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# **Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church**

Edited by  
Staf Hellemans & Peter Jonkers

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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**Introduction**  
**Reforming the Catholic Church**  
**beyond Vatican II<sup>1</sup>**

STAF HELLEMANS & PETER JONKERS

In the last decades, the Catholic Church<sup>2</sup> in Western societies has changed beyond recognition. It is no longer a powerful ‘encompassing institution’, keeping watch over a ‘faithful flock’, but has become a contested minority institution in a turbulent and competitive field. This means that the Catholic Church has to cater to a public since people know that they can always turn away when they lose interest – and this also holds for those who are heavily committed, such as youngsters joining new ecclesial movements or even the priesthood.<sup>3</sup> In this radically new context, at least three fundamental questions crop up: 1) How can the Catholic Church mediate Christ as the ‘light of the nations’ (*Lumen Gentium*) to today’s world? 2) What (new) orientations can theology and theologians offer in this respect? 3) How can the internal organization of the Church be put to good use, so that it can respond constructively to this new context? These three questions define the contents of this book and its arrangement. Given that the situation of the Church in Western societies differs substantially from that in the non-Western world, and given that the cultural and religious background of the contributors to this volume is a Western one, these questions will be answered mainly from the perspective of the Church in the West.

That the Church in the West is confronted with a radically new reality is the baseline of this book. It is reflected in two derived considerations. First, though it is legitimate to use the label ‘seekers’ to identify an important religious attitude of today’s people inside as well as outside the churches, one has to keep in mind that the non-active seekers and the religiously indifferent constitute the overall majority of the population in many Western countries, and their share is still growing. The spiritual foundation on which the Catholic Church can build its religious offer is, hence, much shakier than many theologians and church leaders think. This

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<sup>1</sup> The editors wish to thank Erik Buster for his assistance in editing this volume.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the book, ‘church’ written in lowercase will refer to a church or churches in general; ‘Church’ in uppercase will typically, but with a few exceptions refer to the Roman Catholic Church. Word groups with church, such as church leadership, will always be written in lowercase.

<sup>3</sup> Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015).

means that a popular view to envision the future of the Church, namely, that the great religions would be able to inspire most people to make the transition from their vague religious and spiritual experiences towards faith in vertical transcendence and to transform their lives accordingly, is overly optimistic, at least as far as Europe is concerned.<sup>4</sup> The societal context in which the Church has to develop and promote its views and religious offer has become far less receptive to its message. Moreover, the religious field is pluralizing and is also dissolving into a wider sphere of well-being, happiness, and consumption. When people define themselves as ‘religious or spiritual’, they typically refer to an ever-widening sphere of interest in which Christian faith only plays a minor role. This sphere ranges from traditional Christian and non-Christian religions (e.g., Zen-meditation) to so-called new religions and spiritualities, such as yoga, New Age, neo-paganism, fiction-based religion, and to psycho-therapeutic techniques, wellness centers, music festivals, etc.

Second, and moving to Catholicism proper, most theologians and church leaders still consider the spiritual and intellectual legacy of Vatican II as paradigmatic when it comes to understanding the relations between Church and society in our times. Yet, while Vatican II indeed brought about a major change in the relation of the Church towards the world, marking the start of a fundamentally positive attitude towards contemporary society, the latter, for its part, appears to be less and less interested in the message of the Church. This evolution has been so pervasive that leading social scientists speak of an ‘exculturation’ of Christian faith, especially in Western Europe.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, as Danièle Hervieu-Léger also remarked, the end of one specific form of Catholicism does not mean *ipso facto* the end of Catholicism as such.<sup>6</sup> What the societal developments show in all clarity is the urgent need for the Church to find new ways to make its voice heard in the world of today. This is why we asked the theological contributors to this volume

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 510.

<sup>5</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that “the exculturation of Catholicism as a global historical matrix of French culture seems more and more evident.” Yet, many researchers think that this aspect of the French situation is paradigmatic for all West-European countries. See: Danièle Hervieu-Léger, Mapping the Contemporary Forms of Catholic Religiosity. In: Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George McLean (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age (Christian Philosophical Studies I)* (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 34. More extensively, Idem, *Catholicisme, la fin d’un monde* (Paris: Bayard, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> “La fin d’un monde n’est pas forcément la fin du monde” in *Ibid.*, p. 325.

not to look backwards to Vatican II and its implementation but, rather, to look forward, in particular to analyze some important post-Vatican developments in the Church and the world, and to explore new ideas to engage with them. The Catholic Church only has a future if it finds new ways to relate to the world, no longer from a privileged majority position from which a whole world is led – even if this Catholic world proved to be a subculture – but as a minority group that can only reach people tentatively, with an inspiring offer that can nevertheless be rejected. Furthermore, we – as authors – have to avoid ‘ought’-perspectives that remain in the abstract, i.e., perspectives that one-sidedly emphasize either the shortcomings of the present in comparison to the past (‘the golden past fallacy’) or the fertile lands of the future that lie ahead if a particular church policy were to be implemented (‘the golden future fallacy’). Instead, we need to start from the challenges with which the Church is currently confronted and ask ourselves which feasible paths the Church could take, so that it can continue to unlock the promising prospect of God’s eternal bliss to the world.

### Mediating the Christian message

The leading question of the first part of this volume is to find new ways for the Church to mediate Christ as ‘*lumen gentium*’ in today’s secular society. According to the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the mission of the Church is to bring the light of Christ to all people.<sup>7</sup> At the time of the Council, most faithful and the ecclesiastical hierarchy were convinced that the Church, in fulfilling this mediating role, could count on a congenial society, which would welcome the message of the Church and even accept the Church as a prime actor in society. However, in today’s secular society, most people tend to ignore the light of Christ, and certainly do not perceive the Church as the instrument to spread this light over the nations. So, the congenial relationship between Church and society has been broken and has become a contingent one.<sup>8</sup> On the collective

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<sup>7</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964).

<sup>8</sup> The disjunction between Church and world constituted the basic perspective of the project of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, directed by George McLean, Jose Casanova and George Taylor. The project engaged between 2010 and 2016 scholars from all over the Western world, working in about 20 teams. See the initiating volume Taylor, Casanova, and McLean (eds.), *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, and the concluding volume Charles Taylor, José Casanova, Georg F. McLean, and João J. Vila-Chã (eds.), *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue & Kenotic Vision*

level, it has become more difficult both to identify the actors – in the church and in society – who have to perform the mediation as well as the ways in which the mediation can and should be performed. On the individual level, the broken relationship between Church and world is even more obvious, as the latter's alienation from the Church and its hierarchy is widespread.

Since the role of the Church as mediator between Christ and the world has become more complicated and fragile, the question is how this mediation can be performed under the current circumstances. In the first part of this book, three perspectives on how the Church can mediate Christian faith with the contemporary world are spelled out: the interpretation of Christian faith as an exemplification of individual fulfillment without yielding to the temptation of individualism (Halik); the presentation to the public of a fitting and enticing religious offer (Hellemans); and the revaluation of Christian wisdom as a response to the general need for life-orientation (Jonkers). The question of the mediation between ordinary Catholics and the church hierarchy reappears in almost every chapter of this book, most clearly in the call to enhance the participation and impact of the laity in the Church. Nick Healey, for example, pleads for the incorporation of the 'theology of the ordinary faithful', including the distant Catholics, into the life of the Church, next to institutional and academic theology; Matthias Sellmann stresses the importance of stronger participatory structures of decision-making and involvement; Massimo Faggioli sees the Church as a 'communio fidelium' that finds its first expression in the 'communio ecclesiarum'.

But let us return to the chapters of the first part. In our individualized society where people are, almost instinctively, suspicious of institutional claims of subservience and obedience, the Catholic Church must prove that following Christ brings one nearer to the fullness of life, in particular of one's personal life. In practice, people, irrespective of their traditionalist or liberal views, are already following their particular paths. Today, leading a religious life has become an individual life project, i.e., expressing (inadvertently) the trends towards individualization in society. However, living religiously also means be willing to (partially) overcome the individualistic and self-centered consequences of this societal trend. Czech sociologist and theologian Tomas Halik (Charles University, Prague) takes on this tension. He shows how faith as a personal response to God's call has always, i.e., from the beginning and throughout history, constituted the very heart of and driving force behind Judaism and

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(Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), in particular the chapters by McLean and Taylor.



Christianity. This is exemplified by the option of the Hebrew prophets for the poor and the struggle for social justice over the temple cult, in Paul's opposition against the religion of the Law, in the fact that monks, saints, mystics, and heretics were offering alternatives to imperial Christianity, in the opposition of the Protestants against the vagueness of a general religiosity, in Kierkegaard's existential interpretation of faith, and in the welcoming of secularization by some theologians and philosophers as a preparatory step for a kenotic Christianity. They all demonstrate that religious life as an individual life project cannot be regarded solely as the result of the individualism of modernity, but rather as the outcome of the tension between individual 'faith' and collective 'religion' in the history of Christianity. It has thus to be welcomed as a positive force. At the same time, the examples of Christian social thought, the presence of God in interpersonal relations, the solidarity with the spiritually and socially abandoned, and the idea of an 'open church' also show that Christianity has always stressed that the individualizing force of 'faith' is not to be interpreted in an individualistic way since Christian faith also encompasses the other; in particular, it means solidarity with and empathy for the marginalized. Of special interest in this context are the attempts of the Church to accompany the religious seekers in a spirit of dialogue, mutual respect, and enrichment. Halik thus maintains that Christianity has always been sensitive to individual cravings for the Holy. He concludes that the contemporary search for individual fulfillment is at the heart of Christianity; yet what is also needed is a renewal of spirituality, emerging from charismatic figures and small communities in the forging of the modern critique of religion.

However, when the Church states that a person, by living religiously, leads a more fulfilled life, it needs convincing exemplars and pathways to which it can refer when communicating with the wider public. In order for such statements to be effective, the connection between Christianity and individual fulfillment has to be translated into an offer that is in principle attractive to contemporary society at large. Religious virtuosos may carve out their own, singular Christian path towards fulfillment, but ordinary people need an appealing offer within reach. And here arises, according to Belgian sociologist of religion Staf Hellemans (Tilburg University), a major problem. Between 1800 and 1960, the Catholic Church had an extensive offer for the ordinary faithful: sacraments and sacramentals, processions and pilgrimages, daily prayers, devotional sodalities, religious feasts marking the calendar, religious education, health care and, last but not least, social and cultural organizations of all kinds. Most of this has disappeared by now or still exists in a more church-independent way (e.g., health care or youth organizations). Where the old offer is still present and

church-near, it is appealing only to a smaller section of the population. A new offer has come to replace the old one, yet in less extensive and less appealing ways. The dearth of the existing offer in many places and the inability to present an equally appealing new one goes a long way in explaining the decline of the Catholic Church in the West since about 1960. Consequently, its relevance as mediator of the Holy is at stake.

If the Catholic Church wants to avoid further and enduring institutional decline in the future, it will have to devise an appealing and fitting new and renewed religious offer. Its elaboration and spread need far more deliberate attention and effort than what the Church – especially its hierarchy – has been investing in so far. Moreover, the renewal of the religious offer is not a one-off initiative but requires a continuous updating of its contents and a re-committing of those involved. In order to realize this, it is necessary to establish institutional provisions on the higher levels of the Church (diocese, province, and world church). Pastoral centers at these various levels should take stock of the existing initiatives and evaluate them, devise new initiatives and, if these prove to be successful, disseminate them. A further requirement for a successful renewal of the religious offer is the inversion of the relationship between clergy and lay faithful: the clergy should perceive itself as being in the service of the lay people, not the other way around. Among other things, this implies that the Church accepts that people pick and choose from the religious offer what they find most appealing, while leaving other, less appealing elements aside. In this respect, insisting on orthodoxy and on a total embrace of Catholic doctrine seems counterproductive. Hence, it is advisable not to distinguish sharply between the Catholic in-crowd and the outsiders, but to reach out to society at large since the dividing lines between these two categories have become more blurred. Finally, one has to keep in mind that the renewal of the Church's offer does not at all mean a narrowing down to one type of activity. Rather, all sorts of initiatives, conservative and liberal, demanding and undemanding, for the religiously lukewarm as well as for the virtuosi are needed and should be welcomed.

Closely related to the availability of a fitting religious offer is the question of how the Church can mediate its interpretation of the Holy to society at large. Traditionally, and in particular in the heyday of ultramontane mass Catholicism,<sup>9</sup> doctrinal and moral principles were seen to

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<sup>9</sup> This kind of Catholicism predominated in Europe after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era until the first half of the twentieth century. It was a staunchly conservative Catholicism yet steeped in modernity. It can be qualified as ultramontane since Catholics did not consider the local or national authorities as their real leaders but, rather, the Pope, who lived in Rome ('beyond the Alps').

constitute the essence of Christian faith. The local clergy in the parishes elaborated this doctrinal and moral framework further into a wide-ranging gamma of detailed prescriptions as day-to-day guidelines for a Catholic life. However, in our times of expressive individualism, many people perceive these principles and prescriptions as rather abstract, not resonating at all in their inner selves, so that these principles are at odds with people's view of what it concretely takes to lead a truly fulfilling life. This is why many aspects of Christian doctrine have lost their relevance in our times, especially for the religiously marginal and secular. Yet, in these times of radical pluralism, all people, irrespective of whether they are religious or not, are in need of a truthful orientation in life and, consequently, are interested in how Christian faith puts this into practice. What they are asking for is not so much a load of prescriptions, but rather advice and guidance for finding their individual way to live the Gospel authentically. This points again to the need of translating and even re-focusing institutional theology in order to respond to people's cravings. According to Dutch philosopher Peter Jonkers (Tilburg University), Christian wisdom as a life-orientating tradition and activity is an example of such a re-focusing. As is commonly known, wisdom has always been part and parcel of the Christian tradition: one only needs to think of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, the sayings of Jesus and the life stories of people who follow his example, or the wisdom embedded in pastoral counseling in our times. Two questions can be asked in this respect: Where shall (true) wisdom be found and how can it be distinguished from seeming wisdom? How can the transition from Christian wisdom to the concrete reality of religious people be made in practice?

In reply to the first question, Jonkers states that characteristic of Christian wisdom is that it is God-centered, has the whole of creation as its context, is immersed in history and the contemporary world, and is constantly sought afresh with others in a community whose basic trust is that the Spirit will lead them into further truth. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God's only son, they believe that he is not only a teacher of divine wisdom but is to be regarded also as wisdom incarnate. Hence, Christian wisdom not only consists in letting one's life be oriented by

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It was a mass Catholicism since the Church turned itself, during the nineteenth century, into a highly centralized mass organization, independent of the state, and capable of integrating and mobilizing its flock. See Staf Hellemans, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," in *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity. Transformations, Visions, Tensions*, Staf Hellemans and Jozef Wissink (eds.) (Vienna: Lit-Verlag, 2012), in particular pp. 21-23.

Jesus' example, but also in believing that the final end of life is a life *in* Christ. In reply to the second, practical question, (Christian) wisdom involves the capacity for discerning the right rule in difficult situations requiring action. The exercise of this virtue is inseparable from the personal quality of the wise human being. The need for practical wisdom arises when the universalism that is claimed by moral principles is confronted with the recognition of the positive values belonging to the (particular) historical and communitarian contexts in which these same rules have to be realized. This means that the practical competence of (Christian) wisdom is fragile, always open to reconsideration. Furthermore, it can never propose, let alone impose, one single response to people's quest for a truthful life orientation. According to Jonkers, Catholic social teaching is an exemplar of these two aspects of Christian wisdom since it aims at actualizing the fundamental (Christian) value of justice in the lives of societies here and now, not so much by opting for a uniform top down model but, rather, for a dialogue with those who take the Church's moral guidelines to heart and look for ways to put them into practice in diverging societal contexts.

### **Theologizing the New Realities**

The second part of the book addresses theology. As already noted above, Vatican II was surely a landmark for the Church and it remains an indispensable reference point. Nevertheless, Church and society have changed so dramatically since the end of Vatican II that theology needs to explore new avenues as to how the Church can fulfill its mediating role in today's world. We have asked the contributors to address three major challenges, and their responses take theology definitely beyond Vatican II: 1) the challenge that is posed by the rise of internal pluralism within the Church (Murray); 2) the challenge of the globalization of Christianity and its meaning for re-imagining the content of the Christian faith (Rahner); 3) the challenge of finding a new place and dynamics for theology in a church, in which the hierarchy (from the level of the local clergy up to the Pope) is regarded with less deference, the prestige of refined theological argumentation has lowered, and the laity has become more self-confident and, in part, dissenting (Healy).

These are, essentially, new topics. Internal pluralism, in the last two centuries, always caused unease. It was seen as an evil or, at least, as a temporary condition that would eventually be superseded in an encompassing unity, conceived along the lines of Saint Paul's image of Christ's body. Because this way of dealing with internal pluralism was still paradigmatic until the 1960s, there was no need for the Council to discuss

its more radical manifestations. Since then, it has become apparent that increased internal pluralism is here to stay. One of the characteristics of late modernity is that it enhances various kinds of pluralism, including in the life of the Church. Furthermore, the (internal) pluralism of the Church is a heterogeneous reality, and its elements cannot be lumped together into a sort of ‘pre-established harmony’ view. Differences and clashes between opposing positions are frequent, for example, on access to priesthood, moral issues, and interpretations of dogma. Moreover, the challenges linked with the plea for liturgical pluralism differ from those surrounding doctrinal or moral pluralism, and these two are quite distinct from the thorny questions concerning pluralism of the church organization.

Second, and in close connection with the previous point, the Church has to deal with the challenges of globalization. These were discussed at the Second Vatican Council since, already in those days, there was a growing awareness that the world was becoming one, and that positive or negative developments in one part of the world had a major impact on other parts. However, the way to address the challenge of globalization has since changed. The optimistic overtones are gone because what was the leading narrative of globalization then eventually turned out to be too Euro- and Western-centric, thus oppressing alternative narratives.

Finally, the role of theology has changed beyond recognition after the Vatican Council by which time the limits of Neo-Thomist theology, which used to form the backbone of the study programs of seminaries around the world, had become clear: it was incompatible with the more biblically and hermeneutically inspired type of theology that came into vogue in the 1960s and has remained since.<sup>10</sup> Theology also pluralized and became more critical of magisterial teachings. In a similar vein, the organization of the training of the clergy underwent a major change: it moved (also physically) from the walled premises of seminaries and study houses of religious orders and congregations to the ivory towers of the academy; the study of theology was not reserved anymore to (male) seminarians, but was opened to lay people, including women. Directly or indirectly, these changes in the content and organization of theological education have had an enormous impact on the place and role of theology in the Church.

With regard to the first question, in a time of growing pluralism inside the Catholic Church and of the globalization of Christianity, it is imperative, beyond the issues of ecumenism and of external religious pluralism,

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<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of the problems of Neo-Thomism for philosophical and fundamental theology, see Peter Jonkers, “From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom,” in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.), pp. 170-172.

to develop a theology of internal religious pluralism, thereby taking the sensitivities of non-Western Catholic communities seriously and integrating the insights of non-Western theologians. Can a frame of reference be elaborated that can orient liberals and conservatives to remain on speaking terms with each other and to move forward in and with the Church?

Taking catholicity as his central concept, English systematic theologian Paul D. Murray (Durham University) presents such a frame. In the last decades, and in particular from an ecumenical perspective, catholicity has become a popular concept to reflect on the greater ecclesial setting in which all the Christian churches are embedded – starting from ‘the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church’ in the creed. Murray, who is well versed in ecumenical theology (cf. his ‘receptive ecumenism’), applies catholicity here as a central resource to develop a systematic theology of intra-Catholic diversity, of pluralism within the Roman Catholic Church. He unfolds his ideas in five sections. In the first section, the *pièce de résistance*, he explains the concept of catholicity: how it demands a combination of universality and plurality, of identity and contextual specificity. Catholicity derives from the Greek ‘kath’holou’, ‘according to the whole’. It was already used in the early Church and has two interconnected layers of meaning: the universal character and mission of the Church and its being rooted in the fullness of God, in particular in Christ as the universal particular and in the Spirit. Murray stresses that the spatio-temporal dimension of catholicity should not be interpreted as uniformity imposed from above by a church institution, but as embodying both universality and particularity. Like creation is from the outset plural, so is the Church. And this plurality not only incorporates the many local cultures and local churches, it also reaches much deeper, right into the unique ‘inscape’ (Gerard Manley Hopkins) or ‘haecceitas’ (Duns Scotus) of each particular thing and of each individual human being. Thomas Merton is cited here approvingly: “Therefore each particular being in its individuality...gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now.” Murray concludes that the recognition of this far deeper plurality-in-unity – the total gathering of each and every one of these particulars in communion – should be the starting point for thinking and living internal pluralism within the Church.

In the other four sections, Murray explains what it takes to realize and live this idea of plural catholicity in practice. In the second section, he discusses Johann Adam Möhler’s seminal *Unity in the Church* (1825), from which basic principles for dealing with diversity are derived, such as that proper Catholic unity should be regarded as dynamic and inclusive and that dissonant voices are to be approached as containing possibly partial truths. In the third section, taking gay people in the Church as ex-

ample, the costs for dissenting voices in the Church – their compromised recognition as persons in official teaching and in churchly reality – are considered, resulting, in the fourth section, in recommendations for how the Church might become more fully Catholic (e.g., integrating all relevant parties into the deliberative decision making; taking time for learning and avoiding rushing into ‘definitive’ teachings; viewing dissent as normal and useful). Finally, living catholicity differently also demands a corresponding ethic for each church member, the heart of which is the virtue of active patience, in consonance with the self-giving of God. Yet, whether this is an acceptable sacrifice for those suffering is an issue only they can decide.

Looking back, it appears to us that Murray is advocating here the same, positive strategy for dealing with intra-ecclesial diversity as he has already proposed with regard to the diversity between Christian churches. Just as his idea of receptive ecumenism<sup>11</sup> wants to turn the diversity of churches into an opportunity – let’s not condemn them, but learn from them – his view on catholicity likewise aims to approach internal pluralism within the Church not as a danger to be eradicated, but as an open space that might help the Church to grow further into the plenitude of communion with God and, along the way, allow it also to remain relevant in today’s world.

