism that has so distorted Christianity. Casel thus proposes a new understanding of what it means to be church, and precisely as such makes a turn to the church.

Mystery

In order to better understand the notion of *mysterium*, Casel in the second chapter of the book offers a rather systematic treatise on the theological meaning of *mysterium*. To begin with, he says, the *mysterium* of which for example St Paul speaks, immediately refers to the whole of God's salvific actions:

> Saint Paul thinks of Christianity, the 'gospel,' as a 'mysterium,' but not merely in the sense of a hidden, mysterious teaching about the divine [...] Rather for him 'mysterium' means first of all an *act of God*, the execution of an eternal divine plan in an *act*, which proceeds from God's eternal life, realizes itself in history and world, and again finds its destination in the eternal God himself.[16]

This *mysterium*, according to Casel, consists of God who actively saves the world, or, more precisely: of God's salvific acts of self-revelation to humanity, which found its absolute culmination in Christ. The mystery of Christianity is thus the incarnation of Christ, including its continuation in Christ's mystical body, the church. And while this mystery is revealed, it is not 'public': it is revealed only to the *ekklesia*. So this salvation history certainly is mysterious, in the sense that it is something divine that we cannot grasp by ourselves: we need to be illuminated by grace.[17] Crucially, by focusing on the salvific acts (*Heilstaten*) of God, Casel emphasizes that the church is not constituted by doctrinal agreement or agreement about a moral code. On the contrary, the church is constituted by divine action, an action that is not God's revelation of a body of truth, but God's *self*-revelation.

Simultaneously, he contends that the church is constituted by its own action. In a long and rather obscure exposition, Casel narrates how Christ sacrificed himself to God. As he was the perfect sacrifice, Christ the God-man was pleasing to God. Therefore, everybody who belongs to Christ participates in his perfect sacrifice. The church is thus not only *passively* constituted by divine action, but also made an agent, as such enabled to *actively* participate in Christ's sacrifice.[18]

In a mysterious way, then, the sacrifice of the church, its offering of itself to God, is ultimately no different from Christ's real sacrifice on the cross, precisely because the church can only offer itself to God *through* participating in Christ's real sacrifice. Casel writes:

> The historical Christ made his sacrifice alone on the cross, the pneumatically elevated Christ makes his sacrifice together with the Church, which he has purified with the blood from his side and thus obtained for himself.[19]

Christ has worked salvation for us by revealing God to us, says Casel. Simultaneously, however, this salvation comes in the form of the church's

being enabled through the Spirit to participate in Christ's work. In the Spirit, Christ and the church operate as a single agent, as bridegroom and bride, head and body. Casel maintains both aspects: on the one hand, the church is the *passive* recipient of grace, but on the other this reception takes the form of *active* cooperation.

In a nutshell, this theological exposition serves as Casel's framework which he uses to focus on the liturgy. According to him, it is in the liturgy that we find the form of the church's active participation in and cooperation with Christ's perfect sacrifice. If we want to reflect theologically on the divine, we should focus on the liturgy. Contrary to the modern approach, in which theology reflects either on individual religious desires or on how doctrine can be demonstrated, Casel affirms the theological primacy of the liturgy.

Casel finds the key to understanding the liturgy in ancient pagan mystery cults. According to him, the liturgy continues a form of ritual that was important in certain antique mystery religions. Especially in the Hellenic mystery cults, people could participate in the life of the godhead through a reenactment of the divine epiphany through symbolic acts. Although the Christian liturgy only adopted the form, and was, Casel says, not materially influenced by paganism, a proper understanding of the mystery cults helps to see that the essence of the Christian liturgy is a similar dramatic play between God and his people, centering on Christ the God-man.[20]

Casel offers the example of the Eleusinian mysteries in which the 'elect' were shown an ear of grain by the high priest at the height of the secret ritual. To those who were initiated into the mysteries and participated in them, this presentation of the ear of grain symbolically represented life after death, and the whole rite actualized their union with the godhead.[21] It is not difficult to spot superficial similarities between this example and the liturgy of the Mass. At the same time, however, Casel does not really clarify whether the similarity is superficial or more substantial. Rather than offering a profound analysis of similarities and differences between these cults and Christianity, Casel is content to suggest a general idea of the 'mystery cult' to obtain a new perspective on the liturgy. In these antique cults, he says, we find neither a physical sacrifice, nor a private spiritual sacrifice, but the dawning of the idea of a spiritual sacrifice through a collective ritual, through a communal symbolic drama.

Casel's Theory of Religions: A Contested Theory

Casel has no difficulties claiming that Christianity is indebted to these pagan mystery cults. To him, the evolution of religions is simply the history of God slowly revealing himself to humankind. It makes perfect sense, then, to suggest that the Spirit of God worked through the mystery cults and in this sense provided a preparation for the gospel. Invoking various church fathers,[22] he argues that they too held this view, as they were

perfectly aware of both the real value and the ultimate falsehood of these cults. According to Casel, the early church gratefully adopted the *forms* of the mystery cults, while it rejected their *content* and instead adopted the truth of Christ. His suggestion that the church incorporated aspects of mystery cults is, he believes, perfectly orthodox.

Orthodox as it might seem at first sight, his thesis is in fact highly problematic. Casel not only claims that the church appropriated pagan forms, but also suggests that this was necessary. The early church had to appropriate these forms to understand the event of Christ, because without it, says Casel, it was confined to the religious forms of Judaism. And the conceptual framework of Judaism, Casel believes, was totally inadequate to understand the meaning of Christ:

> The Jews, like all Semites, thought of God as the harsh, majestic Lord, separated from mankind by an unbridgeable gap, whom one tremblingly feared and worshipped, but with whom one could not enter into close relationship. Even the language of the Semites failed to express the new experience of God of the New Covenant.[23]

A little further, he claims that it is

> a historical fact that the Hellenic people often understood the mystery of Christ more easily and profoundly, compared to the Jews with their purely semitic, imageless and legalistic thought.[24]

According to Casel, the 'Semitic' background of the early church hindered it to properly understand the mystery of Christ. On the other hand, the 'Indo-Germanic peoples' and especially the Hellenic peoples were already familiar with personal unity with the godhead in their religious life. Their conceptual and ritual framework was far more refined and profound, although, of course, still not able to comprehend the mysterious meaning of Christ.

To understand Casel, we should first of all recognize that his embrace of Hellenism was not uncommon and fitted neatly into a strong German tradition of *Philhellenism*. This Romantic movement cultivated a nostalgia for ancient Greece, based on the idea that the ancient Greeks were uniquely sensitive to beauty, and it was fairly strongly institutionalized in the Prussian educational reform of the *Gymnasien* in the nineteenth century. In other words, Casel repeats ideas about the supremacy of Hellenism that were quite uncontroversial at the time.[25]

Still, to twenty-first century readers, his gross generalizations of characteristics of broad ethnic groups are disturbing, and especially his dismissal of the 'Semitic' in favor of the 'Indo-Germanic.' Must this be recognized as openly anti-Semitic and racist? Or does it simply reflect what is nowadays characterized as 'supersessionist theology,' the idea that the church is the

successor of Israel? This view on Judaism came under heavy scrutiny after the Second World War, and rightly so, but it was fairly common in Western theology up to that point.

Yet, this aspect of Casel's mystery theology was controversial from the beginning, and it has been criticized from various perspectives. Theologically, the fact that Casel seems to hold Hellenistic pagan cults in higher esteem than the Old Testament made his theology appear heterodox. From the perspective of the history of religions, his thesis of the close relationship between the pagan mystery cults and the early church was soon dismissed as wrong or at least exaggerated. And Biblical scholars pointed out that, in fact, Jewish 'remembrance' rites such as the celebration of Pesach were far more crucial for the development of the Christian mystery cult than Casel allows. Such and other criticisms were soon raised against Casel.[26] We can therefore claim at least that the eagerness with which Casel downplays Judaism in favor of paganism was not uncontested in his own time, and effectively made Casel an outsider in many Roman Catholic theological circles.[27]

While these criticisms point to some serious flaws in Casel's work, these are ultimately not relevant for our own questions. To us, the value of Casel's mystery theology lies not in its argument on the history of religion but in its ecclesiological consequences. At least practically, this was also Casel's ultimate concern, given that he was a monk charged with assisting the Benedictine sisters of Herstelle in their search for a renewal of the liturgy. To a certain extent, his theory on antique liturgy simply provided him with a new useful perspective on the liturgy as a work of the people and of Christ. It offered him a perspective which he could use to explain to highly devotional sisters that their individual religious participation in communal rites was crucial, and to prevent them from succumbing to individualist piety. And as such, it offered him a perspective by which he could solve a typically modern problem: that of the disconnection between the individually authentic and the socially given; or in the terms of his days, of the 'subjective' and the 'objective.'

Restoring Harmony between the Subjective and the Objective

Casel disturbingly prefers Hellenistic religious sensibilities to the religiosity of the Jews. While the Jewish religion was equal in his eyes to being "in bondage under the elements of the world,"[28] the noble Hellenes were at least sensitive to the idea of creation participating in a transcendent, objective ordering of the cosmos, and indeed in God itself. These troubling ideas aside, however, what did Casel try to accomplish?

In order to understand this, we should note that Casel also regard Hellenic religious nature as purer than Germanic spirituality. Germanic people, he says, could not understand the notion of an objective God to which creatures were related. They perceived nature not as participation in a harmonious order but simply as a collection of arbitrary symbols

that could be used at will by the individual for any devotion that they felt drawn to.

> How this dissolving, atomising way of thinking disenchanted the world and destroyed every kind of community, we need not set out in detail; today, everyone with any vision can see with dismay where Europe and the continents under her influence have come, thanks to individualism, liberalism and socialism.[29]

Through this gross generalization of Germanic religiosity, Casel's true concern clearly shines through: it is connected to his *contemporary* situation. Ultimately, it is his contemporary, twentieth-century environment that he views as atomized, disenchanted, and lost to any kind of community. Jewish and Germanic religiosities are just a straw: he ultimately uses them to accuse his own society that, according to him, lacks a sense of cosmic order and of participation in that order through ritual. This perceived lack is closely linked to do with Casel's earlier analysis that modernity introduced a shift from theocentrism to anthropocentrism.

Casel claims that, although a sense of cosmic order and of the individual's participation in it has been lost to modern society, it has been miraculously preserved by the Catholic Church. The church, precisely through the divine mysteries, the form of which it gratefully derived from the Hellenes, enables us to participate in that solemn order of the cosmos. The modern spirit of individualism has frequently affected our understanding of these rituals, making us interpret the sacraments merely as instruments through which God grants the individual believer supernatural grace. We can nevertheless catch glimpses of the more profound meaning by coming to understand how, through the liturgy and sacraments, we can mysteriously and actively participate in the mystery of Christ.[30]

According to Casel, then, contemporary society is in serious decline precisely because of its loss of a transcendent order in which we can participate. A proper renewal of our understanding of the church is crucial if we are to escape from the collapse of society. Hence his argument that the liturgy and sacraments of the church need to be rediscovered as *mysteries* to re-enable our true participation in God. We do not have to change these mysteries; we have to come to a new understanding of what they *do* so as to realign our subjectivity with the objective cosmic order.

These mysteries, according to Casel, effect a relationship between the individual and the whole. They enable creatures to return to God, through participation in the God-man Christ. Not by giving up one's individuality, but by 'internalizing the objectivity,' by pneumatically participating in the passion of Christ, can we find a true, objective anchor point for our individuality.[31]

> The individualist mindset of modern man 'liberates' the personality and isolates it: in so doing it atomizes society and leads to collectivism,

> in which the person is sacrificed to the mass. The objective communal sense of the church submits the individual to a higher, divine norm and orders him to his right place; but in so doing it protects the personality, encourages it and gives it its own place, in which it is irreplaceable.[32]

Paradoxically, the objectivity of the church, with its given norms and exterior forms of religiosity, is the final safeguard for our subjective personality. Precisely through submission to these norms and forms, individuals can find their proper place. In the 'objective,' given religiosity of the liturgy, they are freed from "subjective arbitrariness, personal conviction" or "momentaneous emotions."[33] By restraining all individual thoughts and feelings, the liturgy, through its supra-personal and serene forms, enables individuals to see themselves in the objective light of the church. Only then can individuals start to understand themselves as persons who emanate from and return to the Godhead, no longer disconnected individuals but integral parts of Christ's salvific action.[34] Through the liturgy, the human and the divine become indissolubly and harmoniously connected.

We may well ask how this connection actually works. Casel offers two instructive examples in different places. To begin with, Casel claims that the church, through its mysteries, assists the individual believer to truly and subjectively *appropriate* – in the literal sense of the word: to make one's own – the objective divine truth. As an example, he points to Justin Martyr, Origen, Ambrose, and other early Christian writers, who, he says, showed great creativity in their exegesis of Scripture. Casel says that their liberal 're-narration' (*Nachdichtung*) of Scripture required them to be poets rather than scholars. Through their artistic creations, they revealed how "divine truth can become one's own property."[35]

Secondly, according to Casel, an important aspect of the liturgy lies in its psychological consequences. In a long passage he praises the beauty and variety of the liturgy – now solemn, then full of emotions; now joyful, then mournful, etcetera. And he notes that the beauty and variety of the liturgy affects individuals and offers them the possibility to express their own feelings. Casel presupposes here that people are psychologically moved by the liturgy, to the point that they are able to really feel these kinds of emotions only through the liturgy. In other words, according to Casel, the 'subjective' feelings of the participant in the liturgy are not original to him or her, but are instead externally caused by the 'objective,' 'external' acts of that liturgy. Clearly, Casel does not wish to *reduce* the mysteries to their psychological effects; but without such subjective psychological effects, the mysteries would in a way remain deficient.[36]

Casel shows in this way that an emphasis on the objectivity of the church should not lead to blind submission, but to creative participation of all the participants. In a way, then, his emphasis on the necessity of objectivity is, for Casel, crucial for the true empowerment of the person. The individual becomes a true person, capable of feeling, of creativity and expression,

only by participating in the cosmic order, only by participating in the mysteries of the church.

Is Casel's argument convincing? We could even ask whether it *is* an argument at all. In a sense, Casel states, rather than argues, how an individual can become a true person. We could also ask whether he is right to define the essence of the Christian life – and the place where the individual becomes a true person – in terms of the liturgy alone. Casel not only claims that the individual is mysteriously taken up into God's community in the liturgy, but also suggests that this new way of being is present only *in* the liturgy. This view reflects his monastic life that is centered on the liturgy, but can it account for the secular life of the laity? And if not, can such a view truly help to bring about a societal *Weltenwende*, as Casel explicitly hoped it would? Would such a *Weltenwende* not require a certain politics or a certain way of life? By failing to explain the desired effects for the *saeculum*, Casel's theology unfortunately remains confined to the *claustrum*.

We could rephrase our question: what does it mean for the secular, non-religious, and non-liturgical life of individuals who have become true persons through the mystery of Christ? Mannes Dominikus Koster identified this weakness as early as 1940, when he claimed that theologians like Casel were right to describe the church as a cultic community (*Kultgemeinschaft*). But, Koster claims, they problematically reduce the cultic to mere liturgy:

> However, experience has shown that only few people are able to participate in this [liturgy], with the exception of Sunday Mass – and even this is not always possible anymore. Yet in their own way all can perform the extra-liturgical part instituted by Christ, of which the *Kultgemeinschaft* school does not seem to know anything, whether they are lay people or prelates. So it is out of the question that every confirmed Christian can do whatever the seal of confirmation empowers him to do, just as spouses can do whatever the bond of marriage empowers them to do. No one, however, would describe those acts as liturgical, just as no one will deny their cultic character, since they are acts of church members, whose acts as such always and necessarily have a cultic character.[37]

Without further developing these critical questions here, we should note that the twenty-first century turn to the church offers an alternative by consciously blurring the lines between cultic and non-cultic acts. For example, Hauerwas does so through the idea of 'practices' that range from (liturgical) prayer to learning how to make peace. And Milbank claims that acts like taking care of children, and even sowing crops or building bridges can be ecclesial activities.[38]

As a final remark, we should point to the fact that Casel's turn to the church involves a turn to another anthropology and epistemology. When he presupposes that the subjective 'inner' life of individuals is not fundamental

to their personhood, but that only the objective 'outward' acts in which they participate are, he is constructing an anthropology that differs from the individualism of his days. According to Casel, it is not in authentic or original individuality, but in given, social, exterior facts, that individuals learn who they are: not simply through random given facts, but through the divinely given mysteries. This anthropology hinges upon the presupposition that knowledge of the self and of the world can only be mediated through participation in community, and indeed only in its fullest sense by active participation in the divine community that is the church. This anthropology therefore presupposes an epistemology that can be summarized by the claim that true meaning cannot be found in doctrinal or moral knowledge but only through participation in the divine community. Even if Casel restricts himself to the liturgical aspect of a Christian life, his thesis can in this way open up lines of thinking that go beyond the liturgical.

Casel's Ecclesiology

We have seen that, for Casel, the mystery of Christ is the fundamental event in which the human being participates in the divine. And this mystery is constantly mysteriously actualized in public Christian worship. Therefore, for human beings, worship or cult is the fundamental locus where we can participate, through Christ's work, in the divine.

This perspective allows Casel to step back from the idea, which was widespread then as it is now, that the human meets the divine within the interiority of the person. As we have noted above, according to Casel, modern theology emphasized the veracity of religious truths by trying to demonstrate them; and the modern religious life was characterized by the individual quest or desire for God. Contrary to these modern tendencies, Casel affirms the primacy of the liturgy as a work of Christ and of the people. It is thus not through individual 'faith' that salvation can be found, but only through the actualization of the mystery of Christ by means of the performance of cultic mysteries in which Christ is mysteriously and actively present.

Casel accordingly promotes a 'Christ mysticism,' a form of mysticism in which the church and Christ are believed to merge into one physical-mystical unity. It is Christ united to the church who prays, sacrifices, and celebrates the mystery. This is why Casel favors ecclesiological terms that emphasize the unity and cooperation of Christ and the church. The church is the bride, because it works in a 'feminine' way in the liturgy: active yet receptive, never without the bridegroom.[39] The church united with Christ in his sacrifice is the one 'mystical Christ,' the body of Christ, the High Priest of the new covenant. Similarly, if there were no unity between Christ and the church, Casel says that the church would be a priestess without a sacrifice, and Christ would be a priest without a congregation.[40]

Equally crucial for Casel's understanding of the church is his emphasis on God's *Heilstaten*, his salvific acts, on which the church is founded. The church is therefore the *ekklesia,* a people that, from all times and places, has been brought together by God. Casel thus moves beyond a static neo-Scholastic ecclesiology in which the church is simply the keeper of eternal truth, toward a more dynamic ecclesiology in which the church is part of a broader salvation history.

A similar innovative focus on salvation history can be found in his claim that the church lives in the *Zwischenzeit*,[41] 'between the times': the mystery of Christ has not been fully revealed to the whole world, because today only the church is aware of Christ's presence, and this *only* in a mysterious way. The church lives between the times, between the two moments in which Christ will be physically present, and therefore, though we can believe, we cannot yet see the mystery of the Lord with our own eyes.[42]

The absence of dialectical language in Casel's description of the harmony between the church and the individual believer, between the objective and subjective, is a measure of Casel's optimism about this relationship. Compared to Guardini, Casel is relatively certain that tensions between the individual and the church will and must be dissolved. We may assume that this lack of dialectics and this optimism is related not only to his different philosophical background, but also to his cenobitic life, a form of life that is precisely structured to allow this kind of harmony to develop.

At the same time, Casel believes that the church is sometimes deficient in its performance of the mysteries: for example, people can participate in the liturgy without understanding their proper role, by wallowing in self-indulgent piety or getting caught up in doctrinal rationalism. Such bad 'performances' of the mysteries may lead to situations in which, in fact, the believers do not participate but simply view the liturgy as bystanders. Casel argues that the liturgy, including the sacraments, is not a magic trick that works independently of those who undergo it. Rather, it is or should be a communal act. Therefore, all participants need to cultivate a proper attitude, something which cannot be taken for granted.

Education is required to teach people how to engage with the mysteries. Casel praises the papal appeal to all believers to receive weekly communion, something that was actively encouraged from Rome at the beginning of the twentieth century. He also suggests liturgical reforms which would more explicitly show forth the nature of the liturgy as the work of the people and Christ united. And his own theological work should certainly be understood as an effort to disseminate a new understanding of the liturgy. As the liturgy is truly the work of Christ and the people together, the correct performance of, and attitude toward the mysteries *is* essential.

In general, then, Casel finds the essence of the church in the correct liturgical celebration of the mysteries rather than in any particular institute. Without doubt, Casel was a convinced member of the Roman Catholic Church, and he is very dismissive of the individualism and moralism of

German Protestantism. Furthermore, it seems that he was never confronted with ecumenical questions in his daily life; by consequence, he saw no need to answer them.[43] Yet, during his life, his view on what is essential to the church allowed him to befriend Protestant theologians who introduced the liturgical movement to their own churches, such as Gerardus van der Leeuw and Karl Bernhard Ritter. As such, his belief that the foundation of the church consisted not merely of the visible institute, but of the proper celebration of the mystery of Christ, would become an important building stone in the ecumenical movement in the twentieth century.[44]

Conclusion

Das christliche Kultmysterium contains Casel's effort to reassess an important part of the life of the church: its liturgical acts. In these acts, Casel argues, the essence of the church is revealed. It is in its mysterious cooperation with Christ during these acts that the congregation truly becomes the bride of Christ.

We began our inquiry with the following questions: what problem led Casel to make a turn to the church, what did this turn involve, and in what way has he solved his initial problem? As we have seen, we can distinguish two motives for his turn. First of all, there is a clear theological motive. Casel wanted to transcend the older conception of the church as simply the sum of all individual believers who adhere to the same doctrinal and moral system, because this conception led to an all too individualist and intellectualist understanding of God's revelation, while God's revelation is in fact, Casel believes, primarily a divine *action* rather than a system of knowledge, an action that affects the whole of humanity rather than just the individual.

Casel's turn is also informed by the more general critique that the modern society of his day suffered from anthropocentrism. By focusing on human autonomy and by placing the individual human center stage, modernism has lost a sense of mystery and transcendence. While it attempts to empower individuals, it finally fails to do so because it causes individuals to be understood as no more than slaves of impersonal powers. This second motive for Casel's turn is articulated less clearly but it is nevertheless important: it shows that Casel not only offers a theological solution to an intra-ecclesial problem, but proposes his mystery theology as a solution to the disintegration of German society at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Inspired by these motives, Casel turns toward an understanding of the church not as a collective of like-minded people, but as a theological reality. The idea of ancient mystery cults helps him to develop his argument that the celebration of the liturgy is the form in which Christ and humanity mysteriously effect salvation together. As such, the various sacraments are not simply unconnected and momentary infusions of grace, but aspects of a cooperation between the church and Christ in time, in which Christ allows the church to mysteriously cooperate in his work of salvation through the Spirit.

This cooperation is what makes the church the church: it is in acting mysteriously with Christ in the liturgy that the church is constituted by Christ.

Casel's turn to the church thus involves a theological re-appropriation of what we would nowadays call 'ecclesial practices,' although he focuses exclusively on explicitly liturgical practices. This theological re-appropriation implies a specific anthropology and epistemology in which a human being becomes an individual and attains meaning precisely by participation in these liturgical acts. Hence, even though Casel's proposal is almost exclusively focused on the liturgy, we have suggested that his understanding of personhood and meaning may and should be fruitfully extended beyond the liturgical boundaries. Until that is done, however, it remains unclear how the proper celebration of the mystery of Christ can really transform modern society and introduce a *Weltenwende*, as was Casel's explicit desire

Notes

1 For his biography see Viktor Warnach, "Odo Casel," in *Tendenzen der Theologie im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Geschichte in Porträts*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (Stuttgart: Kreuz-Verlag, 1966), 277–278. For a complete list of works by and about Casel: Osvaldo D. Santagada, "Dom Odo Casel: Contributo monografico per una bibliografia generale delle sue opere, degli studi sulla sua sottrina e della sua influenza nella teologia contemporanea." *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 10, no.1 (1967): 7–77. Continued in: Angelus A. Häussling. "Bibliographie Odo Casel OSB 1967–1985." *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 28 (1986): 26–42.

2 See for a fascinating description of their eccentric traditions, Patrick Malloy, "Odo Casel, OSB," in *How Firm a Foundation: Leaders of the Liturgical Movement*, ed. Robert L. Tuzik (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1990), 50–56.

3 Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1932). I will quote this work in English. The translation is often guided by I.T. Hale's, although I have regularly adapted it to produce a more accurate and literal translation: *The Mystery of Christian Worship and Other Writings*, trans. I.T. Hale, ed. Burkhard Neunheuser (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1962). The work will be abbreviated as DCK.

4 For an early critique of his work, see Johann B. Umberg, "'Mysterien'-Frömmigkeit?" *Zeitschrift für Aszese und Mystik* 1 (1926), 351–366. Burkhard Neunheuser offers a helpful overview of his influence in Catholic theology in: "Odo Casel in Retrospect and Prospect," *Worship* 50, no. 6 (1976): 489–504.

5 As early as 1918, he set forth his mystery theology in Odo Casel, *Das Gedächtnis des Herrn in der altchristlichen Liturgie* (Freiburg: Herder, 1918). But the essence of his mystery theology never substantially changed during his life. *De mysterie-leer van Odo Casel: Een bijdrage tot het oecumenisch gesprek der Kerken*. (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1964), 9.

6 See Arno Schilson, *Theologie als Sakramententheologie: Die Mysterientheologie Odo Casels* (Mainz: Matthias Grünewald, 1987), 50–57.

7 DCK, 9.

8 DCK, 13.

9 DCK, 14.

10 DCK, 15.

11 DCK, 95.

12 DCK, 27.
13 DCK, 95.
14 DCK, 174.
15 DCK, 133.
16 DCK, 21–22.
17 DCK, 21–25.
18 DCK, 30.
19 DCK, 28.
20 DCK, 63–66.
21 DCK, 63.
22 DCK, 65.
23 DCK, 61.
24 DCK, 68.
25 See for an extensive historical study of German Philhellenism and its educational institutionalization: Suzanne L. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1970*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).
26 For an overview of the various criticisms, cf. Plooij, *De mysterie-leer van Odo Casel*, 147–155.
27 Plooij, *De mysterie-leer van Odo Casel*, 14–15. We should mention in this context that Maria Laach later became very supportive of the young Nazi regime, and even hosted the Catholic proponents of the *Reichstheologie*, *Kreuz und Adler*. It was the only monastery in the Rhineland whose properties were not confiscated in 1941. See James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), 511–522.
28 DCK, 63 no. 2. Casel refers to Galatians 4,3, but he fails to notice that Paul speaks not only about the Jewish religion but about both his and the Galatian converts' lives before their conversion (4,9). As the Galatian converts were primarily pagans before their conversion, even if Paul had accused the Jewish religion as such, this accusation would have simultaneously included the pagan cults.
29 DCK, 68.
30 Casel discusses the seven 'classic' sacraments but also rituals like the consecration of religious and funerals. DCK, 31–52.
31 DCK, 134.
32 DCK, 150.
33 DCK, 144.
34 DCK, 98.
35 DCK, 153.
36 See esp. DCK, 153–162.
37 Mannes Dominikus Koster, "Ekklesiologie im Werden" (1940), in *Volk Gottes im Werden: Gesammelte Studien*, comp. Otto Hermann Pesch and Hans-Dieter Langer (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 1971), 229. My translation.
38 See page 45.
39 DCK, 42.
40 DCK, 43–45.
41 DCK, 53.
42 DCK, 52–55.
43 Cf. Plooij, 252–253, 262.
44 The ecumenical value and impact of Casel's mystery theology is convincingly demonstrated in Plooij, *De mysterie-leer van Odo Casel*.