The second challenge – the need for a less Eurocentric theology – has found a strong advocate in Pope Francis. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he argues:

[W]e would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous. [...] Hence in the evangelization of new cultures, or cultures which have not received the Christian message, it is not essential to impose a specific cultural form, no matter how beautiful or ancient it may be, together with the Gospel. The message that we proclaim always has a certain cultural dress, but we in the Church can sometimes fall into a needless hallowing of our own culture, and thus show more fanaticism than true evangelizing zeal.<sup>12</sup> [Instead], the ultimate aim should be that the

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<sup>11</sup> Paul D. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), No. 117.

Gospel, as preached in categories proper to each culture, will create a new synthesis with that particular culture.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the time seems ripe now to actually develop a broader theology.

German dogmatic theologian Johanna Rahner (Tübingen University), who takes up this challenge, states that in order to incorporate the change of perspective that is required by the very idea of a world church, the Church has to listen to some specific signs of the times, namely, those given by the non-Western churches. This acknowledgment implies that the Church has to accept the idea of an inner plurality of Catholicism. It is crucial that the Church incorporates this idea in its own ecclesiology, which, among other things, implies making it less Eurocentric, not only in theory, but also in practice. Pope Francis takes this challenge seriously by promoting a 'subsidiary' form of the office of the unity of the universal church, thus recognizing the importance of the periphery, and the necessity of pluralization, contextualization, and inculturation of what is Catholic. Yet, accepting internal pluralism is not only a matter of changing organizational structures, but requires also, and more importantly, an openness for different currents of thought, and, hence, of theology.

It goes without saying that accepting the challenge of internal pluralism and a less Eurocentric theology poses a number of new challenges for the Church. Nowadays, religious identities are construed from a mixture of sociological, political, and secondary religious points of difference, not from theological criteria. The consequence is that it is difficult to legitimize these criteria for internal pluralism, including theologies from non-Western shapes of Catholicism. Another challenge is finding the right balance between globalization and inculturation. As globalization refers primarily to the universalization of the Western cultural paradigm, the question is whether non-Western cultures and theologies are able to counterbalance this powerful trend; if not, globalization will eventually result in a homogenization or at least hybridization of non-Western theologies under a Western flag. A final challenge is the temptation of subjecting religion to a market strategy, which consists in accentuating the differences between the different (Christian) churches rather than pointing to their common ground in Christ. This can, indeed, result in specific non-Western theologies, but at the cost of unity in the Catholic Church.

Finally, Rahner defines some new tasks and chances for the Church. She urges the Church to go beyond its self-styling as a homogeneous unity and to conceive Catholicity rather as a project aimed at an inclusion of

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, No. 127



diversity. Second, she urges the Church to accept its 'placelessness', namely, a life in a permanent foreign land, an existence in exile, which corresponds to God's place in the world. Finally, as to the topic of a non- or less Eurocentric theology, the question arises of what can or should be preserved of Europe's rich theological heritage. For Rahner, one of the most important European theological 'heirlooms' that can legitimately claim universality is the ideal of the compatibility of faith and reason. Yet, just like with other essential aspects of the European theological heritage, this should not be thought of as a justification for hegemony over non-Western countries, but rather as a permanent task.

A third and final challenge for a theology beyond Vatican II is to re-define the place and significance of theology itself. At least in the heydays of Neo-Thomism, an institutionally dominated type of theology was at the center of Christian faith. It gave a theoretical underpinning to the doctrine of the Church, determined the practice/the life of the faithful, and defined the relation of the Church with the world. In particular, the papal magisterium emerged in the nineteenth century as the most decisive actor in the field and kept this role during a major part of the twentieth century, as is apparent from the number of encyclicals that were published in this period. Seminary and university theology were no less active, but their role was a subservient one, offering intellectual support to the magisterial teaching under whose close supervision they stood. This situation reflects the strengthening of the authority of the church hierarchy in those days. Tellingly, secular ideologies played a similar pivotal role in the theoretical underpinning of the life of the members in some political parties and organizations, the crucial role of party ideology and ideologues in communism being a case in point.

Although the priority of church theology over individual faith has always been a subject of fierce debate, it is nevertheless clear that, today, the trend is going in the opposite direction. This has to do with the typically postmodern aversion against all-encompassing theoretical underpinnings, whether religious or secular. If people are interested at all in the Christian faith, it is not for its refined theology; rather, it is because of the inspiration they find in biblical narratives, in the lives of outstanding religious individuals (officially canonized or not), in the mysterious contact with God that the sacraments and religious music arouse; in sum, in all kinds of experiences that go beyond theological conceptualization and justification. For many people, theology is only of interest if it helps them to understand the inspirational power of these experiences. This evolution can be illustrated by the fact that the elementary knowledge of the doctrine of the Church, even among committed faithful, is evaporating. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that theologians reflect on the

changing role of theology in the whole of the religious enterprise and in the Catholic Church in particular. How can theology change itself in order to prevent (further) isolation, to avoid remaining only a matter of the magisterium and professional theologians operating from behind the safe walls of the Vatican and the universities? In other words, one of the main challenges of theology today is to devise ways in order to integrate the doctrinal and moral insights of ordinary faithful into the teaching of the Church.

American ecclesiologist Nicholas M. Healy (St. John's University, New York) analyzes these changes starting from the idea that theology is performed in new and multiple ways. In particular, lay theology is new and it is both necessary and beneficial for the life of the Church and its mission to the world. To further develop the importance lay theology might have, Healy focusses on the place and contribution of what he calls 'New Catholics', people who regard themselves as Catholics but have an affective, cognitive, and/or practical critical distance from the church leadership's teaching because they judge that it has been confused and erroneous at times in the past. Therefore, they think they cannot in good conscience simply believe the leadership's teachings and follow its moral rules unquestioningly, but have to discern a response that seems right, at least for them and who they are and what they have experienced as a particular person or family.

In order to make room for lay theology, Healy pleads for redrawing the theological map as a three-dimensional space. There is, first, 'institutional theology', practiced by a few members of the church leadership, and enacted within a clerical-pastoral setting and set forth in institutional documents (conciliar statements and papal encyclicals). Second, there is 'academic theology', usually practiced by professionals who teach in universities and similar institutions, but whose influence within the Church is usually indirect. And third, there is 'ordinary theology', practiced by all Christians, sometimes alone, perhaps in prayer or reflection, or in the midst of everyday realities when a situation calls for a decision, or in discussions with family members or friends. Typically, and this is predominantly so for the New Catholics, they reflect before accepting, rejecting, or modifying a church teaching that seems problematic. This reflective character means that ordinary theology can and should be qualified as theology. Obviously, it may be confused, self-serving, or wrong from times to time, but so is institutional and academic theology.

Healy considers the theological contributions of the 'New Catholics' as a gift for the Church since they have sometimes discerned and avoided the mistakes of institutional theology (e.g., its tendency to reduce the lay form of the Christian life to little more than following a moral code and

adhering to a belief system), as well as those of academic theology (e.g., its tendency to reduce theology to a purely theoretical affair). Yet, institutional theology remains essential because an authoritative leadership is necessary in order to present the Church's teaching as sufficiently settled, reliable, and livable to form the basis for the faith and practice of all Catholics. Yet, at the same time, the authority of institutional theology is limited since it does not need to claim that its teaching is always and necessarily good and true. This implies that other theological practices – the academic and ordinary theologies – have an authority of their own, though only a 'local' one, as distinct from the church leadership's universal ('catholic') authority. Hence, they are authorized to dissent when a particular teaching of the leadership is regarded as mistaken or misleading. In sum, through his analysis of New Catholics and their ordinary theology, Healy underscores, from a different theological starting point than Murray, not only the legitimacy but even the necessity of internal pluralism within the Church. He places this pluralism in an overall pneumatological framework: the Spirit is leading the Church through a pneumatological tension that structures and guides the Church's life and mission.

### **Restructuring the Church**

Besides the above-mentioned dramatic changes in the relation between Church and (secular) society and in the nature of theology, the internal organization of the Catholic Church and its way of operating are also changing very rapidly: in most Western countries, the number of priests is dwindling, parishes are restructuring because of the lack of priests and faithful, while at the same time new movements and events (e.g., World Youth Days, papal visits) are on the rise, religious orders and congregations are needing to reconsider their place in the Church and society, there is a lot of talk about the urge to reform the Curia, etc. It is important to acknowledge that the whole Church, and not only the Vatican or the official Church at the local level, is involved in a process of profound change. Hence, reform of the Church is again on the agenda, in particular since the election of Pope Francis. However, it is not at all clear which direction(s) this reform will take.

Obviously, it is impossible to give a more or less complete overview of these changes in the Church, even if only changes in the developments since the beginning of this century and changes to the Church in the West were covered. It is even hard to discover a common trend in these changes since their nature and local settings differ so much. Furthermore, there is a lack of distance that is imperative in order to sketch these changes in some broad outlines. Therefore, the final part of this book proceeds

pragmatically, that is by presenting three different case-studies of change in the Church on three different levels. The first one is situated on a local level, examining what it takes to change the traditional, stable structure of territorial parishes into a local church as an array of initiatives (Sellmann). The second case-study deals with the completely new mindset and organizational structures that are needed to run a multicultural world church (Faggioli). The third case-study explores how religious orders and congregations are responding to the existential question of their need to reinvent themselves while remaining loyal to the ideals of their congregations (Radcliffe). The aim of this part is that, together, these case-studies give an idea of the complexity of these changes and the challenges they present for everyone involved in the Church, from the ordinary faithful to the church leadership.

The first profound change – with which all church members are confronted in their religious life – is their local parish. Once the basis of the whole church pyramid, the parish is now under considerable strain and change. The horizontal, territorial network of local parishes is making way for a conglomerate of diverse initiatives, carried by diverse agents (regional parishes, local lay groups, regional groups of ecclesial movements, diocesan initiative, etc.). Moreover, the laity is better educated and less submissive. All these developments raise the urgent question: What will the landscape of local churches look like in the near future? German pastoral theologian Matthias Sellmann (Bochum University) takes these profound changes as the starting point of his contribution. He examines the contours of a future-proof local church from an empirical and hermeneutical perspective by examining, among other things, the pastoral plans of local churches. Their capacity for change turns out to be very limited. Yet, change, based on an exchange with today's secular liberal societies, is urgently needed. This means, first of all, that the Church should not perceive secularity as a threat but, rather, as an opportunity to communicate its own convictions in such a way that they can be understood by today's people. The predominance of people's free religious self-determination especially requires major infrastructural changes from the local church as to its spatial organization, creative reception, participation, professionalism, and communication.

The intended result is a future-proof parish, operating as a thematic network, in which ecclesiastical and secular actors together forge temporary alliances in order to offer an attractive, diverse ensemble of religious practical and social forms. The underlying spatial concept here is not so much territorial as it is 'occasional', which means that communal utilization of space rather than pastoral spatial control or spatial care is the objective. The model requires further that a diversity of personal inter-

pretations of the Catholic tradition is not only tolerated on a parish level, but also promoted and strategically utilized. A third requirement is the promotion of participatory structures of decision-making and involvement because they are not only the litmus test for social acceptability of secular organizations, but also of religious ones. A fourth one is to develop a new kind of professional leadership that is able to make the change from ‘power’ to ‘authority’, and to support the change of the churches from ‘self-sufficient’ institutions to ‘customer-oriented’ organizations, without giving up their fundamental loyalty to their origins. Fifth, as providers of infrastructures for religious self-determination, religious organizations have to communicate in ways that are characterized by comprehensibility, truth, correctness, and authenticity. Sixth, local churches have to articulate their religious offer in a way that is attractive and inspiring. What is at stake here is not just *that* people wish to be religious, but also *how* they want to be religious, which means that individuals expect from local churches suggestions, examples, and space in order to discover specific ways to transcend themselves. Finally, in order to make sure that all these changes are not only proclaimed, but also realized, a concrete strategy of innovation is needed. Sellmann thus proposes a relational ecclesiology, which does not claim to be the focal point of its surroundings but, rather, reaches out in a ‘spatial turn’ to its surroundings.

Not only is the local level changing thoroughly and, hence, in need of reform, but this is also true for the governance of the world church. Since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a continuous debate on the role of the papacy, the Curia, and the involvement of the local bishops and local churches in the world church. Major variables have changed in the last fifty years: secularization and dissolution of the Catholic sub-societies in the West, the end of deference towards big institutions and their elites, a shift of the center of gravity of Catholicism towards non-Western churches, increasing internal pluralism, etc. Hence, a new vision on what it means to be a multicultural world church in times of globalization is required and, consequently, a reform of the organizational structures that are needed in order to run such a world church is also needed. In his contribution, Italian/American church historian Massimo Faggioli (Villanova University) starts with noting that the idea of change in the Church has long been under the umbrella of the stark contraposition of two ideal typical understandings of the Church, namely, ‘continuity and reform’ versus ‘discontinuity and rupture’. He argues that, since the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Francis, this contraposition has vanished from the horizon, as it has become clear that the real choice is between reform and restoration. In response to the new challenges that Catholicism is facing today, Pope Francis strives for a church governance in which the idea of

collegial-synodal process has priority over bureaucratic decision, spiritual discernment over magisterial authoritarianism, and open-ended thinking over the obsession about continuity as opposed to discontinuity.

The acknowledgment of the theological and institutional emergencies and the need for a new phase in the governance of the global Catholic Church require a new phase in the reflection of theologians. The attempt to re-inculturate the Catholic Church in a multicultural world must also be a re-inculturation of the Church from an institutional point of view. This is the reason for a new appraisal of the relationship between the potential of Vatican II and the needs of the governance of today's Church. First, there is the need for more synodality in the Church, which Faggioli regards as one of the long-term ecclesiological trajectories for the Catholic Church. This means that more lay faithful, in particular more women, should be in leadership positions, not only on the level of the universal church, but also on that of the local churches. Second, Faggioli is convinced that the turn to a global and multicultural Catholicism requires a rethinking of the modality of communion in the Church. It is clear that global Catholicism is going to remain a greatly diverse community of communions, all living in different juridical and political situations around the world. Hence, what becomes urgent is the rediscovery of the *communio ecclesiarum*, the horizontal communion between different local churches, as expression of the *communio fidelium* at the structural level. This is the ecclesiological side of the quest for a new balance between the necessary unity of the Church and the possible multiplicity and diversity of the local churches. This new emphasis on the *communio ecclesiarum* is now more important than ever, because it not only regards the turn of the Catholic Church towards the south, but also towards a world that is more urbanized than before. The new reality requires, third, a reform of the central government of the Church, followed by a new pattern of its relations with the geographical peripheries, in particular by strengthening the mid- or continental level of church authority. A consequence of this reform is, fourth, that the relationship between leadership and people in the Church has to be rebalanced. Leadership should not be marked by loyalty to the institutional status quo, but by its prophetic character, while the 'people' should be thought of as a theological idea rather than as a homogeneous, socially tangible reality.

Even more than diocesan priests, the number of religious men and women in religious orders and congregations is declining. A reversal of this trend is not to be expected, which prompts the question: Are there examples of religious orders that have proven to re-invent themselves on a much smaller scale and/or have gained a new significance for the faithful and society at large?

Who can better treat these questions than the former Master of the Dominicans, Timothy Radcliffe (Blackfriars, Oxford University)? Although he recognizes the steep decline in the number of male and especially female religious in the West, Radcliffe is not fundamentally pessimistic because the Church has an extraordinary talent for institutional creativity. Yet, at the same time, he realizes that a renaissance of religious life may take forms that we cannot now imagine. Therefore, he asks how religious are responding to the crisis of today. A first element is the need for good leadership: it must focus on vitalizing the mission of the community and try new forms of common life and mission while, at the same time, cherishing what has been done in the past, celebrating its achievements and commemorating the sacrifices that made them possible. A second element is identity: millennials interested in religious life seek a community with a clear identity that resonates with their own sense of identity. The religious identity of the future must be founded on their response to the Lord's summons, who calls each of them by name. A third element is to move beyond clericalism. Religious institutes need to reaffirm the value of the religious vocation as a distinct calling with its own dignity. Institutes of religious men which have become clericalized need to reclaim again their original identity. Orders whose founders were priests, should reaffirm the importance of the vocation within their fraternities of those not ordained. Instead of asking what the identity of a lay brother is in a clerical order, we must ask what the identity of a priest is in an order of friars, which is to say, brothers. A fourth element is the summons to adventure. Our society, obsessed with health and safety, is risk adverse. Do we have the courage to challenge the timidity of our culture and send our brothers and sisters on missions that may cost them much, even their lives? Religious life in the West will have a future if we dare to ask of the young more than they think that they have to give: "If a religious calling is not heroic, what is the point?" In relation to this, there is the importance of the vows. If the vows are defined so broadly that most Christians could be said to be living them, the distinctive identity of Catholic religious life is blurred. A final element is life in the community: a community will endure and flourish if it is unafraid to accompany its members in hope as they live through and beyond moments of crisis. Otherwise religious life will just be a place to pause in the endless search of somewhere to belong. Furthermore, religious communities need to relate themselves to the wider community, to lay associates in the immediate surroundings and to the Church as one Body of Christ in which all the parts play a significant role.

## Taking up the New Challenges

Our ambition with this book is not to present a blueprint of the future Church, nor a comprehensive road map towards that future. Rather, we want to identify some main reform areas that the Catholic Church needs to work on and to formulate some leading ideas that concretize the ways in which this reform can be undertaken. The overall goal of this book is to explore how the Church can remain – in conditions that have fundamentally changed – a vital church in the West. In our view, there are nine central issues that the Church needs to deal with, and we have organized them along three axes, constituting the three parts of the book. Of course, there are more issues that would have been worthwhile to discuss. Moreover, each author presents his or her analysis, ideas, and proposals to address these issues from his or her own socio-cultural and religious perspective. Therefore, it would be preposterous to try to press the contributions into an overall ecclesial futurology. Nevertheless, the general set-up of this book and its individual chapters do point, in our opinion, to two general conclusions: the need for the Church to reform, thereby taking into account that the nature of these reforms is itself a multiple one, and the need to go beyond Vatican II. These two conclusions are related: for the reforms to succeed, one needs to think and to comprehend the Church and the world as they actually are, which means that one has to go beyond Vatican II as the main interpretative scheme.

### *The Need for Multiple Reforms*

All the chapters express a need for reforms in the Church. Of course, the title and set-up of the book – ‘Envisioning Futures’ – are in themselves an invitation to bring up proposals for change. But there is more to it. At present, there is a greater sense of urgency and a positive mood for change in the Church, caused by the fact that the Church in many Western countries has shrunk so much that drastic reorganization – in terms of personnel, ecclesiastical organization, parishes – has become imperative. All the chapters in the book express the conviction that continuing to operate along the lines of the past, let alone trying to restore a supposedly glorious past, are not options any more. There is also an awareness, though not shared by everyone in the Church, that the strategy followed by Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI, consisting in redressing the Church from its liberal sliding in the 1960s and 1970s by strengthening the authority of the central magisterium, has reached a dead end. Finally, the election of Pope Francis has unleashed a new enthusiasm for reform.



It is no coincidence that the contributors to this book refer so often to Pope Francis as a wakeup call for reforming and re-centering the Church.

For some within the Church, the resurgence of the mood for reform raises expectations for an upcoming wholesale overhaul of the Church, aimed at completing the reforms that were envisaged in the years of the Council. Yet, the differences with these almost mythic times are great. The first half of the 1960s were the triumphant years of post-war liberal modernity in all Western countries. During this period, all segments of society, including the Church, were engaged in profound reforms, the direction of which seemed pretty clear. Moreover, there was an enormous general enthusiasm about the possibilities to (radically) change society, and this also affected the Council once it got underway. Even then, the proposed changes in the Church took major battles at the Council, although theology, in particular '*ressourcement*' theology, had already prepared the groundwork for a new, 'pastoral' perspective that guided the Council. In comparison to that triumphant period, none of the conditions that made overall change possible are fulfilled today. On the contrary, there is confusion and disagreement about the road the Church should take. There is neither a dominant nor promising alternative theology with enough authority to convince a broad majority of the bishops which reforms are imperative. In the West, the gap between Church and society has become, by now, unbridgeable. Finally, while in the 1960s convening a council proved to be an effective way to create cohesion between the different factions in the Church and to move forward, summoning a new council today would be no guarantee at all for reaching a lasting consensus, but would rather risk tearing the Church apart or to causing fateful paralysis.

Against this background, it is telling that, although the need for reforms is shared by all contributors to this book, none of them has put forward a grand strategy of renewal, just like no one thinks that a full-scale reform of the Church is under way. Instead, multiple pleas for renewal in all walks of life and of the Church are put forward. This is not only a consequence of the lack of a shared vision about the nature and the direction of the reforms that are needed but reflects also a growing awareness that the global character of the Catholic Church does not allow for a 'one size fits all approach' of reforms. Instead, this book offers diverse proposals for reforms in and of the Church, formulating multiple, but also piecemeal strategies for reform and procedures for forceful, yet incremental change. Yet the ambition that unites all the contributions to this book is the plea for a non-hostile climate of reforms and experiments, thereby accepting that what proves to be fruitful in one region or branch

of the Church may not work in another one. Moreover, all contributions express the desire to restore the relevance of the Church for today's world.

Whether the mood for reforms will persist in the years to come is, though, far from sure. It can wither away with the election of the successor(s) of Pope Francis and/or because of a heightening of the polarization between factions in the Church. Behind this prospect lurks the more fundamental question of whether the Catholic Church will be able, in the long run, to generate enough consensus to direct and manage piecemeal and multiple change. The alternative is that the Church will gradually slide into internecine conflict and stagnation due to its incapacity to deal in a fruitful way with the increased internal pluralism combined with the diminished authority of the church hierarchy. The past decades do not bode well in this regard. What gives us hope is that the Church is no exception in comparison to society as a whole in this process of renewal: nowadays, all institutions have to change, if only because they have to respond to the myriad of new challenges they are confronted with in today's fast-changing society. Moreover, what has also changed in all segments of society is the rising variety of possible responses to these challenges. The traditional opposition between conservative versus liberal is only a scheme that hides a far greater variety. All institutions have thus to invest not only in elaborating their options of how to respond to these new challenges, but above all, in implementing these reforms in everyday life and convincing their adherents or members that these reforms are imperative. In sum, as the example of states and major international organizations that are dependent on their constituency show, problems in responding effectively to the need for change and to implement reforms are not unique for the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, only institutions that succeed in managing change effectively and implementing fitting reforms will thrive.

### *The Need to Go beyond Vatican II*

The discussion about the legacy of Vatican II is extraordinarily wide-ranging and still going on in full vigor.<sup>14</sup> That, in itself, is an astonishing fact and it is also visible in this book. Most chapters refer, often extensively, to the documents of Vatican II and invoke its spirit. These chapters can be read as testimonies of the greatness and the continuing relevance of the Council. Yet, time has moved on, and this requires a different reading of the signs of the times. The beginning of the twenty-first century

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<sup>14</sup> For an overview, see Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (New York: Paulist Press, 2012).

differs profoundly from the early 1960s. It would be wrong to approach the challenges of the Church today primarily with the help of the theological ideas that were laid down in the documents of the Council, as well as to interpret today's society exclusively through the perspective of Vatican II. Instead, one needs to dare to think and act 'beyond Vatican II'!

The urgency to envision futures for the Church, starting from the current state of church and society, was our main drive in setting up this book. The changes in society and the Church since the early 1960s are huge. First of all, the Church has changed thoroughly. In many parts of Europe, it has become a minority church with few priests, it has been driven back and/or withdrawn from most secular realms, and it is experiencing a power reversal between the clergy and the faithful. Event religion is on the rise to the detriment of standard religion in the parish. Society, for its part, has changed no less, as becomes apparent from the rise of expressive individualism, self-determination, pluralization, new patterns of partnership and marriage, the decline of traditional institutions and their elites, etc. Hence, hoping for a common future of Church and the world, for a joint march forward towards a bright earthly and heavenly future, led by experienced leaders of these two bodies, a hope that was so admirably expressed in *Gaudium et Spes*, seems nowadays a bit out-of-touch.

Therefore, we need to rethink both Church and society, as well as their relationships, which have become now more volatile than ever, and reconsider the approaches and strategies that the Church might employ to become relevant again for today's individuals and societies. That is what we have attempted to do in pointing to a number of pressing challenges the Church is actually confronted with: how to be relevant for individual persons, to devise a fitting offer, to relate the dogmatic content to people, to handle internal pluralism from a theological as well as from an organizational perspective, to think and act globally as well as locally, to revitalize parishes, to renew religious orders and congregations. These challenges are the Church's top priority and need to be thought through on their own terms. What has been thought about these challenges in the past – if they have been addressed at all – should be taken into account as far as it helps us to deal with the current situation. However, the ingrained tendency to think the present from a past-perspective may serve the purpose of legitimization, but risks hindering an accurate examination of current challenges and the responses they need.

This does not mean that Vatican II – or, in a wider sense, the Catholic tradition – is to be discarded. We noted already that the lasting importance of the Council is confirmed time and again in this book, as many chapters praise its pastoral approach and refer with admiration to its documents. Yet, at the same time, these chapters do not present the Council and its

documents as the final word, but rather as stepping stones that help the contributors to follow their broad and sinuous ways of investigating the new realities, elaborating new vistas, proposing reforms to deal with the challenges of today. The chapters exemplify how one can relate Vatican II as a landmark and indispensable reference point to the Church and society of today. They show that going beyond Vatican II cannot mean simply leaving it behind. Yet, they also show that one cannot start from Vatican II as an encompassing world view in order to interpret, in a second step, the realities of today with the standards of the Council. On the contrary, one needs to start from the current realities and new challenges and reflect on how Vatican II can contribute to the analyses and responses that are needed today! One should not relate Vatican II to the new challenges but, rather, relate the new challenges to Vatican II. This may sound disrespectful to some, but for the analysis of the contemporary world, the light that Vatican II has shed upon the world is to be regarded as a helpful tool, not as the final word. This is also true when one wants to acknowledge that and analyze how the Second Vatican Council – and the wider tradition – has helped to shape the Catholic world of today.

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**Part I**  
**Mediating the Christian Message**





## 1.

# Religion and Individual Personal Fulfillment

TOMÁŠ HALÍK

The world's main religions can be regarded as 'schools' in which people learn to overcome their egoism, discipline their instincts (aggression, in particular) and live in peace and justice with others. In Christianity, love of God and love of one's neighbor are inseparable. Being Christian embraces 'being for others' and 'being with others'. The Church is a community of memory and storytelling. Its mission is to make present the event of Christ, not only in the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, but also in the *liturgy of life*, in the everyday witness of Christians in the world.

The main mission of the Church and the meaning of her existence is evangelization. Evangelization consists of inculturation of the Gospel; evangelization without inculturation is no more than superficial propaganda and indoctrination. Tradition, one of the two most important sources of divine revelation, is a dynamic stream of continuous recontextualization of the message of the Gospel. It is a continuing drama of incarnation of faith into the culture of a certain community in a certain space and time.

Today, leading a religious life has become an individual life project, i.e., expressing (inadvertently) the trends towards individualization in society. However, living religiously is at the same time a (partial) overcoming of the individualistic and self-centered consequences of this societal trend. Where does the inner tension of these two trends originate and how can it be overcome? A good and difficult question!

First, let us try to indicate the genealogy of the trend towards individualization in religion and then point to some Christian responses to modern individualism. In my view the concept of religious life as an individual life project cannot be regarded solely as the result of the individualism of modernity, but rather as the outcome of the tension between 'faith' and 'religion' in the history of Christianity.

The concept of faith as a personal response to God's call has been rooted in biblical prophecy. This concept was largely obscured when Christianity was incarnated into Hellenic culture and the political form of mediaeval '*Christianitas*'. Nevertheless, it did manifest itself in various forms of 'alternative Christianity' from the hermits of the ancient world to the mystics and reformers, and ultimately in the collapse of mediaeval 'Christian civilization'. The endeavor to emancipate faith as a program of Christianity from general religiosity (particularly in Protestantism) may be considered one of the roots of modern individualism. The search for

forms of ‘post-religious Christianity’ is a major topic of several currents of 20<sup>th</sup>-century theology. In the present-day Christianity, which is no longer strictly controlled by an institutional church, the concept of faith as an individual project prevails. Could this undermine the social aspect to such a degree that Christianity loses its identity and dissipates in a vague post-modern religiosity or in the secular religion of individualism? We will try to highlight some attempts by present-day Christianity to overcome this danger.

### Faith and Religion in the History of Christianity

The Hebrew prophets introduced a new type of life orientation into the religious world of Israel. Unlike cultic religion, fulfilling the ritual prescriptions of the Mosaic Law, the faith of the prophets consisted of a personal decision to accept a calling from God, accept a personal mission and ‘set off on a journey’. The prototype of faith would be Abraham (‘father of the faith’), who left behind the security of his home and set off on a journey without knowing where he was going (Hebrews 11:8), and the Exodus, Israel’s going out from Egyptian slavery into the Promised Land. The faith of the prophets has a markedly social and ethical aspect: care for the poor and the fight for social justice are valued more highly than the temple cult (Hosea 6:6 and Matthew 9:13). In the Hebrew Bible and in the Gospels we find many examples of the prophets’ critique of temple religion and the conflicts between the prophets and the priestly caste – one instance of that conflict is also Jesus’ conviction by the supreme council, the Sanhedrin.

Jesus and particularly Paul criticize the Pharisees, whose religion purportedly consisted of the performance of prescribed rituals. Paul favored faith over deeds (Ephesians 2:8), i.e., performing prescribed rituals, and refused to impose the Mosaic Law on converts from paganism. Having thereby been liberated from the synagogue, early Christianity ceased to be one of the many sects of Judaism and could present itself to the world of Hellenic culture as a universal solution.

In the Roman Empire ‘*religio*’ was largely political in character, being a set of symbols and rituals expressing the sacred nature of the state. Christians who refused to participate in those religious rituals were regarded as political criminals and atheists.

In the Roman world Christianity gradually assumes the role of religion in terms of ‘*religio*’. In the intellectual sphere this happens in particular via Augustine’s concept of ‘*vera religio*’ and in the political sphere by the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion during the reign of Emperor Justinian. I once commented ironically on the famous legend that aptly

symbolizes the beginnings of ‘imperial Christianity’ (Christendom), the story of the Emperor Constantine’s dream. In his dream Constantine saw a cross and heard the words: “Conquer with this.” Next morning he fixed crosses to the standards of his troops and won the battle. I wondered how the history of Europe and the history of the Church would have turned out if the emperor had interpreted his dream rather more intelligently.

The exodus of many radical Christians to the deserts of Palestine, Syria and Egypt may be regarded as the initial form of Christian dissent from Christianity as a state religion. That was the beginning of Christian monasticism as a specific critical alternative to the linking of Christianity with the world of power and wealth. The Church managed to institutionalize this alternative form and integrate it; many non-conformist and protest-movements against the contemporary state of the Church (such as the Franciscans) were ‘pacified’ by acquiring the form of monastic orders.

In the lives of the saints – particularly the founders of monastic orders – there appears once more a prophetic type of faith: these saints are original individuals and innovators, achieving new versions of Christianity.

When mediaeval ‘Christianitas’ was in crisis there appeared forms of faith that deviated from the existing form of church and theology. These were particularly various heretical movements, and reformist and mystical tendencies. In periods when the ecclesiastical penalty of interdict – a sort of general strike of ecclesiastical institutions – was overused, lay believers had no option but to seek a direct, personal relationship with God unmediated by priests and ecclesiastical ritual. Thus mystical movements – such as the *devotio moderna* – fostered ‘religious individualism’ that culminated in the German Reformation.

At the time of the religious wars between Catholics and Protestants, an attempt at a sort of third ‘supraconfessional’ form of Christianity gained strength. The more these attempts were rejected by the Christian churches, the more they broke free from classical Christian theology and in some cases they resulted in Enlightenment deism and humanism.

The process of modernization was accompanied by secularization. Christian faith, particularly its ecclesiastical form, ceased to be the natural and universally accepted ‘common language’ of European civilization. Its credibility was undermined by the schism of Western Christianity and the religious wars, as well as by the subsequent schism between traditional theology and the picture of the world introduced by the natural sciences. In the process of the gradual fragmentation of culture and the emancipation of different sectors of society and the field of knowledge (science, politics, economics), the dominance of the church and theology gave way to the ‘exculturation of Christianity’; religion became only one sector of

social life and Christian faith one of the ‘world views’. Christianity ceased to be an integrating force in society (religion in the sense of ‘*religio*’).

Following the devastating critique that religion was subjected to in the course of the Enlightenment there appeared, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an original re-interpretation of Christian faith in the philosophy of the forerunner of modern existentialism, Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was strongly critical of the mass Christianity of his day, which was bourgeois in the main, and he linked Christian faith with unambiguous individualism – the courage to be an individual before God. The existentialist concept of Christianity – particularly via literature and film – was a major influence on the understanding of faith and religious life in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

The critique of religion in the works of influential thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud – turned many people from religion to atheism. The immediate reaction of the church and theologians was understandably negative and apologetic. After the upheaval caused by World War I, protestant theology in particular started to take ‘secular man’ seriously and distanced itself from traditional metaphysical theology and ‘religion’. The dialectical theology of Karl Barth and the ‘non-religious Christianity’ of Dietrich Bonhoeffer radicalized Luther’s theology of the cross and contrasted Christian faith with religion. A similar line was taken by the ‘death of God theology’ of the 1960s and the post-modern philosophy of religion of Gianni Vattimo, who regards secularization as a legitimate result and logical consequence of Christianity.

For some theologians secularization is the end of ‘Christendom’, but not the end of Christianity. Isn’t what some call ‘secularization’ and others ‘the death of God’ – that dark night of God’s hiddenness – *kairos*, the opportune moment? And isn’t it as such a royal gift to the cradle of a new *kenotic* Christianity, *a space for a deeper and more mature faith*? Do not faith and the church need, in a certain sense, to endure weakness, suffering and death, in order to experience resurrection and be a believable witness to victory over death?

So the history of Christianity can be interpreted as a dramatic relationship between faith and religion, when faith – the legacy of the Hebrew prophets – at one time assumes the form of religion as an integrating force of society, and then, several centuries later, loses it. Thus many thinkers – from Hegel to Vattimo – regard secularization as the fulfillment and consummation of Christianity. One could say that in the modern and post-modern eras religion’s original social role – the attempt to integrate society – has been assumed by other phenomena: ‘culture’ (in the Enlighten-

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<sup>1</sup> An eloquent example of this are the novels of Graham Greene.

ment sense), political ideologies, the media or the capitalist economy.<sup>2</sup> Christianity became one ‘world-view’ among others. Faith became a private matter, it was internalized in the form of a culture. Olivier Roy wrote, that “believers eventually accepted the definition of religion offered by secularism and became ‘culturally’ secular, seeing their own religious observance as a private act, devoid of ostentation and of interest only to themselves.”<sup>3</sup> According to Roy, fundamentalism is a form of religious expression, “in which the believer refuses to restrict his faith to the private realm but insists on its being recognized as an integral dimension of his public self, believing that religion should govern every aspect of his personal behavior. Among these movements we find all forms of charismatic Christianity. These new forms of religious expression are individualistic, with a high degree of mobility (there is free movement between groups, even between faiths), institutionally weak (mistrustful of churches and representative authorities), anti-intellectual (unconcerned with theological niceties) and frequently communitarian, but in the sense that one joins a community of believers, not one based on sharing a common background. Membership of a community is a choice, not a cultural inheritance.”

Has ‘the divorce of Christianity and religion’ made way for a vague syncretic and individualistic post-modern religiosity? Robert Bellah called this type of individualistic syncretic religiosity ‘sheilaism’<sup>4</sup> and Christian Smith called it ‘moralistic-therapeutic deism’.<sup>5</sup> This kind of spirituality often lacks any social dimension, which is probably why it becomes a comfortable appendage to the frequently criticized narcissism and ‘selfism’ of our times.<sup>6</sup> How should present-day Christian theology and spirituality react to the danger of individualism?

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning ‘political religions’ see, for instance, Emilio Gentile, *Le religioni della politica* (Roma: Laterza, 2001); regarding the ‘religious role’ of capitalism see Dirk Baecker, Walter Benjamin and Norbert Bolz, *Kapitalismus als Religion* (Berlin: Kadmia, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Olivier Roy, “La crise de l’état laïque et les nouvelles formes de religiosité,” *Esprit* (février 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Bellah and Richard Madsen, *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 221.

<sup>5</sup> See Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> An example of the cultural critique of modern and post-modern narcissism are the works of Gilles Lipovetsky, such as *L’ère du vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

## The Christian Response to Modern Individualism

Catholic social teaching since the encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891) has sought an alternative both to the collectivism of Marxist socialism and the individualism of liberal capitalism. It called this alternative personalism, a concept of human beings as unique persons, who are not isolated from other people but are formed by their relations with others. In contrast with collectivism, which perceives the human being as a cog in the machinery of society, Catholic social teaching posits the principle of subsidiarity, and against individualism it asserts the principle of solidarity. The philosophy of personalism was developed chiefly by French thinkers Jacques Maritain and Emanuel Mounier and authors associated with the Parisian magazine *Esprit*. The idea of personalism is also present in the evolutionary mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin: The supreme stage of evolution is the unification of humankind as a free community of people based on love.

Solidarity and social and political commitment was emphasized by the left-wing alternative to the ‘official’ Catholic social doctrine of the papal documents, namely by political theology (J.B. Metz) and liberation theology (L. Boff, J. Sobrino, G. Gutiérrez). The latter current drew inspiration from Bonhoeffer’s assertion that the authentic Christian form of transcendence consists of radical service to others.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century a significant philosophical stimulus towards surmounting individualism was the philosophy of dialogue, the ideas of the ‘Christian existentialist’ Gabriel Marcel and the Jewish thinkers Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and Emanuel Lévinas. The ‘I and Thou’ relation, the relationship with ‘the face of the other’, the relationship with ‘the Other’ and its ‘exterritoriality’ expounded by those philosophers, open up a relationship with God. Buber speaks of a relationship full of respect for the world and nature, and particularly for another person, perceived as a ‘Thou’ that cannot be manipulated, a relationship that encompasses a relationship with the ‘absolute Thou’ – God. For Lévinas the naked and vulnerable face of the other is the embodiment of God’s commandment: “You shall not kill.” Inter-personal relations are a sovereign ‘*topos theologicus*’, a place of transcendence, God’s revelation.

There is a remarkable theme in the mysticism of the Carmelite nun Thérèse of Lisieux: that dying young woman in great suffering accepted her ‘dark nights’ of feeling abandoned by God as an expression of her spiritual solidarity with atheists. Another nun of the same name, Mother Teresa of Calcutta, was regarded as a self-sacrificing consoler of the poor, sick, and dying in India. It was not until her spiritual diary, testifying to her difficult struggles with her faith, was published after her death that

that great Christian personality of our times was seen in yet another light: during the day she experienced solidarity with the physically and socially suffering, while at night she shared the darkness of people suffering spiritual abandonment.

Michael Novak characterized the ecclesiology of Vatican II in the title of one of his early books "*The Open Church*"<sup>7</sup> (the book's title was a clear reference to Karl Popper's work "*The Open Society*"<sup>8</sup>). The Catholic Church, which, throughout modernity, was often regarded as a fortress besieged by enemies, opened itself in three directions: to ecumenical co-operation with non-Catholic churches, to inter-religious dialogue, and to dialogue with the contemporary world, with secular humanism and atheism. In that spirit, Pope John Paul II cultivated inter-religious dialogue, particularly through his responsiveness towards the Jews. Pope Benedict XVI suggested that the Church should open itself to agnostics and spiritual seekers by creating a 'Courtyard of the Gentiles' for them. Pope Francis has been developing the ecclesiology of the last Council particularly through the metaphor of 'the church as a field hospital', ever ready to heal and alleviate suffering in today's world. During the conclave that elected him head of the Church, he attracted attention by his comment that the Biblical image of Christ knocking on the door should be understood these days to mean that Christ is knocking on the door of the church from inside – He wants to get out and Christians should follow him, cross barriers and get close to people, particularly the suffering and the poor.

In a large part of Europe the process of secularization continues in the sense that people's confidence in traditional religious institutions is growing weaker, and that they are less and less inclined to let themselves govern and control their private lives or to participate in the life of those institutions (such as in the form of regular church attendance).

However, while the number of those who fully identify with the practice and teaching of the churches has fallen, the number of convinced atheists has not risen. The majority of Europeans can be divided into spiritual seekers on the one hand, and the religiously indifferent (apathists), on the other. In many countries the number of 'former Catholics' or 'bad Catholics' (those who have not parted company with Christianity but are very critical of the present form of the Church) greatly exceeds the number of 'active Catholics' ('parishioners').

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Novak, *The Open Church* (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 1964).

<sup>8</sup> Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London: Routledge, 1945).

## The Future of the Church

The future of the Church, the future of Christianity, and, to a degree, the future of Western civilization, depends on the extent to which the Church is capable of addressing ‘seekers’. It is unrealistic to assume that some sort of conventional mission would be capable of winning over the majority of such people, in the sense of squeezing them within the borders of the existing institutional and intellectual structures of the church. It is necessary to open and transcend these borders.

Most probably it will be necessary for the churches to develop a third type of service alongside conventional care of believers in parishes, and alongside conventional missions, namely, ‘*accompanying seekers*’ – in the spirit of dialogue, mutual respect, and mutual enrichment. It is necessary to take the path of sharing experiences and charismas without proselytism. This needs courage, but even Abraham, the ‘Father of the faith’ set out on his journey without knowing where it would lead.

Christians will have to learn the courage to follow Christ into unfamiliar territory, listen to others and accompany them as Christ did as an ‘unknown pilgrim’ on the road to Emmaus. Listen and question before they start to interpret the great biblical narrative or even break the bread of the shared feast. Jesus warned his disciples against the temptation of forbidding those who were not followers to talk about him. I repeat: The number of disciples on a solitary path, as well as that of ‘anonymous Christians’ is gradually beginning to exceed the number of disciplined sheep in the church flock.

I recently read a book openly documenting the phenomena of crisis in the church today, particularly the sexual scandals.<sup>9</sup> However, any attempt at a deeper diagnosis of the crisis phenomena was blocked by the author’s theological nostalgia: none of this would have happened if the faith of the faithful and the state of theology and the church had remained where they were half a century ago. The church has been in a state of collapse since the 1960s and its identity is weakening because it has gone astray. The author does not blame Vatican II for this decline, but, as is usual with ‘moderate conservatives’, its erroneous interpretation, its ‘hermeneutic discontinuity’.<sup>10</sup>

However, conservative critics of the present-day church fail to take seriously enough the fact that the convulsions in the church were a

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<sup>9</sup> Philip F. Lawler, *The Faithful Departed. The Collapse of Boston’s Catholic Church* (New York: Encounter Books, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> This term to describe ‘progressive’ post-conciliar theology was introduced by Avery Dulles and it was one of Benedict XVI’s favorite expressions.



reaction to the radical paradigm shift in civilization starting in the 1960s. Had the Church tried to ignore those changes or had it reacted by closing in itself even more and treating the outside world with hostility (as it did in the ‘anti-modernism struggle’ at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), an even deeper crisis would have been the result.

That paradigm shift may be summed up by the (rather ambiguous) term of *globalization*. Nonetheless the process of globalization was met with resistance and continues to be. The trend towards ‘uniformity’, unification and mass society is balanced by a trend towards individualism, either in the form of sad loneliness in a crowd,<sup>11</sup> or in that of deliberate provocative non-conformity. The present aversion to globalization seems so powerful that many sociologists and political scientists anticipate that the globalization process will give way to a process of global fragmentation. One manifestation of this fragmentation is the growth of nationalism and fundamentalism, including the use of religion for the ideological and political defense of a group identity (particularly ethnic), which is allegedly under threat.