7 Henri de Lubac and the Spiritual Intelligence of the Church

Catholicisme (1938) represents a crucial moment in our earlier turn to the church.[1] In this book, the French Jesuit priest Henri de Lubac (1896–1991)[2] argued that the larger part of the Christian tradition and especially the early church had always understood salvation in a communal sense. In essence, de Lubac claimed, Catholic doctrine has invariably had a social meaning. Compared with Guardini and to a lesser extent Casel, his argument leaned heavily on a thorough reading of patristic sources. But most importantly, the new emphasis on the church in *Catholicisme* was now presented as a rehabilitation of a fully orthodox Christian truth that had become relatively unknown to outsiders.

What is also interesting, is that de Lubac firmly presents his turn to the church as an urgently needed answer to modern questions. During the First World War, de Lubac's military service interrupted his Jesuit formation. The military camaraderie brought about intellectually challenging conversations with communists and atheists, and de Lubac discovered just how the Catholic theology of those days was completely insulated from modern questions of life and death.[3] So when he resumed his formation, he soon found himself at odds with his rigidly neo-Scholastic professors. Determined to find more satisfying answers to the questions of modernity, he started reading not only Aquinas but also Church Fathers such as Irenaeus and Augustine, and more recent writers such as Newman, Möhler, and Blondel.

Hence, in *Catholicisme*, de Lubac not simply turns to the church, but consciously *re*turns to the church. In the next sections, we will analyze the argument of *Catholicisme* using the same questions that we posed in respect of the other theologians too: why does de Lubac believe a rediscovery of the social aspect of doctrine is necessary? What does his proposed solution involve, and what are its ecclesiological implications?

Introduction to *Catholicisme*

When de Lubac wrote *Catholicisme*, he was professor of fundamental theology at the *Faculté catholique* of Lyon and had already established a clear theological agenda. To grasp this agenda, it is helpful to shortly

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discuss his inaugural lecture in 1927.[4] In this lecture, he criticized modern apologetics for its intellectual poverty.

Modern apologetics, he suggested, suffered from a separation between a natural realm of human reason on the one hand, and a supernatural realm of faith which is not in any real sense connected to this natural realm on the other hand. This division was taken for granted in neo-Scholastic theology, and even institutionalized in the theological curriculum: apologetics belonged to the initial philosophical training of priests, as it attempted to rationally establish the fact that God had given a revelation. The study of the doctrinal content, on the other hand, belonged to the domain of theology proper and came only after philosophical training. As such, apologetics provided the natural foundation for the supernatural edifice built by theology. Apologetics could prove rationally that revelation had *in fact* happened, but it could not argue rationally that *the content* of this revelation was true or even desirable: obedience of faith was demanded here.

De Lubac pointed out that in such a view theology can never argue why faith might be relevant for humanity: that would amount to a profanation of the supernatural truths that must after all be held in faith. Therefore, he called for a blurring of boundaries between apologetics and theology. An apologetic theology was needed that did not concern itself with *proving* the truth of revelation, but with bringing revelation into dialogue with relevant contemporary questions in the hope of uncovering and finding the true riches of it. Theology, according to de Lubac, should thus be fully apologetic, not in a defensive but an inviting way.

This idea went against the grain of the theological establishment of the time, as the strict separation between the natural and the supernatural was seen as the hallmark of orthodoxy. But de Lubac believed that this separation encouraged an enclosed ivory tower style of theology that was concerned only with a very narrow definition of orthodoxy, and inhibited any dialogue with philosophy and culture. This diagnosis led de Lubac back to the Church Fathers, who often engaged in dialogue with their surrounding pagan context. Hence, as a professor in Lyon, he started the series *Sources chrétiennes* which offered annotated translations of early Christian texts. He challenged his students to read patristic and medieval Scholastic works, some of whom would become renowned theologians in their own right, such as Hans Urs von Balthasar and Jean Daniélou. The same return to the ancient theological sources encouraged him to write *Catholicisme* in 1938, and it also led him to write his most important work, *Surnaturel* (1946).

In fact, *Surnaturel* demonstrated what de Lubac already intuited in his inaugural lecture: that the neo-Scholastic reading of Thomas is false, in which human beings are understood to have a purely natural end, and in which grace as the supernatural end of human beings is simply an external

and unnecessary bonus. By contrast, on the basis of a re-reading of Thomas, de Lubac argued that human beings have a natural, innate desire for God, and can only find true fulfillment of this natural desire through supernatural grace. To neo-Thomist scholars, this claim was like a red rag to a bull. They argued that if human beings require grace because they have a natural desire for God, God *owes* them grace. This would endanger the very freedom of God and the gift-like character, the gratuity of grace.[5] So when Pius XII, in the encyclical *Humani generis*, warned against theologians who 'destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order,'[6] many were sure that he had Henri de Lubac and other theologians of the so-called *nouvelle théologie* in mind. Most of de Lubac's works were removed from the Jesuit libraries and de Lubac was not allowed to teach during the years that followed. Although de Lubac himself did not see the encyclical as a condemnation of his own position, and he was not in fact formally under investigation by the Roman authorities, he was effectively marginalized by the aura of suspicion alone.[7]

The idea that God's grace is a supernatural gift but at the same time also a true completion of the natural order was fundamental not only to *Surnaturel* but to all of Henri de Lubac's many works, also to *Catholicisme*.[8] As we will see, this idea directs de Lubac's thoughts on the history of religions, on the development of tradition, and on Christian typological interpretations of the Old Testament. It even shapes the fundamental claim of this work, that Catholicity is the mark of true humanity.

Catholicisme consists of twelve chapters and is divided into three parts. The first part reflects on the *social* character of Christianity, from its inherently social sacramental signs to the social aspects of eschatology. The second part reflects on the *historical* character of faith. By comparing the patristic view of history with other views, de Lubac makes the case that Christianity is unique in its view on history, and he expands this to a kind of historical hermeneutics, in which the Old Testament can be read Christologically, as indeed can all of history, as prefiguring the final Kingdom of God. The third part reflects on the contemporary situation of the Catholic Church and especially on the strongly individualistic tendencies in it. It is this third part that explicitly gives a diagnosis of the present situation, in the claim that only a return to the social and historical view on Christianity that is presented in the book is able to solve this.

This rough outline already provides us with clues as to what de Lubac's turn to the church consists of. In the following section, we will read *Catholicisme* on the basis of our three questions: what is de Lubac's diagnosis, why does he turn to the church, and what does this turn exactly consist in? We will address any subject that may help us answer these questions, but we will begin by focusing on the third part of the book which deals with the current situation, and examine the first and second part of *Catholicisme* when we analyze his solution.

De Lubac's Diagnosis

Catholicisme opens with an excerpt from the book *Les vraies richesses* by the atheist French writer Jean Giono. In this quotation, Giono accuses religion of offering merely individual consolation, while sacrificing solidarity among people. According to him, the highly individual 'joy of Jesus' may be experienced even in the midst of war. This already shows that such a consolation is superficial, and Giono argues that true joy is only possible when everybody shares in it.[9]

De Lubac offers this excerpt in order to show how criticism of religion has changed its face. In the past, the origins of Christianity were skeptically questioned by pointing out *historical* or *scientific* inconsistencies in Christianity. But like Giono, contemporary criticism of religion increasingly has an ethical focus, and regards Christianity as *spiritually* or *existentially* deficient.[10] Christianity is rejected, not because it is unscientific, but because it is too individualistic and too dismissive of social life.

De Lubac is particularly stung by the accusation of individualism, and he sets out to prove, against Giono, that true Catholicism in fact has an inherently social meaning. Indeed, on its most essential doctrinal level, it "is so social that even the expression 'social Catholicism' is a pleonasm."[11] However, de Lubac acknowledges to Giono and other critics that modern theology and especially neo-Scholasticism have often forgotten this crucial social element of Christianity. Christianity has too easily adapted itself to individualism, and the result is that other movements have arisen to fill this gap: various forms of humanism stress the social nature of humanity, and these challenge theology to rediscover its own social heritage. At the same time, however, de Lubac believes that the modern desire for social unity is also deficient: it is often a purely immanent humanism. Only a theology that can properly address this humanism is able to remedy its shortcomings.

Thus by turning to the church, de Lubac reacts to theology's own forgetfulness of its social character and to humanism's lack of transcendence. He is convinced that these two seemingly different observations share a fundamental trait: both neo-Scholastic theology and immanent humanism can thrive only in an environment where discursive reasoning is seen as the highest way to understanding, thus depriving human beings of their ability to understand spiritually. In the following sections, we will investigate this analysis in greater detail as we look at de Lubac's thinly veiled criticism of contemporary theology, his positive yet critical interpretation of humanism, and his observation that modern epistemology is spiritually deficient. This will enable us to understand why de Lubac thinks that a turn to the church is necessary.

The Charge of Individualism

De Lubac began his work by quoting the critic of religion Giono, who accused Christianity of offering only individual consolation. The third part of *Catholicisme*,[12] which offers most indications about why de Lubac

wanted to write this book, opens with another critic of religion, the historian Ernest Renan (1823–1892). Ernest Renan was a well-known critic of religion at the time. In various popular works, he traced the origins of Christianity and claimed that the church had failed to understand that Jesus was a sublime but entirely human moral teacher.[13]

Unlike most Catholic responses to Renan, de Lubac does not direct his criticism at Renan's view of the historical Jesus. He aims his criticism at something else: at Renan's central thesis that the true and continuing value of Christianity lies in the individual spiritual consolation it offers to its adherents. De Lubac wonders how such an intelligent man could interpret the early Christian sources so utterly wrongly? The letters of Paul, the Apocalypse, the writings of the Church Fathers, according to de Lubac these all testify to a broad and essentially social rather than individual salvation. True, de Lubac admits, theology itself has also long ignored this important social aspect of Christianity. But Renan was a historian, and knew all these ancient texts well. Why did he miss this crucial element?

In phrasing the question thus, de Lubac is employing a rhetorical trick. To cast doubt on Renan is a perfectly safe thing to do for a Catholic theologian. Hence, by opposing Renan, de Lubac reveals his loyalty to the Catholic Church. Between the lines, however, he makes a rather radical and possibly controversial argument that Catholic theology has long been ignoring an important aspect of early Christianity, and even an aspect that anyone who studies the early Christian sources ought not to miss.

Thus de Lubac's true argument is not with Renan but rather with the neo-Scholastic theology of his day. We must assume that de Lubac felt more comfortable debating Renan than taking on the theological and ecclesiastical establishment of his time. In this way, his argument could be presented as a defense of the church, rather than as an attack on it.[14]

Only through this detour is de Lubac able to claim that theology is ignoring an important social aspect that fundamentally belonged to early orthodox Christianity. Of course, this raises the question: if it is indeed such an essential aspect of Christianity, how could it have been overlooked? In the next section, we will examine de Lubac's answer in detail. In short, he argues that theology has always been influenced by its particular cultural environment, sometimes for the better, but sometimes also for the worse. And even when theology tried to defend itself against harmful influences from the surrounding culture, it sometimes got lost in detail to such an extent that it forgot the larger picture. Without explicitly blaming any single movement or particular theological position, de Lubac works toward the conclusion that theology must rediscover its essentials.

External Influences of Individualism

Responding still to Renan, de Lubac shows that the theologies of the early church offered grand visions of universal salvation for all creation.

These theologies, he says, were rich in imagination but imprecise in their formulations. When these visions gave rise to interpretations involving false community mysticism or millennialism, theology could no longer simply repeat these visions. Theology had to solve this imprecision by clarifying the true meaning of the tradition. This, however, introduced a risk.

> The fidelity to a tradition is never servile repetition. A double task was now needed, of clarification and adaptation, and theology has accomplished it many times with success. Unfortunately, this indispensable task has sometimes lost sight of its objective, which was not to obscure doctrine or to dissolve it, but to strengthen and enlighten it.[15]

Precisely in its response to the historical context, in its attempt to be faithful to the tradition, theology sometimes became too much focused on detail, thereby neglecting its objective: expound the fullness of doctrine. This process that was necessary to defend tradition, de Lubac says, caused theology to become excessively individualistic.

According to de Lubac, other authors have pointed out repeatedly that the medieval rediscovery of Aristotelian logic and Roman law was a factor in this process. Whereas the Platonism of previous times often helped shape an organic and wholesome understanding of the mysteries of faith, the legalistic outlook of Roman law and Aristotelianism with its desire for analytical clarity introduced an atomizing outlook that tended to obscure that these mysteries carried a holistic meaning.[16] This does not mean, says de Lubac, that it was necessarily wrong to appropriate these perspectives theologically, and he praises the medieval rediscovery of the social ethics of the Aristotelian *Ethica Nicomachea*. Yet, he claims, not every theological consequence could immediately be seen at that time, and in hindsight we must say that these new Aristotelian concepts contributed to the current individualist outlook.

De Lubac is aware that he is touching upon fundamental aspects of contemporary theology, and he goes to great lengths to assure the reader that he is not criticizing the church itself. For example, he argues that the mere theological embrace of Aristotelian philosophy did not cause individualism. Rather, he says, it was part of a much broader cultural trend that influenced theology. And he notes that many pastors of the church, complying with formal teachings, have also criticized this individualism. But this raises the obvious question why theology has not been able to divest itself of this individualism, and it is to this question that de Lubac then turns.

A Defensive Theology

De Lubac has assured the reader that his purpose is to recover theology from bad external influences. But why did these bad influences come to affect theology in the first place? According to de Lubac, this was strangely

enough the result of the very attempt to immunize theology from bad influences:

> For however closed off to outside influences the theological world would sometimes like to be, it cannot always remain impenetrable to the trends of the century, and it is not always when it thinks itself to be protected best that it offers the most effective resistance. These trends may penetrate it to its advantage; it may also happen that they do so to its disadvantage.[17]

In fact, according to de Lubac, Catholic theology in the last three centuries has followed precisely this strategy: it has attempted to make itself immune from external influences. But it did so to its disadvantage, and the result was a one-sided, defensive theology that is fueled only by controversies. Too often, he says, the catechism is taught to believers, not in order to awaken the faith in them, but to protect them from Luther or Loisy. As if a minimalistic adherence to all these statements is enough to protect anyone from error or heresy.[18]

To be sure, controversy in itself can be fruitful, de Lubac says. In a way, it has always been the case that theological questions arise out of controversies, heresies and deviations from true doctrine. Doctrinal errors challenge theology to explain doctrine better, so theology advances by means of heresy. However, when theology responds to errors, it allows the heretic to define the framework in which theology then has to operate. So even defending theology against heresy exposes the theologian to contextual dangers:

> In his struggle against heresy, he always places himself more or less, whether he wants it or not, on the heretic's point of view. He often accepts questions in the way that the heretic poses them, so that even without sharing his errors he may be making implicit concessions to his opponent, all the more serious as he refutes them more explicitly.[19]

Precisely such implicit concessions to opponents have defined and damaged Catholic theology in the last three centuries, de Lubac contends. In reaction to a modern naturalism that rejected any supernatural order, Catholic theology tried to protect this supernatural realm. But in doing so, it agreed with modernist naturalism on one fact: that the natural and supernatural domains are two strictly separate realms. And by protecting the supernatural realm, theology became almost incapable of discovering spiritual truths in real life. Similarly, in reaction to Protestantism and the controversies surrounding the Eucharist, Catholic theology developed in a one-sided way: while rightly emphasizing the extrinsic aspects of the church with its juridical and hierarchical aspects against Protestantism, it wrongly neglected the aspect of the church as a mystical body and the role of the laity.

It is interesting to see that de Lubac characterizes these theological developments as a kind of accidental forgetfulness. He appears reluctant to blame Catholic theology for its development influenced by the new Aristotelian philosophy, or for its response to the Eucharistic controversies. Meanwhile, however, his argument that theology is always contextual is radically at odds with the self-understanding of the neo-Scholastic theology of his day, as this theology did not see itself as a contextual, but rather as an almost exact and universal science. Instead of being creative, it was self-enclosed and defensive, and it understood itself as the sole guardian of the eternally true deposit of faith. By suggesting that this neo-Scholastic theology is the result of contextual influences and has, in fact, forgotten an essential part of doctrine, de Lubac chips away at the foundations of the theology of his day.

Humanism without Transcendence

We have seen that de Lubac reveals in the tenth chapter of *Catholicisme* that his new agenda for theology is a reaction to individualism. This individualism is related to modernism and Protestantism, but it has also affected Catholic theology, which caused it to lose its broad outlook and social character. It was also this individualism, de Lubac claims at the beginning of this book, that caused atheists like Giono to dismiss Christianity altogether.

In the twelfth chapter of *Catholicism*, de Lubac describes a new cultural desire to reject individualism, and attributes this desire to 'humanism.' This humanism, he believes, is visible in various political ideologies and it is the direct result of modern science. Social sciences have taught us that a human being is not simply an atomized individual, but is always rooted in a community. Natural sciences, and especially new theories on the origin of humankind, have shown that humanity as a whole has evolved from, and is rooted in nature. These new ideas, taken together, have resulted in the popular idea that all human beings are in fact brothers and sisters. This idea reflects "one of the deepest aspirations of our age":[20] the almost mystical aspiration of the unity of all humanity.

De Lubac appreciates this political-ideological trend, as to him it clearly resonates with the Catholic hope. However, he believes that it is also extremely deficient, because it describes in purely immanent terms something that is, for Catholics, essentially related to a transcendent reality.

Marxism is a good example of this kind of immanent humanism. Its dream of a society without class in which all human beings respect and cherish each other's absolute value is certainly humanist and worthwhile. However, de Lubac says, it ultimately lacks transcendence, and this has devastating consequences. While the social ideal of Marxism is built on the reductive idea that every human being is essentially a nexus of social connections, the ideal of the early Christians was built on the acknowledgement that every human being is created in the image of God.[21] This unique divine imprint in the individual not only guarantees the unity of the whole

of humanity, but it also guarantees the integrity of the person. A human being can, by virtue of being God's image, always to a certain extent escape his or her social and bodily conditions. By contrast, the purely immanent Marxist conception of a human being as a nexus of social connections does indeed guarantee the unity of humanity, but in no way guarantees an individual's integrity. In this view, individuals possess nothing that can help them escape from society, because they are nothing more than what society makes of them.

De Lubac argues that Marxism (and all the other ideologies that were able to rally the masses for future utopias in the 1930s), will ultimately always lead to tyranny over the individual, precisely because they understand the individual as a function of society. Marxists hand themselves over to a tyranny of 'becoming,' and individuals are sacrificed to a future in which they themselves will not partake.[22] What is lacking here, says de Lubac, is a transcendent 'center,' in which all human beings from all ages are held together in unity:

> By all necessity, there has to be a Place where humanity, from generation to generation, can be gathered; she needs a Center where she converges; an Eternal that totalizes her, an Absolute that, in the strongest sense of the word, in the full actual sense, makes her exist. She needs a Magnet that attracts her. She needs Another to whom she gives herself.[23]

Without such an eternal center, humanity will finally dissolve over time, he says. In other words, de Lubac believes that a merely immanent point of view must finally conclude that humanity's development cannot be qualified as good or bad, but is simply a result of the neutral fact that history moves on. As long as the development of humanity is not a 'becoming' that leads to a transcendent end, it is a becoming that is purely arbitrary.

De Lubac accordingly recognizes in contemporary humanist ideals something fundamentally valuable, especially the idea of the ultimate unity of humanity. But he simultaneously warns against the fact that, without any recourse to transcendence, this idea of humanity will turn into a tyrannical ideal. In fact, as de Lubac also contends elsewhere in *Catholicisme*, this new immanent humanism is a bland residue of a once strong Catholic social idea, a residue that is capable of attracting people only because modern theology has neglected it.[24] In the end, only a Catholic point of view is able to fully value the experience of humankind both in the light of humanity's final unity and in the light of the individual's absolute worth. In a passage that would later be echoed in the first lines of *Gaudium et Spes*, he explains the task of Catholicism:

> It is the role of a Christian, a human being among his fellow human beings, uplifted by the same desires and cast down by the same anxieties, to nevertheless raise his voice to remind those who forget their

> nobility: a human being is only himself, he only exists for himself *from the moment* that he discovers within himself, in the silence, some unaffected zone, some mysterious background that, whether gloomy or unconcerned, banal or tragic, does not force itself into the actuality.[25]

The Atrophy of a Spiritual Intelligence

As we have seen, de Lubac points to a neglect of the social aspects of doctrine in contemporary theology, and simultaneously diagnoses the social ideal of the humanists of his day as lacking in transcendence. Theology neglects the social, humanism neglect the transcendent. How could these two movements, which both have qualities that could benefit the other, be so separate?

In a way, this distance between theology and humanism is related to the division that de Lubac observed between a natural realm of human reason and a supernatural realm. He already touched upon this theme in his historical sketch of how Catholic theology came to embrace this rigid distinction. In Chapter 3 of *Catholicisme*, de Lubac offers a more fundamental analysis of the origins of these two realms. He argues there that this division is the result not simply of theological developments, but of a far more widespread and long-term cultural change: a change in how people perceived the world. Throughout the book, de Lubac suggests that there was such a change in worldview, but he does not discuss it explicitly until the third chapter. In a complex and condensed historical argument that he would later elaborate in his *Corpus mysticum: Essai sur L'Eucharistie et l'Église au moyen âge*,[26] he tries to demonstrate the seeds of this development by means of subtle changes in medieval sacramental understanding. Let us resume his analysis.

In the third chapter, de Lubac sets out to demonstrate that the sacraments of the church have a fundamentally social character. To begin with, he demonstrates and explains quite clearly that the sacraments of baptism and penitence unite and reunite individuals with the church, and through the church with Christ. In both these instances, he says, the relationship between the sacrament and the social aspect is quite clear and understandable.[27]

However, in the case of the Eucharist, the sacrament par excellence, de Lubac observes that theologians have struggled to understand the essence of this social aspect, if they have even noticed it at all. Also, although most believers are aware of the fact that the Eucharist is called the 'sacrament of unity,' they often seem to treat this as a nonessential aspect of a sacrament that seems otherwise to carry a meaning primarily for the *individual* believer.

De Lubac wonders why this is so, and points out that in the past, participants in the celebration of the Eucharist immediately perceived its social meaning. Quoting a plethora of text fragments and patristic and medieval references, he demonstrates that, in the early church, the Eucharist was indeed

interpreted primarily in a social sense as the sacrament of unity between God and human beings and between human beings among each other.

De Lubac elaborates on this ancient view, which postulated a profound identity between Christ's carnal body and the church, which was signified in the consecrated bread and wine. Especially the breaking of the bread was understood to represent both Christ's suffering and the partaking in this suffering of the community *as his body*. This profound identity was theologically elaborated as the idea of Christ's threefold body, the idea that his carnal body, the church, and the Eucharistic body were all three profoundly the same.[28] And subsequently, it was similarly elaborated in the theology of the sacraments through the threefold distinction between the *sacramentum tantum*, *sacramentum et res*, and *res tantum*: the Eucharistic species of bread and wine, the body of Christ and the unity of the church were intrinsically linked to each other in the rite.[29] This understanding, de Lubac notes, became classical doctrine and was still repeated at the Council of Trent. It shows that the Eucharist was closely linked to the *social* idea of the unity of the church.

Importantly, de Lubac is not interested in simply expounding the social meaning of the Eucharist, but he points out something else. According to him, all these theological elaborations were not artificial attempts to force a unifying meaning upon the Eucharist[30] but they instead *sprang forth* from this immediately felt meaning of the Eucharist. Apparently, believers could immediately recognize Christ's body in these three forms, because they immediately and instantly recognized the Eucharist as the sacrament that effected unity between Christ and all the individual believers and between the believers themselves. This was so fundamental that this principle remained unquestioned even during the multitude of controversies surrounding other aspects of the Eucharist in early medieval times.

> The followers of Paschasius Radbertus, as well as those of Rhabanus Maurus or Ratramnus, and those of Florus or Amalarius, adherents of 'Ambrosian metabolism,' 'Augustinian dynamism' or of 'simple Roman realism'; whatever the exact relationship that they establish between 'the body born of the virgin' and the Eucharistic body; whether in their affirmation of the sacramental presence they place the emphasis on the 'mysterium' or the 'veritas'; all are unanimous: the result of the sacrament is unity.[31]

What was perceived by all throughout these phases of history, has currently become almost completely absent from Eucharistic spirituality. Even if believers wish to cling to the relationship between the physical body of Christ and his mystical body, they can no longer simply and immediately grasp it. At most, they can see 'a vague extrinsic analogy' between the two.[32] And modern believers may know intellectually, but cannot *grasp* that the sacrament of the Eucharist brings about unity. Apparently, earlier

believers were still sensitive to this meaning, but modern believers have lost this ability. What exactly was this ability, and how did it disappear?

According to de Lubac, it can be shown that the ability to immediately grasp this mystical truth was already declining in the eleventh century. At the time, there was a theological debate about the controversial theologian Berengar, on whether and how Christ was really present in the consecrated bread and wine. Although the opponents of Berengar tried to do justice to all aspects of the mystery, still this controversy for the first time introduced a specific focus on one aspect. Suddenly, de Lubac claims, there was a moment in the history of theology that the value of the sacrament was narrowed down to the question whether and how Christ's carnal body was present in the Eucharistic species.

De Lubac observes something similar in the medieval use of the words *verum* and *mysticum*. In the earlier days, both Christ's physical body and the church were called the *corpus verum*, the 'true body of Christ.' The Eucharistic presence, on the other hand, was called the *corpus mysticum*, because there Christ's body was present due to the 'mystical prayer,' in the context of a 'mystical banquet.' In medieval times, *corpus verum* was still used to denote the physical body of Christ, but less and less so for the church and more and more so for the Eucharistic presence which was the subject of such heavy debate. As it happens, the term *corpus mysticum* was increasingly applied to the church.[33]

For de Lubac, neither the Berengar controversy nor this terminological shift reveal a change in sacramental theology. In fact, he says, doctrine remained essentially the same. However, de Lubac argues that it does reflect a changing mindset:

> Slowly, however, the mental habits changed. The outlook on the world transformed. As we unlearned ourselves to contemplate the spiritual in the mirror of the sensible, and to see the universal and the particular as mutually symbolizing each other, the relations between the 'physical' body of Christ and his 'mystical' body were sent into darkness. It was like the loss of a sense by slow atrophy. While remaining correct, faith was to a certain extent narrowed because it was no longer nourished by 'intelligence.'[34]

Hence, and this is crucial for a correct interpretation, de Lubac does not suggest that the controversy surrounding Berengar or the terminological shift are in a direct way the cause of the present inability to grasp the meaning of the Eucharist. Rather, he believes that these theological questions are a symptom, a consequence of an earlier loss of a certain holistic interpretation of the mystery of the Eucharist and the church, a certain *intelligence*.

More specifically, what was lost was the ability to "contemplate the spiritual in the mirror of the sensible." According to de Lubac, believers in the patristic era knew that a particular social or historical reality could carry

spiritual meaning, which would become visible when it was illumined by the reality of faith. They could therefore immediately grasp that the church was in a very true sense the body of Christ, and that the Eucharistic body, in a hidden but no less real sense, was both the physical and ecclesial body of Christ. But precisely this ability to understand the material world spiritually, to see a deeper meaning in reality, was gradually lost. This new 'mental habit' resulted in an understanding that could still – doctrinally correctly! – reproduce the spiritual truths, but that lacked the 'intelligence,' the spiritual insight that underlay those truths. It led to a theology that was strictly separate from philosophy, and although it could posit and build on purely positive established truths, it could no longer reflect on these truths itself.

We have already mentioned de Lubac's criticism of neo-Scholasticism. We have also noted that de Lubac, in his later work *Surnaturel*, would criticize contemporary interpreters of Thomas who upheld the rigid division between the natural and supernatural order. According to these neo-Scholastic theologians, purely natural reason can fully comprehend the natural order: neither God nor revelation are required to account for biology, chemistry, or philosophy. God's revelation must be studied only to understand the supernatural truths. In this view, neither theology nor philosophy need the ability to perceive spiritual truth behind the material order. There is no need to cross the chasm between reason and faith, no need for any kind of spiritual insight.