What task awaits Christian faith in this situation? Can it become a religion once more, i.e., an integrating force in the contemporary world? I fear that today’s calls for the defense or renewal of a ‘Christian Europe’ to confront, as in the Middle Ages, the ‘Islamic onslaught’ (jihadist terrorism and the wave of refugees from the Islamic countries) would result at most in an embarrassing mobilization of Christian fundamentalism.

Nevertheless, it is certainly pertinent to give serious thought to the cultural identity of our civilization, as well as to the future mission and scope of Christianity. It is unrealistic to expect Christianity to play a dominant role in today’s radically pluralist world. Pope Benedict’s reflections on the need for compatibility and alliance between secular humanism and Christian faith surely point in the right direction. I am not sure, however, whether the kind of Christianity highlighted by Pope Benedict, namely, the bonding of faith and classical metaphysical realism, still has a future. Wasn’t Nietzsche nearer the mark when he proclaimed the death of *that kind* of Christian culture?

John Paul II and Benedict XVI brought to a dignified end a long chapter in the history of Christianity. *With Pope Francis a new stage is beginning*. Or to put it more cautiously: it could begin in certain circumstances. The main theme of the previous epoch was coming to terms with modernity. But the modern age is over. A radical change of the current civilizational paradigm is occurring in a large part of the world. The

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<sup>11</sup> See David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

pontificate of Pope Francis will open up – a new reading of the gospel – the promise of an open, ecumenical Christianity for the planetary age. The present transition from one historical form of Christianity to another – like similar transitions in the past – could well involve crises, tension and conflicts, and the ‘gift of discernment of spirits’ will probably be of greater need than ever.

The reforms of Vatican II would have been unthinkable without the efforts of the great theologians of the 20th century. It strikes me that the reforming pontificate of Pope Francis also urgently needs the support of the painstaking work of today’s theologians; it needs a ‘new theology’ of which an essential part will be *‘kairology’ – the art of reading the signs of the times*. In other words, it needs a theological hermeneutic, a *critical interpretation of contemporary culture*, which is the context of our life of faith.

It strikes me that the only truly vital form of Christianity can be one that has undergone a profound transformation in the forge of the modern critique of religion, as spoken about by Paul Ricoeur and thinkers of post-modern ‘atheism’, particularly Richard Kearney.<sup>12</sup>

If in the future, Christians’ service to the world will concentrate above all on accompanying spiritual seekers, it will clearly be able to draw inspiration from this mode of post-modern Christian thinking. However, the future practice of Christian faith will require not only a renewal of theological thinking and language, but also a radical deepening of spirituality. The renewal of spirituality always emerged from charismatic figures and the small communities that grew up around them.

I repeat: Confrontation with modernity, which is now finished, is no longer a living issue. The main theme concerns problems linked with the process of globalization and various reactions to it. Pope Francis has laid fresh emphasis on what found itself overshadowed: charity, solidarity, responsibility for creation, cultivation of conscience, and the courage to be creative. In my view, the ‘Christianity of the post-secular age’ has to be able to integrate the gifts of modernity, namely the focus on the dignity of an individual conscience, non-conformism and personal responsibility, with a new and deeper sensitivity towards our neighbors. We don’t need to ask, who is our neighbor and who is not. In the contemporary ‘global village’ we are all neighbors. We need to share our charismata and our experiences across all borders.

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Kearney, *Anatheism: Returning to God After God* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 2009).

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## **Will the Catholic Church Remain Relevant? The Evolution of its Offer After 1800<sup>1</sup>**

STAF HELLEMANS

This chapter will argue that the offer<sup>2</sup> a church or religious group is providing is constitutive for a religion. The presence and appeal of an offer signal the ability of the church or group in question to translate its approach to the Holy in concrete practices that are considered relevant by its following and the public. There are two main facets here. The first is how the translation is performed and legitimated in the light of the religious tradition the religious group feels part of and in the light of the message that it wants to convey – and, if the group is hierarchized, how the practices on the ground possibly deviate from the definitions of the religious leadership. The second is how successful the translations are, how the offer is used by the following and the public, and whether and how the offer is eliciting appeal. This chapter, focusing on the offer in the Catholic Church, will investigate the second facet. Usually, this is not regarded as an object matter in its own right, warranting systematic and explicit concern. Yet, providing an appealing offer comes down to being relevant in religious matters and, as a consequence, in society. If a church's or religious group's offer isn't felt to be relevant, that church or group is dead. In this respect, one can say that the Catholic Church was highly relevant in the past. But whether it will remain relevant in the future is far less certain. Analyzing the evolution of the Church's offer is a way of getting to the question of relevance.

Between 1800 and 1960, an extensive offer was presented by the Catholic Church: sacraments and sacramentals, processions and pilgrim-

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<sup>1</sup> For references to literature, I thank Wilhelm Damberg (Bochum University), Leo Kenis (Leuven University) and Karim Schelkens (Tilburg University). For checking my story of and for providing me with information on the St Laurens parish in Kleinostheim, I thank Ulrich Geißler (Würzburg), Edwin Lang (Kleinostheim) and, in particular, Johanna Konrad-Brey (Diocesan archives, Würzburg). Johannes Först (Würzburg University) kindly commented on an earlier version.

<sup>2</sup> For want of a better word, I shall use the term 'offer' to refer to all the interpretations, statements, activities, pathways, practices, roles, and services that a church is offering to the faithful and the public at large for consideration and as opportunities for involvement (e.g., official pronouncements, theological texts, Sunday masses, prayers, charities, public actions).

riages, daily prayers, devotional sodalities, religious feasts marking the calendar, religious education, health care and, last but not least, social and cultural associations of all kinds. Most of this has disappeared by now or has gone further in a more church-independent way (e.g., health care or youth organizations). Where the old offer is still present and church-near, it is appealing only to a smaller section of the population. In place of the old has come a new offer, but one that is less extensive and has less appeal. The dearth of the offer in many places nowadays and the inability to present an equally appealing new offer goes a long way in explaining the decline of the Catholic Church in the West since about 1960. Consequently, its relevance as translator of the Holy is at stake. If the Catholic Church wants to avoid further and enduring institutional decline in the future, it will have to devise an appealing and fitting new and renewed religious offer.

Analyzing the Catholic Church in terms of relevance, i.e., in terms of the popular appeal of its offer (or lack thereof), is a contemporaneous approach. This approach is, in fact, related to the new way the Church has become embedded in modern society. Individualization and the freedom to opt for a religion (or not), increasing religious and cultural pluralism, and higher geographical and professional mobility have all made religion into a more individual quest. In the first modernity, from the French Revolution to about 1960, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church was already very conscious of the fact that its following could break away and, hence, had to be cared for more intensively than before. Next to trying to harness the state, as in the past, to force people into the fold – over time, a waning strategy – the Catholic Church could, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mitigate, halt and, in some cases, even reverse a potential decline by becoming extremely active in providing all sorts of offers and services. This will be analyzed in the next section. Thereafter, I will reconstruct the changing offer of the Catholic Church after 1960 in order to better grasp both the unceasing changes in repertoire and the post-1960 dynamic of renewal and decline. I will thus spend much time on the historical analysis of and the changes in the offer, which will demonstrate the intimate link between the creation and appeal of an offer on the one hand, and the historical context on the other hand. More importantly, it will also point out that and why the creation and implementation of an appealing offer has become so much more difficult in our time. Only then will it be possible to put forward at the end of this chapter, with all due prudence, some ideas of how the Catholic Church might proceed in fostering an appealing offer for today and for the future.

## **An Extended Offer Leading to Comprehensive Bonding (1800-1960)**

Let me first describe how the highly extended offer between 1850 and 1960 forged an intense bond between church hierarchy and laity in the context of a most Catholic world. I will focus on the parish offer because it was by far the most important. Indeed, the Church assumed that every Catholic would find within his or her parish all that was needed for this life and the next. The central place of, and the pastoral vision on, the parish dated back to the Council of Trent and its aftermath, yet it reached its apogee in 19<sup>th</sup> century modernity.

### *An Example: A Rural Parish in Germany*

The historian Johanna Konrad-Brey<sup>3</sup> describes what was at that time on offer in the Laurentius parish in Kleinostheim, a German village in the highly Catholic region of Lower Franconia (Unterfranken).

In a first period, from about 1815 until about 1870, the baroque forms of religious life were reconstituted after the upheavals of the revolutionary period around 1800 and they were brought in line with rising ultramontanism. Stability and re-stabilization of the religious forms – not innovation – were the characteristic features of the era. Church buildings were repaired and extended. Sunday and daily masses were celebrated – and brought in alignment with Roman prescriptions. Prayer meetings and devotions were (re-)organized. Numerous processions were held and their number increased even more after 1850. Occasional parish missions, stretching over two weeks, were undertaken. Indulgences and sacramental benedictions and consecrations of all kinds were deemed important. Some old religious brotherhoods were restored and some new ones (Sacred Heart of Mary, Ludwig Mission, and Boniface Association) were founded. The parish priest continued to act as the civil servant of the Catholic Bavarian State, registering births, marriages, and deaths, among other things. The village and parish were still almost 100% Catholic.

In the second period, from 1870 to the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, the parish offer increased further and it became highly differentiated. Innovation was no longer scorned as Catholicism was considered threat-

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<sup>3</sup> Johanna Konrad-Brey, *Integration und Mentalität(en). Katholische Lebenswelt(en) in den Umbrüchen des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, dargestellt am Beispiel der Gemeinde Kleinostheim am Bayerischen Untermain* (Dissertation; Würzburg: Universität Würzburg, 2013), retrieved December 10, 2016, from <http://d-nb.info/1033504300/34>.

ened. The Prussian-led unification of Germany ended the old alliance of Catholic Church and state. Industrialization proceeded. After 1900, the rise of socialism made inroads in parts of the population. At the same time, modernity offered new opportunities and fields to relate to the population. As a result, the parish priests and committed Catholics doubled their efforts in all directions. More religious activities were offered, many linked to religious brotherhoods. New brotherhoods were founded (Sacred Heart of Jesus, Rosary Prayer Association, Third Order Franciscans, Christian Mother Association, Eucharistic-Marian Male Sodality, a church choir). Catholics were encouraged to confess and practice Communion frequently. A primary school, charity work, and health care unfolded, all with the help of Franciscan religious women who came to Kleinostheim in 1911. Yet, not only activities and institutional arrangements under the direct control of the clergy in the traditional areas of religion, school, and charity increased. The parish also witnessed, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a surge in the number and reach of semi-autonomous lay Catholic organizations in the social-economic realm, in the political arena, in the domains of culture, science and, above all, leisure. These innovations were without precedent. Also new was that some of them, like some brotherhoods, acted as local branches of nationwide Catholic organizations like the Catholic Labor Association ('Katholischer Arbeiterverein'), the Christian Farmers Association ('Christlicher Bauernverein'), the Catholic political party and the cultural mass organization 'Volksverein für das Katholische Deutschland'. The surge continued after 1918, in particular with the sprawling youth organizations and the Catholic press. In the process, the parish world was highly renewed after 1870. It became more definitely structured and parish life further intensified. The Catholics, no longer all inhabitants, but still the large majority of the village, felt themselves more Catholic than ever before. In the same vein, the Catholic priest and his chaplains no longer acted as state representatives, but as 'milieu managers', controlling and advancing the extended Catholic organizational world.

In the third period, the Nazi totalitarian regime between 1933 and 1945 partially destroyed the Catholic milieu, at least the outer ring of political and social associations. Nevertheless, the Nazis couldn't bring the Catholic world under their control. The parish clergy and most of the Catholics stayed at distance.

As a result, the Catholic milieu was speedily reorganized after 1945, though many pre-war associations – socio-economic, youth, as well as religious ones – were not. The milieu became even more centered on the parish and their priests. Instead of the semi-autonomous lay organizations, Catholic Action-type associations under the direct command of the church



hierarchy were now advanced. The 'living parish community' ('die lebendige Pfarrgemeinde') was presented as the ideal alternative against what the critics then regarded as the spiritual superficiality and the fragmentation of the pre-war associational world. However, from 1950 onwards, despite warning sermons by pastor Hepp and tireless efforts from many, decay of the Catholic milieu set in.

*Building Most Catholic Worlds*

Though there are many differences, parish life elsewhere unfolded mainly along similar lines. In Germany, the dense Catholic milieu in Kleinostheim was no exception. In most areas with a sizable proportion of Catholics, an organized Catholic world took form. It has been calculated that around 1900 between a third and a half of the Catholics in Germany were members of one or more Catholic associations, the religious ones having the most members.<sup>4</sup> The divergences were mainly limited to matters of timing and extension of the milieu. As a rural parish, Kleinostheim exhibited an incomplete and belated formation of milieu associations.<sup>5</sup> In the Saint-Joseph parish in Gelsenkirchen, in the center of the Ruhr region, amidst bustling industrialization and in competition with both Lutheranism and socialism, more than 70% of the Catholic associations were founded already before 1900.<sup>6</sup> Yet, as in Kleinostheim, a good half of the Catholics were members of one or more of these organizations.<sup>7</sup> Gelsenkirchen is representative of the whole Rhine region and Westphalia. Early industrialization and the integration in and consequent clashes with Protestant Prussia after 1815 unleashed an early formation of a multi-pronged Catholic milieu, starting with occasional outbursts in the 1830s and gaining full speed and vigor in the 1850s to 1870s.<sup>8</sup> Fighting against what was regarded as illegitimate state interference, the Catholic milieu advanced to a defensive counter-world, proudly called 'the Tower' ('der Turm').

The description of the parish world in Germany fits well with the portrayals in other countries. In the Netherlands, 'the rich Roman life' ('het rijke Roomsche leven') had become proverbial. It gives expression

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<sup>4</sup> Konrad-Brey, *Integration*, p. 179.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 411.

<sup>6</sup> Hans-Jürgen Brand, "Kirchliches Vereinswesen und Freizeitgestaltung in einer Arbeitergemeinde 1872-1933: Das Beispiel Schalke," *Sozialgeschichte der Freizeit*, Gerhard Huck (ed.) (Wuppertal: P. Hammer, 1980), p. 213.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

to the all-encompassing presence until 1960 of a vast religious and associational offer.<sup>9</sup> Dutch postwar studies increasingly termed the Catholic world, and comparable Protestant and Socialist worlds, as ‘pillars’.<sup>10</sup> Since similar organizational worlds were also present in Belgium, the terminology was quickly taken over in Belgium.<sup>11</sup> In France, Catholic associations and organizations had less significance. Nevertheless, the book by Yves Lambert, describing how “God changed in Brittany” in the village of Limerzel – what could be seen as the French parallel of Kleinstheim – demonstrates in detail how the rich religious offer and the religious feasts marked the life of the village no less deeply than in Germany, the Netherlands, or Belgium.<sup>12</sup> He calls it ‘the parish civilization’ (‘la civilization paroissiale’). In the United States, Catholicism before 1960 was marked by immigration from Europe. First Irish and, later, in particular, Germans, Italians, and Poles founded ethnic parishes in their new living quarters, mainly the great cities in the North East. As in most European countries, these immigrant-urban parishes were the organized expressions of their neighborhoods and, hence, constituted complete worlds that encompassed the daily life of the Catholics with a rich religious and non-religious offer. From the 1920s onwards, the parishes – as well as the parishioners – ‘Americanized’, a process that was greatly enhanced by the move of many Catholics to the suburbs where they lived side-by-side with non-Catholics. The parish life in these suburban parishes became more privatized, yet remained oriented towards devotional Catholicism.<sup>13</sup> So, basically, the direction that parish life took in both Europe and the US was the same as in the village of Kleinstheim: an extended offer that was pervading all aspects of life and that was binding most of the Catholics intensely to ‘their’ Church.

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<sup>9</sup> Michel van der Plas, *Uit het rijke Roomsche leven. Een documentaire over de jaren 1925-1935* (Utrecht: Ambo, 1963).

<sup>10</sup> Johannes M.G. Thurlings, *De wankele zuil. Nederlandse katholieken tussen assimilatie en pluralisme* (Deventer: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Luc Huyse, *Passiviteit, pacificatie en verzuiling in de Belgische politiek* (Antwerpen: Standaard Wetenschappelijke Uitgeverij, 1970); Jaak Billiet and Karel Dobbelaere, *Godsdienst in Vlaanderen. Van kerks catholicisme naar sociaal-culturele christenheid* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> Yves Lambert, *Dieu change en Bretagne. La religion à Limerzel de 1900 à nos jours* (Paris: Cerf, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience. A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), pp. 204-208, 357-358 and 384-388.

*The Non-Parish Offer between 1800 and 1960*

The uttermost part of the offer of the Church was presented and taken up within the confines of parishes. Yet, all through its history, Catholics also found a substantial offer outside its perimeter. One can distinguish four strands.

The religious orders and congregations, often dubbed as ‘the second pillar’ of the Catholic Church (next to the territorial (Rome-diocesan-parish) structure), were here the prime actors. Leaving aside their administration of local parishes, which was until the 1960s considerable in some countries (e.g., the Netherlands), they conducted missions, ran schools (from primary schools to universities), powered devotional associations and pilgrimage centers, and took the lead in many intellectual enterprises – from devotional material to spiritual and theological works. At least from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards when the number of religious surged, especially female religious, every Catholic was familiar with a few religious men and women, often being related to one or more in the extended family.

A second string of supra-parish activities originated from the higher echelons of the Catholic Church, the dioceses, and Rome. After 1800, parishes were more closely integrated into the diocesan structure. The connections not only concerned the parish priests – educated in diocesan seminaries, appointed by bishops, and controlled by deans – but also the regular faithful. Deans and, more rarely, bishops visited the parish. The diocese promoted diocesan pilgrimage centers and diocesan saints (for example, St. John Berchmans for the young in the archdiocese of Mechelen, Belgium). Most regional congregations and sodalities, emerging in droves after 1800, were approved as diocesan religious institutions. They all contributed to emerging diocesan identities and cultures. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rome also became prominent in the minds of average Catholics, more so than the diocese. It began with the wave of public sympathy towards the Popes following their harsh treatment by the French revolutionaries. Papal encyclicals and letters became diffused more widely with Gregory XVI (1831-1846). But it was during the long papacy of Pius IX (1846-1878) that the eyes of Catholics really turned to Rome: the Saint Peter’s penny was introduced to sustain Rome financially, pilgrimages to Rome were organized, calls to defend the Papal States against the Italian Risorgimento were issued and an international Zouave army force mustered, devotional cards to pray for the Pope were distributed everywhere, papal jubilees and Marian feasts were celebrated, and on and on. Rome

was henceforth omnipresent, not only in the overall direction of the Church, but also as the source of a popular religious offer.

Third, sometimes, the local religious offer, enacted at a place, radiated widely. The main religious festivals and processions in villages and cities invariably drew crowds from the surrounding areas. Grand celebrations in main churches, e.g., for the city's patron saint, a visit by the king, or war commemoration, attracted parishioners from all over the city and beyond.

Finally, many associations on the parish level were local branches of regional and national organizations. Sacred Heart and Marian congregations and other sodalities in the devotional realm and Catholic social-economic, political, cultural, women and youth associations and organizations all had parish level groupings, as was exemplified by the parish in Kleinostheim. Through them, about half of the Catholics were directly connected to the wider Catholic world. The meetings of these associations, small gatherings of the leaders at the many echelons of the organization and large rallies involving the rank-and-file, were constituting an important share of the supra-parish offer of the Catholic Church between 1800 and 1960.

#### *Conclusion: Thickly Wired Church Life*

The offer of the Catholic Church greatly increased in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Until 1960, Catholic parishes were the focal point of Catholics' daily lives. The strength of the offer was that it covered nearly all major interests that people might have in modern society. Hence, parishes reached out with a comprehensive program to all people living in their territory. In the first place, there was the traditional turf of the Church, the core offer. These forms of the offer could, in principle, be traced back to the Catholic reformation or earlier – liturgies, sacraments, brotherhoods, processions, feast days, charitable activities, etc. Yet, as we saw, they were also renewed and extended, in particular with more religious associations. I will henceforth call this segment of the offer the core offer, the spiritual offer, or the 'religious' offer, with religion taken here in its restricted sense. Yet, Catholicism had always insisted that the other domains of life should be no less guided by the Church. It is here that the Catholic Church was most successful after 1850. Spurred on by the process of functional differentiation, a number of domains (economy, politics, science, culture, education, leisure, media, sports) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century tended to function more independently from the main churches. The battle for or against the separation between church and state was the one that was fought out most fiercely. The Catholic Church vehemently opposed all these threats of 'secularization', as this process of drifting away from the main churches

became known, and it did so, most convincingly, by establishing a host of Catholic lay organizations in these domains. The ‘religious’ offer taken in its restricted sense was, hence, complemented by an even more extended ‘non-religious’ offer – professional, political, cultural, in leisure and sports, etc. In this way, the non-spiritual interests of Catholics were taken to heart in a Catholic atmosphere. A whole system of ideas was developed to back the claim that all these interests had to be taken up under Catholic auspices, with the rise of Catholic social doctrine or teaching probably as the best example. Equally important was that there were enough priests and religious present, especially parish chaplains, to (co-)found and control these organizations. Both types of the offer, the core ‘religious’ offer and the one extending beyond the core, ensured that the lives of Catholics were embedded ‘from cradle to grave’ in a most Catholic world. As a result, the life of Catholics became thickly wired into the Catholic Church, not only within the parish locality, but also in the world church.<sup>14</sup>

The so-called ‘non-religious’ Catholic offer basically emerged from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, in rural regions mostly after 1900. It was a bold and innovative strategy, linked to the modernization of society, not uncontested even among Catholics. It was a hard fight and largely successful. The success was dependent on two sets of circumstances. First, there had to be a prior religious revival that made the Church stand strong in the strict religious sphere. In regions where the religious revival didn’t take hold – for example Paris and secularized industrial regions – the later extension of the Catholic world didn’t succeed either. The religious energy and world acted as a hub, as a springboard towards other functions. This was understandable given that the superposition of the economy, politics, culture, etc. by religion was demanding special efforts, i.e., legitimation as well as organizing potential. A second conditioning factor was the agreement of or, at least, the non-obstruction by the Catholic hierarchy. Popes, bishops, and priests were suspicious vis-à-vis activities and organizations that were not religious in the first place and that weren’t under their direct control. They sometimes opposed lay-led organizations, especially when they organized the lower classes or less reputed areas such as sports. Part of the great significance attributed to Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) is that he allowed these organizations. However, despite the growth of these organizations, they always remained disputed. They were the first things that the Catholic hierarchy

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<sup>14</sup> The process is called ‘churching’ by Franz-Xaver Kaufmann, *Kirche begreifen. Analysen und Thesen zur gesellschaftlichen Verfassung des Christentums* (Freiburg: Herder, 1979), pp. 100-104. See also Karl Gabriel, *Christentum zwischen Tradition und Postmoderne* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), pp. 80-104.

got rid of in authoritarian regimes – so in Italy in the 1920s under Mussolini and in Germany in the 1930s under Hitler. And when the organization of ‘secular’ activities and interests under a Catholic umbrella became increasingly criticized by liberal Catholics from the 1950s onwards as no longer fitting in post-war modernity, they were abandoned once again – in the hope that the stronger focus on religion and spirituality would suffice to remain the main partner for non-Catholics in a changing world (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*).

There is basic continuity from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s. The religious revival paved the way for devotional forms and for an ultramontanist church organization and ecclesiology until far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In German church history, this period is known as the *Pian Era* (‘die pianische Epoche’) – referring to the succession of Popes from Pius IX to Pius XII. Along the way, minor periods can be discerned. After the rupture of the French Revolution, a first re-organization of church and parish life took place from Napoleon onwards until the 1830s. The Church had to reinforce again its clerical corps, with both parish priests and bishops, and to build up its infrastructure anew on non-feudal grounds. In a second period, there was hesitation and conflict between regalian, liberal, and ultramontane policies. After 1848, the ultramontane faction prevailed. The devotional apparatus guiding the Catholic flock was re-established and extended in the 1840s to 1880s. After 1880, the differentiated world of non-religious functions made headway. In the interwar years, Catholic Action movements were set up. The decade after WWII witnessed the last religious revival along ultramontanist lines, marked by organized Catholicism and parish activities at soaring heights. This was shortly before the great break-up of the 1960s.

### **The Changing Offer after 1960**

Thanks to the revival of the Church in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular of the parish and its offer, popular abstention and rejection were kept within limits. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, secularization became felt more strongly, since the alienated sections of the population, especially in the bourgeoisie and the lower classes, ceased considering themselves as religious. Yet, the decline was incremental. All this changed from the 1950s onwards. Church life took a downward turn and church decline increased. During the 1950s, the crisis of the ‘first modern’ way of being Catholic became so apparent that something had to be done. The Second Vatican Council was the start for a thorough overhaul. And, indeed, the 1960s marked a great rupture. Among other things, the offer changed sub-

stantially. From 1968 onwards, however, disillusion set in and the offer, old and new, started to decrease.

*Back to the Laurens Parish in Kleinostheim*

As a first lead-up to the changes, let us go back to the Laurens parish in Kleinostheim. The website of the parish gives us an overview of the actual offer, which is still manifold.<sup>15</sup> First of all, there is the core religious offer consisting of daily and weekly services, the ‘rites de passage’ and their catechetical preparation – there is an extensive trajectory for communion and confirmation – and yearly feasts like the Saint Laurens patron’s day. Informal teams – altar boys and girls, servers, sextons, lay catechists and parents, handymen – are supporting these activities. Second, charity work is performed, but no longer in a purely Catholic setting. A key player is the Home Saint Vincent de Paul. Founded in 1994, it has pooled the resources of the Catholic parish and the Protestant congregation together with those of the municipality to organize a range of social services, in particular for the elderly, the sick, and the needy. Yet, the input of the parish was and is significant. The name of the Home, Saint Vincent de Paul, is a clear indication. Clemens Bieber, the then parish priest, was the driving force behind the whole undertaking. Nowadays, the pastoral worker and the remaining four Franciscan sisters are greatly involved. The parish website also pays much attention to recruiting volunteers to visit the hospitalized and the elderly and to help neighbors. Third, as in the past, the parish has links to the primary school, named after the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century bishop von Ketteler. In Germany, the school system is not denominationally structured. Yet the school has a broad Christian orientation, involving both the Catholic parish and the Protestant congregation (for example, at the inauguration of the new school buildings in 2009). School church services in both confessions, for example, during Advent, are organized. The school is coordinating the preparation of its Catholic pupils for First Communion. Fourth, the parish associational world is still alive, but it has shrunk and, in part, became deinstitutionalized. Several pre-1960 associations, some in altered form, have survived, like the Catholic Employees Association (the KAB, founded in 1889, but now extended to all employees), Women in Saint Laurens (‘Frauen in St Laur-

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<sup>15</sup> “Pfarrei St. Laurentius Kleinostheim,” Pfarrei St. Laurentius Kleinostheim, [www.sankt-laurentius-kleinostheim.de](http://www.sankt-laurentius-kleinostheim.de) (accessed from January 5 to 16, 2017). Additionally, I consulted Edwin Lang and Günter Wegner, *Im Dienst der Kirche. Chronik der Pfarrei Sankt Laurentius Kleinostheim* (Kleinostheim: Pfarrei Sankt Laurentius Kleinostheim, 2017).

entius im KFDG’, a fusion in 2005 of two older woman’s organizations, the ‘Mütterverein’ and the ‘Frauenbund’), the Catholic Church Choir (originally founded in 1918), the Catholic Library (founded in 1930), the Schönstatt Movement (founded in 1936) or the Legion of Mary (founded in 1956). Other associations and initiatives are more recent. A nursery was established in 1996, a Hospice group, assisting the seriously ill and dying, was formed in 1997, a Third-World shop has opened in 2001, a Saint Jacob Pilgrim group started in 2003. Last but not least, there is manpower. The parish disposes of a parish priest, a female pastoral worker and a parish secretary. Four elderly Franciscan sisters are still taking part in the Home Saint Vincent de Paul. Moreover, the parish pastors are assisted by a significant number of volunteers and by a coordinating parish team and a parish council.

Let us now compare the actual parish life with the one before 1960. First of all, it will be clear that the Laurens parish is still a lively parish that is organizing a lot of activities and has a presence appreciated throughout Kleinostheim. While the unity between parish and state has long been gone, it still enjoys close links with the communal authorities, manifested in the foundation of the Home Saint Vincent de Paul, in the religious celebrations that are part of the yearly village feast or the presence of the mayor at celebrations in the parish or at jubilees of its organizations (see, for example, the 125 Jubilee of the KAB).<sup>16</sup> Second, the changes associated with the 1960s and Vatican II also affected the Laurens parish, as is visible in the change of the liturgies and in the preparation of the ‘rites de passage’, in more ecumenical openness and in the democratization of the parish. Ecumenical relations with the Protestant congregations are good, as is evident from the cooperation in the primary school and in joint initiatives as the Vincent de Paul Home or ‘Priceless’ (‘Unbezahlbar’), founded in 2013 to help people, both villagers and migrants. Democratization and lay participation have changed the way the parish is run. While pastoral work was performed before 1960 almost single-handedly by the clergy, the parish pastor and his chaplains, being aided by Franciscan nuns and some lay people in subordinate positions, it has now become teamwork. Though the parish priest is still in the cockpit, the parish team has become the crucial coordinating and initiating body. Most of the activities are now executed by teams and informal groups.

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<sup>16</sup> Katholische Arbeitnehmerbewegung, *125 Jahre KAB – Ortsverband Kleinostheim* (2014), pp. 5-7, [www.kab-kleinostheim.de/medien/47fe0ebb-1318-47a9-8a40-e4004b289123/125-jahre-kab-festschrift-.pdf](http://www.kab-kleinostheim.de/medien/47fe0ebb-1318-47a9-8a40-e4004b289123/125-jahre-kab-festschrift-.pdf) (accessed January 13, 2017).



Third, not only the workings of the parish but also the offer it is presenting has changed deeply. The religious services and the ‘rites de passage’, the core religious offer, are evidently still on offer, though the way they are celebrated and prepared clearly have changed. School and charity have also kept the interest of the parish, though, again, changes are tantamount. The school is no longer seen as an extension of the parish. The parish contributions to charity work are now mainly performed under the aegis of the municipality. Above all, the parish associational world is different from the past. The baroque and ultramontane devotional associations, already slowing down after 1900, have disappeared. The only devotional associations left are two post-war initiatives, the Schönstatt Movement and the Legion of Mary. Major decline has also hit the differentiated system of self-organizations – labor, peasant, youth, women, culture – that characterized, in particular, the years 1870 to 1930. Only two of them are left: the KAB with only some 130 members, and the women’s organization with about 400 members and still one of the biggest in Kleinostheim – but in 1976 the two predecessor women organizations still totaled about 900 members.<sup>17</sup> Youth organizations are (almost) absent. On the website only the ailing KjG for adolescents (‘Katholische junge Gemeinde’, founded in 1970) is mentioned. Yet, as a sort of youth work, there are about 80 (!) altar boys and girls. Furthermore, the contrast between the limited number of Catholic self-organizations and the lively organizational world of Kleinostheim is striking. On the website of the municipality, about 50 associations, most of them in sports or leisure, are mentioned. In the past, non-denominational organizations were also active in Kleinostheim, for example, the volunteer fire brigade, but most of the associations were or became Catholic. Now, only three Catholic organizations figure on the communal website, alongside three Protestant ones.<sup>18</sup> Looking over all the changes, one has to say that the parish offer has ‘religionized’, meaning that the offer covers less spheres of life and is mainly focused on the core religious offer with charity as a connected area of interest. The couplings with other realms – economy, politics, culture, even education – are gone or have lessened.<sup>19</sup> The parish is no longer a whole world.

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<sup>17</sup> St. Laurentius Pfarrei Kleinostheim, *Statistik für das Jahr 1976* (Archiv und Bibliothek des Bistums Würzburg, DAW Generalakten 3137), p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> “Ortsvereine,” Gemeinde Kleinostheim, [www.Kleinostheim.de/home/main/freizeit-sport-kultur/ortsvereine-parteien.html](http://www.Kleinostheim.de/home/main/freizeit-sport-kultur/ortsvereine-parteien.html) (accessed January 16, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> Yet, in 2009, the then pastor Clemens Bieber signed the foundational call of the ‘Working Group of Committed Catholics in the Christian-Democrat Parties’ (AEK – ‘Arbeitskreis Engagierter Katholiken in CDU und CSU’).

Fourth, though the Catholic Church has held firm in Kleinostheim and the Würzburg region, there is an unmistakable overall quantitative decline. In the diocese of Würzburg, in the space of 30 years, the number of Catholics has dwindled by almost two-thirds, from 286,000 in 1988 to 98,000 in 2015.<sup>20</sup> In Kleinostheim, however, Catholics still form the majority – the proportion dropped from 83.79% in 1966 to 75.1% in 1987, and then to 60.6% in 2011.<sup>21</sup> But, as elsewhere, Sunday church service attendance has dropped very substantially. In 1966, 2,417 Catholics attended the service.<sup>22</sup> In 1976, 1,973 attendants were counted on an average Sunday.<sup>23</sup> In 1987, the figure had dropped to 1,276; in 2015 to 506.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the population in Kleinostheim increased from about 5,000 in the mid-1960s to slightly over 8,000 around and after 2000.<sup>25</sup> In other words, Sunday church attendance dropped in 50 years from about half of the population to about 6%. The quantitative downward trend was also felt at the associational level. With the exception of the woman's organization and, to a lesser extent, the KAB and the altar boys and girls, all parish associations and groups now only organize a handful of people. Tellingly, reports also show that the major festivals and church celebrations still draw large crowds. All in all, we can conclude that the Saint Laurens parish in Kleinostheim continues to be a lively parish in quite another way than before 1960 and, yet, we have to add in the same breath

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<sup>20</sup> For 1988, see "Kirchenstatistik (Katholische Kirche), 1970-1997," IBKA, [www.ibka.org/statistiken/kath-kirche.html](http://www.ibka.org/statistiken/kath-kirche.html) (accessed January 16, 2017); for 2015, see "Katholische Kirche in Deutschland, Zahlen und Fakten 2015/16," *Arbeit-shilfen* 287 (2016), p. 48, [www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Zahlen%20und%20Fakten/Kirchliche%20Statistik/Allgemein-ZahlenundFakten/AH287\\_Zahlen-und-Fakten-2015-16\\_internet.pdf](http://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Zahlen%20und%20Fakten/Kirchliche%20Statistik/Allgemein-ZahlenundFakten/AH287_Zahlen-und-Fakten-2015-16_internet.pdf) (accessed January 16, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> The figure for 1966 has been calculated from St. Laurentius Pfarrei, Kleinostheim, *Statistik für das Jahr 1966* (Archiv und Bibliothek des Bistums Würzburg, DAW Generalakten 3137), p. 1. The figures for 1987 and 2011 are drawn from Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik, *Statistik kommunal 2015. Gemeinde Kleinostheim* (2016), p. 6, [www.statistik.bayern.de/statistikkommunal/09671136.pdf](http://www.statistik.bayern.de/statistikkommunal/09671136.pdf) (accessed January 16, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> St. Laurentius Pfarrei, Kleinostheim, *Statistik für das Jahr 1966* (Archiv und Bibliothek des Bistums Würzburg, DAW Generalakten 3137), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, *Statistik für das Jahr 1976* (Archiv und Bibliothek des Bistums Würzburg, DAW Generalakten 3143), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> The figures for 1987 and 2015 were sent to me by Edwin Lang, archivist at the parish archive of Kleinostheim.

<sup>25</sup> Bayerisches Landesamt für Statistik, *Statistik kommunal 2015. Gemeinde Kleinostheim* (2016), p. 6, <https://www.statistik.bayern.de/statistikkommunal/09671136.pdf> (accessed March 2, 2017).

that the figures indicate a clear and decennia long trend of decreasing reach.

*The Collapse of the Extended Catholic Worlds and the Religionization of Church Life*

What happened in Kleinostheim, generally happened elsewhere as well but with one major *caveat*: a great many parishes – in several countries, most of the parishes – were (and are) not so lively and successful!

First, the loss of non-religious functions happened all over the West. The break with the pre-1960 ‘*omnia instaurare in Christo*’-policy (‘restore the whole world in Christ’, the motto of Pope Pius X) was particularly clear-cut in the Netherlands. There, as mentioned, an impressive Catholic organizational world called ‘pillar’ (‘zuil’) had been raised from the 1850s onward. Even in the 1950s, new organizational heights were attained. Catholics were intensively socialized and mobilized into this Catholic world: 70% of Catholics, themselves constituting 40% of the population, were present at Sunday services,<sup>26</sup> the birth rate of Catholics<sup>27</sup> and the number of priests per Catholic<sup>28</sup> were higher than in other countries. Yet, the discontent over the closed character of the Catholic world grew in the 1950s and exploded thereafter. Church practice plunged.<sup>29</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, many prominent Catholic organizations merged with their non-Catholic rivals to overall Christian or secular organizations (e.g., the merger, respectively, of the Catholic party into the CDA and of the bulk of the Catholic trade union into the FNV). In a few years’ time, the once seemingly unshakable pillar collapsed. In 1966, the Dutch bishops handed their authority of the Catholic school network over to the school boards and the parents. The Catholic schools, without shedding away their Catholic identity completely, hastened themselves to loosen

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<sup>26</sup> The first count (not a poll!) of Sunday service attendants in all the Dutch Catholic churches in 1965 registered 64.4% of all Catholics 7 years and older, cf. Theo Schepens and Leo Spruit, *De Rooms-Katholieke Kerk in Nederland 1960-1998. Een statistisch trendrapport* (Nijmegen: KASKI Memorandum 317, 2001), p. 33; Jos Poeisz, “Een kerk in overgang,” *Sociologische Gids* 15, 4 (1968), p. 218.

<sup>27</sup> Frederik van Heek, *Het geboorte-niveau der Nederlandse Rooms-Katholieken* (Leiden: Stenfert Kroese, 1954).

<sup>28</sup> Poeisz, “Een kerk in overgang.”

<sup>29</sup> Schepens en Spruit, *De Rooms-Katholieke Kerk*, p. 33.

their ties to the Church.<sup>30</sup> In 1969, the Dutch bishops admitted finally that they had lost control of the Catholic pillar and stated: “new organizations and institutions of Catholics in secular fields may be erected without permission of the bishops and without episcopal approval of their statutes.”<sup>31</sup> The religionization of the Dutch church was executed within a decade.

In Germany, as we have seen for the Laurens parish in Kleinostheim, the loss of non-religious functions started already in the 1930s.<sup>32</sup> In contrast to the Netherlands – and other countries like Belgium, Austria, and Italy – the church hierarchy in Germany decided in 1945 not to help re-establish the former major Catholic political and social-economic organizations. Consequently, the Catholic milieu was now straightforwardly directed by the bishops and the parish priests. Though the significance of social-economic and youth organizations expanded temporarily again in the 1950s, the re-organization of Catholicism in the wake of Vatican II further focused the energy of the Catholics on the religious realm. According to bishop Tenhumberg of Münster, evaluating critically the effects of the parish reforms in 1970, “most parish committees only seem to have liturgical, sacramental and cultic issues in mind.”<sup>33</sup> The removal of the outer shell of the Catholic milieu, which, as said, stretched out over several decades, didn’t immediately usher in a full-blown crisis of German Catholicism. As elsewhere, conflicts in the 1960s and the following years between liberal Catholics and the hierarchy abounded. But the Catholic world didn’t explode spectacularly as it did in the Netherlands. On the contrary, the enthusiasm to renew Catholicism continued throughout the 1970s. In Kleinostheim, these years constituted the high tide of renewal (liturgical reform, extensive youth work, lay voluntary commitment). They shaped the parish to this day.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, though backed by substantial infrastructural and financial means, the enduring erosion, already

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<sup>30</sup> Johannes M.G. Thurlings, *Van wie is de school? Het bijzonder onderwijs in een veranderende wereld* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 1998), pp. 74, 88-89.

<sup>31</sup> “Nieuwe organisaties en instellingen van katholieken op wereldlijk terrein kunnen zonder toestemming van de bisschoppen en zonder bisschoppelijke goedkeuring van hun statuten vrijelijk worden opgericht,” cited in Walter Goddijn, Jan Jacobs and Gerard van Tillo, *Tot vrijheid geroepen. Katholieken in Nederland 1946-2000* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1999), p. 242.

<sup>32</sup> For what follows, see Wilhelm Damberg, *Abschied vom Milieu? Katholizismus im Bistum Münster und in den Niederlanden 1945-1980* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1997), pp. 107-306.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>34</sup> My assessment is based on the information over these years, provided to me by Ulrich Geißler.

begun in the 1950s,<sup>35</sup> sapped the system over the years. In the last few years in Germany, abolishment and merging of parishes have also become the order of the day.

The loss of non-religious functions is also visible in American Catholicism. The so-called ethnic parishes that were slowly emerging after 1820, were, though less organization-minded, equally comprehensive as the pillarized parishes in the Netherlands or the milieu parishes in Germany. In some cities and regions, they extended into the political arena, acting as ‘political machines’ in local elections, e.g., in New York. By the 1940s, as the Americanization of the Catholic immigrants proceeded, they lost most of these ethnic functions. From an “ethnic fortress,” the parish became “a religious fortress.” “This shift from ethnic loyalty to denominational loyalty meant that the parish had fewer claims on people.”<sup>36</sup> Sure, new incoming groups were – and are – still forming new ethnic parishes, e.g., the Vietnamese in the 1970s or the Latinos ever since the 1940s. In general, however, the evolution is thus not dissimilar from the one in Kleinostheim and Western Europe.<sup>37</sup> Surfing on the internet for contemporary examples of parish ministries in the US, I landed on the website of the Saint Austin Catholic Parish in Austin, Texas.<sup>38</sup> It is a large and thriving parish, served by the Paulist Fathers, with 2000 families in the center of the capital of Texas, well-staffed with 3 priests, a deacon, and several paid lay staff members. Both the website and a guidebook present a large and differentiated offer of activities and programs. They can be ordered in five sections. First, the strictly religious offer consists of 5 (!) masses on the weekend and one on weekdays, in the preparation for the sacraments of the ‘rites de passage’ (CCD – Continuing Catholic Development – on Sundays for those not attending a Catholic school, among others), and in an offer for spiritual development (local small Christian communities, female and male spiritual groups, Paulist Associates, indi-

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<sup>35</sup> Wilhelm Damberg, “Pfarrgemeinden und katholische Verbände vor dem Konzil,” *Zweites Vatikanum – Vergessene Denkanstöße, gegenwärtige Fortschreibungen*, Günther Wassilowsky (ed.) (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), pp. 11-20.

<sup>36</sup> Jay P. Dolan, et al., *Transforming Parish Ministry. The Changing Roles of Catholic Clergy, Laity, and Women Religious* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 288.

<sup>37</sup> See Kai Reinhold and Matthias Sellmann (eds.), *Katholische Kirche und Gemeindeleben in den USA und in Deutschland* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011), who are stressing the differences.

<sup>38</sup> “Saint Austin Catholic Parish, served by the Paulist fathers,” and “Guidebook and Directory 2017/2018,” Austin Catholic Parish Texas, <https://staustin.org> and <http://guidebookpublishing.com/guidesections/2068.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2017).

vidual guidance by a professional spirituality adviser). Second, organizations and activities fostering community life ranging from adult volleyball and basketball to the Knights of Columbus to Graduate and Professional Ministry. Third, Social Justice Programs like the Gabriel Project for assistance in difficult or unanticipated pregnancies, help in Food Banks, Saint Vincent de Paul Society. Finally, a number of programs for the youth, Boy Scouts and, in particular, a Catholic parish school with age groups for further religious education. In comparison to the German village of Kleinostheim, the offer is quite different – even in the devotional sphere. Conspicuously absent are the self-help and interest organizations that were so paramount in Germany before 1960, the remainders of which in Kleinostheim are the employees' and the women's organization. Typically, social justice is regarded in Austin as an issue of charity and of justice for the poor and for those in need, not something that matters for oneself. As in West-European Catholicism, and even more than in Germany, the parish in Austin is focused on religious affairs only.