Somewhat hidden away in his analysis of the social character of the Eucharist, de Lubac demonstrates that this neo-Scholastic approach with its rigid separation of the natural and the supernatural offers a dim and impoverished approach to doctrine. But more than that, modern people are unable to see what the theologians of old could still see, because they have lost the ability to perceive the material order with a spiritual intelligence. De Lubac accordingly not only claims that theology has lost the *social* understanding of the sacrament. He also suggests that, on a crucial level, it is the understanding itself that has changed and narrowed. In other words, modernity, including neo-Scholasticism, suffers from an *epistemological* deficiency.

De Lubac's Solution

We have so far inquired into why Henri de Lubac wrote *Catholicisme*. We have found that he mourns the modern loss of the social aspects of doctrine, that he is triggered by social humanism that lacks transcendence, and that he observes a general inability to understand the world spiritually. Theology itself, according to de Lubac, has been tempted to adopt an increasingly defensive and narrow attitude in modern times. Aristotelian philosophy introduced an atomizing outlook, modernism and Protestantism caused individualization, and modern Catholic theology suffers from an epistemology that presupposes a division between nature and grace.

Before moving on, it is worthwhile to draw attention to the language which he uses: *atomization*, *individualization*, *division*. In short, loss of

unity. This already suggests the direction in which de Lubac seeks the solution. Indeed, as we will see, he calls for a renewal of theology that is *integrated* instead of atomized, *broad* instead of narrow, *holistic* instead of focused on detail, *synthetic* instead of antithetical. A theology that is all these things, and is *catholic* precisely as such.

This preference for unity and a holistic approach gives de Lubac's solution its own unique flavor. We have seen earlier that Romano Guardini favored the image of flourishing: what once was arid now flows, what is dead is brought to life, etcetera, and he depicted the truly catholic person as someone whose influence causes every object to revive (see page 136). In *Catholicisme*, de Lubac offers a somewhat similar description of a truly catholic person, but now as someone whose influence restores everything to its unity:

> In the one in whom the Grace of Christ triumphs over sin, the most spiritual interiority will finally coincide with the fullness of the catholic spirit, that is, with the spirit of the broadest universality and the most rigorous unity at the same time. No other than this truly 'spiritual' man deserves the beautiful name of 'ecclesiastical' man, and no one is further removed from anything that smells like the sectarian spirit. [...] In the midst of an always opaque and most often hostile world, he already finds the lost unity.[35]

So where the culture and theology of his day had become infested with things that were un-catholic – separation between nature and grace, atomizing thought, individualism, etcetera – de Lubac intended to retrieve a truly catholic perspective. A perspective that we have gradually lost, but can be found in the Fathers, whose outlook was to understand salvation holistically, as a divine work of restoration that spans the ages and encompasses the whole cosmos.[36] The Fathers, de Lubac believes, could see both the individual and his or her social context, both the present and the whole of history, both nature and grace, and they thus enable us to understand the full scope of God's salvation of humanity. It is this quest for a holistic approach that drives *Catholicisme*'s *ressourcement*. It was not born from dilettante curiosity for long lost times, or a simple nostalgia for a once Catholic age. Rather, for de Lubac the rereading of these ancient texts served a very contemporary purpose: he wished to recover a theological agenda undisturbed by modern fragmentation. We will now follow de Lubac in this quest.

Salvation is Social

The idea that all human beings belong equally to one single humanity might seem a commonplace today, embraced as it is by all, at least across the Western political spectrum. Once, however, as de Lubac writes in his

first chapter, this notion was anything but self-evident. In fact, he claims, it was one of the most striking innovations which the early church brought to the pagan world. The idea was directly related to Christianity's relatively unique monotheism, and it followed from the belief that everybody was created in the same image of the one God.[37]

This social meaning guided the Father's understanding of sin and salvation. As de Lubac shows through lengthy quotes, the Fathers described salvation as a restoration of disrupted social harmony. They made use of all kinds of symbols to communicate this social aspect of salvation: Christ as the queen bee who gathers all the other bees around her; Christ's blood as fig juice curdling the milk together, Christ as the needle who was pierced with a string but who now stitches Jews and Greeks together, etcetera.[38] The Fathers regarded not individuals, but humanity as a whole as the object of salvation.

Moreover, in this patristic view, Christ not so much *offers* us salvation, as if salvation is something extrinsic from us. Rather, Christ *works* our salvation precisely by becoming united with human nature, thereby uniting us all.[39] Christ did not simply take on human form, after which he redeemed humanity, but he redeemed humanity by being incorporated into it. In de Lubac's own words:

> In assuming a human nature, it is *the* human nature that he united himself to, that he enclosed in himself, and this as a whole serves him as some sort of body. [...] As a whole, he will carry it to Calvary, as a whole he will raise it from the dead, as a whole he will save it. Christ the Saviour not only offers salvation to each one; he works it, he is himself the salvation of the Whole, and for each one salvation consists in personally ratifying one's original belonging to Christ [...].[40]

This leads de Lubac to formulate the rather universalist thesis which is evident throughout *Catholicisme*: all human beings, everybody from all nations, races, and cultural backgrounds, are essentially one and healed and elevated in Christ. Christ, he says, did not first work our individual salvation, after which he founded a community of followers. No, Christ's salvific act is immediately constitutive of community, because it consists in restoring a unity among human beings that had been lost. And not only does it restore this original unity, it also surpasses it: it brings about a unity that is higher than our natural, original nature. From Christ's act onward, the whole of humanity is bonded together not only by its common nature, but also by love.[41] Similarly, it is precisely the goal of the church to gather all of humanity within herself, and at the same time she herself is the *ekklesia*, the people gathered by God. This gathering of all people is made visible through the sacraments, which cannot be fully understood without understanding their social and ecclesial meaning

According to de Lubac, the social interpretation of the church was not original to the Church Fathers but was inherited directly from Judaism. In

contrast to Casel, he denies any link between early Christianity and pagan mystery religions: in those religions, he claims, human community was instrumental to our reunification with God. In Christianity, on the other hand, Christ's salutary act *is* the reunification of humankind. It rests on the typically Jewish idea that being a people is part of what it means to be saved. Therefore, de Lubac claims that, although numerically "the Church stems mainly from the Gentiles, – ecclesia ex gentibus –, the idea of Church stems mainly from the Jews."[42]

Salvation is Historical

In the first part of his book, de Lubac rediscovers the patristic understanding of salvation in social terms. In the second part of the book, and especially in the fifth chapter, de Lubac tries to show that this social idea of the church is connected to an alternative view on *history*.

Most religions, de Lubac says, view history as something to escape from. This has to do with the particular genesis of religions, which, he says in a passages that draws heavily on the history of religion, always start in a local social setting: in a small tribe, a city, or another local group of people. Often, after some time, this religion starts to transcend these natural social confinements, and it does so by escaping them. Platonism, Indian religions, and ancient mystery religions all in various ways allowed people to escape society and its temporality through asceticism or initiation into secret truths. All these religions also conceive of wise and truly religious men as men who are distant from and unaffected by the natural and daily social world. Apparently, the natural and temporal itself lacks true meaning.[43]

The early church entertained a unique alternative perspective on history, de Lubac says. Even though it transcended the local and social world of its Israelite origins, it emphasized its history not as meaningless confinement but as a meaningful *direction*. From the outset, the church believed that the whole of humanity is heading toward its final consummation through time. Salvation was understood as a social process and precisely therefore also as something that unfolds through time, as the slow penetration of God into humanity. Such a view on history, de Lubac points out, means that time is no longer regarded as an eternally closed cycle or an arbitrary process of becoming, but consists of real 'events.'

> For Christianity, on the contrary, duration is indeed something very real. It is not a sterile dispersion but it possesses, so to say, a certain ontological density and a fecundity. [...] Facts are no longer merely phenomena, they are events and acts. Something novel, incessantly, takes place. There is a genesis, an effective growth, a maturation of the universe.[44]

According to de Lubac, this new view on history was not primarily a speculative idea, but was first of all practically implied in the most basic

faith praxis of the early church. He demonstrates this by offering a comparison between the common symbolic language of the earliest church and that of pagan religions. For instance, says de Lubac, when pagan philosophers spoke of the journey of the soul toward salvation or illumination, they used an array of cosmographical images and depictions of heavenly hierarchies. Illustrative is the mystery religion of the cult of Mithras that used the symbols of seven planets and seven trees to speak about the seven stages of the initiation of individuals in the secret truths.[45] In the early church, by contrast, the imagery to describe the spiritual journey was not primarily taken from nature or cosmology, but mostly from historical events such as the seventy years in Babylonian captivity or the forty years in the desert in Exodus. Historical events became models through which individuals could understand their own spiritual journey. This preference for historical images to describe the individual journey, de Lubac says, reveals an implicit shift in historical understanding: suddenly, the historical process was no longer seen as something to escape from, but was understood as a typical *example* of such a 'journey.' In other words: history was not a confinement, but a movement.

And even when the symbolic language of the early church was derived from pagan religion, its liturgical praxis and doctrinal meaning fundamentally differed from it. Where pagan religion concerned itself with the individual's escape from the temporal order, Christianity was primarily concerned with the whole of humanity finding salvation through the temporal order. Christianity, therefore, says de Lubac, is a story of redemption without the need to escape from history or society. History is no longer an arbitrary process of becoming, nor a closed system of cause and effect. It is a journey, led by a good God, that is heading toward the end of time, when everything will finally be at peace.[46]

Recovering a Spiritual Intelligence through the Church

The Church Fathers offered de Lubac a perspective that had long been forgotten in the church. His reading of the Fathers revealed that, to them, their new religion implied a turn to the social and the historical. In fact, de Lubac demonstrates that this social and historical aspect was so deeply entrenched in their idea of Christian salvation that they could not understand salvation independently from it. So, whereas in other non-Christian modes of thinking a retreat from temporal society was necessary to acquire wisdom or truth, in this new religion history and society had to be embraced and studied. De Lubac, through these ancient texts, accordingly recovers a language that is both theological and humanist; a language that exposes the shortcomings of the narrow neo-Scholastic theology of his time just as it exposes those of modern immanent humanism.

However, a mere unearthing of this patristic language is not sufficient. As we have seen earlier in the context of the Eucharist, de Lubac believes

that modern believers have trouble interpreting the world spiritually. The spiritual 'intelligence' that was fundamental to the early church's interpretation of the Eucharist has been lost or at least 'atrophied.' In the third chapter on the social meaning of the sacraments, he was content to demonstrate that this atrophy had indeed taken place, and that, as a result, the social meaning of the Eucharist had become hard to grasp. However, in the sixth chapter of *Catholicisme*, he more or less provides a solution by suggesting that this spiritual insight is not a sense that can be possessed by an individual; rather, it is a perspective that is made manifest by the church as a whole. Only by participating in the mystery of the church can persons gain this spiritual perspective which it is impossible to possess individually. We begin to see here the direction in which de Lubac is going. It is time, therefore, to examine this chapter more closely.

Chapter 6 of *Catholicisme* discusses the exegesis of the early church. Superficially, patristic Scriptural interpretation to modern readers seems not so much exegesis but mostly *eisegesis*, on account of its wildly imaginative allegorical explanations. According to de Lubac, however, the patristic treatment of Scripture, properly understood, testifies to a radical and subversive but very consistent view on history. By elaborating this historical worldview behind the patristic interpretations, de Lubac attempts to lay bare the 'spiritual intelligence' that drives their exegesis. He intends to demonstrate that the interpretation of the Church Fathers was essentially linked to their conviction that the mystery of the Christ, which is also the mystery of the church, should guide every understanding.

We look first at de Lubac's account of patristic exegesis. As is well known, Church Fathers interpreted the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament, and they often did so allegorically. Exuberant and imaginative as they sometimes were, the Fathers were not, de Lubac stresses, simply trying to solve a textual puzzle:

> When they [the Fathers], convinced that everything was full of mysterious depths, bent over these inspired pages in which they traced through its successive stages the Covenant of God with the human race, they felt that, rather than commenting on a text or deciphering verbal enigmas, they were interpreting a history. [Just like nature, more than nature, history was a language to them. It was the Word of God.][47]

In essence, de Lubac claims that the Fathers were not concerned with the text as such, but with the historical reality behind it. In their exegesis, they tried to understand how history testified to a kind of development in the spiritual sphere. According to de Lubac, this focus on development radically distinguished them from pagan philosophers who often used similar instruments of allegory, but who mainly attempted to distill eternal truths from mythical texts which they perceived to be ahistorical. It is true that the Fathers were also looking for eternal truth, but according to de Lubac,

they believed that this truth had somehow to be "prepared, come to pass, and mature socially in history."[48]

The early church's way of understanding how the Old and New Testament are related is exemplary for this new view. To clarify, de Lubac explains that these terms do not simply point to two sets of books. Even before the New Testament was written, Saint Paul spoke of two testaments or covenants. Therefore, according to de Lubac, we should instead understand these terms to mean, in their original sense, two 'dispensations,' two eras in the history of the world that can be distinguished by two different relationships between God and his people.[49] Hence, the Fathers' crucial question was how the old dispensation was related to the new dispensation in which the early church lived.

But why did the Church Fathers even attempt to interpret the Old Testament as a preparation for the New Testament? De Lubac remarks that some historians believe that Christianity as a young religion in a Hellenistic context tried to create credentials for itself by appropriating an ancient text. We could add that this is exactly the suspicion of *eisegesis*: modern readers often have the impression that the Church Fathers arbitrarily read into the text whatever they wanted to find there, especially if they are able to extract Christological information even from the most trivial story detail in the Old Testament. But de Lubac strongly rejects this view and believes that this misses the point of what the Fathers were trying to do. According to him, the idea that the Old Testament was a preparation for the New was not superficial or strategical. Rather, it had to do with the heart of the belief system of the earliest Jewish Christians. They intuitively grasped that the incarnation was somehow a fulfillment of what had already come to pass. These early Jewish Christians understood themselves as participating in a new moment in the already long history of God with his people. It was this very fundamental intuition of the earliest believers that made them investigate the Old Testament and re-read it, to find a meaning that up to that day had always been overlooked. It was this intuition that finally evolved into the common project that occupied all early Christian exegetical schools, both Latin and Greek, from highly allegorical to strictly historical, of arguing that the relationship between the Old and New Testament was important.[50] And it was only in order to prove and understand this relationship that the Fathers in so many ways poured over the sacred pages. Therefore, de Lubac believes that the patristic reading of the old texts was not simply arbitrary or an attempt to appropriate an ancient text: it necessarily arose from the very fundamental *Jewish* question on how to relate the new situation or dispensation in which they found themselves to the earlier history of God and Israel.

The patristic attempt to relate the two Testaments to each other was not without its difficulties. The early church saw the New Testament both as a fulfillment of the Old and as something completely new at the same time. The early church, de Lubac writes, did not believe that the New Testament revealed a meaning that was already concealed in the Old. It was not as if

an expert reader of the Old Testament would be able to deduct that something like the incarnation would one day take place. On the contrary, the early church regarded this salvific act as something truly novel, not anticipated by the Old, although it did fulfill the Old and in retrospect supplied it with its true anticipatory meaning. In a way, the early church seemed to believe that the incarnation retroactively *created* the true meaning of the Old Testament; it 'adopted' it and transformed it into a prefiguration of this act.[51] According to de Lubac, it is difficult to underestimate the sheer radicalism of this thesis, which led Tertullian to exclaim in wonder: "Never does the shadow exist before the body, nor does the copy come before the original."[52] In the incarnation, the original comes chronologically *after* the copy, and the Old Testament is understood as the *shadow*, which is the *consequence*, of the New. Of course, for this view to make sense, it was necessary to believe both in the literal meaning of the Old Testament stories, and to believe that this historical reality somehow received its fullest meaning only in the course of later, New Testament, history. In this way the Church Fathers developed a unique idea of history in which radical novelty could be thought together with organic growth. And it was not the result of a speculative philosophy, but of their fundamental conviction that the history of Israel now had to be read in the light of the Gospel. This conviction led them to ultimately redefine all historical common sense.

This relation between the Old and the New Testament had a significant social implication. The exegesis of the early church was guided by the belief that the historical reality of the Old Testament somehow prophetically prefigured the mystery of Christ. To the Fathers, this immediately implied that the Old Testament also prefigured the church that participated in this mystery. Hence, de Lubac says, patristic exegesis reads the historical vicissitudes of the Jewish people as foreshadowing Christ and also immediately as foreshadowing the church as His Body. For example, the suffering Job was understood as prefiguring both the suffering Christ and the church that participated in Christ's suffering. And Noah's ark was seen as a prefiguration of Christ, while its double walls were understood to prefigure both the Jews and Gentiles that make up the church. Thus de Lubac shows that the early church's exegesis was always Christological but also immediately social or *ecclesial*: the textual meaning was thought to reveal something about the collectivity of the people saved by God.

Secondly, however, the early Christian understanding of history did not exclude an individual interpretation. The Fathers not only used their allegorical readings to see the Old Testament as a prefiguration of Christ and the church, but they also believed that this history revealed something about an individual's spiritual journey. In their understanding, the salvation of the world followed the same pattern as the salvation of the individual:

> [There is a correspondence between the spiritual growth of the world and that of the individual soul, as a result of a similar divine

illumination.] The soul is the microcosm of that great world that is the Church, and in the vicissitudes of its spiritual life, it can find in itself all the stages traversed by the Church in her long pilgrimage.[53]

As an example, de Lubac points to the contemporary liturgy of Easter, which references the crossing of the Hebrews through the Red Sea as a prefiguration of the traversing of death by Christ, through which not only the Hebrews but all of humanity is redeemed. This Christological reading also instantly sheds light on each individuals' baptism. Therefore, de Lubac says, the early church read Scripture according to the following maxim: all that happens to Christ happens to his church as well, and all that happens to the church happens to each individual soul as well.[54] Precisely because the church and the individual believer participate in the salvation of Christ, their salvation follows an analogous pattern.

To resume what we have found thus far: de Lubac tries to understand patristic exegesis by pointing to the Fathers' underlying concerns. Their creative exegesis was not simply the result of wild imagination, but followed from very essential convictions that were related to the self-understanding of the early Christians. They understood themselves as somehow following in the footsteps of Israel, but they realized that in Christ something new had taken place, something in which they participated both as a community and individually. This insight led them to read Scripture not in a supposedly timeless manner but historically, as a story that testified of a development over time, caused by God. This same insight led them to apply the meaning of this development to both the church and the individual believer. This is why patristic exegesis was historical in form, while at the same time yielding a social and individual meaning.

What conclusions does de Lubac draw from these observations? Here as elsewhere, he is extensive in his analysis of patristic exegesis, but very brief in his conclusions. It is possible, however, to infer the following. First of all, the patristic perspective allows de Lubac to retrieve a collective interpretation of salvation against the individualistic piety of his time. It shows that, at least in the early church, the individual meaning of Scripture was intrinsically bound to its universal and social meaning. It also allows him to uncover the false dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural realm, as, at least for the Fathers, there is no natural history or social reality that is untouched by the grand maturing of the world toward God. Also, this maturing is not simply an organic growth in which something is unfolded in history that had in fact always been visible from the beginning. Rather, in the light of what de Lubac has found in the Fathers, this process of maturing is truly led in a mysterious way by God, and it is only visible once God has revealed it to the world.

In this way, we can start to see how de Lubac envisages the spiritual intelligence which he believes has been lost. The literal, historical meaning of the Old Testament acquires its full spiritual meaning only in the light

of the New Testament. Just as no witness of the history of Israel could ever come to understand its true final meaning in Christ and the church in advance, we cannot come to understand the true meaning of any aspect of the world without guidance. In this view, knowledge is not something that is in principle accessible to all, regardless of where he or she stands. Instead, knowledge is dependent on God.

It is no accident that de Lubac applies the same adjective 'spiritual' both to the patristic exegesis and the Fathers' view on history, and to the intelligence that is needed to see the proper meaning of the Eucharist. Neither 'spiritual intelligence' nor 'spiritual exegesis' is simply a preference for a vaguer or more symbolic understanding. Rather, in all cases, it presumes the ability, acquired through participation in the church, to grasp the ultimate supernatural meaning of the natural world, whether the object is the Eucharistic bread, the history of Israel or some other topic. In *Catholicisme*, de Lubac does not explicitly explain his various uses of the adjective 'spiritual.' It is no coincidence, however, that he uses the same word, and in his later *Méditation sur l'Église*, he acknowledges the fundamental analogy between the two:

> Just as there is with regard to Scripture a spiritual intelligence which does not eliminate the literal sense nor imposes an overload on it, but which completes it, which bestows its fullness on it, which discovers the profundity and brings out its objective extensions, so it is with regard to the Eucharist.[55]

Thus an epistemology emerges between the lines of de Lubac's analysis of patristic exegesis in *Catholicisme* that is at odds with any modern epistemology that thinks that a purely natural understanding of the world is possible. This is an epistemology that also questions neo-Scholastic rationalism by claiming that eternal truth cannot be found by simple deduction from timeless theological principles. In fact, de Lubac shows that neo-Scholastic rationalism is directly opposed to the early Church Fathers' idea of the kind of intelligence that is needed to understand the world spiritually. Theirs was a much more creative and uncertain idea in which true knowledge could be found only by attempting to make sense of God's invisible but crucial salvific action in the world.

Importantly, according to de Lubac, the Fathers did not simply make an intellectual effort according to some historical or social interpretative scheme. Rather, their sometimes counterintuitive schemes followed the more basic belief of the early church that its existence was founded upon Christ's salvific acts. The new Christian perspective on the world was thus not the result of an intellectual or speculative effort. Rather, the Fathers' exegesis was the result of their fundamental experience that the church as the Body of Christ is the first result of Christ's saving of humanity. It was this fully ecclesial perspective that allowed them to read the Old

Testament in the light of the New, and that guided their interpretation both of Scripture and of the world as a whole. In themselves, the ingenious, creative and often far-fetched interpretations of the Church Fathers are not important to de Lubac. What he treasures is their basic conviction that the 'spiritual intelligence' needed to obtain true understanding can only be found in the life of the church. De Lubac therefore concludes this chapter with the following words:

> The law of the "spiritual intelligence" is the very law of spirituality: it is only authentic and certain when it constitutes not a solitary outlook, but an interiorisation of the Liturgy, which means an application of the life-rhythm of the Church to the life of the soul. One and the same essential Mystery fills everything in Scripture and in the Liturgy, apart from which no participation in the Mystery of God is possible. In this sense again we must say with St Epiphanius: "At the beginning of everything is the Holy Catholic Church."[56]

As such, the epistemology that de Lubac rediscovers is not simply an illuminationist epistemology that believes that divine intervention is required for every thought act. Rather, he rediscovers what we might label as a sacramental epistemology that is grounded not in intellectual or speculative thought, but in the individual's participation in the social life of the church. Only by becoming part of the church and by thus participating in the mystery of Christ could the Church Fathers find the spiritual intelligence necessary to understand the true meaning of the Eucharist, the history of Israel and the world in general.

Susan Wood rightly observed this when she wrote that, according to de Lubac,

> [the Church] does indeed represent the social embodiment of grace in the world. It is 'social' since it is formed by the union of human beings who together comprise the members of the body of Christ when united with their head. The Church is 'embodied' because it is a historical institution. It is also 'embodied' since it is the body of Christ mystically signified by the Eucharist in covenantal union with its spouse. As body, spouse and sacrament the Church possesses a historical incorporation. Finally, it is graced through its relationship with Christ. The Church as the anticipation of the final union of all the blessed in Christ represents the proleptic presence of the whole Christ in human history.[57]

To de Lubac, this sacramental and ecclesiocentric epistemology means, very concretely, that any theology that is grounded on speculative reasoning by individuals, and does not start with the life of the church, will lack the 'spiritual intelligence' necessary to grasp the mystery of God, even if it can still correctly reproduce its doctrinal formulations. And this means

that de Lubac's epistemological proposal, offered as a solution to an overly individualist and immanent understanding, cannot be understood without relating it to his ecclesiology. We must now therefore examine his concept of the church.

The Church

Earlier, when we discussed de Lubac's inaugural lecture, we saw that de Lubac's theology is shaped by the conviction that the created order cannot be fully understood independently from the divine. This intuition guided him to reject the false dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural, a rejection which would later become the central thesis of *Surnaturel*. Having roughly followed de Lubac's argument in the third, first and then second part of *Catholicisme*, we can see that this intuition also led him to recover a sacramental epistemology in which participation in the life of the church is needed to obtain correct understanding, as we have seen in the previous section.

In the light of this particular epistemology, we might wonder whether de Lubac's opposition against the natural-supernatural divide was itself primarily shaped by philosophical or metaphysical concerns, or whether it was also informed by his ecclesiology. In the following section, I will argue that the latter is the case: it is his ecclesiology that leads to his critique of the natural-supernatural divide. This is so because it is especially in his ideas on the church that de Lubac's dismissal of a clear-cut nature-supernature distinction shifts into a higher gear: in the church, the interplay between God and humanity becomes intense. We will therefore conclude that the recovery of a particular ecclesiology is crucial to de Lubac's whole theological project and is also a cornerstone of *Catholicisme*: according to him, the church is the concrete earthly and historical community in which the world encounters the eternal God, to the point that the human and the divine aspects become almost indistinguishable from each other.

In the following section, I will systematize de Lubac's ecclesiology, which is presented in a fragmentary way in *Catholicisme*, aided in this endeavor by later texts wherever these seem helpful. We will see how, according to de Lubac, the church must be understood radically from these two viewpoints: both as a fully human and transitory institution that is place- and time-bound, *and* as a fully divine institution with universal and eternal significance. Finally, we will return to the theme of his ecclesiocentric epistemology.

The Church: Universal and Historical

As we have seen, de Lubac argues in *Catholicisme* that the early church had a view on salvation that is universal in scope. God's salvation must touch and transform every aspect of the world, every aspect of any human individual. This view is also historical: God touches and transforms the world

step by step, in a slow process of becoming. As the whole world finds its true origin and its final destination in God, everything that happens can only be understood properly as part of this mysterious historical process. This notion of salvation as both universal and historical guides de Lubac's ecclesiology in a fundamental sense, and it brings him to devise a paradoxical image of the church.

On the one hand, de Lubac understands the church as a historical and concrete community. De Lubac explicitly distinguishes his universalist outlook from the "vague cosmopolitanism"[58] that the early church encountered in the mystery religions, and also rejects the "vague mysticism"[59] of much contemporary mystical-body theology. Rejecting any such vagueness, de Lubac focuses on the concreteness, the historicity, of this particular society that is the church.

On the other hand, however, de Lubac does not equate the church with any purely empirical society. As we have seen earlier, the whole of humanity is saved, and it is in the church that this salvation is made a reality. We must therefore not simply understand 'the church' as a smaller part of the whole world, as the community of Christians but not of others. In a profound way, the church encompasses the whole world: the church is "every individual and the whole world in her."[60]

How must this paradox be understood? It could help to note that de Lubac does not think of the church as a collection, either of all believers or of all human beings. Rather, the church is the 'gathering,' the *ekklesia*, or, in Hebrew, the *qahal*:

> "Qahal" does not mean a restricted group or a purely empirical assembly, but the totality of the people of God, a concrete reality, perhaps reduced in its visible aspect, and yet always far greater than its appearances.[61]

By turning to the meaning of *qahal* and *ekklesia* as a kind of 'gathering,' de Lubac suggests that, to put it in my own words, the church is both the process and the outcome of the process. In this view, the church is both the event of God's gathering of his chosen people, and the result of this gathering. Contrary to an understanding of the church as something in itself, as a particular and thus closed-off group of individuals, de Lubac discovers that the church as a gathering is fundamentally open, as God's constant invitation to everyone to be reborn in the divine life.[62] So, as the outcome of God's gathering, the church is based on that particular historical situation where God gathers, yet precisely as the process of a gathering, its borders are without limit. Hence, for de Lubac, the historical situatedness of the church does not endanger its universal meaning, but gives it a concrete center. From a Christian perspective, Gods fundamental act of universal redemption is nothing other than the *historical* founding of the church.