*The Relative Rise of a New Non-Parish Offer after 1960*

The pattern in the evolution of the parish offer after 1960 – disappearance of much of the old offer and emergence of a new one, yet with a more limited reach – is pertaining even more to the supra-parish offer. Let us follow the same four strands as we did before (cf. supra 1.3).

First, most religious orders and congregations are struggling to attract novices and to redefine their identity and area of activities. What is more, many congregations, especially female ones, are on the brink of extinction. Consequently, the offer and presence of the so-called second pillar of Christianity have become far less visible for the average Catholic. Yet, there is also sparse renewal and revival.<sup>39</sup> New congregations, small, variegated, some mingling with lay people, have sprung up. Moreover, many old orders and congregations are initiating activities and programs so that their religious spirituality may reach a wider public of lay people. Formerly closed off abbeys are now offering opportunities for visit, retreat, and silent week(end)s. Several Jesuit centers have redesigned the Ignatian exercises in a number of programs for lay persons. All over the world, these new ways of doing the Exercises in daily life have become increasingly popular, including among Protestants and marginal Catholics.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See the paper in this volume: Timothy Radcliffe, "Religious Life: Candlemas Time?"

<sup>40</sup> Joyce Huggett, "Why Ignatian Spirituality Hooks Protestants," *The Way Supplement*, 68 (1990), pp. 22-34.

The second strand, the supra-parish levels of the Church institution, i.e., the dioceses and Rome, still contribute substantially to the offer, even more so than in the past. As elsewhere, the diocesan offer has changed beyond recognition. Diocesan saints, congregations, and pilgrimage centers have lost significance, as well as the attempts to promote diocesan cultures and identities. In its place came a new offer. By abstention of the parishes, diocesan service centers are now trying to reach the young, the old, the new Catholics, pilgrims, etc. With the help of the parishes, they are organizing yearly mass gatherings for acolytes and sextons and for the youngsters preparing for confirmation. They are convoking meetings preparing for the fusion of parishes and are offering training courses for parish volunteers. Of course, many dioceses are not that active. The extent of diocesan activities is also dependent upon the financial means. But, if anything, dioceses have become more central to the functioning of the Catholic Church, including in the provision of a religious offer.<sup>41</sup> For its part, Rome has remained a center of activities and, indeed, an important medium of a religious offer. Here there is continuity with the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> past: the wide diffusion of encyclicals, papal letters and declarations, the pilgrimages to Rome, the mourning when a Pope dies and elation when a new Pope is elected, the solemn beatifications and sanctifications, etc. The rise of the mass media is ensuring nowadays that every activity and utterance by the Pope – each address, interview, and gesture – is brought to a worldwide audience. And there are other, totally new incentives coming from Rome. The World Youth Days are, of course, a prime example as are the frequent papal visits to all the world's countries since the papacy of John Paul II. Recently, Pope Francis is turning the synods of bishops into an event of church-wide dialogue over topics like the family (in 2015-2016) and youth (in 2017-2018). Not surprisingly, in a globalized world, Rome is, more than ever, a permanent source of religious ideas and activities to which the public can turn, ranging from a distant gaze to enthusiastic embrace.

With regard to the traditional city-wide and regional religious festivals and processions, they have declined severely. Some village religious festivals are surviving – see again Kleinostheim – as well as some processions with regional radiation, the latter also helped by the tourist and heritage industry. But, in the main, this type of offer now has only marginal significance. This is also true for the local and regional pilgrimage centers, but

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<sup>41</sup> Wilhelm Damberg and Staf Hellemans, *Die neue Mitte der Kirche. Der Aufstieg der intermediären Instanzen in den europäischen Großkirchen seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010).

not for the international ones.<sup>42</sup> Lourdes, Compostela, Taizé are still attracting large crowds – a phenomenon also seen in other religions, most spectacularly the ‘*hadj*’ to Mekka. Of course, travel to these centers has become more accessible and affordable. But, interestingly, their attraction has changed too: they are now attracting many people with loose church connections. In the case of Compostella, even Camino Zen-Yoga Guided Tours are offered!<sup>43</sup>

Finally, we look at the Catholic associational world after 1960. As we have seen in Kleinostheim, the once wide-ranging offer of religious sodalities and non-religious Catholic organizations has almost disappeared. Only Catholic Action-type organizations have survived in some countries (like France and Italy). In place of the old sodalities and organizations, a whole array of new movements and associations have arisen. In the 1960s and 1970s, critical church movements were preponderant. Afterwards, the new ecclesial movements made headway. Often, the latter are functioning as delocalized ersatz parishes, attracting young Catholics and non-Catholics into a new Catholic ambiance.<sup>44</sup> Also important are the many new diaconal and social initiatives, for example, the Catholic Third World and Fourth World Movements that have sprung up almost everywhere in the Western world since the 1950s and 1960s (see Kleinostheim and Austin). Comparing the old with the new, we have to conclude that there is little continuity in the Catholic associational realm.

In conclusion of our exploration of the non-parish offer, we can say that, for sure, registering the decline and disappearance of most of the old offer highlights only one side of the coin. Especially here, the rise of a differentiated new offer is remarkable. On the other hand, stating that the current non-parish offer is being taken up more widely by Catholics than the old one was before 1960 would go too far. But in view of the declining impact of the parish offer, the relative importance of the supra-parish offer, in particular the one with event character, has certainly accrued.

*Conclusion: The Renewal of the Offer and the Thinning of the Church Bonds after 1960*

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<sup>42</sup> Ian Reader, “Pilgrimage Growth in the Modern World,” *Religion* 37, 3 (2007), pp. 210-229.

<sup>43</sup> “Camino Zen, Follow the Camino, pilgrimage, walking and cycling tours,” Camino Zen Tours, <https://www.followthecamino.com/caminotours/caminozen> (accessed March 6, 2017); Helena Vilaça, “Pilgrims and Pilgrimages: Fatima, Santiago de Compostela and Taizé,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 23, 2 (2010), pp. 137-155.

<sup>44</sup> Massimo Faggioli, *Sorting out Catholicism. A Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements* (Collegetown, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2014).



In comparison with the 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I see four major changes in the offer after 1960: its wholesale renewal, the religionization of the offer, the scaling-up of the offer and, decisively, its more limited reach.

The tracing of the parish offer in Kleinostheim and of the non-parish offer after 1960 has made abundantly clear how different the offer is nowadays in comparison to the past. A whole new offer has arisen and, moreover, it is used in new, more individualized ways. Gone are the days when the parish was the organized collectivity of the community. Even the core religious offer, built around the sacraments, has been completely overhauled. An array of new initiatives has taken shape. It is wrong to present the thorough renewal as a question of conservation of the old versus installing something totally new. What is going on is rather a combination: decline of the bulk of the old offer, transformations of some of the old offer, and the invention of many new offers. In effect, all actual offer is new. It is also wrong to assume that the renewal stopped after the great reform waves – and disillusion – of the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, these were years of enthusiasm for reform. Nevertheless, though the attempts to renew the offer have lessened afterwards, they continued both in the parishes, as several initiatives taken in the last thirty years in Kleinostheim demonstrated, and on the supra-parish level (cf. for example, the Youth World Days and the new ecclesial movements).

A second characteristic of the post-1960 offer is its religionization (cf. supra). Performing what we have rather clumsily called ‘non-religious’ functions has become increasingly difficult and they have thus largely been shed. As we pointed out already, this has substantially changed parish life. Whereas the parish from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s at the latest functioned as a total world, as the self-organized community with the Church as supervisor in the lead, it is now reduced to its religious dimension, to relating the parishioners to the Transcendent. The self-help organizations, whether political, social-economic as in the case of Catholic peasant and workers’ organizations, or cultural as in Catholic theater, literary, or tourist associations, have disappeared. It is true that many Catholics engage in activities with the aim of improving the living conditions in the modern world, but this is done in a different way now. Social outreach is now seen as, in the first place, linked to spiritual intentions, not as advancing, under a Catholic umbrella, one’s own particular group interests in secular realms or as an opportunity to indulge in culture and leisure. The organizations are no longer self-help organizations to advance the cause of the members. Rather, they have taken on a charity or service character, intended not to benefit oneself, but to help ‘poor others’.

Noble as this is, it is also demanding more; and, if more than spending money is required, it is only attracting the highly convinced and dutiful.

Third, let us look at the scaling up of the offer. Whereas Catholic life before 1960 was played out chiefly on the local parish level, nowadays, supra-local initiatives capture the enthusiasm of many Catholics, whether World Youth Days, Radio Maria, spiritual centers, or the publications of spiritual authors, ancient and modern. One can live a most Catholic life in a new ecclesial movement without setting a foot in a parish. For many Catholics, especially new Catholics, the religious offer after 1960 has moved upwards. True, the local parish is still the place where most Catholics gather. In many European countries, however – as in Belgium, France, or the Netherlands – the majority of parishes are in poor health. Their offer tends to be reduced to the weekly Eucharist or prayer meeting and the ‘rites de passage’. Many of these parishes are on the brink of extinction. One can rightly object that some parishes manage to do well. Yet, also here the scaling up is evident. One can distinguish three types of thriving parishes. First, there are parishes like Kleinostheim, where the old fabric between village and church is still alive. Their number is declining, especially since secularization is now making headway in the countryside. Second, there are immigrant parishes where subcultural identity and societal integration provide for strong attachments. They are mostly located in the major cities. Third, there are bigger parishes in old churches and cathedrals, also in the cities. They are often well-staffed and attracting well-to-do, more easily activated parishioners. Thus, cities or regional centers become the habitual locations for well-performing parishes. They no longer gather the local neighborhood or community, but are operating on a regional base.

Fourth and decisively, there is a serious and continuing decline in the people that are reached by the offer. Again, this is especially visible in the parishes. The parishioners are ageing and their number is declining. There is a decrease in the number and scope of the parish activities and organizations. The parishioners left are, generally, spending less time and commitment. With fewer activities performed within and more activities spent outside the parish, the threads binding Catholics to the parish and to the Church are thinning – to the point of breaking without being noticed by the person in question. The increase in lay volunteer work and the attraction of part of the new supra-parish offer are countervailing factors. Yet they have not compensated for the overall decline. The average Catholic is more thinly wired to the Church than he or she was before 1960. All in all, I come to a grim conclusion. Whereas the 19th century saw an increase of the religious offer and a thickening of the church bonds, the range and the reach of the offer and the intensity with which it is used has decreased

in the decades after 1960. Hence, the secularization narrative continues to hold convincing power in the West.

Often, growing bodies are depicted as changing, as taking up new opportunities, whereas those in decline are pictured as cast in deadlock, as frozen in the old, as unable to change. It is a frame also used for interpreting the fate of the Catholic Church. Our review of the evolution of the offer after 1960 has proved this wrong. The offer of the Catholic Church, and indeed the Church itself, has changed substantially – I would say, no less than expanding religious organizations. Society has changed substantially since 1960 and so have Catholics and the Catholic Church. There had to be a renewal of the offer since the old ways of living Catholicism and of relating Catholics to the Church no longer worked. But, at the same time, the revised old and the invented new offer did not appeal as well as in the past, generally speaking. The crucial point is that the renewal did not achieve a grasp as firm as in the past. Seen from the perspective of the Catholic Church, a negative spiral unfolded. Obligated to renew the offer, it did so, and, in the beginning, it did so enthusiastically. However, though there was no shortage of attempts, after the 1970s, the renewal of the offer, taken together, elicited less resonance, with the result that, after a while, with declining membership and enthusiasm, the offer also began to decline. I repeat: the crucial problem is the incapacity to arouse the same fervor among a broad part of the population as was possible before 1960. Before giving advice on how to deal with this negative spiral, let us first try to grasp the causes of the declining appeal.

### **Getting Institutionalized Religion Across in Late Modernity**

The crucial issue, indeed, is why the offer of the Catholic Church was no longer so appealing after 1960. The fact that the old offer, which had been so vastly extended in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was so intensely bonding the Church and Catholic following, had to change and be renewed is only the minor problem. The majority in the church hierarchy became aware in the early 1960s that the world had changed and that the Church had to change accordingly. The Church was confident that it would succeed, that it would be possible, as it had done before, to replace the old offer with a renewed fitting one – as confident as it was that it had also reached an even deeper understanding of the Christian message with Vatican II. Yet, it proved to be impossible in the decades after 1960 to devise an offer that was taken up with the same interest and vigor as in the past, irrespective of which side – ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’, to put it simply – it was engineered and propagated. This is the real issue that requires explaining. Why this inability?

The breakdown of the Catholic worlds is certainly an important factor. Ultramontane mass Catholicism, the clerically led phalanx against liberals and socialists, gave way to an optional Catholicism, to a minority church that has to cater for a public in the midst of competition with other churches and movements.<sup>45</sup> In the wake of the break-down, most of the non-religious functions were, as we have seen, lost. Whereas before 1960 the Church orchestrated the provision of education, social and political interests, and cultural preferences of all sorts, these functions were now cared for by markets and organizations independent from the Church – or semi-independent as oftentimes in the case of education and health care. The breakdown and the loss entailed a first drawback of relevance. Indeed, religion was no longer the central area from which all sorts of institutions were guided and, consequently, religion lost relevance in people's lives. The Church was no longer of concern to decide which party to vote on, which partner to marry, what book to read, etc.

A second factor that is conditioning the odds for church commitment in a negative way is the distrust people nowadays harbor against all big institutions: the state and political parties, big corporations and labor unions in the economy, the main churches in religion. Suspicion vis-a-vis the Catholic Church is great – and not only among outsiders. A few years ago, I was invited to be part of a reflection group in my hometown. We were asked to indicate with a stone our level of identification with the Church, imagined as a chair in the middle of the room. Though many of the attendees were contact persons for their parish, they hastily put the stone as far away from the chair as possible. Only the dean put his stone below the chair, indicating total identification. It is hard to raise sympathetic curiosity for one's offer when one is judged negatively from the outset – and the Catholic Church has done little to dissipate these feelings (cf. the child abuse scandal). Church organizations have become regarded, by outsiders as well as insiders, as intrinsically flawed.

However, there is more to it than the breakdown of the protective belt of a Catholic world, the loss of non-religious functions, and the heightened suspicion towards church institutions. Really worrying is the rising inability to get religion across to most people. The cognitive framework on which the world view of the Church rested for so long – literal interpretation of Bible passages, God as intervening physically in the world, afterlife in heaven, purgatory, or hell as direct reward or punishment of one's terrestrial life – has lost much of its plausibility. As a result, in the

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<sup>45</sup> Staf Hellemans, "Tracking the New Shape of the Catholic Church in the West," *Towards a New Catholic Church in Advanced Modernity*, Staf Hellemans and Jozef Wissink (eds.) (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2012), pp. 19-50.

eyes of many, God no longer has power over one's life. Moreover, and often overlooked, for the average man and woman, the decline of literal interpretations and the stress of symbolic views have, in fact, raised the threshold to enter religion. Religion has become a complex and complicated personal quest with few clearing posts and with a goal – dwelling in God's grace – that is hard to achieve, even in incipient form. Most people do not get what religion is really about, especially as it is chiefly conceived and practiced in our times. Entering religion nowadays is highly demanding.

Attracting the public with a church offer has thus become much more difficult in our time. Not only has the Catholic Church less power to organize society and people's lives and does its highly institutionalized and hierarchical church form evoke resistance, the new conditions for interpreting and living religion are also more demanding for the average man and woman in terms of religious sensibility and seeker capability. Together, these factors make the long-term future for the Church look rather bleak.

### **Shaping an Appealing Offer**

Communicating what contemporary religion is really about, and that it is relevant for one's life, has become more difficult, especially when professed by a main institution. So what can the Catholic Church do in the actual conditions? Without attempting to mount a full-blown program with accompanying practicalities, let me suggest a few key points.

First of all, and the crux of the matter, the creation, spread, and maintenance of a religious offer should be systematically and methodically targeted by the church hierarchy. It should be made into an organized and prioritized undertaking. At the moment, the religious offer is still seen either as self-evident and not needing special concern, except for control of orthodoxy – as in the case of the Eucharist, the rites de passage, or 'popular Christianity' – or as emerging naturally out of spontaneous initiative, as indeed most of the new initiatives are. This attitude was adequate in a time when an offer, once in place, could be kept going rather easily and the offer replacement ratio was consequently low. This no longer holds today. As in other realms, a religious offer today needs continuous updating and re-commitment of those involved. Fast changing needs and aspirations as well as opportunities (e.g., the internet) equally demand the permanent creation of a new offer. Though I am aware that one has to be cautious with comparing churches to companies, it is not exaggerated to state that a religious organization today has to invest in a new and fitting offer to the same degree as companies have to do in competitive economic

markets. In both cases, those without an interesting offer will wither away. Like companies, nowadays churches need a kind of R&D department. Therefore, one should establish institutional provisions on the higher echelons of the Church (diocese, church province, Rome) where the existing offer is inventoried and critically valued, where a new offer is devised and, above all, where a promising offer, emerging somewhere, is supported and its dissemination fostered. In short, it is necessary that the creation and spread of the church offer is taken care of methodically. With regard to the spread of the offer, we have seen that a substantial part of the parish offer after 1850 consisted of parish branches of the grand devotional, social, and cultural organizations – from Sacred Heart to workers, women, and youth organizations. This territorial spread of local branches of organizations has virtually been halted and the parish offer has thus been left to the devices of the parish itself, resulting in a flurry of local initiatives in the vibrant parishes (see Kleinostheim and Austin), but also in an almost complete lack of initiatives in the decaying parishes. Certainly, in the latter case, advice and support from a committee specialized in fostering the local religious offer could make the difference. In short, the Church needs to develop a systematic offer policy.

The offer a party is supplying, in this case the Catholic Church, will not land if the receiving party, the following and the public, is not taken into account. At least three facets are important here, and they are all linked to the deepening of the individualization process after 1960. First, the relationship between clergy and faithful has become inverted. In the past, born Catholics were deeply socialized into a Catholic ‘totalistic’ culture. The clergy had the power to force lay people to conform. Inter-confessional and non-religious organizations and activities that were condemned by the church hierarchy were consequently scorned by most of the Catholics. After 1960, the relationship between clergy and laity has been reversed. The clergy is now seen as having to stand in the service of the lay people. The individuals decide for themselves whether the offer and approach of the Church may interest them. This has serious implications. The Church itself needs to be seen as attractive, not only in offer, but also in personnel and as an institution. It also implies that the Church will have to accept that people will make a singular choice in the offer, tailored to their own preferences, and that they will mingle elements from different religions and spiritualities (‘syncretism’). If the Church decided to press hard on orthodoxy and on total embrace of only Catholic teachings, its offer will not even be considered by the bulk of the population. Second, taking the receivers into consideration, also has repercussions for the global orientation of the offer. When people are guided nowadays by individual preferences when opting for Catholic religion, the criterion

they use to choose to engage in Catholic religion is the expectation that being Catholic, building a relation with God through Catholicism will somehow be beneficial to and even improve their life, and in the first place their life on earth. In forging an offer, the Church should heed the rule that the ‘individualized individuals’ (Luhmann) of today, when turning to religion, are looking for the fullness of life.<sup>46</sup> The offer should be developed in such a way that it holds this promise. Third, individualization and the demise of the totalistic Catholic worlds mean also that the division, at times polarization, between the Catholic following and the non-Catholic outside world isn’t clear-cut anymore. The following isn’t merely following and outsiders may become interested in aspects of Catholic religion. In effect, following and outsiders are tending to merge into a new category that I would like to call ‘audience’ or ‘public’, a public with different degrees and ways of commitments. The Catholic Church should fashion its offer in such a way that all sections of the public can find something appealing.

The connection between the supplying party, the Church, and the receiving party, the public, is made by the offer. What suggestions can here be made? Our review of the evolution of the offer has demonstrated that the religious offer nowadays is very distinct from the one in the past. Hence, the Catholic Church doesn’t need to be afraid of renewing the offer. Renewal has happened and is happening all the time. Second, all sorts of offer, conservative and liberal, demanding and undemanding, for the distant as well as for the virtuosi are welcome and are needed. After all, the tastes and the willingness of commitment of the public is very diverse. Uniformity should thus be avoided. Let a hundred flowers bloom! Yet, this will give rise to strains with regard to the overall offer policy of the Church. The breadth of the offer, the acceptance of syncretism and the welcoming also of low and occasional commitment are contentious issues. Third, the review of the offer after 1960 has shown that the new initiatives often pass over the parish. Rome, the dioceses, and supra-local movements are the centers of the new religious offer. Catholicism is no longer a parish world, but rather a collective noun for a multitude of initiatives, taken in different centers and involving people with diverse persuasion. This implies that the offer policy must be attentive to this diversity of centers and of activities. No doubt will it be fruitful to explore more thoroughly the new opportunities opened for the supra-local centers to develop a new offer and to attract the big public. It is, however, the parish

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<sup>46</sup> For the relation between religion and ‘fullness of life’, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 4-20, 768-769.

level that is faced with the greatest problems and where the odds will be cast. For a long time, it was the basic building block of the Church and the site of the bulk of the offer for Catholics. At the moment, the restructuring and scaling up of the parishes stand at the forefront. Necessary though this is, a central issue that has to be tackled is what to do with the parishes, and what offer can they be presenting in our time and how.