This double – universal and historical – aspect of the church causes de Lubac to favor the image of *mater ecclesia*.[63] To him, the image of the church as a mother reveals that the church is not a vague universal fellowship, but is situated in a particular time and place. And just as any mother, the church's situatedness, its historical form, does not close it off from the world, but in fact shapes the character of its openness to the world. The church as a mother is a concrete historical reality in which everybody can be reborn and receive nourishment.

The Church: Divine and All-Too-Human

We have seen that, according to de Lubac, the church is the divine universal gathering of all humanity, and at the same time the historical and restricted group of the believers. This paradox is related to another paradox: that of the church as simultaneously a divine and a human institution.

De Lubac believes that traditional ecclesiological symbolism was very sensitive to the tension between these two realities: the church as the dedicated Bride is also the prostitute saved by God; the holy church is also a *corpus mixtum*; as a community founded by Christ, it is a provisory instrument for the salvation of humankind, but as the City of God it is also a salutary goal of salvation; and so on.[64] These are not contradictions, de Lubac says, but they are two different sets of perspectives that cannot be fully reduced to each other. Opting for one perspective alone – either by equating the visible church with the Kingdom of God, or, its opposite, seeing the heavenly church as an entirely invisible society unrelated to the earthly church with its all-too-human aspects – is an invalid reduction. It is invalid, because it separates two aspects of reality that "God from the beginning has joined together."[65]

According to de Lubac, we should thus not speak about the church in a way that suggests that there are in fact two communities: one heavenly church of all saints, and one visible, human-made community. But nor should we speak about the church in a way that suggests that the visible church institution is fully equivalent to the invisible Body of Christ. How can this be understood? For de Lubac, the visible church is *mystically* the invisible church. Or, in his own words:

> [J]ust as Christendom is not the Church, so the Church in so far as she is visible is not the Kingdom, nor is she the Mystical Body, although the holiness of this Body shines through her visibility.[66]

The visible church is thus related to the Mystical Body because this Body shines through her. De Lubac suggests that the crux to understanding the nuanced relationship between the two is that we encounter the invisible reality in the visible reality. The visible church is not *identical* with the Mystical Body, but it is the visible church, with its institutions,

its human-made buildings and its often sinful members, to which human beings must look if they are to see the Body of Christ.

In his later work *Méditation sur l'Église* (1953),[67] which in many ways offers an elaboration of the ecclesiological ideas that de Lubac had already introduced in *Catholicisme*, he introduces the helpful notion of *eschatology*. He explains that the church is holy in an *eschatological* sense, not in the sense that it is a strict future reality that is wholly unrelated to the present, but in the sense that this future already "establishes the present and attracts it toward itself." In other words: the future perfection already fundamentally qualifies our present all-too-human ecclesiastical reality.[68]

The Church: Continuity and Change

Eschatology, as de Lubac says in the quotation above, is not merely the knowledge of something that has yet to come, but also of something that is already mysteriously present. Apparently, there is a kind of continuity in the church – its being or its final goal which is however already present mysteriously – that must in time be perfected or brought to light. This is of course directly related to the fundamental theme of 'maturation' that we encountered earlier, when de Lubac explored how Christianity introduced the idea of history as a process of growth and fruition, in which the present is only the shadow or the reflection of the bright future that is not yet actualized.

De Lubac uses this idea to explain that both continuity and change are elementary to the church, when he writes the following about the church:

> The house that we have to build in our turn, on our behalf – because, on her eternal foundations, the Church is a perpetual building site – has changed its style several times since the time [of the Fathers], and without considering ourselves superior to our Fathers, we have to give it our style, that is, the one that answers to our necessities, – to our problems.[69]

The church as a *chantier*, a building site: the hustle and bustle of hard-hat workers, the yelling of constructors and the noise of machines that are tearing down obsolete constructions define it as much as the underground pillars that have been carrying the structure for centuries. For de Lubac, living in the church means confronting one's own historical context, and not being content with obsolete answers. A Christian must engage with his or her own times, precisely because it is the mission of the church itself to constantly engage with the world.

Doctrine and faith must therefore constantly be open to new interpretations, and the church must constantly allow the current age to ask questions that have never been asked before. It is only by allowing such change in style, de Lubac believes, that the essence can be preserved. This is intrinsically connected with a fundamental thesis of *Catholicisme*: the church is not called to destroy and recreate, but to redeem and fulfill the entire world.

As history continues, the church keeps finding new fruits that it can harvest. Just as the early Church Fathers found similarities between Christianity and Greek and Roman culture, and made good use of the insights these provided, the church nowadays must also be attentive to everything that happens in the world.[70] Of course, it can be challenging to discern which aspects of contemporary culture are good and which are bad, and in the midst of the process, no one can be sure of the right outcome.[71] But to claim in advance that no change can be tolerated is to fundamentally harm the church's mission to redeem and fulfill history itself.

De Lubac's Ideal of a Concrete Church

We have seen that de Lubac understands the church as the eschatologically oriented, social and historical event of God's gathering the whole of humanity into one community. At the same time, the church is a community of believers on earth. In both instances, this community consists of human and divine elements. This patristically informed view on the church enables de Lubac to criticize the theology of his day first of all by emphasizing the social and historical aspect of the church and secondly by explaining that these very earthly and temporal aspects are still also the realm of God's grace. It also inspired him to more fundamentally criticize the metaphysical presuppositions of modern theology in general in his later *Surnaturel*.

All this is formulated in relatively abstract terms. To gain a proper understanding of this, however, we should also ask what concrete church de Lubac has in mind, when he speaks about these things. Does he equate this church with the institution of the Roman Catholic Church? How does he relate to other churches and denominations, and to intra-ecclesial movements of renewal? And what ecclesial agenda did he pursue?

To begin with, de Lubac speaks as a Roman Catholic theologian. Whenever he speaks about the church, he seems to presume the Roman Catholic Church. To be sure, he denies that the visible church is simply identical to the Mystical Body.[72] He also believes that the term 'Catholic' has wider meaning and that it should not denote a sect or denomination, and that the Catholic Church is not the 'Latin or Greek, but the universal' church.[73] He devotes a lot of attention to the Greek Fathers, thus probably contributing to ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Churches. Nevertheless, he seems reluctant to directly address the question whether and to what extent, to put it bluntly, Orthodox or Protestant communities also belong to the church. And he shies away from directly discussing ecumenical problems, which are, he says in his introduction, better treated in Congar's *Chrétiens désunis*.[74] We can imagine that the obvious challenge of ecumenism for de Lubac's thought is that it often postulates an invisible unity between the communities, which goes against the grain of de Lubac's message in *Catholicisme* that precisely the historical and social aspects of the church carry salvific meaning. In the next section, we will see

how different historical contexts inspired de Lubac to emphasize different aspects of the ecumenical question. In general, however, we can note that de Lubac's silence on ecumenism is more a matter of hesitation than of any lack of sympathy toward the endeavor itself.

On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that in *Catholicisme* the term 'Protestantism' stands for everything that de Lubac rejects. Whereas, according to him, the spirit of Catholicity is a spirit of fullness, wholeheartedness, universal embrace and the attempt to hold several viewpoints together in an harmonious equilibrium, Protestantism thrives on antitheses: "either rite or morality, either authority or freedom, either faith or works, either nature or grace, either prayer or sacrifice, either bible or pope,"[75] etcetera. And while Protestantism understands the visible church as "an almost secular instrument" and instead takes "refuge in an invisible Church,"[76] de Lubac embraces the concretely visible and historical church as the place where God meets humanity. We could say that de Lubac uses Protestantism as the antithesis of Catholicity, only to show that true Catholicity does not need antithesis. Protestantism is accordingly discussed more as an idea than as a tradition, and de Lubac never considers the question as to what extent Protestants do or do not belong to the church.

Secondly, for de Lubac, the concrete church is related to the celebration of the Eucharist. Nowadays, de Lubac's name is often associated with the 'Eucharistic theology' which he developed mainly in his later *Corpus Mysticum* and in *Méditation sur l'Église*.[77] But in *Catholicisme*, too, he makes a number of meaningful but very tentative comments that point in this direction. In his discussion of the sacraments, de Lubac recovers the patristic idea that the unity of the church is established by the celebration of the Eucharist, and argues that the sacrament of communion itself can only be understood in this social, church-constituting context.[78] According to de Lubac, a proper understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist is closely linked to the theology of the Mystical Body: in the celebration of the Eucharist, we receive unity with the church as the Mystical Body of Christ and simultaneously with Christ himself. So, according to de Lubac, anyone who wishes to see the church should not look at the visible hierarchy of priests, bishops, and the pope; the church most visible when it celebrates the liturgy of the Eucharist.

Thirdly, de Lubac embraces many movements of renewal in the church. He explicitly mentions the liturgical movement, the missionary movement, and social movements such as the Young Christian Workers[79] in Belgium that sought to evangelize and improve the working conditions of industrial laborers.[80] Mission belongs to the heart of the church because it is the task of the church to unite the whole of humanity. De Lubac is very sensitive to the fact that mission has often been too imperialistic, and resists the *intégrist* political movements that desired a powerful church that joined forced with the state.[81] Rather, it is the unfolding and maturing of divine

truth to constantly new locations, and the collecting of the goods of humanity for the Kingdom:

> The Church cannot renounce her preeminently world wide mission for the sake of an exclusive service of one or other form of civilization. For her, this is not merely a matter of justice. Because, – apart from the fact that no human achievement has received the promises of eternity – in order to make the most of the divine treasure that is entrusted to her, she knows that all races, all centuries, all centres of culture have to provide their share.[82]

In general, the particular elaborations of de Lubac's ecclesiology are directly related to the concrete ecclesial environment in which he lived. His emphasis on Catholicity led him to recognize the church as the mystical body of Christ in the Roman Catholic Church that celebrates the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity between God and humanity. It also inspired him to embrace movements in the church that value and ennoble humanity, while rejecting others that did the opposite. And although he himself did not discuss the politics of ecumenism, his attempt to deepen the earlier institutionalist conception of the church and the idea of catholicity as a unifying spirit clearly helped shape the field of ecumenism.

Conclusion

We have read Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme* in order to understand his turn to the church, both its underlying motivations and his own elaboration of this turn. First of all, we have seen that de Lubac's most immediate concern is both modern individualism and the failure of theology to sufficiently counter it. According to de Lubac, a narrow and defensive attitude against modernity has caused theology to forget its own broad and social character. As a consequence, it has too often given the impression that Christianity is concerned with individual salvation alone. Second, de Lubac is also worried about contemporary attempts to overcome individualism through a purely immanent social ideal, which, he believes, will only lead to the tyranny of the group over the individual.

De Lubac finds an alternative and more social approach in the patristic idea of salvation. The early Church Fathers believed that God had saved humanity as a whole and that he had done so in history. They accordingly understood the church as a human, historical and social institute that was simultaneously – in a mystical but very real sense – the body of Christ. The church as such was understood as an eschatological reality in which the fullness of this universal salvation shines through, even if the salvation is not yet fully visible.

This view on salvation and the church also affected the patristic idea of truth. De Lubac found a social idea of truth in the exegesis of the Fathers: in

this view, truth cannot be attained by escaping the confines of the social and the historical, but rather by studying these and embracing them. However, a kind of spiritual illumination is necessary to reveal their true meaning. De Lubac accordingly suggests an alternative epistemology, an ideal of human understanding in which the purely natural cannot be understood in terms of the natural only; mere deduction and logic cannot offer us the divine illumination that is needed to truly understand.

Therefore, only a turn to the mystery of the church and only a participation in its liturgy can provide the perspective in which the social and historical can be understood in their relationship to the divine. According to de Lubac, this patristic outlook reveals the nature of the mistake that neo-Scholasticism and immanent humanism make: both are built not upon the mystery of the church but on speculation and theoretical reflections. Therefore, by turning to the church, de Lubac transcends an epistemology that separates the natural and the supernatural, the immanent and the transcendent. Only participation in the life of the church can offer an alternative view in which a person can understand both him- or herself and the whole of humanity with a truly spiritual intelligence.

Notes

1 Henri de Lubac, *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1938). Later editions use different page numbers and include more patristic sources in the appendix. For an overview of the shifting of page numbers throughout newer editions, see Neufeld and Sales, *Bibliographie Henri de Lubac S.J., 1925–1974* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974), 62. The English translation of quotes is partly guided by Sheppard's but adapted to acquire a more accurate and literal translation: *Catholicism: A Study of Dogma in Relation to the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958). References to the work will be to CAT followed by the page number.

2 For a general introduction in de Lubac, see Jordan Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," in *T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, ed. Jordan Hillebert (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2017), 3–27; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Henri de Lubac: Sein organisches Lebenswerk* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1976); Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 67–86. A comprehensive list of all the works of Henri de Lubac can be found in Neufeld and Sales' bibliography, published in two parts: Karl H. Neufeld and Michel Sales. *Bibliographie Henri de Lubac S.J., 1925–1974* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1974). And Karl H. Neufeld and Michel Sales. "Bibliographie Henri de Lubac S.J., 1970–1990." In Henri de Lubac, *Théologie dans l'histoire*. Vol. 2. (Paris: Desclée De Brouwer, 1990), 408–437.

3 On the impact of the war on de Lubac's theology, see Robin Darling Young, "A Soldier of the Great War: Henri de Lubac and the Patristic Sources for a Premodern Theology," in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James Heft and John W. O'Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 103–122.

4 Published as: Henri de Lubac, "Apologétique et théologie," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 57 (1930): 361–378.
5 Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "La nouvelle théologie, où va-t-elle?" *Angelicum* 23 (1946), 126–145. Also Hillebert, "Introducing Henri de Lubac," 21.
6 Pius XII, *Humani generis*, encyclical letter, section 26. Vatican website. February 15, 2019. http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html.
7 For a thorough analysis of the *nouvelle théologie* movement, see: Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Nouvelle Théologie – New Theology: Inheritor of Modernism, Precursor of Vatican II* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010); Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
8 For a clear overview of how the various themes are always related to the same theological structure, see the fourth chapter of Von Balthasar, entitled "Die Neuheit Christi," 50–74. See also John Milbank's study of the crucial importance of de Lubac for contemporary theology: John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Renewed Split in Modern Catholic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014).
9 CAT, vii. Reference is to "Jean Giono, *Les vraies richesses*, 1936, p. v et viii."
10 CAT, vii.
11 CAT, ix.
12 The third part consists of the last three chapters, 10–12, of the book.
13 Ernest Renan, 1823–1892, was a philologist and historian, best known for *La vie de Jésus* (1863), the first part in the series *Histoire des origines du Christianisme* (published between 1863 and 1881). In this collection of works, he traces the rise of Early Christianity. De Lubac quotes from several works in this series.
14 We should point here to his Jesuit background which obliged him always to *sentire cum ecclesia*. It is this attitude that distinguishes the tone of his 'genealogy' from the far sharper tone of Milbank's genealogy. However, the context of these two writers was also different: de Lubac was at risk of losing his teaching position if he were to be suspected of criticizing the church, and in fact that is precisely what happened, while Milbank can be as polemical as he wishes without fearing any consequences.
15 CAT, 237.
16 De Lubac refers to Emile Mersch and Dom Rousseau as sources, and mentions Mersch's example of Baius who harmed theology by introducing a Roman legal outlook. CAT, 237 n. 1 and 238 n. 1.
17 CAT, 238.
18 CAT, 239–240.
19 CAT, 241.
20 CAT, 277.
21 CAT, 281–284.
22 CAT, 277–280.
23 CAT, 278.
24 CAT, 238–239.
25 CAT, 281.
26 Henri de Lubac, *Corpus mysticum: l'Eucharistie et l'Église au Moyen Age; Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1949).
27 CAT, 51–56.
28 CAT, 65.
29 CAT, 63.
30 De Lubac proves that this principle of unity was not mere theological speculation but was essential to the liturgy in CAT, 67–74.

31 CAT, 60.
32 CAT, 65.
33 CAT, 65–66, esp. 66 n.1. Later, in his *Corpus Mysticum*, de Lubac famously researched and commented on this medieval change in attributes. Here, he simply notes the change and remarks that it did not change the essence of doctrine, although it reflected something of a changing mindset.
34 CAT, 65. Note that intelligence here does not mean 'rationality' but rather 'insight.'
35 CAT, 48.
36 CAT, 12.
37 CAT, 3–9.
38 CAT, 12–13.
39 CAT, 19.
40 CAT, 13–15.
41 CAT, 18.
42 CAT, 33.
43 CAT, 95–97.
44 CAT, 99.
45 CAT, 107.
46 CAT, 104–110.
47 CAT, 123. The sentence between brackets can be found in the fifth edition: *Catholicisme: Les aspects sociaux du dogme*. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1952).
48 CAT, 120.
49 CAT, 123.
50 CAT, 126–127.
51 CAT, 130–131.
52 CAT, 125. In the accompanying footnote, de Lubac refers to: "Apol., c. 47, no. 14 (Waltzing, pp. 100–101)."
53 CAT, 153. The sentence between brackets appears in the fifth edition.
54 CAT, 151. De Lubac quotes Pascal: "Br., n. 209. Thomassin, *Traité des fêtes de l'Église*, l. 2, c.3."
55 Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Église* (Paris: Aubier, 1953), 135.
56 CAT, 158.
57 Wood, *Spiritual Exegesis*, 154.
58 CAT, 34.
59 CAT, 251.
60 CAT, 208. De Lubac does not claim that every individual will be saved; see for example 208–213 on his interpretation of Romans 8 and 11; but he claims that "all losses will not leave any gap in [humanity]. They cannot hurt its fullness." CAT, 213.
61 CAT, 35.
62 CAT, 36.
63 CAT, 34–38.
64 CAT, 39–40.
65 CAT, 44.
66 CAT, 38.
67 Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Église* (Paris: Aubier, 1953).
68 *Méditation*, 99–100.
69 CAT, 249.
70 CAT, 227.
71 CAT, 208, where de Lubac offers the example of the Chinese Rites Controversy in which the Jesuits and the Dominicans clashed over whether Confucian rites were idolatry or not.

72 As we have quoted above, he believes the Mystical Body to ‘shine through’ the visible church. CAT, 38.
73 CAT, 229.
74 CAT, xi.
75 CAT, 244.
76 CAT, 45.
77 For a clear overview of the development in de Lubac’s thought on this matter, see Lam T. Le, “The Eucharist and the Church in the Thought of Henri de Lubac,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 71, no. 3–4 (2006), 338–347.
78 Chapter III in CAT, esp. 60.
79 In French, the *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* (J.O.C.).
80 CAT, 249.
81 See Henri de Lubac, “Le pouvoir de l’Église en matière temporelle,” Revue des sciences religieuses 12, no. 3 (1932), 329–354. Translated as “The Church’s Intervention in the Temporal Order,” in *Theological Fragments* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1989), 222–233.
82 CAT, 226.

8 The Early-Twentieth-Century Turn to the Church

Introduction

The last three chapters have offered a perspective on a development in the first decades of the twentieth century that we have already tentatively described as a turn to the church. We have seen that Romano Guardini, in his *Vom Sinn der Kirche*, optimistically embraced a new sense of the church, recognizing in this a reaction to the alienation that modern individualism and rationalism had brought to society and culture. The Benedictine monk Odo Casel in *Das christliche Kultmysterium* more radically dismissed the individualism of his days, and pleaded for a return to the mysteries of the church. And, finally, de Lubac in *Catholicisme* turned to the church as the historical and social form through which God comes to reveal himself to humanity. Three different works which make a turn to a church, but each of the three works does this in its own particular way.

It is interesting to see that the authors themselves were fully aware that their contribution was part of a larger development. In 1923, as we already noted, Romano Guardini wrote that "the Church awakens in the souls of men."[1] In 1953, de Lubac added this observation:

> The fact that Romano Guardini celebrated thirty years ago continues to assert itself with an increased extent: the Church has awakened in our souls. In a way, her reality has become more interior to the Christian consciousness. At the same time, though not always without blunders, ecclesiological studies flourish everywhere.[2]

Three decades full of theological activity fall between these two observations. Three decades in which something like a 'turn to the church' did indeed happen. But does it make sense to describe this as one single development, and if so, what exactly is the nature of this turn? It will be the main purpose of this chapter to step back somewhat from the individual contributions, and offer a description of the turn itself. In the following sections, I will try to relate Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac to each other, so as to identify both their shared concerns and their unique differences.

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In the same way as we did in Chapter 4, where we described the contemporary turn, we will firstly focus on the specific contexts in which these three theologians operated, and then examine their theological proposals. Once we have related these to each other, we can step back and give a more generic description of that crucial theological episode in the beginning of the twentieth century that we call the 'earlier turn.'

Whose Turn? Differences and Similarities of Context

Social and Ecclesial Contexts

Importantly, all three selected works were published in the Interbellum, between the First and Second World Wars. According to Robin Darling Young, Catholic Europe in the interwar period was challenged by two profound theological issues that had already been lingering for some decades. These two issues were initially addressed in two famous nineteenth-century encyclicals of Pope Leo XIII, *Providentissimus Deus* (1883), and *Rerum novarum* (1891) respectively. *Providentissimus Deus* challenged 'modernism' and specifically the role of modern historical research in theology. Soon after its publication, but especially under the pontificate of Pius X (1903–1914), the debate on modernism became increasingly polarized, effectively inhibiting any creative Catholic response. *Rerum novarum*, on the other hand, dealt with the labor movement and ideologies such as Marxism and capitalism. Especially after the First World War, which many understood as the failure of the old regimes, collectivist Marxism and socialism made an adequate Catholic perspective even more urgent.[3] Both the modernism debate and the social question were not merely theological issues, but they mirrored the quest of Catholicism to find a way of relating its faith to modern science and modern society. If the Great War had taught Catholics anything, it was that a gap existed between the theoretical answers of Scholastic theology and complicated daily life. The simple repetition of old answers had lost its power, and Catholicism had to reinvent itself in new ways to survive in a modern world.

Broadly speaking, this was the common context in which de Lubac, Guardini, and Casel operated. Indeed, we have seen how they each in their own way responded both to the challenges of modern historical research and the experience of new forms of collectivity. They each felt that the results of the modernism debate had not truly solved the questions that initially led to this debate, and they steered clear of any theology that dwelled on this bankrupt individualist heritage. In this way, they were clearly affected by the spirit of their times. We should not overlook the fact, however, that, at least biographically, none of these three theologian was responding to generalized theoretical challenges as such, but they each found themselves placed in particular contexts that made them aware of these themes.

Romano Guardini's theology and philosophy cannot be understood apart from his participation in the Liturgical Movement. This not only connected him to the youth movement, but it also encouraged him to appreciate the sensory, bodily, and emotional aspects of faith. To him, liturgy was not about the correct celebration of a prescribed ritual. Rather, it was something that could, when performed rightly, align the individual as a whole with his or her fellow human beings and with God in such a manner that the whole would flourish. Odo Casel operated in the same context. He and Guardini were more or less the same age, both were German Roman Catholic priests, both were active in the Liturgical Movement through the Abbey of Maria Laach, and both were inspired by Benedictine monastic life. Both believed, as did most German Catholics at the time, that postwar German society was not only financially but also morally and intellectually bankrupt. Both were convinced that the lack of true *Gemeinschaft* could only truly be resolved by the objective and transcendent community of the church.

Both also witnessed a new interest in community and transcendence. However, whereas Guardini optimistically embraced this new spirit and believed that it could be oriented in the right direction, Casel also welcomed this awakening but expected a more radical *conversio*.[4] Indeed, Casel often seemed to make his own monastic liturgical experiences normative to others, an attitude which would eventually lead to a conflict with Guardini.[5] This was not only a clash between personalities, but also a clash between a secluded Benedictine monk immersed in liturgy and a priest in the midst of a world in which people most of the time sought God individually. Casel did not hesitate to describe the relationship between an individual and his community in terms of unity, while Guardini always used more dialectical terms and believed that persons may encounter God both objectively in the church but also subjectively, in their own experience.

As a Frenchman and Jesuit, Henri de Lubac operated in a different context than the other two theologians. Various themes that occur in his work can be recognized as typically Ignatian, such as his preference for the image of the church as Mother[6]; his attempt to always do theology in loyalty to, rather than in a spirit of criticism of the church;[7] and his constant quest to show God's relationship to the natural world.[8] Moreover, the Jesuits offered an environment in which his intellectualism and learning could blossom. In this regard, we must note that de Lubac worked in a more strictly academic theological context. Casel never held any academic position, and Guardini certainly had a notable academic career but as professor of the 'Philosophy of Religion and Catholic Worldview,' he always kept his distance from the theological departments. Of the three, only de Lubac held appointment at a theological institute.

Furthermore, notwithstanding the general situation of the Catholic Church in Europe described above, the situation of the church in France was quite different from that in Germany. At the end of the nineteenth century, both the German and the French state had effectively marginalized

the power of the Catholic Church. Yet, as we have already noted in our chapter on Guardini, in Germany the *Kulturkampf* resulted in the emancipation of the Catholic minority, which came to believe that its sense of community, including its perceived obscurantist anti-Enlightenment attitude, was an asset against the strong Protestant-liberal alliance that was the dominant force within pluralist German society. This sheds some light on Casel's and Guardini's claim that society needed to return to mystery and transcendence.

In homogeneously Catholic France, however, the battle for *laïcité* was rather different from the *Kulturkampf*.[9] It was not the repression of a Catholic minority group by another religion – after all, the vast majority of the French were Catholic – but a power struggle of an atheist state against the Roman Catholic *institution* and its role in public life. Therefore, the institutional church was forced to relinquish all its privileges and secular power, and its adherents retreated into a sphere of individual piety or 'ghetto spirituality' (as Hansjürgen Verweyen has characterized the popular French Marian and other devotions of those days[10]). Meanwhile, Catholic *intégrist* movements such as *Action française* promoted the ideal of a society and state ordered on the basis of Catholic principles, and such a society could be imagined precisely because there was a Catholic majority. So when de Lubac questioned the strict division between the natural and the supernatural order, he was attempting to seek a third alternative for these two typically French options, an alternative in which the church could relate to society. Instead of either urging the church to retreat from public life and from the natural order, or desiring it to dominate the natural order by its supernatural authority in the form of a totalitarian integralist church-state, de Lubac discovered that the church could actually help the natural world to discover its true supernatural end.

Sources and Dialogue Partners

As Roman Catholic priests from the early twentieth century, Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac all worked against the backdrop of a predominantly neo-Scholastic theological climate, and they all attempted to distance themselves from it. De Lubac did so most directly, for example by rejecting the typically neo-Scholastic separation between the natural and the supernatural, and in a more general sense by rereading Thomas Aquinas' work historically as a valuable contribution to the patristic tradition rather than as a once-for-all synthesis of theological truths. Guardini and Casel were less openly critical to the default approach. Their contributions were met with suspicion by some, received as a breath of fresh air by others; but they were not recognized as a direct challenge to neo-Scholasticism. Only in hindsight could their rediscovery of liturgy and community be recognized as an early departure from the neo-Scholastic theological agenda.[11]

It would be mistaken, however, to conceive of their novel theological agenda as truly unprecedented. To be sure, all three repeated alternative lines of thought that had been simmering for some decades and that were in various ways tied to theological movements that originated in the early nineteenth century. These alternatives had, however, lost ground to neo-Scholasticism after the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Catholic Church adopted an increasingly hostile stance toward the modern world.

In order to understand why neo-Scholasticism became the default position in Catholic theology, we must look at the traumatic event of the temporal flight of Pope Pius IX from Rome in 1848, due to the uprising of Italian republicans. According to Schoof,[12] this event effectuated a radical change in the once open-minded pope, and fueled his new suspicion of anything modern and liberal. As a result, the pope came to embrace anti-liberal neo-Scholasticism and encouraged it to take up its role as defender of orthodoxy. Neo-Scholasticism seemed well-equipped to this task.

While theologians today criticize neo-Scholasticism because of its "avoidance of the human subject, its lack of a historical method, and its reliance on discursive reason,"[13] we must be aware that precisely these factors contributed to its success. One of the founding fathers of neo-Scholasticism, Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio (1793–1862) viewed post-Cartesian philosophy as too subjective and incapable of underpinning a public morality. In fact, he claimed, all political philosophies of the time, whether socialist or capitalist, were founded upon merely subjective notions of self-interest and sovereign free will, but lacked the concepts of the common good and natural law. Taparelli believed that the empirical discoveries of the new social sciences could be appreciated fully only if they were integrated into an objective and metaphysical framework. Hence, precisely as an answer to the political and social upheaval of those days, he desired a new Thomism that could incorporate deductive and inductive reasoning, allowing fundamental principles to guide theory without reducing the value of contingent historical observations.[14] As a result, this neo-Scholasticism viewed itself not as a reactionary movement but rather sought to be a stronghold of universal and rational philosophy amid a splintered and overly political philosophical climate.[15]

Yet, despite its noble attempt to salvage rationality, neo-Scholasticism soon became the equivalent of a narrow defense of orthodoxy, and as we have seen, at the beginning of the twentieth century, had become almost synonymous with isolated and ostracized theology.[16] What once was seen as its asset, its "avoidance of the human subject, its lack of a historical method, and its reliance on discursive reason" was now considered a weakness. Hence, twentieth-century theologians who sought alternatives to neo-Scholasticism were drawn almost naturally to theological movements of the early nineteenth century that had been eclipsed by neo-Scholasticism because of their more subjectivist, historical and practical approaches.

The theology of Johann Adam Möhler, for example, located doctrinal truth not in the rational acceptance by an individual of statements that corresponded to revelation, but in the *Gemeingeist*, the organic and living tradition of the church as inspired by the Spirit. Hence, Möhler introduced the historical and the natural into theology, without denying its supernatural aspects.[17] Precisely because of this, the work of Möhler and his fellow Tübingen theologians resonated with Guardini, Casel and de Lubac's theology. These three theologians all adopted typical themes of the Tübingen School, such as an emphasis on the organic development of tradition, the problem of individualism in theology, and the understanding of the church as a mystery. We have already noted this indebtedness in our chapter on Guardini with regard to his use of the Kingdom of God. The same goes for Casel, whose emphasis on mystery theology is in some respects strikingly similar to that of the Tübinger theologian Drey.[18] In *Catholicisme*, de Lubac explicitly mentions the Tübingen School as a line of thought he feels affiliated with.[19]

We must furthermore mention John Henry Newman, whose theological contributions shared many concerns with the Tübingen School.[20] Both de Lubac and Guardini had read Newman. He is a regularly quoted source in de Lubac's *Catholicisme* and is mentioned by name in one of the few footnotes in Guardini's *Vom Sinn der Kirche*.[21] In general, even though it is not always clear whether and how these older theologians exactly influenced Guardini, Casel and de Lubac, their new theological approaches did not appear in a complete theological vacuum. Even if the neo-Scholastic approach still dominated, alternatives were already available.

Of course, Casel and de Lubac also leaned heavily on patristic *ressourcement*, although their approaches differ immensely. As a 'philhellene' Casel tended to see the early church's unique symbiosis with Hellenistic culture as normative for every other age and culture.[22] De Lubac on the other hand saw the Fathers as outstanding examples of how to do theology *contextually*. According to him, tradition becomes fruitful through interaction with its cultural context, and it is precisely this that can be learned from patristic sources. Hence, both Casel and de Lubac returned to patristics to overcome the speculative theology of their day, but they did so with opposite intentions.

There is no similar *ressourcement* in Guardini's work. It is true that Guardini shared an often negative outlook on modernity and especially on German idealism, but Guardini believed that modernity would come to an end *by itself*. He *observed* the dawn of a new era, which absolved him of the duty to overcome it.[23] Guardini was therefore less interested in challenging modernity than in outlining what would come next. He believed that only a new philosophy of life, a new embrace of the concrete, was able to offer guidance. A philosophy that he found, among others, in the existentialism of Kierkegaard and the phenomenology of Max Scheler. In other words, Guardini used new philosophies rather than historical sources as a source of reform.

Finally, we can also understand all three theologians as reacting against the nineteenth century's severe criticism of religion. At the time, philosophers such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Nietzsche had expressed a deep mistrust of religion and traditional society as sources of humanity's alienation from itself. In order to be free, a person had to reject religion and all societal constraints. In contrast, Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac all argued in various ways that alienation was not due to religion, exteriority, or transcendence, but rather to the anthropocentric, purely immanent and individualistic mindset itself. This view is not exclusive to these three theologians, and we have seen that Guardini and de Lubac both welcomed new movements that were more communitarian in nature. However, in response to this broader cultural change, all three theologians claimed that a mere immanent humanism would not ultimately overcome the alienation.

On a fundamental level, then, these three theologians responded to the critique of religion by positing an alternative anthropology in which some sort of 'otherness' is crucial to becoming a person. In contrast to other, nonreligious, communitarian anthropologies of their day, however, they defined this otherness not simply as the otherness of fellow human beings but as *transcendent* otherness. In order to become a true person, all three theologians believed, it is necessary to relate to a *transcendent* social order. It is precisely this perspective that caused them to turn to the church.

To What Church? Differences and Similarities of Agenda

We have thus established that Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac had a lot in common. As European priests, they all operated in a context of dominant neo-Scholasticism, from which they escaped by pursuing alternative lines of thought such as that of the Tübingen School and Newman, and often by means of patristic *ressourcement*. They also roughly shared a philosophical opposition against individualism and rationalism. With many other communitarian movements of the early twentieth century, they believed that personhood requires otherness, but they added that this otherness must also be transcendent. For these reasons, they turned to the church as a transcendent *societas*.

At the same time, we observed a number of crucial differences between the three. For example, we have seen that the two German theologians had a different attitude toward contemporary culture: whereas Guardini optimistically embraced the new communitarian enthusiasm, Casel was more reluctant. Similarly, Guardini was more optimistic about the possibilities for human beings to encounter God outside of the liturgy than Casel. As to de Lubac, he differed from the two Germans in emphasizing the historical and social aspect of the church.

In the previous section, we have focused on similarities and differences in the backgrounds of Casel, Guardini, and de Lubac, which help explain why they made a turn to the church. But we must also ask to what church

exactly did they turn? Did they turn to a certain concept of a church, did they advance certain ecclesiological ideas, or did they hope to promote a specific ecclesial agenda? We will now address these questions.

Ecclesial Ideals

To begin with, Casel and Guardini, as contributors to the Liturgical Movement, both turned to the liturgical aspect of the church. In their view, the church is first and foremost a *worshipping* community. This perspective operates differently in Casel's thought than it does in Guardini's, especially with regard to the relationship between the individual and the community. As we have seen, for Casel, the celebration of the mysteries allows a person to escape modern society with its destructive individualism and rationalism. Only in the liturgy, that collective ritual, can a person experience a sense of the cosmic order and even participate in that order to the extent that he or she can truly and subjectively appropriate divine truth. The fundamental aspect of being a Christian, then, consists not of the interiority of a person's individual experiences or feelings, but only of the social and exterior liturgical life which forms people's interiority.

Guardini claimed much more scope for individuals' interior life, and steered clear of the suggestion that a person's interiority should be subsumed under the liturgical life. Instead, he argued that in a liturgical act, the objective and the subjective, liturgy and individual prayer, should meet and complement each other in a synthesis. In a comparison of Casel and Guardini, Aidan Nichols has suggested that precisely the possibility of such a synthesis had great implications for Guardini's view on the non-liturgical life. In his words, it enabled Guardini to understand that

> the attitudes to which that synthesis gave rise could be replicated outside the church building, in a kind of 'Liturgy after the Liturgy,' at a variety of times and places as circumstance might suggest.[24]

Nichols himself thinks primarily of explicitly religious rituals such as the individual prayer of the Angelus, but we must take this argument even further. The synthesis of the subjective and the objective that, Guardini believed, a liturgical act encompassed, could give rise to attitudes that can be replicated *everywhere*, in politics, philosophy, and any other aspect of culture. Only such an extensive view on this 'replication' explains why Guardini could become not only a contributor to liturgical studies, but also a professor of *Catholic Worldview* who would leave a crucial mark on post-World War II European politics. To Guardini, the idea of liturgy was essentially founded upon a positive evaluation of the participant's individuality. In his view, an individual brings a whole interior world into the liturgy; through participation in the liturgy, the church corrects and broadens this interior world where this is needed, but primarily embraces it as a unique

and esteemed particular perspective. Hence, his turn to the church involves the ideal of a broad Christian-humanist culture.

Casel's thought *could be* developed in this way too, as he himself believed that his mystery theology allowed for a new harmony between the individual and the community. However, as we have already seen in our discussion of Casel, this harmony in his view implied a rejection of "subjective arbitrariness, personal conviction" and "momentaneous emotions."[25] This seems to suggest that any dissonance must be regarded as something that endangers the harmony. As such, Casel's harmony appears as a rather *totalitarian* harmony, and it is hard not to relate this to Casel's and his fellow monks' failure to see the dangers of Hitler, whereas in contrast Guardini immediately perceived these in the early days of National Socialism.[26]

In general, as we have already observed in Chapter 6, Casel offered his view on the liturgy as a correction of broad cultural and social issues, specifically of an excessively anthropocentric and rationalist worldview. Unfortunately, he nowhere explained how his turn to liturgy and ritual would be relevant for any domain beyond the liturgy itself, so his theology remains deficient in this regard.

Unlike Guardini and Casel, Henri de Lubac did not turn to the liturgy. It is true that, after retrieving the social meaning of the word 'Catholicism,' he also retrieved the centrality of the Eucharist as the mystical body of Christ and hence as a symbol of the church. But the emphasis here is still on its theological meaning and not on its ritual aspects. Nor did de Lubac problematize the relationship between the individual and the collective, or between the subjective and the objective, as the two Germans did. Of course, he saw the danger of overemphasizing either the individual or the collective, but this did not lead him to suggest that any equilibrium between the two forces is needed or that some sort of paradox or dialectical relationship exists between them. In fact, he does not seem to think of the church as a force that is extrinsic to the individual. Rather, as he learned from the Church Fathers, the individual, like the church as a whole, is a nexus of divine operation: God works in the church and in the individual, but it is one divine work.

The Church and the World

When it comes to the cultural and political meaning of the church, de Lubac's thought is closer to Guardini's than to Casel's. According to de Lubac, the church is a cultural and political force that elevates humanity to its final, supernatural, destination. This is not only a momentary elevation that is temporally achieved in the celebration of the Eucharist, but it is also an elevation that takes place on a larger historical scale and on a sociocultural level. De Lubac did not want the church to retreat from the world, but rather wished it to become fully missionary. To de Lubac, this missionary zeal did not mean proselytism. Rather, he believed that it is the church's

mission to constantly show the world its true meaning: the fact that it is created by God, its 'noble nature', and its intended supernatural end.

Yet, compared with Guardini, de Lubac related the church to the world in a slightly different way. This becomes evident if we compare these two statements, the first by Guardini and the second by de Lubac:

> The little crowd on Pentecost already was "humanity," for it was objective community, in which the individual stood as member; it was ready to rise above itself, and slowly also in fact to embrace everything, just as the mustard seed becomes a tree in which "the birds of heaven dwell."[27]

And:

> Humanity is one, organically one by its divine structure, and it's the mission of the Church to reveal its native unity to human beings who have lost it, to restore it and to complete it.[28]

In these quotations, both de Lubac and Guardini suggest that the church is related to the unity of humanity. They both show a tendency to espouse a sacramental ecclesiology, as the church both signifies and effectuates this unity. Both also speak in terms of historical development rather than in terms of static images. Yet, upon close inspection, de Lubac introduces a greater degree of tension into this relationship. Guardini says that the church *is* the unity of humanity, and introduces the image of organic growth: the unity of humanity will grow by the slow embrace of the church. In contrast, de Lubac says that the church *knows of* an original unity of humanity that is, however, lost. Hence de Lubac defines the mission of the church in an active and oppositional sense to a greater degree than Guardini: to de Lubac, the church must actively reveal, restore, and complete a unity that is as yet still lost.

This difference has much to do with the fact that these two authors emphasize different aspects of the church's nature. Guardini usually spoke about the church as a rather abstract idea of a divine community that stands over against the individual; his approach always emphasized the church as a phenomenon, as an idea, and the way it appears to the subject. De Lubac understood the church more historically and less phenomenologically. He also radically understood the church in a double perspective, both as a divine, eternal institution and as a human and historical reality. De Lubac would not therefore necessarily deny Guardini's statement quoted above, but nevertheless put far more emphasis on the concrete historical form of the church. De Lubac understood the church as a concretely visible worldwide cultural force that sometimes opposes cultural entities, and sometimes cooperates with them. He was generally very hesitant to even try to equate Christianity and Europe, because he felt that this would confine the church to a particular continent.[29] To Guardini, on the other hand, the church is an abstract idea to which an individual can relate concretely in

the parish[30]; and for this reason he has less to say about the 'macro-level' notion of the church as a visible and distinguishable cultural force. This is not to deny that Guardini also believed that cultures could be christened, and indeed throughout his life believed in the possibility of a Christian Europe, a Europe that would return to its own religious roots.[31] But in the dynamic of his theology, the focus seems to be more on cultural entities that can more or less correspond with an abstract idea of church, and less on the church as a cultural entity itself.

These differences can also partially be explained by less theological factors. To begin with, de Lubac was a theologian and functioned in a fully ecclesiastical context, while Guardini was always more of a cultural philosopher who kept some distance from the ecclesiastical institute. Secondly, as we have seen, the religious context in Germany was rather different from that in France. While pluralist German society distanced itself from the authority of Rome, it always in many forms showed its indebtedness to its Christian character – non-ecclesial, but Christian nonetheless. In homogeneously Catholic France, however, distancing itself from Rome more radically implied a *laïcisme* and an atheist government. Hence, the relation between Christianity and the contemporary culture was more openly antagonistic in France than it was in Germany, and was more openly a power struggle between two clashing forces. In this sense, it is not strange that Guardini could envisage a broad Christian-humanist European culture, without this immediately being misinterpreted as a reactionary desire for a powerful church.[32] We can imagine that a similar dream in France would more quickly have been interpreted as a reactionary *intégrisme*. *Intégrisme* was not a viable option for de Lubac, and he stressed that the history of Christianity was not confined to Europe. According to him, Christianity could, also as a minority, be a distinct cultural influence anywhere in the world. By developing this idea, he showed a way in which the church in France could be a cultural force without necessarily threatening the dominant constellation of power.

Characteristics of the Early-Twentieth-Century Turn to the Church

A Single Turn?

In the previous section we have compared Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac, first by focusing on their biographical and theological contexts, and then on their ideas of the church. In doing so, we have encountered not only important differences, but we have also discovered some crucial similarities that could reasonably allow us to speak of one single turn to the church.

First of all, we have seen that Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac turned to the church in an attempt to overcome or at least circumvent neo-Scholasticism. They believed that this form of theology was not suited to address the

urgent questions of modern postwar life. We have also seen that this diagnosis was not merely theoretical but tapped into a more general existential feeling of postwar disillusionment, a disillusionment that had shattered many beliefs: not only Catholic teachings, but also modern values, individualism, etcetera. Whereas modern society once prided itself on placing humanity on a high pedestal, these theologians felt that it had ultimately abandoned human individuals to their own devices. Simultaneously, traditional Catholic theology failed to offer an adequate response to this sense of being lost. Therefore, the most urgent problem of modernity, to which neo-Scholasticism offered no adequate response, was modernity's 'subjectivism' (Guardini), 'anthropocentrism' (Casel), or 'immanent humanism' (de Lubac); three different terms that were all premised upon the diagnosis that humanity or human individuals were being left to their own devices.

To Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac, a rediscovery of the concept of the church offered the solution to this problem that they were seeking. It was an appropriate solution both as regards form and content. As regards *form*, because, as the observed problem of modernity was not only theoretical but also existential, the concept of the church offered the existential aspect that was needed. The rediscovery of the church was not the rediscovery of a forgotten theory, but it was a turn toward a living and visible reality. Hence, by turning to the church, these theologians expressed their desire to prioritize Christian praxis over doctrinal systems.

It was also an appropriate solution as regards *content*. The living reality of the church, and especially its liturgy, community, and magisterium, testified, so they believed, that contrary to modern experience, human beings were not being abandoned. Through participation in the church, the relationship between human beings and God could be revealed and nourished. In the church, individuals could encounter other individuals and recognize them as fellow members of humanity, creatures of the same God. In the celebration of the liturgy, but also in participation in community life or in surrender to the magisterium, people could encounter otherness, and especially God as the transcendent Other. This was in itself already salvific because this encounter redeemed people from being enclosed in themselves (Guardini) and fulfilled and reoriented their otherwise ignored supernatural desires (de Lubac). As such, the very visible and living reality of the church was a kind of practical argument against the modern experience of being lost.

In short, the turn to the church was elaborated in various ways and with various emphases. Yet, notwithstanding these crucial differences, all three theologians share a fundamentally similar tenet so that it seems justified to speak of one single turn to the church.

A Common Epistemology?

In the first part of this study, we discovered that the *contemporary* turn to the church is primarily an epistemological turn that argues that

participation in the daily life of the church rather than in theoretical reflection is necessary to arrive at truth about God and the world. To what extent did the early twentieth-century turn to the church make similar epistemological claims?

Although the proponents of the earlier turn did make epistemological claims, it is easy to overlook them. We have seen that none of the three theologians under consideration turned to the church primarily because of epistemological concerns: they were concerned about individualism or the lack of transcendent values in modern society, and they tried to renew theology by turning to the church as a community that transcends the confines of nature. On closer inspection, however, we have seen on several occasions that this renewed focus on the church went hand in hand with certain important epistemological changes, and our theologians were well aware of this, as we have seen for example in our discussion of Guardini's *Der Gegensatz* on pp. 139–141. Apparently, the three theologians shared not only the intuition that human beings best relate to themselves, the world and to God by participating in the church. As they had all wrestled with the kind of knowledge that neo-Scholasticism produced, they also shared an intuition that a different kind of knowledge and a different idea of truth was needed to account for this relationship between humanity, the world and God. In the following section, I will argue that their turn to the church was indeed inherently connected with an essentially epistemological turn to *mystery*.

Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac clearly share a general preference for the words 'mystery' and 'mystical.' To them, the word 'mystery' initially indicates a reality that somehow evades our rational grasp. Mystery is beyond comprehension, and precisely therefore it stands in a tense relationship with modern rationalism. For example, de Lubac writes of Aristotelian logic that "in its desire for analytical clarity, it is impatient of any mysterious idea"[33] and Casel complains that modern men, by their desire to master nature, have made it void of mystery.[34] Such examples make clear that their focus on mystery is immediately related to their attempt to break loose from rationalism.

It is crucial, however, to note another aspect. When they turned to the church, they did not do so simply because the church happens to be one of many interesting mysterious realities that defy rational description. To overcome rationalism, they could have turned to any mysterious reality. In his introduction, Casel explicitly mentions many of these mysterious realities that have been lost in modernity: nature, death, love, the depths of the human soul, community.[35] Nevertheless, Casel and the others turn not to one of these mysteries; they turn to *the church* as mystery.

This is related to the more specific theological usage of the word mystery. To them, 'mystery' and 'mystical' do not simply denote everything that evades a rationalist grasp, but these words point to a divine reality. Odo Casel most clearly distinguishes three senses in which he uses the word 'mystery.' Firstly, according to Casel, "mystery is *God in himself*."[36] In this

general sense, the word 'mystery' points to the experience of majesty or transcendence, such as the ancient religions that felt "that all earthly things were only the reflection and effect of a supra-earthly glory."[37] Secondly and more specifically, mystery denotes Christ, because in Christ and his deeds, people could finally see this hitherto obscure divine glory. Casel calls this the 'personal mystery' (*persönliches Mysterium*). The third meaning of mystery is the ritual or 'cultic mystery' (*Kultmysterium*) in which the once visible deeds of Christ are represented through the mysteries, or sacraments.[38] Interestingly, in Casel's threefold description of mystery, each sense is related to another mystery *in a mysterious way*. The church and the sacraments do not reveal Christ immediately, but only in a mysterious way: he is visible for the believers only, and even then only in a non-immediate sense. Christ in turn reveals God, but again only in a mysterious way: he is hidden to the world and visible only to the faithful.

In short, to Casel, Guardini, and de Lubac, the church is not simply one mysterious reality among many other phenomena that cannot be rationally explained. Rather, the church is a unique mystery because through the celebration of its mysteries (the sacraments) it mysteriously reveals Christ who in his turn mysteriously reveals God, who himself is the mystery *par excellence*. Hence, the church is unique because only there can human beings encounter the profound mystery of existence itself.

Clearly, then, it was not Casel, Guardini, and de Lubac's primary goal to defeat rationalism. If this had been their main goal, they could well have chosen other mysterious realities, such as love or death, the experience of which defies exhaustive rational description. Rather, their main goal was to rediscover how the church, in its worship, its community etcetera, offers unique access to the mystery of God. Their opposition to rationalism was functional: they had to resist this only to account for this rediscovery. In other words: *it was not the rejection of rationalism that caused them to turn to the church (they could also have turned to other mysteries for this), but their turn to the church fueled their rejection of rationalism*.

Their turn to the church necessitated a more general turn to an epistemology of mystery. In the church, in its mysteries, in Christ and in God, these theologians encountered realities that defied description. According to Casel, the mystery is "ἄρρητον, ineffabile, 'unutterable,' not only in the original sense of the word, in which it is not allowed to be spoken, but also in the sense that it cannot be exhausted by words."[39] We encountered something similar in Guardini, whose phenomenological method of *Gegensätzlichkeit* rests on the idea that the church can never be described by means of a unifying conceptual scheme. And de Lubac describes the church using paradox, which is, according to him "the provisional expression of an always incomplete view, that nonetheless orients itself towards fullness."[40]

Generally speaking, this insight is shared by all three theologians, by de Lubac, Guardini, and Casel: the true depth of existence, the mystery of the world, cannot be comprehended conceptually, but it can be hinted at and

experienced and lived. Rather than try to dispel the mist of apparent contradictions to gain a clear view of reality, we should instead embrace these paradoxes and in doing so embrace living reality itself.

For de Lubac and Guardini – and to a lesser extent for Casel – this turn to mystery also involves a turn to *catholicity*. A truly catholic outlook, they claim, does not restrict itself to a single individual's opinion, but tries to integrate everybody's perspective, the natural and the supernatural, the historical and the eternal, etcetera. Rather than fear that so many perspectives would introduce contradictions and give rise to conflict, they view this integration of multiple perspectives as an *enrichment*. De Lubac closely relates this to a universalist perspective and a strong conviction that new eras and new cultures can enrich our understanding of revelation. Similarly, Guardini claims that only a catholic, all-embracing outlook views the world as it really is: a living reality. Of the three theologians, Casel is least explicit in reflecting on the meaning of 'catholicity,' but he engages a similar argument when he suggests that the liturgy, precisely in its supra-personal form, is able to integrate an individual's particular perspective with that of the whole community.

A turn to mystery and a turn to catholicity: these two elements together form the early-twentieth-century turn to the church. The church's catholicity guarantees that all perspectives are integrated and that it is not a one-sided theory; the church's mysterious nature, its participation in the mystery of Christ, guarantees that this praxis will lead to the final and eschatological convergence of all various *gegensätzliche* or paradoxical viewpoints, to the point where we will contemplate, rather than simply conceptually know, God.

Let us summarize what we have found thus far. Casel, de Lubac, and Guardini each believe that reality is too complex to be summarized under a single unifying conceptual scheme. All modern attempts to give an unequivocal description of reality have failed. These theologians offer not a philosophy but a way of life as an alternative for this conceptualizing project: the church. Guardini believes that once persons allow themselves to be ordered rightly in the community of the church, they will become fuller individuals and gain an integrated – catholic – perspective on the world that will reveal its true multifaceted and living reality. Casel focuses on liturgical participation in the mysteries of the church, but also believes that only these supra-personal expressions enable people to become united with Christ and as such experience and love and sense the profound mystery of God. And, finally, de Lubac believes that only through the church, that paradoxical community that is at once historical and eternal, can human beings acquire the means necessary to view the supernatural aspects of the natural world.

These observations permit us to conclude that the early-twentieth-century turn to the church also involves an epistemological turn. It clearly rejects a rationalist view on knowledge. According to Casel, the liturgy of the church enables its participants, not to rationally grasp, but to become

united with Christ and God. In the case of Guardini and de Lubac, it also implies a more plural and relative view, although this does not mean that *any* plural or relative type of knowledge will do. Characteristically, they believe that the truth that is revealed in the church needs a very specific pluralism, namely that of catholicism; and it needs a very specific relativism, namely one that acknowledges that the divine mystery always exceeds us.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed how Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac each in their own way turned to the church. Notwithstanding some important differences in their contexts and theological agendas, we have concluded that their 'turns' have enough core characteristics in common to justify speaking of one single turn. In short, all three disavow the construction of yet another doctrinal system and instead advocate a turn to a living reality, and all three believe that the church as a living community has something to offer to individuals who feel lost in the modern world.

Furthermore, we have claimed that this early-twentieth-century turn to the church gave rise to an alternative epistemology. This epistemology hinges upon the concepts of 'mystery' and 'catholicity.' All three authors embrace the idea that the full truth of reality can only be partially known to us. Casel claims that such a view on reality calls for a supra-personal and 'objective' outlook, one that, he believes, the rich liturgy of the Catholic Church offers. Guardini and de Lubac reflect more explicitly on the meaning of 'catholic' and interpret this as meaning that it can encompass a great plurality of outlooks. According to all three, it is only in the church that the catholicity and the mystery can be found that are needed to know the ultimate ineffable truth about God, the world and humanity.

Notes

1 VSK, 1.
2 *Meditation*, 20.
3 Robin Darling Young, "A Soldier of the Great War: Henri de Lubac and the Patristic Sources for a Premodern Theology," in *After Vatican II: Trajectories and Hermeneutics*, ed. James Heft and John W. O'Malley (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2012), 103–122.
4 DCK, 9. Casel's positive but critical attitude toward the new cultural developments can be seen throughout the first chapter.
5 Guardini and Casel were both editors of Maria Laach's *Das Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft* of 1921, until Casel somewhat inappropriately rebuked Guardini for giving too much room to individual piety.See Romano Guardini, "Das Objektive im Gebetsleben: Zu P.M. Festugières 'Liturgie catholique,'" *Jahrbuch für Liturgiewissenschaft*, 1921, 117–125. Casel, as editor, took the liberty of adding a critical footnote to the article, on page 125, at which Guardini appears to have taken umbrage. After this incident, Guardini ended his involvement in Maria Laach.

6 See Ignatius of Loyola, *Spiritual Exercises*, 353.
7 *Spiritual Exercises*, 352–370.
8 *Spiritual Exercises*, 235–236.
9 For a historical overview of the German and French culture wars, see Christopher Clark, *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
10 Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Der Weltkatechismus: Therapie oder Symptom einer kranken Kirche?* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1993), 100–104.
11 Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology 1800–1970*. Trans. N.D. Smith. (Paramus, NJ: Newman Press, 1970), 84.
12 Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology*, 31.
13 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 40.
14 Thomas C. Behr, "Luigi Taparelli D'Azeglio, S.J. (1793–1862) and the Development of Scholastic Natural Law Thought as a Science of Society and Politics," *Journal of Markets and Morality* 6, no. 1 (2003), 101–104.
15 Verweyen, *Der Weltkatechismus*, 102.
16 Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology*, 31.
17 Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology*, 36–52.
18 A comparison can be found in Sam Goyvaerts, "Vereniging en tegenwoordigheid, offer en gemeenschap: De theologie van de eucharistie en de liturgie van de Katholieke Tübinger Schule en Döllinger" (PhD diss., Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2013), 429.
19 CAT, 249.
20 See Schoof, *A Survey of Catholic Theology*, 170. He observes: "There are astonishing parallels between Newman's ideas and those of the Catholic theologians of Tübingen although specialists in the field have, with some surprise, come to the conclusion that it is only in a very remote sense that any connection can be made."
21 VSK, 11.
22 See for a very critical assessment of this aspect of Casel's approach, Schilson, *Theologie als Sakramententheologie*, 98–108.
23 VSK, 7.
24 Aidan Nichols, *Lost in Wonder: Essays on Liturgy and the Arts* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 25–28. These pages contain a concise and helpful comparison of Casel's and Guardini's anthropologies.
25 DCK, 144.
26 See 162, n. 27.
27 VSK, 22.
28 CAT, 27.
29 CAT, 229.
30 VSK, 15.
31 Krieg, *Proclaiming the Sacred*, 12–13.
32 As early as 1950, in *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, Guardini prophesied that modern society would be increasingly post-Christian and that Christianity would increasingly be seen as less self-evident. Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit: Ein Versuch zur Orientierung* (Würzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1950).
33 CAT, 237.
34 DCK, 10.
35 DCK, 1–3.
36 DCK, 15.
37 DCK, 17.
38 DCK, 17–19.
39 DCK, 19.