Finally, what kind of future church emerges from our analysis? I think that the decline in numbers and societal stature of the Catholic Church will continue, at least for a while. As a result, the Catholic Church will become a smaller minority church that has to cater for an audience through an appealing offer.<sup>47</sup> Gone are the days when the Catholic Church was preparing itself to take over modernity by sheer might and the Catholic organizational world, presided over by the Catholic Church, was seen as the prefiguration for that wholly Catholic society, as was reflected in the mottos of Pius X ('Instaurare Omnia in Christo' – 'to restore all things in Christ') and Pius XI ('Pax Christi in Regno Christi' – 'the Peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ'). Under the new conditions, the position of the person, potentially or actually interested in Catholic religion, is a totally different one. In the days of the restoration ideal, the presence of a Catholic world where a Catholic could find all he or she needed religiously and non-religiously was regarded as the unconditional prerequisite for the formation of a Catholic. Since the collapse of these most Catholic worlds, the religiously-inclined person has to be won over only by the presence of an appealing offer, moreover, by an almost exclusively religious offer. It is an open question as to how far this can be successful. Western Buddhism may be an example of the potential of such a strategy. The number of self-declared Buddhists in the West is tiny, yet the appeal of Buddhism is great. Buddhist-like meditation is practiced well beyond Buddhist centers. Mindfulness and the ideal of Zen tranquility are even more widespread. It is not the Buddhist organization that has effectuated this diffusion. The Buddhist scenario might, I think, be exemplary for the case of Catholicism – and for other main religions. The presence and appeal of an offer that is fruitfully embodying the longing for the Holy will ultimately decide the fate of the Catholic Church.

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# Serving the World through Wisdom: Revitalizing Wisdom Traditions in Christian Faith

PETER JONKERS

## Introduction

The fundamental conviction that underlies this chapter is that the future of the Church depends on its ability to respond to the needs of the world in their broadest sense. As I argued elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> this does not mean that the Church should accommodate the essence of its message to the mundane needs of the world, since Christians are called to be *in*, not *of* the world. Yet this catchphrase does imply that the Church should open itself to the needs of the world, and not turn its back on the world, e.g., by blaming the world for not listening.<sup>2</sup> Since these needs vary in the course of time, every new generation of Christian faithful has to answer the question how to respond to these needs in new, creative ways in order to be truly ‘in the world’. In the context of today’s West-European societies, this means that the Church has to ask itself how it can fulfill its missionary task amidst an ongoing exculturation of Christian faith,<sup>3</sup> and of having become a (small) minority church.<sup>4</sup> The very nature of this mission implies

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Jonkers, “From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom,” *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.) (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), pp. 163-168.

<sup>2</sup> George McLean, “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age,” *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision*, Charles Taylor, José Casanova, George F. McLean and João J. Vila-Chã (eds.) (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2016), p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger states that “the exculturation of Catholicism as a global historical matrix of French culture seems more and more evident.” I think that this aspect of the French situation is paradigmatic for all West-European countries. See: Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “Mapping the Contemporary Forms of Catholic Religiosity,” *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean (eds.) (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> This is the main conclusion of the empirical part of our book: Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.), *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 21-160.

that the Church should not confine itself to preaching to the converted, but reach out to society as a whole, even though it is predominantly secular. In order to do so, it is, as a first step, necessary to get a clear idea of people's religious and/or spiritual convictions, practices, and needs, an analysis that, for practical reasons, will be limited in this paper to Western Europe (section 2). The aim of this section will be to show that a fundamental expectation that Charles Taylor elaborated in his book *A Secular Age* concerning the future of religion and church has not materialized. Taylor expected that, even in modern, secular societies, people would be willing to move beyond their unspecified longing for spiritual wholeness, and transform this longing into a search for holiness. If this were the case, the churches could respond to this trend through a renewed religious offer that is nevertheless still relatively close to their traditional spirituality. However, not only is church membership dwindling, but also the connection between people's spiritual needs and beliefs and the core elements of religious traditions have become much looser. This has led to a dissolution of the religious field as a whole and to the rise of so-called self-spirituality, which is at odds with essential elements of Christian religion.

As will be shown in section 3, this move from Christian orthodoxy over unbound forms of religious spirituality towards self-spirituality confronts the churches with an unprecedented situation – at least since Christianity has become the majority religion in Europe – and requires them to respond to it in far more innovative ways than before. The crucial question is whether the Church is able to rediscover in its own tradition insights and practices that respond to the existential – although not necessarily religious – needs of today's people. Without making any claim to be exhaustive, I will explore in this section whether the Christian wisdom-tradition offers such a response. It is common knowledge that Christian faith is the heir of a long tradition of divine wisdom, from the Old Testament to the writings of saints, spiritual people, and theologians of our times. It is equally well-known that there is a profound need for true wisdom, since people have always felt the need to orient themselves, including in today's world, which has lost many traditional points of reference. Against this background, it is no wonder that various traditions of wisdom, religious and secular, Christian and non-Christian, are so appealing.

Two questions need to be asked in this respect. The first one is “where [true] wisdom shall be found” (Job 28:12), and how it can be distinguished from seeming wisdom. Second, the competence to relate wisdom to the concrete reality of people's contingent lives needs to be examined. The question is how to make the transition from the one to the other in order to prevent that wise proverbs and sayings remain empty phrases, even for people who are looking for a truthful or at least plausible life-orientation

in difficult, and sometimes even tragic circumstances. Both questions are typically philosophical, since they focus not primarily on concrete instances of wisdom from various traditions, but rather explore the necessary conditions for wisdom to function as true orientation in life.

### The Role of the Churches in a Secular Landscape

#### *Taylor's Analysis of Religion and Church: A Post-Durkheimian Age*

In order to get a clearer idea of the religious landscape and the role of the churches in today's Western world, I start from Charles Taylor's pertinent insights on this matter.<sup>5</sup> He characterizes the mode under which religion appears in our times as post-Durkheimian.

The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this. [During the neo-Durkheimian mode, characteristic of early modernity,] the choice of denomination was understood to take place within a fixed cadre, say that of the Apostles' Creed, the faith of the broader 'church'. Within this framework of belief, I choose the church in which I feel most comfortable. But if the focus is going now to be on my spiritual path, thus on what insights come to me in the subtler languages that I find meaningful, then maintaining this or any other framework becomes increasingly difficult. But this means that my placing in the broader 'church' may not be that relevant for me. [...] In the new expressivist dispensation, there is no necessary embedding of our link to the sacred in any particular broader framework.<sup>6</sup>

This mode of religiosity is a manifestation of the culture expressive individualism and its ethics of authenticity. It can be defined as a mode of being according to which each of us has her own way of realizing her humanity and to live that out, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or by a religious or political authority.<sup>7</sup> Although the roots of expressive individualism date back to the Romantic period, it has become predominant in all Western societies since the second half of the twentieth

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 486-495 and pp. 505-535.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 486f.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 475.

century. According to expressive individualism, ecclesiastic religion and its focus on doctrinal questions, which dominated the neo-Durkheimian mode, were responsible for the fact that

the very point of religion is being lost in the cool distance of even impeccable intellectual orthodoxy. One can only connect with God through passion. For those who feel this, the intensity of the passion becomes a major virtue, well worth some lack of accuracy in theological formulation. In an age dominated by disengaged reason, this virtue comes to seem more and more crucial.<sup>8</sup>

This explains why there are nowadays so many people who see themselves as seekers for a meaning in life that resonates deeply inside them, as pilgrims on a quest for personal spiritual enrichment in a world marked by an ‘immanent frame’.<sup>9</sup> What they are looking for is a more direct experience of the sacred, a greater immediacy, spontaneity, and spiritual depth, a sense of unity and wholeness of the self, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures, all of which they find lacking in the institutional churches with their focus on doctrine and authority. Taylor thereby builds on an influential study by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead of 2004, according to which a spiritual revolution is taking place in Western societies.<sup>10</sup>

For Taylor, it is essential not to disqualify this new religious longing as something purely negative, i.e., as a variety of invitations to self-absorption, without any concern for anything beyond the agent, whether the surrounding society or the transcendent. Instead, this striving reflects a new understanding of the good and a fuller human flourishing, and uses religious language and images to convey it. People heed and conform to a source of significance, which ultimately transcends the life of this world.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this striving should be valued as a truly moral ideal, more in line with what is required in our post-Durkheimian era than the traditional offering of the churches. The important conclusion that Taylor draws from these insights is that the spiritual ideal of ‘wholeness’ and the traditional Christian one of ‘holiness’ are not necessarily opposed to each

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 488f.

<sup>9</sup> See Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – to Whom?,” *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean (eds.) (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), pp. 17-24.

<sup>10</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 507-510.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 509. Taylor refers to the study of Heelas and Woodhead as well as the example of the religious community of Taizé.



other, since it is always possible that the former transforms into the latter.<sup>12</sup> In spite of all the flattened religious attitudes that abound in the post-Durkheimian era, there is also religious faith in the strong sense, which brings people into contact with a transcendent source of significance. What is more, the fate of this strong religious faith in the modern West depends on people's ability to transform their lives and orient them towards a transcendent reality, thus fulfilling a double criterion: "The belief in transcendent reality, on the one hand, and the connected aspiration to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other."<sup>13</sup>

According to Taylor, the consequences of this post-Durkheimian mode of religiosity and its main driving force, the ethics of authenticity, for the churches are far-reaching. Churches have to operate in a societal environment, in which the barriers between different religious groups have been broken down, so that the gamut of intermediate positions has widened. Moreover, the number of people having an indeterminate belief in something beyond (e.g., an impersonal force) has also increased, thereby moving outside Christian orthodoxy. The proliferation of New Age modes of spiritual practice, of views that bridge the humanist/spiritual boundary, and of practices that link spirituality and therapy has to be interpreted as consequences of this development. At the same time, these new, fertile lands in the religious landscape go together with the overall retreat of Christendom, understood as a civilization where society and culture are profoundly informed by Christian faith as well as by the large, collective connections formed by the traditional churches.<sup>14</sup> The result of this trend is an 'unbundling' of various kinds of religious life: the traditional bundling of religious and other forms of belonging has come apart, and the same has happened to the rich bundle of spiritual and other activities within the churches.<sup>15</sup>

Following Grace Davie, Taylor describes the current religious landscape and the diminished role of the churches in it as 'believing without belonging'. He uses a metaphor to describe the dominant attitude that not only many spiritual people, but also Christians are taking towards Christian faith and the Church: Christian life

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 510.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 513f. See also: Charles Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age*, Taylor, Casanova, McLean, and Vila-Chã (eds.), p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," p. 271.

is orbiting farther out from a star which is still a key reference point. [...] This becomes evident at certain moments, for instance when people feel a desire to be connected to their past. [...] Our eccentric orbit, which normally carries us far into outer space, passes close to the original sun on those occasions. This is part of the significance [...] of the fact that our past is irrevocably within Christendom.<sup>16</sup>

Taylor thereby refers to fact that, even in secular countries, tragic events with a major societal impact (e.g., the bloodbath at a school in Erfurt, the capsizing of a ferry in the Baltic Sea, the funeral of princes Diana) are often commemorated in a church and by using religious symbols. These phenomena show “that the religious or spiritual identity of masses of people still remains defined by religious forms from which they normally keep themselves at a distance.”<sup>17</sup> Another term that Taylor borrows from Davie to qualify today’s religiosity as well as the changing role of the churches is ‘vicarious religion’. It refers to

the relationship of people to a church, from which they stand at a certain distance, but which they nevertheless in some sense cherish; which they want to be there, partly as a holder of ancestral memory, partly as a resource against some future need (e.g., their need for a rite of passage, especially a funeral); or as a source of comfort and orientation in the face of some collective disaster.<sup>18</sup>

The above shows that Taylor is quite optimistic about the enduring importance of religiosity in general in our post-Durkheimian era, as well as about the future of religious faith in the strong sense. In order to ensure the prospects of the latter, it is essential that the Christian churches take up a new role: they have to accept the dissolution of Christendom as a matter of fact and, instead, reach out to the unbound seekers for meaning and help them to transform their general spiritual seeking into the experience of a profound source of significance, which ultimately transcends the life of this world. Taylor summarizes his answer to the question of envisioning futures of the church as follows:

[O]ur horizontal, irrevocably pluralist society, where we live together in the immanent frame, amounts to a new human predicament, one in which the church must find a different voice, analogous to its ‘ac-

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<sup>16</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 520f.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 522.

culturation' in non-European civilizations. But that doesn't mean that the Christendom past is irrelevant. Its saints and their acts form part of the network we connect to all ages and all *loci* of Christian life.<sup>19</sup>

*A West-European Perspective on the Future of Religion and Church*

Taylor recognizes that his views on the future of religion and church are influenced by his American perspective, and that the situation in Europe is a different one, thereby referring to the work of Casanova.<sup>20</sup> The latter points out that there are two main divergent patterns of how the religious landscape will evolve in the decades to come.

There is on the one hand the dynamic which is clearly predominant in many European societies, namely the transformation from homogeneous confessional church religiosity to homogeneous secularity, without any significant growth of religious pluralism (except for the one brought by immigrants). Another alternative pattern, paradigmatically represented by the United States, shows that modernization may actually be accompanied by religious revival and increasing religious pluralization with limited secularization.<sup>21</sup>

According to Taylor, this divergence

is due [...] to the fact that the impact of the age of authenticity, where seekers try to find their own spiritual path, is different in societies where the 'religious' option is dominated by one official body demanding conformity, than it is in a society where faith has been irremediably 'plural' for two centuries already. In the first context, 'religion' is tainted by its association with power and unearned authority, in the other, it is quite without this negative connotation.<sup>22</sup>

As Taylor himself also recognizes, I think that his conclusion that people can be rather easily convinced to make the transition from their vague religious and spiritual experiences towards faith in a vertical transcendence, and that they are willing to accept the guidance of the great

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<sup>19</sup> Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," p. 279.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 522-530.

<sup>21</sup> José Casanova, "A Catholic Church in a Global Secular World," *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age*, p. 70.

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, "Shapes of Faith Today," pp. 274f.

religions and churches in this transformative process is only valid for the American situation and therefore cannot be applied unreservedly to all modern societies. As I will argue in more detail below, West-European societies are likely to follow a different, far more secular path than the United States. As to the future of religion and church, this means that it is highly improbable that West-Europeans will engage in the above-mentioned transformation and accept the guidance of the main churches in this, even if the latter would be willing to accommodate their offering to the spiritual needs of the people.

Recent empirical research<sup>23</sup> seems to confirm that West-European societies are evolving towards a state of general indifference to religion and spirituality, thereby underpinning Casanova's first pattern.<sup>24</sup> Hence, it is quite probable that the Christian past as a normative, transcendent frame of reference is unable to serve as an effective and broadly accepted force towards spiritual transformation. West-European societies are going through a process of exculturation of Christian faith and of a decreasing interest in spiritual matters in the strict sense. Obviously, this does not mean that Taylor's ideas about the prospects of religious faith in the strong

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<sup>23</sup> My main sources are: Nienke Moor, "Religious Vitality and Church Attendance in Europe," in *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe. Painting European Moral Landscapes*, Wil Arts and Loek Halman (eds.) (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 213-230; David Voas and Stefanie Doebler, "Secularization in Europe: An Analysis of Inter-Generational Religious Change," in *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe*, Arts and Halman (eds.) (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 231-250; Joep de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (Den Haag: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2014), p. 149; Loek Halman, "Patterns of European Religious Life," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Hellemans and Jonkers (eds.), pp. 21-70; Joep de Hart and Paul Dekker, "Floating believers: Dutch seekers and the Church," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Hellemans and Jonkers (eds.), pp. 71-96; Staf Hellemans, "Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers," in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Hellemans and Jonkers (eds.), pp. 129-160; Ton Bernts and Joantine Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht: Ten Have, 2016), p. 224. Although some of these publications focus on the development of the churches and religiosity in the Netherlands, they regularly compare this with other West-European countries. From this, they conclude that similar developments are taking place in other West-European countries. See De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>24</sup> De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 120f.; Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, pp. 41-44. In particular, these authors conclude that the 'spiritual revolution', predicted by Heelas and Wuthnow, has not taken place in Western Europe.

sense and the role of the churches would be obsolete; rather it is to be expected that the societal impact of this kind of religiosity in Western Europe remains limited.

The heading, under which I want to substantiate these claims about the current (and future) outlook of the West European religious landscape is ‘dissolving religion(s)’. First, *dissolving religions* refers to the fact that religious denominations become less identifiable, so that the traditional clear division of the religious field is receding. Although more than half of the West Europeans consider themselves as religious persons,<sup>25</sup> the main churches, which are the guardians of the religious identity of a denomination and its demarcation from other ones are clearly in decline.<sup>26</sup> A first explanation of this development is the fact that church-membership counts less and less as an identity-marker and is replaced by a wide range of other characteristics, such as social class, education, ethnicity, language etc. Moreover, a power reversal has taken place between the institutional churches and the individual faithful: individuals nowadays decide autonomously whether they want to be a church member, and they experience church membership and being religious as only one out of many options. Additionally, the religious option is becoming a marginal one, and has to be justified vis-à-vis the predominant secular option.<sup>27</sup> This shows that the churches are no longer in a monopoly or oligopoly position, but have become competitors on a turbulent religious market with a very diverse supply.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the most recent data show that the ritual function of the churches – including at pivotal moments in life – and their normative

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<sup>25</sup> Halman, “Patterns of European Religious Life,” pp. 47f.; De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, p. 24 and p. 69.

<sup>26</sup> Moor, “Religious Vitality and Church Attendance in Europe,” p. 214; Voas and Doebler, “Secularization in Europe,” p. 240; Halman, “Patterns of European Religious Life,” pp. 48f. and pp. 63f.; De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 65-68; Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, p. 23 and p. 25 and p. 51. However, it has to be noted that the ‘market share’ of the churches in terms of membership and impact is by far the largest in comparison to all other major societal organizations. On an average Sunday, more people in the Netherlands go to church than to a football-match in the premier and the first league together. Moreover, church members do far more charity work, including for non-religious organizations, than other societal groups. See: De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 35-37 and pp. 43f. See also: Halman, “Patterns of European Religious Life,” p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> See Hans Joas, “The Church in a World of Options,” *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age*, Taylor, Casanova, McLean, and Vilã-Chã (eds.), pp. 89-91.

<sup>28</sup> Hellemans, “Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers,” pp. 131-3; Voas and Doebler, “Secularization in Europe,” p. 248; De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 31f.

role – as the guardian of norms and values – for society as a whole is clearly declining, especially in the last decade and even among church members.<sup>29</sup> This means that the medium term validity of Davie’s (and Taylor’s) thesis of the enduring importance of vicarious religion in a secular society is doubtful, since it may describe only a temporary phase.

The phenomenon of dissolving religions not only concerns the diminishing role of the churches in society, but also the profound changes in the religious convictions of the faithful. They become manifest in the changing proportion between religious dwellers and seekers, especially among the church members.<sup>30</sup> Let us start from Taylor’s idea that seeking has become a general characteristic of the ‘individualized individuals’ of our time. Although there are plenty of reasons to argue that the term ‘seekers’ indeed applies generically to the overall attitude of today’s people, it is important to realize that the empirically demonstrable group of people who are actively seeking spiritual growth in various (religious) traditions without belonging to any of the traditional churches, is a (small) minority.<sup>31</sup> Actually, the non-active seekers and the religious indifferent form the overall majority of the population in secularized Western Europe.<sup>32</sup> Yet, when one abstracts from whether or not the seekers belong to one of the churches, and defines them in a more general way as those who are looking for ‘new spiritual vistas’ and deeper spiritual insights, they form the majority of all religious people. Most of them draw substantially, but selectively from the Christian heritage, and sparsely from other religious traditions, but emphasize above all the personal character of their religion. Many of them even think that a church is not necessary in order to be religious, since they are not in search of a doctrine, but rather are looking for deep experiences on the path of their personal spiritual journey.<sup>33</sup> For obvious reasons, this attitude applies most strongly to nonchurch-affiliated seekers, but many church members take this stance too.<sup>34</sup> Their beliefs, moral attitudes, etc. are becoming vaguer, reflecting less and less the doctrines of the denominations to which they belong, so that these doctrines have lost their role as religious identity markers.

A second feature of religiosity in the post-Durkheimian era is *dissolving religion*, meaning that the religious field as a whole is dissolving

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<sup>29</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, pp. 54-56.

<sup>30</sup> See Hellemans and Jonkers, “Introduction” *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, pp. 4-7, as well as the individual chapters of that volume.

<sup>31</sup> Halman, “Patterns of European Religious Life,” p. 38 and p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45. De Hart and Dekker, “Floating Believers,” pp. 72f.; De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> De Hart and Dekker, “Floating Believers,” pp. 82f. and p. 85.

into a wider sphere of well-being, happiness, and consumption.<sup>35</sup> Although the demarcations between the religious and the non-religious domain have never been sharp, the borders between them have become much vaguer still since the turn of the century: when people define themselves as ‘a religious or a spiritual person’, they are referring to an ever widening sphere of interest, of which Christian faith is only a part. This sphere ranges from traditional Christian spirituality over the spirituality of non-Christian religions (e.g., Zen-meditation) to so-called new spiritualities, such as yoga, New Age, certain psycho-therapeutic techniques, visiting wellness centers, music festivals etc.<sup>36</sup> In addition to this, there is a host of specialized magazines, websites, fairs, informal groups etc., through which people can get information and connect with like-minded. This illustrates that vertical and horizontal transcendence are merging or, to phrase it more concretely, that the difference between the religious domain in the strict sense and all kinds of ‘human interest’ matters is fading. The growing popularity of the phenomenon of self-spirituality is pointing in the same direction. It is defined as

the belief that in the deeper layers of the self one finds a true, authentic and sacred kernel, basically ‘unpolluted’ by culture, history and society, that informs evaluations of what is good, true and meaningful. Those evaluations, it is held, cannot be made by relying on external authorities or experts, but only by listening to one’s ‘inner voice’: What lies within – experienced by way of ‘intuition’, ‘alignment’ or an ‘inner voice’ – serves to inform the judgments, decisions and choices required for everyday life.<sup>37</sup>

Self-spirituality is further characterized by a strong self-validation (contrary to the institutional validation of the churches), a focus on the individual self, and by relying on subjective certainty as criterion for the truth of one’s conviction.<sup>38</sup> This means that the ‘spiritual revolution’, on which Heelas and Woodhead (and Taylor) based their optimistic views

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<sup>35</sup> For an explanation of this term see Staf Hellemans, “Imagining the Catholic Church in a World of Seekers,” pp. 134f.