40 Henri de Lubac, *Paradoxes: Suivi de nouveaux paradoxes*, 71. Throughout his life, de Lubac wrote down many of his thoughts in the form of aphorisms, and these were published in various collections: *Paradoxes* (Paris: Livre français, 1946); *Nouveaux paradoxes* (Paris: Seuil, 1955); and posthumously *Autres paradoxes* (Paris: Culture et Vérité, 1994). The first two works were published together in *Paradoxes: suivi de nouveaux paradoxes* (Paris: Seuil, 1959) and I made use of this edition.

Part III

Two Turns

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9 A Comparison of the Two Turns to the Church

As we approach the end of our investigation into two different turns to the church, it is time to return to the main question that lies at the heart of our inquiry. The central question of this study is: *what is the current turn to the church, what are its aims, and to what extent is it innovative?* In order to answer this question, we have first investigated the present turn to the church, and then a similar turn in the beginning of the twentieth century. In order to evaluate the contemporary turn and draw our conclusions, we must now compare these two turns. In doing so, we must try to rise somewhat above the level of the individual authors. Even though we are discussing individual authors, our final goal is to reach a comprehensive grasp of the contemporary turn to the church as a whole.

In Chapters 4 and 8, we offered a description of the various individual turns in the following way: first, we focused on the social, ecclesial, and academic context in which the turn in question took place. Second, we observed the theological agenda and the ideals toward which the movement turned. And finally, we provided a summary of the characteristics of the turn itself. In this chapter, I will offer a comparison by following the same route: after comparing the contexts of the two turns, I will compare their respective contents. This will ultimately enable us to obtain a comprehensive perspective on the present turn, which takes account of both the similarities with and differences from the earlier turn to the church.

A Comparison of Contexts

Social and Ecclesial Contexts: European Catholicism vs. Anglophone Postliberalism

The context of the contemporary turn to the church is clearly very different from that of the earlier one. Most obviously, the contemporary turn takes place in a different time. The two events are separated by almost a century which has seen drastic changes in theology and its philosophical, ecclesial, and cultural context. It is also different in location: the present turn is taking place mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom, while the

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earlier turn was effected in Germany and France. And its setting is different: the interconfessional context of the present turn is obvious compared to the Catholic character of the earlier turn. We will now investigate these differences, and see whether we can use them to more specifically characterize the turns that we have so far called the 'earlier' versus the 'contemporary' turn to the church.

To begin with, we must acknowledge that the difference in geographical location between the two turns is the result of a broader change in theology. Over the course of the last century, the center of gravity of theology has shifted from Western Europe (mainly Germany and France) toward North America. Partly, this is due to a general cultural shift in which, especially after the Second World War, the United States of America has become the dominant cultural influence and English the new *lingua franca*. Partly, also, this change is caused by the different religious situation between the two continents: church membership is far stronger in North America than it is in Western Europe, and so is the budget for faculties of theology and seminaries, to name just a few differences.[1]

But we should also realize that present-day Anglo-American theology mostly operates *in continuity with* its earlier Western European heritage. The editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* rightly speak of the "European tradition in North America," distinguishing this tradition from rather different theological traditions that stem from Russia, Africa, China, and so on. They also correctly observe that, as the center of gravity of theology, the Western tradition is already being replaced by these other traditions that after all represent far larger Christian communities.[2] So even if the earlier turn took place in Germany and France and the contemporary turn is taking place in the USA and UK, both turns are still part of the same declining Western tradition. Hence, whenever we speak of a (continental) West European turn versus an Anglophone turn, we should remember this nuance.

Secondly, the earlier turn to the church was first and foremost a Roman Catholic theological movement. Not because this turn had no equivalent in other confessions (one may think of Karl Barth's *Kirchliche Dogmatik*), but because it was a reaction to a typically Catholic problem, that of the neo-Scholastic hegemony in theology. As such, it was not only a mono-confessional turn, but it also arose out of a 'mono-philosophical' and 'mono-theological' context. It was a consciously *Catholic* attempt to escape from an all too uniform *Catholic* theological atmosphere and instead opt for a more pluralist approach that was also understood to be more profoundly *Catholic*.

In our time, this neo-Scholastic hegemony has long disappeared, and Catholic theology itself has become more differentiated.[3] What is more, academic theology in general has become more ecumenical and 'inter'- or even 'post-confessional.' Theological trends and challenges are often no longer restricted to one particular confession, theologians are far more

aware of the particularity of their own perspective amid a pluralist context, and personally they tend to identify less strongly with one single confessional tradition. We have encountered this phenomenon in our study, because even though we intentionally selected three authors from different ecclesial traditions, they defy any easy identification by church membership: Hauerwas was raised a Methodist, sympathized with Mennonites, long considered conversion to Roman Catholicism, and finally became Episcopalian; Milbank is an Anglican from the Anglo-Catholic tradition who believes that this orientation is a natural development from his Wesleyan Methodist background; and Healy is Roman Catholic but was raised as an Anglican.[4]

This does not necessarily mean that the present turn to the church is broader. We should acknowledge that, even though Roman decrees and papal encyclicals are less crucial to present-day theologians, Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy still have their own institutional settings, persons and traditions of canonical importance that they must agree or argue with: Yale, MacIntyre, Wittgenstein, postliberalism, to name a few. And even if the contemporary turn has a wider scope than the earlier one, this is a mark of contemporary theology in general more than of the turn to the church specifically. Hence, rather than characterizing the two turns by calling the one 'Catholic' and the other 'interconfessional,' I propose to simply and more neutrally characterize the contemporary turn as an *Anglophone postliberal turn* versus an earlier continental *Western European Catholic* turn.

Social and Ecclesial Contexts 2: Marginalization of the Church

Notwithstanding the contextual differences, however, there is a highly interesting similarity between the two turns. Both turns arose out of a theological context that was in one way or another *restrictive*. Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac sought new ways out of the common ecclesial and theological context in order to make room for theological creativity and to make theology relevant again for their contemporaries' experience of daily life. In a similar vein, Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy struggle with the confinement of their own contemporary ecclesial and theological world, and seek ways to be more creative and relevant again.

This offers us an important interpretative key that can help us gain a better understanding of what is going on in the present turn to the church. So let us restate this aspect of the earlier turn again. As we have seen, the earlier turn operated against the background of a dynamic of oppression or at least of marginalization of the Catholic Church. The Germans Casel and Guardini were part of a Catholic minority that had been deprived of much of its privileges in the late nineteenth century, but that had also been able to forge a certain pride and self-awareness out of its sense of *Gemeinschaft* that they believed was lacking in the modern secular state. De Lubac was part of a French Catholic community that was not strictly a minority but

still suffered from an inferiority complex vis-à-vis the secular state. We have seen that this community retreated from the public domain into a narrow ghetto spirituality, where it sometimes dreamed dangerously of an integralist revolution that would restore the old glory of a powerful Catholicism.

Now, notwithstanding the many differences between the German and French contexts, the earlier turn to the church in both cases helped to *reimagine* the relationship between the Catholic tradition and modern secular society. The recovery of a less exclusively institutional ecclesiology offered theology a way forward in which it could argue for the value of Catholicity for the whole of society, without necessarily having to presume institutional power. Of course, this new approach was not without its own risks. Guardini's refusal to directly identify the Kingdom of God with the church, and his sensitivity to God's work in the inner life of the believer created scope for a less institutionally focused ecclesiology. It also helped him see that *any* attempt to understand Christ's lordship as a merely external power over the individual was mistaken. Later in his life, this enabled Guardini to oppose Hitler by pointing to the only true *Herr*. But we may assume that the same attempt to craft a less oppositional relationship between the church and secular society also contributed to the failure of Casel and his fellow Benedictines in Maria Laach to perceive the dangers of National Socialism on time.

In general, the earlier turn to the church rejected any nostalgic idea that Catholics were the remnant of a once-powerful but now marginalized group, and instead offered its adherents a future-oriented perspective in which Catholics could pride themselves on participating in a dynamic tradition that was still valid for today and tomorrow. In other words, it aided believers in coming to terms, and possibly even to embrace, the church's loss of power.

Certainly, the marginalization of Christianity nowadays is a far cry from the aggressive ways in which the Catholic Church in France and Germany was stripped of its power in the late nineteenth century. Yet, it has had the similar result of forcing the church to find a new relationship to society. We have already mentioned that Milbank's theology arose in a broader Anglican context of rediscovering the societal relevance of the church even at a time of secularization and an immense decline in membership. From the 1980s onward, the Church of England sought to assume the role of moral guide by criticizing liberal society. Its attempts were theologically thin, as it relied more on Marxist and socialist social critique than on specifically Christian considerations. This caused some to ask whether the church even had anything unique at all to offer society, and in this light, Thatcher's call on the church to limit itself to its religious tasks actually made sense (see page 12). John Milbank responded by offering a more profoundly theological outlook which enabled the church to engage with society as a whole. In other words, his theological proposal functioned as a reaction to a mistaken ecclesial attempt to seek relevancy not only for its own adherents

but for society as a whole as it faced a loss of power. Rather than turn to secular alternative social orders, Milbank turned to the church.

Something similar is the case for Stanley Hauerwas, although the American context is different. Hauerwas responds to a liberal American Christianity that still dreams of conquering the world, either by embracing and enforcing a progressive ethic, or by engaging in a culture war against the same progressives. Pushing back against these religiously motivated culture wars, Hauerwas believes that the church should not try to influence the world or act as a universal moral authority. Rather, he says, the church can only more or less 'passively' witness Christ to the world by its countercultural praxis. As he frequently claims: "the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic."[5] In other words, the church should limit itself to performing its own peaceful praxis, as testimony to the world that it is possible to treat the world not as a place of conflict but as God's creation. As such, the church should not try to "make the world more just" but try to "make the world the world" simply by acting according to, and as such revealing, the world's true nature.[6] In other words: the church is crucial to the world, but its value depends on the truthfulness of its own praxis rather than on its influence, size, and power.

Both Milbank's and Hauerwas' work thus must be understood as attempts to come to terms theologically with a Christianity that has lost power. Interestingly, Milbank and Hauerwas reject the two most obvious reactions to that loss of power: that of defeat and a retreat into a certain ghetto mentality on the one hand, and that of a reactionary power grab on the other. They forcefully reject any ghetto mentality, especially when they explicitly denounce the confinement of Christianity to the merely religious sphere (Milbank[7]) or a domesticated Christianity (Hauerwas). On the contrary, they insist that Christianity is relevant for all and every aspect of our lives. But they also denounce any reactionary desire to return to a powerful Christianity that might use coercive power to attain religious goals. Milbank does so by distinguishing the church's pastoral oversight from an 'ultimately coercive rule,'[8] and also by delineating his 'integralist' project from French 'integrism'[9] (but more on that later). Hauerwas does so even more strongly by offering his explicit pacifism as an alternative to the attempts of many American Christians to acquire societal influence in the so-called culture wars.[10] Both authors are confident that modern society, even if the church has been diminished, still needs the practices of the church.

Of course, there is an inherent risk attached to this approach: such theologies could fuel a nasty kind of 'sectarian' complacency. It is possible to imagine that the church, by virtue of Milbank and Hauerwas' theologies, could become too content with its own perceived relevance, small as it might be. From this vantage point, Nicholas Healy's contribution can be seen as a kind of *reaction to* this mindset, as he warns theology not to become too ecclesiocentric or to succumb to ecclesial pride. To prevent

this unhealthy attitude, he urges theology not to look away from the many failures of the church.

Accordingly, our comparison with the earlier turn to the church highlights the fact that the present turn to the church also operates in, and reacts to, a context of marginalization. At a time when the church is increasingly marginalized, it is tempted to think of itself as having meaning for its own members only. It runs the risk of becoming too defensive while retreating into the private and individual sphere, or behind the ghetto walls of a now sectarian community. Against this tendency, Guardini, Casel, de Lubac, Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy unanimously point to the essentially universal and catholic meaning of Christian *praxis*: even when this is performed by a small community, it holds universal meaning for the world.

To be clear, neither neo-Scholastic theologians nor liberal Christians ever *denied* that Christianity holds universal meaning for the world. However, by turning to the praxis of the church, our theologians try to broaden the perspective from what they perceive to be a narrow-minded or reductive attitude, back to a living and dynamic tradition. They do not claim that the church is the repository of all rational or moral truth. They *do* however claim that the church in its *praxis* holds the key to the final truth that this world is and will be God's world. As such, they once more create a space for creative theology, no longer confined to the theological formulas of yesterday, but still dynamically tied to the tradition to which they are the heir.

In short, just as the earlier turn to the church took place in the context of the marginalization of the Catholic Church in France and Germany, the contemporary turn operates against the background of processes of marginalization and numerical decline of Christianity in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Hauerwas' and Milbank's theologies give the adherents of a Christianity that is no longer powerful a reinvigorated sense of purpose and self-esteem, and Healy's plea for a listening church that is open to the world must also be understood in the light of this ongoing attempt to come to terms theologically with being a minority church. By turning to the church, these theologians reject any tendency to retreat into a safe, merely religious sphere in the margins. Instead, they urge minority Christians to understand themselves not as oppressed disciples of a moral or doctrinal system that needs to be restored to its old glory, but as the heirs of a dynamic tradition that is valuable for the future even as a minority. As such, they seek to encourage believers to make sense once again of their own identity as Christians.

Sources and Dialogue Partners

The two turns differ a great deal in their sources and dialogue partners, for the obvious reason that they took place at different times. We cannot begin to imagine how the liturgically oriented theologies of Casel and Guardini might have been affected by Wittgenstein's theory of forms of life, or how de Lubac's historical approach might have developed when confronted with

MacIntyre's cultural perspective. What we can do, however, to acquire a better understanding of the unique characteristics of the present turn, is firstly ask whether any overlap in preferred historical sources can be found, and secondly, whether the contemporary turn itself has been directly or indirectly influenced by the earlier turn.

Regarding the first question, as to whether there are any shared preferred historical sources, we can offer an immediate reply: it is simply impossible to describe shared sources without using far too broad categories. Most of the theologians selected share an interest in Aquinas (with the exception of Guardini and Casel); and Kierkegaard is not only often mentioned in Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory* but also profoundly influenced Guardini and de Lubac.[11] The problem with such observations is that they are not sufficiently *distinctive*. Aquinas is a standard point of reference for a large part of Western Christianity, and Kierkegaard has in a different sense been widely influential as well. Our best reply to the first question must consequently be that no obvious and clearly definable tradition or school has surfaced in which both turns participate. To be sure, this does not exclude that they have certain ideas and arguments in common, and we will discuss these in the next section.

For now we must move on to the second question, regarding whether the present turn has been influenced by the earlier turn. This question can be answered more easily. The most obvious direct relationship is between John Milbank and Henri de Lubac. Milbank has frequently expressed his indebtedness to de Lubac, especially in his study of de Lubac's work *The Suspended Middle* (2005). The exact relation between the two authors could be a topic for further research, but at first sight, this relationship hinges on the philosophy of Maurice Blondel, whose criticism of extrinsicism and investigation into the supernatural end of human nature gave both de Lubac's and Milbank's work its defining direction.

Hauerwas does not seem to be directly influenced by the theologians involved in the earlier turn to the church,[12] and neither is Nicholas Healy. The latter, however, having received a Roman Catholic theological education, is clearly *indirectly* influenced by them. Healy's work resonates with and operates within the theological spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and this spirit in turn bears the strong imprint of the earlier turn to the church.[13] Also, more generally, he embraces typical ideas that we have found in the earlier turn and that have now become common Catholic teaching, such as the rejection of an excessive distinction between the natural and the supernatural or the notion that the church is not a merely sociological institution but a theological reality as well. Even when Healy pushes back against the overly abstract and bipartite sacramental ecclesiology of post-Vatican theology – and indirectly also against the ecclesiology of the earlier turn to the church – he does so by emphasizing the historical, 'in-via' character of the church, and this also is a similarity with the earlier turn to the church.

A Comparison of Ideas: Three Shifts

We have so far compared the contemporary turn with the earlier turn to the church in respect of their contexts. We have found that the contemporary turn to the church is distinctively Anglophone and postliberal, in contrast to the earlier turn that was Western European and Catholic. We have also seen that there is an interesting similarity: in both turns, the marginalization of a once powerful church tempts believers to retreat from the world and live their religious life in private. Both turns to the church are a reaction to this that urges theology to rediscover the universal relevance of faith even without access to formal power. Furthermore, we have observed that, although the two turns do not necessarily draw from the same theological sources, the earlier turn to the church itself has influenced the present turn in various ways.

Now that we have observed to what extent the two turns are dependent upon their context, each other, and other common traditions, we can make a more thorough comparison of the *ideas* of both turns. As we will find out, a comparison of the present turn with the earlier one can be useful to highlight certain lines of thought that are crucial not only to the former but also to the present turn. It will also illuminate the kind of ideas or concepts which both turns reject. Concretely, I will propose three shifts that characterize both turns, three shifts in which theology, in rather similar ways, tries to move toward a new paradigm. These three shifts are by no means exhaustive, but I believe that they not only highlight three similarities between the two turns, but also constitute the fundamental characteristics of the present turn to the church. Hence, these three shifts, together with the description of the context given above, will provide the answer to our initial research question on the nature of the turn to the church.

Church and Politics: A Shift from Extrinsicism to Integralism

I would like to characterize the first shift as a shift from *extrinsicism to integralism*. In short, this shift does not simply denote a theoretical change in the view on the relationship between nature and the supernatural, but primarily describes a change of the role of the church in the political order.

In order to define the terms, we should first examine the earlier turn to the church, and especially de Lubac and the debate on the supernatural which occupied him for many years. We may recall that de Lubac in his inaugural lecture accused the apologetic theology of his day of establishing a "merely extrinsic link" between faith and reason.[14] This 'extrinsicism,' as it is usually called, separated faith and reason, the supernatural and the natural, grace and nature, and this resulted in a dull theology that failed to address human daily life. De Lubac believed that this separation must be undone, and in *Catholicisme* and in *Surnaturel*, he developed his own patristically informed alternative view.

Even though Casel in *Das christliche Kultmysterium* and Guardini in *Vom Sinn der Kirche* less explicitly addressed the question regarding the relationship between nature and grace, they too tried to put an end to the separation between grace and nature. Casel's mystery theology revolves around the thesis that grace is not merely extrinsic to the liturgy of the sacraments, as if sacraments work grace only because God has freely decided to do so. Rather, grace is an integral part of the mysteries in which God and believers act together. As such, he refused to analytically separate that part of the mysteries that was merely human from that of divine origin. And Guardini believed that modern human beings had been alienated from all the experiences of transcendence that are original to them. Hence, he put forward an alternative understanding of the human person in which his or her transcendence and divine origin are also integral to his or her truest nature.

This alternative view is nowadays often called *integralism* which is, according to John Milbank,

> the view that in concrete, historical humanity there is no such thing as a state of 'pure nature': rather, every person has always already been worked upon by divine grace, with the consequence that one cannot analytically separate 'natural' and 'supernatural' contributions to this integral unity.[15]

Clearly, to these authors, the question of the relationship between nature and grace was not merely theoretical. Casel was concerned with the way in which individuals could participate in the mystery. And Guardini's integralism helped him to criticize the devaluation of true personhood and community in modern society, and led him to turn to the church to find an alternative view in which the transcendent dignity of both is preserved.

Here too, de Lubac is the most explicit of the three. The whole of *Catholicisme* testifies to the fact that a rejection of extrinsicism has consequences far beyond speculative theoretical analysis. In fact, de Lubac's alternative integralist proposal was a conscious attempt to redeem theology from merely speculative theoretical debates. De Lubac complained in *Catholicisme*, and not without reason, of the neo-Scholastic singular focus on conceptual truth that effectively 'banished'[16] theology to the margins of life. He repeatedly explained that his rejection of extrinsicism was closely tied to his rejection of the speculative nature of neo-Scholastic theology, and he often directly juxtaposed 'abstract doctrine' with his view that nature and grace are intimately related, such as when he writes of the Fathers:

> What they consider above all else is not the proclamation of an abstract doctrine: it is the concrete meeting of man and God, it is human nature becoming accustomed to divinity, it is the transformation of man

> through the action of God's grace. It is the irruption of 'Divine Energy' and 'Strength of the Spirit.'[17]

It was this 'concrete meeting of man and God' that concerned de Lubac, and we have examined *Catholicisme* thoroughly in a previous chapter to see what he meant by this.

To prevent misunderstanding it must be emphasized that this integralism has nothing to do with the similar French term *intégrisme*, which is used for a wholly different perspective. This latter term is used to define the radical right-wing political visions of movements like *Action française*. Such *intégrisme,* according to Milbank sought

> a clerical and hierarchic dominance over all the affairs of secular life, founded upon a 'totalizing' theology which presents a complete system, whose details cannot be questioned without compromising the whole.[18]

For obvious reasons, de Lubac's theology has nothing to do with this extremist French *intégrisme*, from which de Lubac always distanced himself. But Milbank makes an interesting observation. According to him, it was fear of this French *intégrisme* that prevented the Second Vatican Council to fully embrace the political consequences of an integralist theology. Precisely because the council fathers were eager to distance themselves from the highly politicized theology of *intégrisme*, they were reluctant to relate the political to the religious. The Council's silence, Milbank argues, opened a void which liberation theology soon filled, in which its adherents sought to follow through the consequences of integralism more radically by closely relating the political and the social to the religious. They ultimately failed to do so, Milbank argues, because they grounded their universal humanism upon secular – Marxist – theory, a mistake for which Milbank blames Karl Rahner especially.[19] However, Milbank believes, a proper understanding of de Lubac's integralism still holds promises for a political theology that is grounded in a better understanding of the relationship between nature and grace.

Now that we have characterized both extrinsicism and integralism as two perspectives on the relationship between nature and grace, and have also hinted at their political implications, we must now flesh out the details of how these perspectives in fact affect the role of the church in politics. The story recounted earlier of the conflict between Margaret Thatcher and the church (on page xx) is especially illustrative.

At first sight, the disagreement between Thatcher and the Church of England was about whether or not the church should interfere with politics: Thatcher seemed to believe that the church was not qualified to engage in politics and would do better to limit itself to its spiritual task, while the Church of England held that its religious inspiration imposed a fundamental drive toward better and more social politics. Despite their

disagreement, however, Thatcher and the Church of England both shared the assumption that reason, at least political reason, is available separately from faith. Therefore, somewhat analogously to de Lubac's depiction of neo-Scholasticism, we can characterize both their stances as extrinsicist. Both parties only allowed a 'merely extrinsic link' between faith and political reason, and believed that political argument cannot be based on faith. Both accepted the premise that, if the church is to enter the debate, it has to use universally acceptable arguments rather than rely on revelation.

We must acknowledge that extrinsicism in fact offers a very tempting strategy for shaping the relationship between religion and politics in a plural society.[20] Extrinsicism permits the church to engage with pluralist politics in a tolerant way without having to give up its typical Christian character. On the one hand, extrinsicism allows the church to derive inspiration from faith, Scripture or canonical traditions to view certain political outcomes as desirable. On the other, extrinsicism enables the church to enter the political debate and offer political proposals as being perfectly consistent with human reason or common goodwill. Extrinsicism permits the church to operate within a neutral frame of reference in its interactions with the public sphere and in the proposals it puts forward, while simultaneously accepting tolerantly that other people may derive their inspiration from other religious or ideological traditions. This is the paradox of extrinsicism: it is precisely its voluntary confinement to a neutral frame that enables the church to interact with modern society.

We can now begin to see how the theological debate on extrinsicism interlocks with our earlier observation that the present turn to the church, like the earlier one, is a theological attempt to come to terms with a church that is no longer in power. We have seen that, instead of cooperating with the secular order and letting themselves be confined to the merely religious realm, these theologians argue for the universal meaning and mission of the church even in the absence of worldly power. We can say that, to them, the strategy of extrinsicism has proved to be insufficient, and the price for ecclesial confinement has become too high.

Why has this insight arisen at this particular moment in time? In order to understand this, we must see that the strategic success of extrinsicism is dependent upon one essential condition: the church's appeal to reason or nature in drawing attention to its political proposals makes sense *only to the extent that the majority experiences the Christian ideas of the political good as reasonable or natural*. Only as long as the majority of the British population, even if it does not regard itself as Christian, agrees in general with the social vision of the church, can the church operate as a kind of moral guide. But as soon as society starts to develop other social ideals, ideals that diverge from those of the church, this function fails. Suddenly, the church turns out to be a superfluous relic from the past.

In fact, this is exactly Hauerwas' argument in *With the Grain of the Universe*. He explains that Niebuhr's theology was convincing to Christians

as long as his theology could still speak to a thoroughly Christian culture. As has been seen, Niebuhr reinterpreted traditional Christian concepts such as 'sin' as pragmatic Jamesian concepts such as 'anxiety', and thus offered Christianity a tool to demonstrate the universal reasonableness of its doctrine. However, in doing so, Niebuhr ignored the fact that it is necessary to participate in the life of the church to understand Christianity. Hence, the more liberal society lost its basic Christian texture, the more Christianity appeared to be obsolete. After all, it is possible to experience Jamesian anxiety without having to use a Christian terminological framework. Hauerwas saw what Niebuhr could not yet see: the degree to which Christian values are not natural but must be learned in praxis. As soon as Christian praxis is in decline, its Christian values will slowly fade away with it. Hauerwas therefore sees no benefit in trying to prove the reasonableness of Christianity. He proposes a different strategy: simply to accept that the church's praxis may seem unreasonable to the majority. It does not need to explain itself in foreign terms, because even when it goes against the grain of society, it knows or believes that it is acting *with* the grain of the universe. Rather than attempt to establish a merely extrinsic link between the church and the world, Hauerwas claims that truthful church praxis is actually *integral* to the universe even if the majority of the world no longer sees this.

John Milbank in *Theology and Social Theory* takes a similar view. He explicitly portrays his political outlook as the opposite of extrinsicism,[21] and his work is a clear rejection of Thatcher's premise of a neutral political sphere on the one hand and a religious ecclesial sphere on the other. Therefore, he opposes the situation in which the Church of England could be seen as a benevolent and tolerant force in a liberal society, as long as it did not invoke any too particular or controversial religious convictions. This status quo, Milbank believes, is unhelpful. And we must assume that his theology is convincing precisely because the primary condition of political extrinsicism is no longer met: an increasing part of British society no longer shares the church's basic assumptions.

Healy also espouses an integralist view. He describes the church and other "religious or non-religious bodies" as places in which a "confused mix" of "human actions that display finitude and sin, as well as grace-enabled action in accordance with God's will"[22] occurs. Contrary to Milbank and Hauerwas, however, this view does not cause him to argue explicitly for a more politically involved church. Rather, it motivates him to find an ecclesiology that is not built upon a 'bipartite' construal of a transcendent ideal of the church which only manifests itself in the concrete church in the second instance.

This last observation shows that acceptance of integralism does not necessarily lead to agreement on the way in which the church must relate to society. In fact, Milbank and Hauerwas also often differ from each other; Milbank seeks a vigorous Christian socialism, while Hauerwas desires a

church that stays in the margins of society.[23] But notwithstanding the differences in emphasis, our observations show that the earlier turn's shift from extrinsicism toward integralism is repeated in the contemporary turn to the church. Just as in the earlier turn, this shift not merely reveals a theoretical change in the relationship between nature and grace, but primarily functions as an encouragement to the church to shake off its theological confinement.

We should note, however, that the contemporary turn differs from the earlier turn in one important respect: the shift toward integralism is now even more marked. Milbank's and Hauerwas' contributions especially ensure that it is more openly political, more explicitly critical of the modern secular and liberal[24] state and more strongly in favor of seeing the church itself as an *alternative* politics. Compared with the earlier turn, the present turn has lost even more confidence in the ability of a secular society to maintain peace and strive toward the common good, and it therefore desires a more countercultural church praxis.

How can we explain this difference? To begin with, it might simply be a matter of personality. Healy is proof that an integralist stance does not necessarily lead to a contrarian rejection of modernity. It might also be explained by the fact that any highly politicized theology was suspect in the days of *intégrism*, as Milbank has suggested. A more openly political theology is less immediately suspected of totalitarianism today. Yet, I believe that these explanations are not sufficient.

Maybe Guardini can offer us the clearest explanation. In his *Das Ende der Neuzeit* (1950), he provided a diagnosis of the end of modernity that strongly resembles Hauerwas' abovementioned description of the end of a Christian culture. First, he sketches how modern society will increasingly become explicitly post-Christian. According to him, there is no reason to lament this. In fact, it is preferable to the earlier stage in which society was still Christian in name only, because a post-Christian society can finally and honestly live out its own secular ideas, instead of dishonestly professing a Christian ethics without upholding its doctrine. In this new context, Guardini suggests, Christianity will be freed from the half-heartedness and dishonesty which have so often marked it during modernity, and will be able to return to a more profoundly eschatological way of life. This analysis leads him to make the following claim:

> To the extent that Christianity more accurately manifests itself again as the non-self-evident; and to the extent that it must distinguish itself more sharply from a dominant non-Christian worldview, in dogma the practical-existential moment will emerge alongside the theoretical more strongly.[25]

Indeed, the contemporary turn to the church takes place in a context in which not only the church has lost power but society as a whole is more strongly post-Christian. Thus Guardini's prophecy has come true in the

contemporary turn in which theologians seek a more countercultural stance and again emphasize the 'practical-existential moment of doctrine'.

Let us summarize. Our comparison with the earlier turn has highlighted the close relationship between the present turn's rejection of extrinsicist theories about the relationship between nature and grace, and of the social and political confinement of the church. Initially, when the direct social and political power of the church became weaker and was contested, the church sought to appease society by confining itself to a moral and spiritual power. However, in the eyes of both the earlier and contemporary turn to the church this was an unwarranted strategy of retreat that eventually harmed theology. The two turns found an alternative in their discovery that the meaning of the church is not related to the degree of societal influence it has: the meaning of the church is sacramental but also social, as it somehow already grasps, witnesses to, ritualizes and even itself prefigures the ultimate peaceful harmony of the world. Compared with the earlier turn, however, Milbank and Hauerwas take this insight in a more political and countercultural direction, due to their context that has become more explicitly post-Christian.

The Church and the World: A Shift toward an Inclusive Catholicity

We have described above that the contemporary turn to the church rejects the idea of a neutral common ground, on the basis of which believers and non-believers alike can tolerantly discuss matters of the world. According to the authors discussed, this is an erroneous and unnecessary confinement of theology. Instead, they reject extrinsicism in favor of a view in which the world and humanity are understood as having "always already been worked upon by divine grace."[26] Hence, they say, theology is about everything. And this means that the church should feel free to engage with politics on its own terms rather than surrender to foreign terms.

This bold stance on the part of theology may sound rather unsympathetic, as if theology were giving itself the right to involve itself in every aspect of the world. This is only increased by claims made both in the contemporary and the earlier turn, that the church is the exclusive and unique God-given way for the salvation of humanity. Does the contemporary turn promote religious intolerance?

However, on closer inspection this is wide of the mark. Our theologians in many ways suggest that the church should honor the value of the world and recognize its goods. They call for a dialogue between the church and its historical and social context, and believe that the church should interpret the world around it and learn from it. Rather than clinging to a predefined truth which would *a priori* smother any dialogue, both the earlier and the contemporary authors stress the fact that this process is inherently open and incomplete. Moreover, they believe that this

receptive attitude to the world is not merely instrumental, but is somehow closely related to the essence of the church. Hence, both turns somewhat paradoxically couple a belief that the church is the only way to salvation with the conviction that, for various reasons, the church must adopt an open stance toward the world, especially toward other cultures and toward humanity in general.[27]

The key to understanding this paradox points to a second aspect of the contemporary turn to the church, which can be characterized as a shift toward *inclusive catholicity*. In short, I will use this term to denote an approach that is characterized by two aspects. First, by an emphasis that, while the church uniquely possesses ultimate truth, the salvation it offers is not merely intended for its adherents but is somehow oriented toward the world. And second, by the acknowledgement that, as the church is destined to work for the salvation of the world, the world itself has goods that are worth receiving into the church. The various authors differ in their descriptions of exactly how this orientation toward the world works. Yet, it is a shift that is crucial to all the authors' ecclesiologies.

To a large extent, this inclusive catholicity is equivalent with what the earlier turn often simply called 'catholicism' (in fact, the early theologians would be quick to claim that 'inclusive catholicity' is a pleonasm). Yet, to put it differently, this shift toward an inclusive understanding of catholicity is also a fundamental aspect of the contemporary turn to the church. Anyone who fails to grasp this aspect, will easily but wrongly suspect the contemporary turn of retreating into a bulwark of totalitarian orthodoxy. But it is precisely this horizon that qualifies the often countercultural stance of the contemporary turn.

The Church is Uniquely Oriented to the Salvation of the World…

Our contemporary theologians believe that the church is somehow oriented not to the salvation of its individual adherents, but to the salvation of the world. Milbank is exemplary for the others when he claims that catholic Christianity is "the one final and universal truth," but immediately adds that this catholicity should be envisaged in "generous, open-ended and all-inclusive terms."[28] This paradox is not a case of doublespeak, but rather touches upon a crucial element in the turn to the church. The earlier turn to the church certainly already embraced a similar all-inclusive understanding of catholicity. This earlier turn argued that the church is the true religion *because* it is oriented toward the salvation of the entire world. Precisely for this reason, Casel, Guardini, and de Lubac insisted that the church is unique and superior, as it is the only community that throughout history truly embodies this catholic, universal, salvation. As Guardini put it, "one cannot detach the salvific values from it and seek them elsewhere, as they are once and for all embodied in the historical reality of the Church."[29]

A good example of this combination of exclusivity and an open orientation toward the world can be found in the following quote from de Lubac's *Catholicisme*:

> To see in catholicism one religion among others, one discipline among others, even if one adds that it is the only true religion, the only effective discipline, would be to mistake its very nature, or at least to stop at its appearance. Catholicism is *the Religion*. It is the form that humanity must take on to finally be itself. As the only reality that does not need to be opposed in order to be, it is the opposite of a 'closed society.'[30]

In this quote, de Lubac does not deny that catholicism is the only true religion, but he points out that this claim has consequences that reach far beyond those who call themselves 'Catholics.' Interestingly, de Lubac here speaks of *catholicism* rather than of the church. At first sight, this term may be confusing, as the word 'Catholicism' seems to denote a particular confession, distinct from Protestantism for instance. But de Lubac actually prefers this term to *distinguish* his approach from any such denominational approach. To him, the catholicity of the church precisely denotes its fundamental openness toward the whole of human existence and the whole of humanity.[31] Guardini and Casel make a similar argument for 'catholicism' not primarily as a confessional description of a group of individuals but rather as the church's and theology's fundamentally open outlook or attitude towards the world.[32] By reinterpreting the notion of catholicism, these authors effectively suggest that the Roman Catholic Church *is more true to itself when it is open to the whole of humanity*.

This use of the term 'catholicism' is mostly absent from the contemporary turn to the church.[33] Yet, even without using this word, Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy do uphold the view that, on the one hand, the church is unique because it plays an exclusive role in God's salvation, and on the other, this salvation aims to include the entire world. According to Milbank, the church uniquely exhibits "the exemplary form of human community,"[34] but this rather exclusive claim is directly tied to his belief that ecclesial salvation is not individual but consists in the "restoration of being."[35] Even Healy, whose intention is to combat ecclesial arrogance and ideas about 'ecclesial perfection,' still maintains that the church is superior to any other community precisely because of its unique and Spirit-powered fundamental orientation to the ultimate goal of creation.[36] And Hauerwas, who has often been accused of sectarianism,[37] in fact holds that Christians should not withdraw from the world precisely because the church "precedes the world not only epistemologically but also axiologically,"[38] which means that it is the task of the church to reveal the true meaning and value of the world.

These quotes already reveal some differences of emphasis between the authors. Milbank stresses the instrumental character of the church for the

salvation of the world: it is the church's mission to contribute to that salvation. Healy and Hauerwas emphasize that the church *reveals* the salvation that God works for the world. In these diverse ways, they all emphasize that the church's salvation extends beyond its ecclesial sphere and includes the entire world. With various emphases, then, the church is an instrument and sign of the world's salvation, and we may note that this converges with the Second Vatican Council's idea that the church is somehow the sacrament of the salvation of the world.[39] In a profound sense, then, the inclusive catholicity of both turns to the church is the immediate consequence of their sacramental understanding of the church.

... And the Church Receives From the World

A second aspect of the shift toward an inclusive catholicity is the belief that the salvation of the world entails not only missionary activity on the part of the church, such as spreading the gospel or serving the poor, but also a receptive attitude. The world is not just missionary territory, but it is somehow valued on its own terms: the world has qualities that need to be honored and offered back to God. However, the various authors have different ways of approaching and understanding this receptive moment.

Some authors suggest that it is the church's nature and mission to be receptive to the world, because the salvation of the world is closely linked to the church's appropriation of aspects of the world. In other words, precisely when the church has received or appropriated something, it is brought back to God and as such truly 'saved.' We could label this 'salvation through ecclesial appropriation.' John Milbank's ideas seem to go in this direction when he claims that difference should not be resolved but elevated by placing it in a harmonious order. This expression clearly is the ontological counterpart of the belief that the various goods of the world can be saved by making them part of the church, as, to Milbank, the church is precisely the social and historical embodiment of this harmonious order. Guardini in a different way hints at this view when he says that "Every object should under the influence of the Catholic spirit revive towards freedom and the fullness of its nature."[40] And although de Lubac phrases it differently, he expresses a similar conviction when he claims that, as the church is the "unique ark of Salvation, it must within its immense nave give shelter to all varieties of humanity"[41] and when he compares the church to a "treasure house"[42] in which the goods of the world should be stored. None of these approaches amounts to a clear-cut explanation of how the church should relate to the world in practice, but they do show that, according to these theologians, it somehow belongs to the task of the church to collect and incorporate all the goods of the world, and that this incorporation itself also meaningfully contributes to its salvation.

Odo Casel gives a fairly rigid example of this approach when he explains why catholicism is the opposite of sectarianism:

> Christian religion, as the fulfillment of all human desire in the religious realm, as the "catholic" or universal religion of humanity, sovereignly claims for itself whatever truly noble humanity has created in the realm of religious forms. If the church would anxiously shut itself off from her context, it would not be the Catholic Church, but a sect. But it has absorbed everything fully into its spirit and thereby transformed it; in its crucible it has purified it from everything that is all-too-human and ended up with pure gold.[43]

Nicholas Healy would probably be reluctant to use such overly epic and triumphalist language, as if "all that the world has to do for it to be healed is to submit to the church."[44] Also, Healy would point out that such phrases confuse the church triumphant and the concrete church *in via*, as if the church *in via* were the final *telos* of the world.[45] Nevertheless, Healy also passionately wants the church to become more receptive and listening to the world. Unlike for the others, however, this is less for the sake of the world, and more for the sake of the *church*. The church can learn from the world, as the church is not perfect, and much of what happens in the world is good. As such, the world can even assist the church in performing its unique role of witnessing to Christ.

Stanley Hauerwas takes yet another approach. It is true that he argues in *With the Grain of the Universe* that the church must stop adapting to the world, and he does not seem to leave much scope for any too intimate a friendship between the church and the world. However, this claim is made in the context of his argument that the church has adapted too much to the *liberal* world. In his view, the liberal world is evil precisely because it is oppressive rather than receptive. As he writes elsewhere, "the problem is that the guiding principle in the United States is to sublimate differences so that we won't have to face up to conflict. As a result, society imposes on people a kind of peace that is really violent order."[46] Hauerwas prefers a dialogue in which people can truly disagree to a civil conversation between two traditions that have learned to sublimate their difference for the sake of a tolerant dialogue. On many other occasions Hauerwas argues that the church cannot engage with a pluralist society by developing a theory of tolerance, but only by forming truly virtuous, humble and peace-making characters that are capable of the hard work that is required to listen to others. An example of his stance can be found in his wonderful tribute to David Burrell, C.S.C, in which he expresses his admiration for how this theologian and priest contributed to the Roman Catholic dialogue with Jews and Muslims simply by listening very carefully.[47] Clearly, rather than subscribing to any official statement that the church needs to learn from other traditions, Hauerwas wants Christians to be formed in such a way

that they can humbly enter into peaceful dialogue without trying to control the situation beforehand. At the same time, he also seems to believe that it is the church's task to "acknowledge and worship"[48] the source of all the goods of the world, something that the world itself is incapable of doing. In a sense, then, Hauerwas believes that only the church can truly appreciate the world, and as such he comes close to a kind of 'salvation through ecclesial appropriation.'

To sum up, we have seen that all six theologians argue that the church is unique, but this uniqueness consists in its being oriented to the salvation of the world. Secondly, the church in their view does not just offer salvation to the world. Instead, it also appropriates good things from the world. It listens to other traditions to find whatever values they hold, it purifies these and becomes enriched by them, so that these values may be offered to God and saved – we have called this 'salvation through ecclesial appropriation.' Or the church listens to other traditions, not primarily because these traditions need salvation, but because the church itself may benefit from other insights – this is the approach that Healy, and to some extent, also Hauerwas, takes. All six theologians picture the form which this reception takes differently, ranging from Casel's liturgical appropriation of non-Christian spiritual forms to Guardini's life-bringing care of the world. There is thus sufficient proof to show that this shift toward an inclusive catholicity, – the belief that the church's salvation is meant for the whole world, and this coupled with a receptiveness and attentiveness to the goods that are already present in that world – is an essential aspect of both the earlier and present turn to the church.

As a final note, we should remark that, while both the earlier and present turn to the church clearly consist in a shift toward inclusive catholicity, they differ in their point of departure. In general, Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac argue for a broad embrace of the world, mainly in the context of what they saw as a mediocre Roman Catholic theology that was far too abstract, too defensive, and too exclusively focused on the institutional church. Milbank, Hauerwas and Healy also adopt various forms of inclusive catholicity, but they do so mainly in reaction to a liberal pluralism that seems to allow for, but in fact violently opposes, true difference. They believe that their approaches to other traditions are *better* capable of honoring true otherness and offering social harmony than liberalism.

Church and Epistemology: A Shift to the Primacy of Praxis

The third shift that can be identified in both the earlier and the present turn is one that we have already discussed in Chapters 4 and 8. To put it in general terms, this shift is an epistemological shift from neutral rationality toward the idea that participation in the church somehow establishes knowledge of the world.

To recapitulate, we have seen that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, neo-Scholasticism entertained what might be called a two-tier view of the world order. On the one hand, every being gifted with reason could in principle know the natural order. On the other, only those who believed in the fact of God's revelation in Christ and who subsequently received the grace of faith had the ability to grasp the supernatural order through faith. In this view, the truths taught by the faith did not contradict the truths that could be known by natural reason. In fact, they barely bore any relation to each other and were at most extrinsically linked, for example in the case of Christ's divinity in which reason could establish that Christ in fact performed miracles, while only the faith could acknowledge that he was divine. Yet, in a sense, the idea that faith somehow gave access to a different kind of knowledge was not uncommon.

De Lubac, Casel, and Guardini abandoned this two-tier view. As we pointed out, they turned to an epistemology that is *catholic* and allows for *mystery*. This was a catholic epistemology, in the sense that they believed that a catholic view on reality was the opposite of a reductive view, and offered the most profound understanding of that reality. In a way, they suggested that catholicity means embracing and ordering all different particular perspectives on reality. And this epistemology allowed for mystery, in the sense that they believed that a catholic, non-reductive view of the world must acknowledge that the reality of the world can never be grasped entirely by human beings, especially because a reality is encountered in the mysteries of the church that surpasses our understanding.

Hence, they agreed with the neo-Scholastics that the mystery of the church does not contradict natural knowledge. An encounter with the divine mystery does not result in a disavowal of all previous knowledge. Contrary to the neo-Scholastic perspective, however, they emphasized that knowledge of the divine mystery was not merely an addition to the whole corpus of rational knowledge, but resulted in a complete *transformation* of all previous knowledge. For example, according to Casel, Christianity does not simply offer doctrinal or moral values but, through the operation of its mysteries, it brings about a fundamentally new perspective on the world and as such overcomes the destructive, atomizing perspective of modernity.[49] De Lubac argued that the reality of the church invites us to understand nature and history spiritually, offering a way of looking that both completes and surpasses any natural way of seeing. Guardini most aptly describes this difference with the earlier neo-Scholastic view when he compares it to truly religious art, which is more than simply the application of worldly paintbrushes to a religious canvas. Rather, religious art is religious because it "sees the entire world spiritually," in the light of God's coming kingdom.[50]

In short, then, this new perspective suggested that faith not simply adds to a person's understanding of the world, but it changes the way a person sees the world. It deepens their understanding, and makes them aware that

even the catholic understanding of the world is incomplete, as they now know that the world is not closed off but instead fundamentally open to God. Hence, the belief that catholicism is the most profound view on the world is coupled to a rejection of rational certainty. Guardini unreservedly describes the combination of humility and superiority of this perspective in the following quote:

> The true Christian is sovereign. He has a highness and a freedom that carries him away from any unbelieving judgment. He cannot be the object of such a judgment at all, since it cannot even hold him in its field of vision. His own view, on the contrary, embraces 'all things,' and his standard is absolute. [...] Genuine humility with the aristocratic consciousness of unconditional and perfect supremacy.[51]

It is not difficult to see that this understanding of a catholic perspective is related to the shift toward inclusive catholicity mentioned earlier, and that it suggests an open stance toward other traditions, not on the basis of neutral rationality but of the idea of catholicity as 'embracing all perspectives.' We should note here, too, that this relativism and openness was explicitly not grounded in seemingly non-theological notions of religious tolerance, but rather in explicit fundamental theological ideas about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural. In a similar way, this new perspective suggested that not neutral reason, but only a catholic perspective is able both to understand the world and to become aware that our understanding is limited before the mysterious depths of God; and this perspective also hinged upon fundamental theological ideas about the relationship between the natural and the supernatural.

Much of the above resonates with the epistemological shift of the present turn to the church. We have seen that Milbank claims that theology is a *metadiscourse*, a discourse that other discourse cannot hold in their 'field of vision.' Indeed, it belongs to the "logic of Christianity"[52] that the whole of history should instead be interpreted from the viewpoint of Christ and his church. So Milbank's version of Guardini's sovereign Christian field of vision sounds like this:

> In this fashion a gigantic claim to be able to read, criticize, say what is going on in other human societies, is absolutely integral to the Christian Church, which itself claims to exhibit the exemplary form of human community. For theology to surrender this claim, to allow that other discourses – 'the social sciences'- carry out yet more fundamental readings, would therefore amount to a denial of theological truth.[53]

In general, as we have noted before, these theologians tend to espouse a sacramental worldview in which the present world and the church somehow signify the world's final *telos*, its being brought under the peaceful

reign of God. Thus Milbank's claim that theology is a metadiscourse is echoed by Hauerwas' claim that the continuing peaceful practices of the church help us remember the deepest truth of this world, namely that it is God's world. Even Healy, who often worries that such theological claims may appear arrogant, does not hesitate to argue that we should not interpret the world according to some prior theory, but rather in the light of the theo-drama, the still-developing story of creation, fall, redemption, and final consummation, which is the ultimate narrative that situates all other narratives.[54] As such, contrary to the secular belief that the world is self-explanatory, both the earlier and the present theologians unanimously claim that Christ and the church offer a way of understanding the world that is not available without the church's perspective.

The three contemporary theologians also argue that the church does not simply offer its perspective in the form of an alternative rational outlook. Rather, they contend that the church offers an alternative to a rationalist way of engaging with the world itself. To them, salvation does not consist in acquiring some particular salvific knowledge, as if salvation is a theory that can be individually acquired. On the contrary, salvation consists in participating in a certain creative *praxis*, so that salvation becomes a creative and open historical process that is somehow divinely inspired. Compared with a rationalist view, this focus on tradition introduces immense uncertainty, because traditions are inherently open. Any new historical moment requires a creative adaptation of tradition, an adaptation that must now be judged according to unstable temporal and basically aesthetic notions that require the discernment or an intuitive 'grasp' of the ultimate *telos* of the world. But just as in the earlier turn, the three contemporary theologians do not regard the relativism and uncertainty of the historical process as problematic. Instead they embrace it as the creative way God has chosen to save the world.

Remarkably and significantly, the earlier and the present turn thus both shift toward an epistemology that views knowledge as rooted in a traditioned ecclesial praxis instead of in neutral reason. Of course, there are differences and nuances. For example, the earlier theologians suggested that religious knowledge cannot simply be added to natural knowledge, but that it transforms our vision of the world and sheds new light upon our natural knowledge. They also dismissed modern reason as excessively 'atomizing' and 'individualistic.' Hence, on the whole, they suggest that natural reason is *insufficient*. By contrast, the contemporary theologians are more radical in their dismissal of modern reason. Especially Milbank and Hauerwas emphasize that modern reason is not simply insufficient, but is in fact built upon an alternative theology that is incompatible with Christianity on the fundamental level of praxis, as it actively shuts out the Christian ontology of peace. For this reason, Milbank believes not only that Christianity is a metadiscourse, but also that secular reason presents itself as an alternative metadiscourse that is profoundly antagonistic to Christianity. Milbank therefore believes

it is necessary to deconstruct secular reason. Hauerwas similarly does away with any rigid difference between natural and religious knowledge, and claims that all knowledge is finally constituted by the praxis of a tradition.

Due to Wittgenstein's and MacIntyre's influence, the contemporary theologians more strongly emphasize praxis and tradition than the earlier theologians did. Yet, it seems fair to say that on close inspection, the earlier theologians also tended to move into that direction. They focused on the liturgy while rejecting mere aestheticism, and found in it a source for theology that could help to avoid the pitfalls of rationalism. According to them, liturgy is the participation in a mystery, a "deeply inner formation and training,"[55] but ultimately also the source and summit of the church's life. Hence, even though they did not feel the need to flesh out the exact relationship between creativity, rationality and tradition, they did espouse the primacy of praxis, and were strongly aware that this is fundamental to a theology that wants to overcome the dangers of modernity. In a sense, then, in explicating the relationship between theory and praxis, doctrine and the tradition of the church, the contemporary turn to the church completes something that was already implicitly present in the earlier turn to the church.

Notes

1 According to Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 9.
2 *The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought*, 9.
3 See Paul D. Murray, "Roman Catholic Theology after Vatican II," in *The Modern Theologians: an Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, ed. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 272.
4 Nicholas M. Healy, email message to author, 11 January 2017.
5 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, 1983), 99.
6 E.g. Stanley Hauerwas, *A Cross-Shattered Church: Reclaiming the Theological Heart of Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 142.
7 E.g. TST, 140.
8 TST, 98.
9 TST, 206.
10 See Stanley Hauerwas, "A Non-Violent Proposal for Christian Participation in the Culture Wars." *Soundings* 75, no. 4 (winter 1992): 477–492.
11 See Jon Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology: Catholic and Jewish Theology* (London: Routledge, 2012), with chapters devoted to Guardini and de Lubac.
12 But cf. John W. Wright, *Postliberal Theology and the Church Catholic: Conversations with George Lindbeck, David Burrell, and Stanley Hauerwas* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2012). Wright argues that Hauerwas and other postliberal authors are more indebted to the *nouvelle théologie* than is often acknowledged. See also the interview with Stanley Hauerwas, especially 100–102.
13 E.g. CWCL, 133.

14 *Apologétique et théologie*, 264.
15 TST, 206.
16 "the transcendence by which the supernatural was believed to be zealously preserved, was in fact a banishment." CAT, 242.
17 CAT, 196.
18 TST, 206.
19 TST, 206–209.
20 I am indebted to Philip Krinks for sharing some of his thoughts on the relationship between extrinsicism and pluralism: "Grace undeserved? Pluralism in Milbank's de-Lubacian response to Karl Rahner" (Paper presented at the annual conference of the Society of the Study of Theology, Warwick, 8–11 March 2019).
21 TST, 206.
22 CWCL, 68.
23 For a comparison between Hauerwas' and Milbank's social vision, see: Malcolm Brown and Jonathan Chaplin, *Anglican Social Theology Today* (London: Church House Publishing, 2014), 82.
24 Milbank is more critical of the whole concept of a secular state, whether in a liberal or Marxist or any other form, while Hauerwas directs his critique toward the *liberal* state in its American form.
25 Romano Guardini, *Das Ende Der Neuzeit: Ein Versuch Zur Orientierung* (Würzburg: Werkbund Verlag, 1950), 115.
26 TST, 206.
27 In the following pages, the concept of 'world' should be understood in this cultural sense. Of course, 'world' can also be understood as the non-cultural world of nature, the realm of plants and animals. Sometimes, the theologians under consideration here open up theology toward a more friendly 'eco-theology' in which nature is interpreted theologically. On the whole, however, these theologians generally use 'world' for the cultural world or the whole of humanity.
28 TST, second edition, "Preface to the second edition," xxiii.
29 VSK, 38.
30 CAT, 229.
31 CAT, 23–28.
32 Regarding Guardini, see page 134–137; regarding Casel, see DCK, 87.
33 WTG, 145.
34 TST, 388.
35 But cf. TST, 402.
36 CWCL, 17–18.
37 See for his defense against sectarianism: Stanley Hauerwas, "Why the 'Sectarian Temptation' Is a Misrepresentation: A Response to James Gustafson (1988)," in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 91–110.
38 WTG, 220.
39 *Lumen gentium*, 1.
40 VSK, 52.
41 CAT, 227.
42 CAT, 226.
43 DCK, 87–88. See also DCK, 113–115, where he insists that the mystery of Christ is the fulfillment of all mysteries, not only of those of the old covenant, as is traditionally believed, but also of the pagan mysteries of antiquity.
44 CWCL, 12.
45 CWCL, 37.

46 Hauerwas, "Christianity: It's Not a Religion: It's an Adventure," *The Hauerwas Reader*, 526.
47 Stanley Hauerwas, "The End of 'Religious Pluralism': A Tribute to David Burrell, C.S.C.," in *The State of the University: Academic Knowledges and the Knowledge of God* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 58–75.
48 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Work of Theology*, 29.
49 DCK, 10–13, 25–27.
50 VSK, 14.
51 VSK, 72–73.
52 TST, 388.
53 TST, 388.
54 CWCL, 67.
55 VSK, 18.

10 Conclusion

I have so far investigated individual theologians who in one way or another engaged in a turn to the church. Moreover, in Chapters 4 and 8, I attempted to describe significant common characteristics of the turn that these individual theologians made. As such, I was able to identify two 'turns,' one that occurred in the early twentieth century, and one in the recent past and continuing up to the present. In the last chapter, I compared these two turns. This comparison has revealed some fundamental similarities as well as differences between the two turns. However, this study focuses not on the comparison itself, but rather aims to obtain a better understanding of the present turn. Hence, in this final chapter, we will review to what extent the comparison can help to acquire a better understanding of the contemporary turn to the church. This will also enable us to sketch the implications, challenges, and prospects that this turn offers.

Back to Our Initial Question

What have we gained by comparing the contemporary turn to the church with that earlier turn at the beginning of the twentieth century? The previous chapter has revealed that, in comparison with the earlier continental-European Catholic turn, we should describe the present turn as *Anglophone* and *postliberal*. We also found an important similarity: both turns are attempts to come to terms theologically with the loss of power and marginalization of the church.

Although some indirect and direct influences of the earlier on the contemporary turn could be established, these two turns should not be understood as belonging to a single theological tradition. Rather, they should be understood as sharing a number of patterns of ideas that are related to the aforementioned context of marginalization. These patterns of ideas can be best understood through the prism of three important shifts: an *integralist shift* that embraces the political and social meaning of Christianity; a shift toward an *inclusive catholicity* that rejects both Catholic exclusivism (because the church needs the world), and liberal pluralism (because the church is unique); and an *epistemological shift* away from rationalism

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toward an idea of knowledge as rooted in the praxis of a living tradition. Along these lines, both turns urged the church to jettison an ossified past and instead understand itself as the heir of a living tradition that, even as a minority, holds a promise for the world.

We are now in a position to answer our initial question of this study: *what is the current turn to the church, what are its aims, and to what extent is it innovative?*

What is the Current Turn to the Church?

The current turn to the church appears as an Anglophone postliberal theological reaction to a marginalization of the church in the modern world, the structural characteristics of which can be exemplified by three shifts that together form a coherent new paradigm: to put it concisely, a more integralist and more (inclusive) catholic theology that is based upon an epistemology in which church praxis is prioritized.

Fundamentally, the current turn to the church is a turn toward the belief that somehow the praxis of the church gives or should give access to 'salvific knowledge.' This salvific knowledge is practical in nature, which means that it does not primarily convey concepts and theories, but a way of engaging with reality. Through its practices, the church enables its members to live their lives 'with the grain of the universe,' with the world according to its deepest essence as created by God. Precisely this practical knowledge makes the church uniquely different from any other social group. Yet this does not mean that the church offers salvation only to its loyal believers. This practically implied salvific knowledge of the church is not restricted to a religious realm but concerns the whole of reality, which means that it also affects politics and social life. Hence, it is believed, church praxis is sacramental in nature: it *reveals* and *works* salvation for the entire world.

The comparison with the earlier turn to the church in particular has revealed how much the theological agenda of the authors who turn to the church is marked by the decline of institutional Christianity. This decline has been taking place for quite some time now in the United States and the United Kingdom, and more generally in the Western world. In the eyes of the proponents of the turn to the church, earlier attempts to deal with this modern phenomenon too often consisted of efforts to adapt to modern demands: either by marking out a private religious sphere in which Christianity is effectively reduced to a 'ghetto spirituality;' or by focusing on the universal moral qualities of Christianity, thus revealing the Christianity to be true but superfluous; or both. The three theologians we studied therefore strongly dismiss these attempts as forms of 'domestication' and 'confinement.' On the contrary, they are remarkably optimistic that the church can function perfectly as a minority as long as it does not lose sight of its universal significance.

The three aforementioned shifts offer a framework within which we can understand most of the other aspects of the contemporary turn to the church that we have encountered in the previous chapters. As theology becomes more integralist, it shifts its attention from religious or doctrinal truths taken in isolation to the entire world. But the very moment that theology begins to deal with the world, it must deal with the temporal, the concrete and the particular, with uncertainty, difference, embodiment, and plurality. History starts to matter, as the history of the world is now also the history of God and the church. Moreover, as the history of God's saving work becomes important, abstract theological reflections on salvation start to make less sense. By contrast, the church's practical witness, including its failures, now becomes theologically relevant. No longer can its failures be seen as minor operational accidents that do not affect its abstract and timeless message, but they truly and tragically interrupt the flow of God's grace in the history of the world. Also, as the essence of the church is now understood along more inclusively catholic lines, the church's fate suddenly turns out to be fundamentally tied to the fate of the world. It must now account for its ability to make a distinction between things that should be rejected, things that could possibly be restored, and things that can be appropriated. For this, a new epistemology that involves creativity, discernment, and constructive imagination is needed and must be practically developed. The history of the church now becomes the history of this creative imagination, and theology becomes a practical and contextual discipline. As such, the turn to the church implies a departure from any theology that is concerned with mere theory about God or the religious domain, and a return to the belief that there exists a distinguishable Christian life-form, and that the retrieval of that sacramental life-form is somehow beneficial to humanity as a whole.

These three shifts thus contribute to a better understanding of how the various aspects of the theologies of Milbank, Hauerwas, and Healy are tied together. They can be used as a tool to determine whether other theologies participate in the contemporary turn to the church or not. As such, further research can thus investigate the full scope and reach of the turn to the church as a contemporary theological phenomenon.

What Are Its Aims?

If we wish to describe the aims of the contemporary turn to the church, we should point to the somewhat paradoxical or double movement it makes. On the one hand, it does not attempt to adapt the church to a modern context, but strongly embraces the *otherness* of the church; on the other hand, it does so in the belief that precisely this otherness provides a way out of the confinement of the church and is the best way to critically engage with modernity. Thus, in short, the turn to the church aims to realize an engagement with modernity precisely through emphasizing the church's otherness.

All three theologians strongly focus on the particular life of the church as a distinct community or sphere. The church is ontologically and eschatologically distinct from other societies, and this distinction is or should be reflected in its daily praxis. However, the turn to the church does not embrace the church's otherness in order to espouse what Healy calls 'ecclesiocentrism,' which, to put it bluntly, means that the church is somehow the only thing that really matters in this world. Rather, precisely in considering the distinct element of the church, theology regains perspective on the whole world. All of this does not imply that ecclesiocentrism is no longer a danger for any turn to the church. But the turn to the church shows that, in fact, a strong emphasis on the divine origin of the otherness of the church might be the best way to prevent any harmful ecclesiocentrism.

This double movement of distinctiveness and engagement with the modern context clarifies why the turn to the church on the one hand tends to embrace the label of orthodoxy, and on the other tends to interpret the content of this orthodoxy rather loosely. It does not focus on doctrinal details, but it encourages an attitude of *sentire cum ecclesia*: an attitude that rejects a derogatory or dismissive attitude toward the history of the church, and always seeks to offer theological proposals that are faithful to the tradition of the church, conceived as widely as possible. Hence, even if these theologians sometimes offer theologically innovative proposals which they believe would help theology to better engage with modernity, such as Milbank's espousal of a revised nominalism or Hauerwas' advocacy of pacifism, they insist that this innovation must be understood as being in harmony with the ecclesial tradition.

This double movement also explains why the protagonists of the turn to the church place so much emphasis on contextual theology and practical discernment in the life of the church. According to them, it belongs to the essence of the church to "read, criticize, say what is going on in other human societies."[1] Theology cannot stand on its own, but must enter into dialogue with other voices, stories and forms of life. To them, the church is essentially relational: even its claim to unicity does not function as a means to isolation, but serves the purpose of offering itself as a measure for other societies.

As such, the turn to the church is not aimed primarily at making certain detailed theological proposals. Rather, its aim is to offer a profound critique of modern society and an attempt to reimagine the role of the church and modern theology in it. Especially the notion of universal reason is opposed by all protagonists of the turn, and their alternative proposals all seek to embrace the concrete, historical, practical, and bodily aspects of human existence.

To What Extent Is It Theologically Innovative or Promising?

Even as it adopts themes that were already present in the earlier turn to the church, – integralism, inclusive catholicity, and epistemological critique – the contemporary turn introduces novel aspects.

First of all, it is no longer restricted to the Catholic Church. Of course, this novel aspect is an inevitable result of the contemporary theological environment that has become inter- or post-confessional and definitively more plural. Yet, the contemporary turn has a unique ecumenical value as it upholds an ideal of the church in which differences must not be subsumed under a rationalistic theory, but must harmonically be ordered through ecclesial praxis. As such, it revives the ideal of catholicity that the earlier turn to the church espoused more explicitly.

But while the earlier turn to the church used the idea of catholicity to break free from a confined tradition, the present turn more clearly insists that this catholicity is still always tied to a traditioned ecclesial praxis. This is due to the fact that at the time of the earlier turn the traditioned ecclesial praxis was not at all contested by most theologians. Guardini, Casel, and de Lubac simply did not need to argue for the value of the church, but instead wished to broaden the perspective and open the church up to the world. In the contemporary turn, on the other hand, this is no longer the case. The church is no longer closed off from the world, but instead has to rediscover its own unique asset of being a place where the divine meets the human. As such, the present turn seems *more* capable of arguing for the two sides of its inclusive catholicity: both the church's uniqueness and the church's receptive stance.

We have also seen that the contemporary turn is more openly political, and more openly critical of modern politics. Milbank and Hauerwas understand the church as a form of life that somehow practically prefigures a politics that is based upon harmony and peace, in contrast with the inherent violence of liberal society. Hence, they feel free to embrace a more countercultural church with its own politics, without fear that this might be confused with a totalitarian *intégrisme*. Behind this lies a perception of the nature of modernity: the earlier turn believed that modernity was essentially the lack of a sense of mystery and transcendence. The contemporary turn on the other hand believes that modernity entails a political worldview that is opposed to the Christian vision of peace. Given this perception, the contemporary turn to the church distances itself from modern society more strongly than the earlier turn did, and it is less optimistic about the humanist tendencies of liberalism.

The difference that is mostly evident, is that the contemporary turn has a much broader understanding of what the praxis of the church is. Earlier, we saw that Koster accused Casel of reducing the church to the merely liturgical.[2] Influenced by Wittgenstein and MacIntyre, the contemporary theologians are more sensitive to the fact that the ecclesial tradition crucially depends not only on explicitly liturgical, but also on non-liturgical acts. In fact, they consciously blur the lines between the two. For example, Hauerwas believes that non-liturgical practices that teach participants how to resolve conflicts belong to the heart of the church. Healy suggests that the whole culture of a particular congregation should be read in the light of

the theo-drama. And Milbank understands the church as a socio-linguistic praxis including stories of saints, preachings, icons, etcetera. As such, the contemporary theologians are more able to account for the whole of the Christian life.

Nevertheless, I believe that the most promising aspect of the contemporary turn to the church lies not in the innovations it introduces with regard to the earlier turn, no matter how appropriate these innovations are. Rather, it lies exactly in its *continuity* with the earlier turn to the church, a continuity that we have already described as consisting of three shifts. This is theologically promising precisely because it continues, in a wholly different context, insights that were able to pry open the earlier, ossified neo-Scholastic theology. If the contemporary turn to the church is able to influence contemporary postliberal Anglophone theology as fruitfully as the earlier turn influenced Catholic theology, its recipe of an integralist, inclusively catholic and praxis-oriented perspective will prove rewarding in the near future. If it succeeds in reimagining the church, it will fundamentally change the shape of future theology. It will strongly root theology in a broadly conceived catholic tradition, at the same time assisting that tradition by recovering the fundamental openness to the world that lies at its heart, by being the church through which God reveals his love for the world.

Promises and Perspectives

In the sections above, I have sketched the turn to the church as an important and even crucial episode in the history of the church in modern Western society. In an era in which Christian practices in the West are in decline, most visibly of course the practice of church attendance, this turn emphasizes the indispensability of these practices for the understanding of Christian truth. Yet, even though this turn puts all its stakes in a praxis that is undoubtly in decline in the West, the turn does not seem to foster pessimism, but in fact gives occasion to hope. In this last section, I will argue why that is the case, by highlighting what I believe to be the most important lessons that can be learned from this investigation. After that, I will offer two images that can help to visualize the promises and challenges of the turn to the church.

To begin with, the turn to the church is in itself good news for those who love the church but mourn over its decline in the West, for this turn offers a reimagination of the relation between the church and modern society, whereby societal relevance is no longer crucial for this relationship. Of course, the marginalization of the church is a tragic event in some ways. Communities are forced to sell the church buildings their forefathers have built themselves, and parish reorganizations bring real world struggles with it to the point of people loosing their faith in God *and* humanity. Nevertheless, this loss does offer a vantage point from which we may more clearly discern the true meaning of both the church and the world.

One might even say that this loss offers an opportunity for *conversion*, as the works studied here repeatedly point us to the belief that the church has no stable identity of its own and is grounded in Christ. In other words, this study reveals that the marginalization of the church in the West is in itself not merely negative, and this perspective should prevent theology from too hastily claiming a new relevance for today's Western society.

In fact, the turn to the church broadens the perspective of Western ecclesiology by consciously questioning the history of the church in the West. For example, as the turn to the church goes hand in hand with a rejection of universalist rationalism and emphasizes practical discernment, it paves the way for Western theology to learn from ecclesial communities in other parts of the world. Also, by its reflection on the increasing marginalization of the church, Western theology might be in a better position to appreciate the ways in which many ancient churches have been able to survive as minorities in non-Western societies.

At the same time, the turn to the church might function as a critical perspective vis-á-vis the sometimes overly optimistic success stories of numerical church growth in non-Western countries. For example, one might suggest that any increase in societal relevance will bring its own temptations and challenges, just as it has done in the West. More importantly, some of these successes suffer from exactly the same aspects of modernism that this study tries to overcome. For example, the Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole convincingly argues that the church in Africa, although numerically very strong, often fails in its political responsibilities due to a modern *Western* view on the relationship between church and state. His work is an outstanding example of how the turn to the church may provide non-Western theologies with instruments to chase the colonial ghosts and appreciate their own practical discernment.[3]

We have noted above that the turn to the church continues important theological ideas of the earlier turn, ideas that have often become characteristic for the church of the Second Vatican Council. Notions such as the sacramentality of the church, its fundamental orientation upon Christ, and its openness to the world, to name a few, have since become established notions in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. This study thus provides Catholic theology with an opportunity to approach these notions in new postliberal theological vocabularies. For example, it offers a way of appreciating the current debate on *synodality*. The way of the church is not that of following a blueprint, but of creative discernment. And this creative discernment is not the work of magisterial theologians alone, but takes place in the daily praxis of the entire church, religious and lay believers. This is not a denial of the own specific role of the magisterium, and certainly should not amount to a 'democratization' of the church. But it should uphold the conviction that those believers who tend gardens, build bridges, sow crops, and care for children are practically discerning the Kingdom of God just as much as those who pray or study.

In the end, the most valuable gift this turn has to offer is its emphasis on the full *integral* truth of Christianity: God's grace is not merely important for an increasingly marginal sphere of our lives. Rather, the whole world is locus of God's grace. So in times of increasing marginalization, the church should not fearfully withdraw into its own private sphere nor let others define its boundaries. Rather, it should freely and boldly practice the gospel everywhere, be it in matters of environmental care, medical ethics, migration issues, or any other 'worldly affairs' that are in need of God's grace. Most importantly, it should constantly envisage itself as a *catholic* church: a church that is fundamentally oriented to the salvation of the *whole* world, no matter how small the number of its members and no matter how irrelevant to outsiders it may appear.

Des hommes et des dieux

Two images may help to visualize the promises and challenges of this turn to the church. The first image is derived from the 2010 film *Des hommes et des dieux*, directed by Xavier Beauvois, and is an example of how the turn to the church envisages the relationship between the church and the world.

Des hommes et des dieux recounts the true story of nine Cistercian monks who lived in Tibhirine during the Algerian civil war. It shows the Trappist community as it coexists peacefully with the neighboring Muslim village, until Islamist insurgents arrive after which seven of the nine monks are kidnapped and killed. The film uses long shots and the plot unravels rather slowly. Visually, a lot of attention is devoted to the differences between the lives of the monks outside and inside the monastery. Outside the monastery, the harmonious coexistence with the local Muslim village inhabitants is apparent. The monks serve the villagers, by running medical clinic and working the land together with the local farmers. The relationship is reciprocal in many ways: some villagers seem to be employed by the monastery, while the monks also participate in the Muslim population's religious festivals. At the same time, however, inside the monastery, the monks revive through the solemnity of the Christian liturgy, the brotherhood they experience, and the recognition that they have a common vocation to be loyal to that village no matter what it takes.

Earlier, we noted that the turn to the church is not simply a call for more visible or radical church practices, but primarily a call to return to the *heart* of the church. The underlying idea is that, unlike other groups and societies, the church's *raison d'être* is not tied to a principle that decides who belongs to the group and who does not. Rather, the heart of the church, its very being, is its dependence upon God's act of saving the world. As such its heart *is* a fundamental openness to the world. Any true participation in the church can thus never involve a rejection of the world, but must somehow embrace the world and as such participate in God's act of redemption. In the film, frère Luc's medical clinic provides an image of this participation

in God's action. His task is simply to serve the well-being and health of the village inhabitants. In a more general sense, the presence of the monks in the village functions similarly to the kind of participation in God's action that is envisaged here. By living there, the monks relate to the lives of the others, without any clear agenda or goal. Yet, the viewer is not left in any doubt that their presence is indeed a participation in God's act of redemption, and this is made particularly visible in how their final suffering and death at the hands of Islamist insurgents is portrayed. Some days before they are taken hostage and killed, they consciously choose to stay loyal to the locals rather than to escape back to Europe. Their passion and death is preceded by a climactic scene in which they solemnly drink wine together, with unmistakable and obvious cinematic references to the Eucharist and to Christ's last supper.

Our study of the turn to the church has also revealed that, even if the church exists for the sake of the world, it needs a formative praxis of its own. The church's praxis, it is argued, is crucial in teaching its members what it means that this world is in fact God's world. This teaching is not a theory but is first and foremost a way of life that has been shaped and handed down through the ages. Christians needs to immerse themselves in ecclesial praxis in order to acquire the necessary understanding. In the film, this is beautifully visualized through life in the monastery itself. To the viewer, it is clear that the monks find the spiritual nourishment and the fraternal correction they need to continue their vocation in the world in the liturgy, in their shared life, and in their individual study. In a way, it is through the explicitly Christian praxis inside the monastery that they are able to blur the boundaries between themselves and the 'others,' represented by the Muslim population, without giving up their own strong identity. This is an example of how the church's perspective on God, humanity, and the world cannot be acquired through text books or conscious reading of the catechism, but needs participation in a communal tradition that espouses this perspective. It needs participation in the liturgy, very eminently, where this perspective is received and celebrated, but also in everyday non-liturgical acts, such as is made visible in the scene in which the monks debate their different views as they wash the dishes.

The third point that the film makes visible is the idea that, even if the praxis of the church is necessary to correctly grasp the ultimate truth of the world, this does not mean that the church already possesses the full understanding of this truth. The praxis of the church is not only formative, but also *creative*. We have seen that the theologians who turn to the church envisage a church that is receptive and creatively discerning and that seeks to increase its understanding of the truth and the meaning of the gospel. In the film, the relationship of the monks with the locals is portrayed as reciprocal and respectful. Locals assist the monks in repairing the community's car, monks visit a young boy's circumcision celebration. Such relationships surely require discernment and creativity. We can imagine how the monks must have negotiated with themselves whether or not to

participate in explicitly Muslim festivals, for example. Explicit discernment is also visualized through the study and appreciation of the Quran by the prior Christian; and the film extensively shows the process of discernment that the monks require to decide whether they will stay or escape from the dangerous situation in the Algerian civil war; a process in which they also weigh the needs of the local community. The monastery of Tibhirine as portrayed in the film shows that a strong and countercultural group identity does not necessarily lead to a defensive attitude, and can in fact be indispensable if a true dialogue with other perspectives is to be fostered.

These three points make the monastery of Tibhirine as portrayed in this film a good example of the kind of church envisaged in the contemporary turn to the church. Just as the monks of Tibhirine form a small minority amid a Muslim population, the church in the West will soon be a minority. And just as the monks found a way to be a strong group with its own identity which they use to engage with their context, the turn to the church advocates a double movement of distinctiveness and engagement with the context. In a way, the monastery offers a structure not entirely unlike that of a ghetto or a sect: it offers its participants a strong praxis that encompasses their whole life, with strong bonds that hold them together. But unlike a ghetto or a sect, this strong and closed-off praxis revolves around a *centrifugal* vocation: to serve the world.

In a more practical fashion, the image of a monastery such as that of Tibhirine helps us to reflect on the variety of shapes that the church can take in different circumstances. For example, it shows that the traditional parish structure of the church is not all there is. Parishes seem to exist primarily for their own sake: parishioners are a flock to their pastors. In this context, mission is an activity that takes place outside the flock, aimed at finding new 'sheep.' In the case of the monastery of Tibhirine, the boundaries are blurry. Who belongs to the monks' flock? The monks seem to treat the local Muslim population as somehow constituting 'their' flock, even though the villagers themselves probably do not share this view. In a profound way, the monks engage in missionary activity, but this mission is not understood merely as a search for new converts. Part of the mission is simply to be present, to serve, and to listen to the local population, to honor their religion, and to live – and die – among them just as Christ did with his people.

In short, the image of the monastery of Tibhirine can help to understand what the protagonists of the turn to the church so strongly argue: that the church consists of *des hommes*, to the extent that its fate is irrevocably tied to that of humanity, but it also consists of *des dieux*, because precisely when it shares in the fate of humanity it participates in a fully divine mission.

Of Monasteries and Field Hospitals

There is nothing new in using the image of a monastery to offer a vision of the church as a whole. In fact, monastic life in various forms has become

a popular notion in debates on the future of the church. Thus there is the so-called New Monasticism,[4] a popular movement in which church renewal is sought by embracing a religious and contemplative communal lifestyle; or communities such as those of the Catholic Workers and Jean Vanier's *L'Arche*, for whom traditional monasticism is an explicit source of inspiration.[5] In many cases, the image of the monastery stands for the desire for a more countercultural church, a church in which the 'otherness' of the Christian praxis is more visible. Sometimes, for example in the case of Rod Dreher's pessimistic book *The Benedict Option*,[6] it also stands for a desire to retreat from the disappointing modern world. These various desires are certainly not absent in the turn to the church as we have studied it. Yet, if the present study has shown one thing, it is that the image of a monastery must never function to urge the church to confine itself within its own sphere and to escape the world. Ultimately, the church cannot retreat into its own purely religious sphere without fundamentally harming its mission. On the contrary, if the church were to forget the world, it would lose its essence.

In this light, the popular image of the monastery should be counterbalanced by a second image. Pope Francis has famously claimed that

> the thing the church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful; it needs nearness, proximity. I see the church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds.[7]

Symbolically, a field hospital seems to be the opposite of a monastery: it is ad hoc, flexible, on the move, and its staff is unconcerned about the tidiness of its own operations but always seeking ways to treat the severest wounds of every new patient. Whereas the symbol of a monastery brings to mind quiet contemplation, permanent formation, uniformity, stability, and distance from worldly affairs, a field hospital evokes images of frantic activity, constant coordination, flexibility, improvisation, and close proximity to worldly affairs.

As such, the image of a field hospital can shed light on a number of aspects of the turn to the church that might be more easily forgotten if the monastic ideal is the only image used. For example, a field hospital functions in the midst of the world, separated from the world not by thick walls but by loose canvas. As an image of the church, it can reveal that the church is distinct from the world in the role it has to play, but it shares with the world the dynamic historical and cultural context. Moreover, a field hospital is not exclusively oriented toward the wellbeing of its own members: rather, it seeks to heal all injuries. In a similar fashion, the turn to the church encourages theology to understand the church not as being exclusively oriented toward the salvation of its own believers, but rather as participating in God's attempt to save all human beings.

Most importantly, a field hospital in the midst of a battle witnesses to the possibility of an alternative praxis. It does not explicitly discuss questions of war and peace, and its doctors and nurses may even share thoughts of violence with the soldiers in the fight outside, combating the enemy. Yet, through its praxis alone it reveals that maiming and killing are not the only available options for action: people can perform surgery, offer consolation, care for each other. Moreover, it does not witness to this alternative praxis by isolating itself from its context, but rather by fully immersing itself in it. As such, a field hospital is more obviously defined by the 'outside' than a monastery: it offers a temporary refuge from battle, it heals injuries that have been sustained outside, and as such its presence only makes sense as long as the battle is raging. Yet, a field hospital is countercultural precisely by being 'in the world': its healing praxis runs counter to the violent forces that surround it. As such, the image of a field hospital can help to prevent a certain extrinsicism in which the essence of the church is located in a realm separate from everyday life in the world.

So while the image of a monastery represents a return to the church's own essence, the image of the field hospital represents a return to the church's role in the world. It is important to note, however, that these two images do not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, our study has clearly shown that these two moments, both a return to the essence of the church and a return to the world, *cannot* ultimately clash with each other. For when the church truly returns to its own praxis, when it again contemplates the deepest Christocentric meaning of its divine liturgy, and when it assists its participants in being formed accordingly, the whole world returns to sight, now understood, in the light of its final *telos,* as the redeemed creation of God.

It does not take a prophet to foresee that the near future of the Western church will no longer be marked by a strongly hierarchical parish life that encompasses all facets of life. But the images of the monastery and the field hospital can suggest ways to proceed into the future. Just like monasteries and field hospitals, small local groups may be able to sustain the praxis needed to keep witnessing to Christ, whether in new forms of communities or in more traditional parish structures. If these groups are indeed viable, this study suggests that the specific challenges of the church in the West – its pluralism, its cultural and numerical decline, its loss of power – can be reinterpreted as potential blessings in disguise. The challenge of pluralism and the final demise of a homogeneously Christian culture in which Christianity is taken for granted may offer the church the possibility to rediscover the value of a broad catholicity in which harmonious unity is recognized even when there is no uniformity. The *cultural* decline of Western Christianity may enable the church to rediscover a Christian culture that has old and new traditions, that has cast off the dead weight of the majority church of the past but yet thrives on the rich soil of its legacy. The *numerical* decline of Christianity may offer the church the possibility to rediscover the theological value of all that is not church, the world as it

appears in all its splendor when viewed through the lens of ecclesial praxis. Only time will tell what such a perspective can contribute to the pressing questions of justice, equality or ecology, to name just a few contemporary challenges. Finally, the obviously marginal position of the church can be an opportunity to rediscover a properly Christian attitude toward power and self-preservation.

Of course, these possibilities also constitute the difficult challenges of the ecclesial future. A new shape of the church will not suddenly resolve all these questions, because while the church has caught a glimpse of the final *telos* of the world, it has not yet received the whole truth. Just like the theologians who turned to the church, we should understand that the church is not the Kingdom in its glory, but rather the divinely-led practical imagination of that Kingdom in history. In other words, the church of tomorrow will be in need of Spirit-led creativity and discernment no less than the church of today, and the church of tomorrow will probably fail as often as the church of today. This should not dishearten us. The theologians in this study have each argued for ways into the future. Their most important contribution, however, lies not in the detailed route that they have outlined. It lies in their insistence that the church is a witness to something greater than itself, witness to a history in which it is not the church, but God himself who creates and redeems the world.

Notes

1 TST, 388
2 See page 157.
3 See Emmanuel Katongole, esp. *The Sacrifice of Africa: a Political Theology for Africa*, Grand Rapids (MI), 2011; *Born from Lament: the Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*, Grand Rapids (MI), 2017.
4 See for instance: J.R. Wilson-Hartgrove, *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005).
5 Stanley Hauerwas and Jean Vanier, *Living Gently in a Violent World: The Prophetic Witness of Weakness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 57.
6 Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (Penguin Books, 2017). Dreher derives the theme of monasticism as the solution for Western civilization from the work of MacIntyre, who famously ended his *After Virtue* with the words that the West is "waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict." in: Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1984), 263. It is clear, however, that Dreher's apocalyptic vision of the church and Western civilization generally does not correspond with MacIntyre's ideas.
7 Antonio Spadaro, "A Big Heart Open to God: An Interview with Pope Francis," *America: The Jesuit Review*, September 30, 2013, https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2013/09/30/big-heart-open-god-interview-pope-francis.

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