<sup>36</sup> Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, p. 149.

<sup>37</sup> Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers and Willem de Koster (eds.), *Paradoxes of individualization: social control and social conflict in contemporary modernity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 36f. Quoted in: De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, p. 100.

<sup>38</sup> De Hart and Dekker, “Floating Believers,” p. 89; De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, pp. 97-99 and pp. 101f. and p. 127; Bernts and Berghuijs, *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, pp. 150f.

about the future of religion, seems to be over and has been replaced by a dominant secularity, combined with an ever vaguer veil of human interest matters, of which religious spirituality is only one.

The multifaceted phenomenon of dissolving religion(s) shows that the prospects of religious faith in the strong sense and those of the churches look rather weak, especially as far as the West-European situation is concerned. When we tie in again with Taylor's analysis of the post-Durkheimian era, what essentially distinguishes the strong, vertical manifestations of religious faith from horizontal spiritualities is the effective presence of a normative, vertically transcendent frame of reference. Typically, this frame is offered by the traditional churches, thus enabling people to transform their lives in a way that goes beyond ordinary human flourishing. However, the ongoing dissolution of the religious landscape as a whole in Western Europe offers a strong indication that Taylor's expectation that people would make rather easily the transition from spiritual wholeness to Christian holiness seems to be less and less realistic in this part of the world. In particular, although many aspects of the definition of self-spirituality correspond with Taylor's idea of post-Durkheimian religiosity, the strong focus on the *self* indicates that the relation to a vertical transcendence and normative frameworks is weak. Therefore, not only the prospects of religious faith in the strong sense are rather feeble, but also those of the churches, in particular their acceptability by secular societies in Western Europe to serve as a determining force in transforming people's lives.

### **A Church Which Serves the World through Wisdom**

Against this background, the question arises how the Church can serve the world in West-European societies, which are not only post-Durkheimian, but also increasingly post-Christian, and have turned away from most expressions of vertical transcendence.<sup>39</sup> It is hardly realistic to expect that the Church will be able (to continue) to play its traditional transformative role. However, since resigning itself to the general indifference to religion would run counter to the Church's missionary character, its only option is to find alternative ways to serve the world on the basis of the tradition of faith, which she passes on from generation to generation. In this section, I want to explore one of these alternative ways, namely Christian faith as an exemplification of wisdom.<sup>40</sup> In order to introduce the relevan-

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<sup>39</sup> Hellemans and Jonkers, "Introduction," pp. 3f.

<sup>40</sup> This section builds on: Peter Jonkers, "From Rational Doctrine to Christian Wisdom," pp. 163-191; Peter Jonkers, "A Serving Church: Overcoming Polari-



ce of the Christian wisdom-tradition for today's people, let us start with a short analysis of the normative uncertainty that marks the current social climate.

*The Need for Wisdom in Times of Normative Uncertainty*

According to Durkheim, normative uncertainty is latently present in all modern societies, since individual and societal moral norms are not derived anymore from an eternal divine order or an immutable natural law, but depend on the contingencies of societal recognition. Therefore, it is no surprise that the great variety of norms and values and the speed, with which they are changing cause a dominant feeling of normative uncertainty among secular people as well as church members.<sup>41</sup> Another important element that explains the current normative uncertainty has to do with the fact that some of the predictions of the modernization theory on moral issues have not come true. This theory predicted the emergence and diffusion of an ethos of individualism and instrumentalism in all modern societies, as well as a procedural, rational, and universalist ethics, combined with the fading away of all kinds of social discrimination. The expected result was a society, in which cultural and religious differences would be irrelevant, so that conflicts over substantial values would belong to a distant past.

However, in contrast to this prediction we see that cultural and religious traditions continue to leave a lasting imprint on the worldviews and values in all European societies. These traditions are especially important in those domains where modernization has eroded the functional basis of traditional moral rules, without being able to provide plausible new ones, as the example of the care for the sick and elderly shows. Another persisting problem of modern societies is that moral rules, which seem at first sight universal and rational, lose their self-evidence when people try to apply these rules when being confronted with concrete moral dilemmas.<sup>42</sup> What has made this problem even worse is the fact that these universal principles tend to become ever more formal (or abstract) and procedural, while the moral decisions that people have to take in concrete situations become more and more entangled. In sum, there is a gap between the uni-

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zation Through Wisdom" *Renewing the Church in a Secular Age*, Taylor, Casanova, McLean and Vilā-Chā (eds.), pp. 229-252.

<sup>41</sup> De Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, p. 42.

<sup>42</sup> Hermann Dülmer, "Modernization, Culture and Morality in Europe: Universalism, Contextualism or Relativism?," *Value Contrasts and Consensus in Present-Day Europe*, Arts and Halman (eds.), p. 257.

versal, but formal moral principles of modernity and the culture-specific values that people used to take as guidance in their concrete moral behaviour, while it becomes clear at the same time that the former have not been able to replace the latter.

Confronted with this problem, it is no wonder that we witness a growing popularity of so-called virtue-ethics. This kind of ethics rests on substantial – rather than procedural – values, which are theoretically underpinned and existentially nourished by a (religious or secular) tradition, consisting of (old and contemporary) stories, doctrines, rituals, and experiences that exemplify the good life. Typically, people form communities around these value-traditions and let their lives be inspired and orientated by them. Another important element of these value-traditions is that they have a longstanding experience in practical wisdom, which is precisely aimed at bridging the gap, characteristic of moral life as such, between abstract universality and concrete particularity. Because this gap has become acute in all contemporary Western societies, it comes as no surprise that the need for this kind of wisdom is increasing.

As is commonly known, wisdom has always been part and parcel of the Christian tradition: one only needs to think of the wisdom books of the Old Testament, over the sayings of Jesus and the life stories of people who follow his example, to the wisdom embedded in pastoral counseling in our times. In my view, this aspect of the Christian tradition connects better with the above analyzed predicament of contemporary societies than betting on the Church's guiding role in transforming people's spirituality from wholeness to holiness, which largely depends on the questionable assumption of the continuing impact of the spiritual revolution on secular societies. Because all people, regardless whether they are religious or not, experience normative uncertainty as well as the gap between universal moral principles and concrete practices, the need for a truthful or at least plausible orientation in all kinds of moral and existential issues is a fundamental one. Hence, through its tradition of Christian wisdom the Church can render an invaluable service to the world of today, in particular by offering this wisdom as a truthful life orientation and by educating pastors whose counsels are inspired by this tradition, thus enabling people to find a plausible answer to moral dilemmas.

In this context, two important underlying problems crop up that need to be addressed by every wisdom-tradition, including the Christian one. First, all these traditions, religious and secular, old and more recent ones, claim to be exemplars of *true* wisdom, in particular claim that the wisdom they offer is not limited to the here and now, but connects people's lives

with ideas, images, and practices of the good life in general.<sup>43</sup> Yet, since these claims can be false, every wisdom-tradition is in need of a critical self-examination in order to purify itself. Moreover, because modern societies are by definition pluralist, what is also needed is an external critique of what presents itself as wisdom, preferably on the basis of a rationality that is not disenchanting or reductionist with regard to these traditions, but accepts the need for true wisdom as a fundamental human striving. Second, the plea for a reevaluation of the Christian wisdom tradition should not be misunderstood as a plea to return to a premodern religious homogeneity. Given the pluralist character of modern society, the Church has to accept the fact that Christian wisdom is but one among many (religious as well as secular) wisdom traditions. This factual plurality makes it imperative for the Church to offer its treasure of wisdom to all people without allowing itself to be led astray by taking an exclusivist attitude towards other wisdom traditions.

In order to further develop how Christian wisdom can serve the world, I will first give a description of the main characteristics of wisdom in general as well as of Christian wisdom. Then, a specific condition for Christian wisdom to serve today's secular world effectively will be discussed, namely how to connect the general principles of Christian wisdom with the particular, concrete lives of people.

### *Wisdom*

If there is one thing that has fascinated civilizations around the globe, secular as well as religious ones, for thousands of years, it is wisdom. Because of its rarity wisdom has been compared with precious stones, and some people even think that wisdom is something essentially divine, beyond the grasp of human beings. Hence, it is no surprise that religions around the world, from Hinduism over the mythologies of ancient Egypt and Greece to those of Northern Europe, from Buddhism and Taoism over Zoroastrianism to Judaism and Christianity, abound with divine revelations of wisdom. They have permeated the history of humankind with stories and legends about and sayings of wise men and women, as becomes apparent from the eight 'immortals' in ancient China, the seven sages of Greece and Rome, the wise men from the East who came to adore the child Jesus,<sup>44</sup> the rishis of India, and the five Sufi sages in the Islam.

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<sup>43</sup> Trevor Curnow, *Wisdom. A History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), pp. 186f.

<sup>44</sup> For Barton, this is a paradigmatic story of the quest of the nations for wisdom and of the revelation of true wisdom in a place, where no-one expected it. See:

Finally, and on more implicit level, there is a lot of wisdom present in the literature of all cultures of the world.<sup>45</sup>

However, although this enumeration shows that wisdom is a common element of nearly all civilizations and something that people have always been striving for, it is very hard to define wisdom unambiguously. According to Plato and Aristotle, as well as many philosophers of (early) modernity, like Descartes, Leibniz, Fichte, and Hegel, wisdom is primarily a theoretical knowledge of the first principles. This explains why wisdom is sometimes identified with science; scientism, in particular, is convinced that only science is able to solve all problems of individuals and society.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, according to Aristotle there is also another kind of wisdom, namely practical wisdom, which is vital in moral issues, that is when one has to apply general insights about the good life to individual situations. Epicurus also approaches wisdom as practical matter, considering it as a constitutive element of a pleasant life. In his view, wisdom consists in liberating oneself from fears and desires as well as from the thought-lessness linked to all false opinions. According to the Stoa, wisdom comes down to disciplining one's natural inclinations, goals in life and thinking.<sup>47</sup> Augustine, in contrast, believes that wisdom resides in God, so that humans can only attain it by humbly following Christ who is the one and only Mediator between God and them.<sup>48</sup>

Although this variety shows that a clear definition of wisdom is impossible, there are nevertheless a number of family-resemblances between what different cultures understand by this term. Generally speaking, wisdom offers an encompassing, theoretical or practical understanding of how to orient one's life, based on human experience or divine revelation.<sup>49</sup>

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Stephen C. Barton, "Gospel Wisdom," *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found? Wisdom in the Bible, the Church and the Contemporary World*, Stephen C. Barton (ed.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> For a broad, cross-cultural, historical overview of wisdom, see Curnow, *Wisdom*.

<sup>46</sup> For an analysis of the (problematic) fate of wisdom in modern philosophy, see Peter Jonkers, "A Revaluation of Wisdom as a Way to Reconnect Philosophy With the Life-World," *Philosophy and the Life World*, He Xirong, Peter Jonkers, and Shi Yongze (eds.) (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2017), pp. 41-62.

<sup>47</sup> For an overview of the manifold meanings of wisdom, see: Andreas Speer, "Weisheit" *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Band 12 (2005), pp. 371-397.

<sup>48</sup> Carol Harrison, "Augustine, Wisdom and Classical Culture," *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* Stephen C. Barton (ed.), p. 137.

<sup>49</sup> Speer, "Weisheit," p. 371.

This means, first, that wisdom is essentially based on a profound insight in what is true and good, not only for oneself, but for all people. This distinguishes true wisdom from self-conceit, and true prophets from false ones. Although true wisdom essentially includes a profound self-critique of its own digressions, it has also always been philosophy's task to separate the wheat of true wisdom from the chaff of ideology, superstition, fanaticism, etc.

Second, although a profound insight in the true nature of things and human beings is essential for wisdom, it is certainly not identical with ordinary factual knowledge. Someone who knows all kinds of petty facts, who gives all the right answers in a hypothetical quiz about everything, is not deemed wise at all. Rather, wise people are those who can see the bigger picture, whose horizons are broadest, whose vision is clearest, who live in the light.<sup>50</sup> Yet, wise people not only need to have a broad vision, but also have to be able to relate it in a meaningful way to a particular moral or existential situation of concrete individuals or societies. Hence, it is no surprise that the need for wisdom crops up most often in situations where factual knowledge and (technical) know-how come up against questions of ethics, values, beauty, the shaping and flourishing of the whole person, the common good, and long-term perspectives.<sup>51</sup> This explains why one of the most intricate difficulties of wisdom, namely to relate in a meaningful way a broad, theoretical vision of the good life in general with a particular, practical situation, is often addressed by presenting wisdom through a narrative. Many stories of religious and secular world-literature derive their lasting impact precisely from the fact that they offer a wealth of profound insights in existential and moral matters through recounting the concrete experiences of individual people and communities.

Third, as a life orienting kind of knowledge, wisdom is principally *about* people. It also stems *from* people, since wisdom is above all manifested in and derives its source from wise people, even if they are mediators of divine wisdom. In connection with the previous point, this means that what makes these people wise is that they are able to connect general wise insights with whatever life throws at people in the particularity and complexity of their day-to-day lives.<sup>52</sup> Just reciting wise sayings without being able to connect them with or apply them to people's specific situations is anything but wise, but rather manifests a hubris of reason.

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<sup>50</sup> Curnow, *Wisdom*, p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> David Ford, *Christian Wisdom. Desiring God and Learning in Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Curnow, *Wisdom*, p. 9.

Yet the reverse is also true: someone who is only sensitive to the complexities of people's concrete situations, but is unable to take into account the importance of moral principles as objective standards of the good life, yields to the illusions of the heart, and is not considered wise either.<sup>53</sup>

In order to illustrate the role and importance of both aspects of wisdom and their mutual relation, it is helpful to draw an analogy between geographical and life-orientation.<sup>54</sup> In both cases, there is an obvious subjective need for orientation, namely to avoid to get lost geographically or to go astray existentially or morally. Moreover, both kinds of orientation consist in linking the specific situation of a person or community to some general rules or principles. In order to orient myself in a city, region, or country I need first of all an external, fixed point of reference, in relation to which I can situate myself. This can be the sun or the Pole Star, the satellites of the GPS, a road- or city-map, etc. In a similar vein, in order to orient myself in life I need first of all an external, stable point of reference, with the help of which I can put my life in perspective. Traditionally, the fundamental insights of religions and the exemplary life-stories of saints have played the role of such a reference point. In the case of geographical orientation, the second step is to link this external point of reference with the specific point where I am. In the case of existential or moral orientation, I also need to determine as accurately as possible the contingencies of my personal situation in relation to moral reference points. Hence, the analogy between geographical and existential (or moral) orientation consists in that both are a matter of combining an external point of reference with an accurate assessment of the specific situation of the person who has to orient herself.

Yet there are also some fundamental differences between geographical and existential or moral orientation. Whereas the objectivity of geographical points of reference is unproblematic, and the person who needs to orient herself can determine most of the times her specific location unambiguously, the objectivity of existential points of reference and the univocity to define our specific situation in relation to them when orientating ourselves morally or existentially raise fundamental problems. In our pluralist era, there are many divergent, and even competing points of

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 241.

<sup>54</sup> I developed this point earlier with the help of Kant's essay *What does it mean: to Orientate Oneself in Thinking?*, in which he also draws an analogy between geographical and moral orientation. See: Peter Jonkers, "Redefining Religious Truth as a Challenge for Philosophy of Religion," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4, 4 (2012), pp. 153-158.

reference, and some of them lack stability (e.g., media stars or temporary fads), let alone objectivity. It is also difficult to determine our specific, existential situation unambiguously, because of our biases and prejudices. Finally, because of increased social mobility, the number of new existential situations in which we are in need of orientation is far greater than those of the average traveler, most of whose trips are routine. In sum, whereas geographical orientation is subjectively and objectively adequate (i.e., we need to orient ourselves and can thereby rely on objectively given points of reference), moral or existential orientation is subjectively adequate, but objectively inadequate (i.e., we need to orient ourselves, but have no universally valid, objectively given points of reference).<sup>55</sup> This explains why the quest for true wisdom is a never-ending process, why the (religious and secular) traditions that comprise these existential points of reference need to be critically examined as to their plausibility or truth, and why we need the advice of wise people in difficult existential and moral situations much more than that of live travel-guides.

### *Christian Wisdom*

In his book on Christian wisdom, David Ford describes Christianity as “at present the largest global wisdom tradition.”<sup>56</sup> Characteristic of Christian wisdom is that it is God-centered, has the whole of creation as its context, is immersed in history and the contemporary world, and is constantly sought afresh with others in a community whose basic trust is that the Spirit will lead them into further truth. Since Christians believe that Jesus is God’s only son, he is not only a teacher of Godly wisdom, the title by which he is most frequently addressed and referred to in the New Testament, but also wisdom incarnate, a theological claim regarding Jesus which first appeared within the early history of the transmission and development of the traditions regarding Jesus.<sup>57</sup> This means that Jesus was not just an enlightened ‘wisdom teacher’, memorable for his subversive parables and startling figures of speech, since such a reconstruction fails to do justice to the messianic, eschatological dimension of Jesus’ kingdom proclamation, and overlooks the extent to which the wisdom which Jesus

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<sup>55</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Was heißt: sich im Denken orientieren?,” *Werke in zehn Bänden. Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel*, Band 5: *Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 270, footnote.

<sup>56</sup> Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> James D.G. Dunn, “Jesus: Teacher of Wisdom or Wisdom Incarnate?” *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?* Stephen C. Barton (ed.), pp. 79 and 83.

teaches is a hidden heavenly wisdom, not reducible to matters of empirical observation or existential need. Rather Jesus' wisdom points to a transcendental reality discerned only by faith and in the context of obedient discipleship. Christian wisdom is not primarily a matter of existential, let alone technical or empirical knowledge, but has much more to do with mystery and revelation. It is a manifestation of the hidden life of God made known in the life, death and resurrection of the Son of God.<sup>58</sup>

The essentially divine character of Christian wisdom explains why Paul is so critical of its opposite, namely all manifestations of human or worldly wisdom and human's boasting of it as if it were the result of human knowledge alone. Therefore, Paul qualifies all worldly wisdom rather as folly in the eyes of God, thereby marking its incommensurability with Christian wisdom. Hence, from a Pauline perspective, the common approach of Christian apologists, namely to identify the culture's questions and then provide satisfying Christian answers, is counterproductive. In Paul's view, Jews nor Greeks will get the answers they seek, since they ask the wrong questions. Only by believing wholeheartedly in the story of Jesus, and accepting that one's whole life is reframed by it, one can become open to the revelation of God's wisdom.<sup>59</sup> Beyond doubt, through the belief that true wisdom can only be reached through God and Jesus as wisdom incarnate Christian wisdom differentiates most explicitly from secular wisdom.

Yet, the relation between worldly and Christian wisdom does not necessarily have to be interpreted as a sharp opposition, but can also be seen as a deepening and radicalization of secular wisdom. Starting from the family-resemblances of secular or worldly wisdom, they can be summarized as follows: as a life orienting kind of knowledge, wisdom stems from humans, who are able to see the world on the basis of a profound insight in the true and the good, and are capable of applying these insights fruitfully to the day to day concerns of concrete individuals and communities. Yet, every kind of human wisdom runs the risk to degenerate into a shallow pragmatism, thus becoming 'all too human'. Against this background, Christian wisdom can be interpreted as deepening and radicalizing secular wisdom. In particular, to stave off the risk of letting one's life be led by seeming or false wisdom and, phrased positively, to value true wisdom as much as possible, Christianity has redefined wisdom in a

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<sup>58</sup> Barton, "Gospel Wisdom," pp. 108f.

<sup>59</sup> Richard B. Hays, "Wisdom According to Paul," *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Stephen C. Barton (ed.), pp. 122f. See also: Colin Gunton, "Christ, the Wisdom of God: A Study in Divine and Human Action," *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Stephen C. Barton (ed.), p. 260.



radically transcendent way, to the extent that Jesus is believed to be wisdom incarnate. Hence, from a Christian perspective, wisdom does not stem from humans, but directly from God, and is mediated by Jesus. This does not mean that, from a Christian perspective, worldly or secular wisdom is by definition false or a folly, but it does mean that Christian faith radicalizes the depth and broadness of truly wise insights in the most radical way.

Turning to the wisdom-character of Christian wisdom, we can see how it relates to wisdom in general, discussed in the previous section. Christian wisdom is primarily gained from reading scripture alert to both its origins, reception and current interpretations and also to contemporary understanding and life. Much of scriptural wisdom is narrative, i.e., lies in the way the story is told, the narrative pattern and detail, the encounters and images, and the key events and statements, as becomes manifest in a paradigmatic way in the book of Job and the stories about Solomon, as well in the parable of the Good Samaritan. The narrative character of scriptural wisdom, and more in general the fact that Christian wisdom has its source in God means that it is inexhaustible and even elusive, and hence can never be fully grasped by a rational interpretation, be it theological or philosophical.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, Christian wisdom is not only embedded in narratives, but also in teachings, long-term practices, and patterns of family and community life. As a community of interpretation, the Church can be seen as a school of wisdom, since, historically and theologically, it is inextricably interwoven with scripture, tradition and worship and is the social location of the three together.<sup>61</sup> A recent example of how deep Christian wisdom is embedded in the teachings and the life of the Church is the encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), in which Pope John Paul II discusses extensively the relevance of wisdom, as related to God's revelation and human knowledge, for the ongoing intellectual debate. Since God offers his wisdom to mankind as a gift, it deserves to be meditated and asks to be accepted as a sign of God's love. "This revealed truth is set within our history as an anticipation of that ultimate and definitive vision of God which is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart."<sup>62</sup> As a life orienting kind of knowledge, Christian wisdom is a unity of faith and reason. This unity means that, with the help of their reason humans can discover true wisdom to some extent, although it eventually remains a

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<sup>60</sup> Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, p. 190

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153 and p. 254.

<sup>62</sup> John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1998), p. 15.

mystery for them; it is only thanks to faith that humans can await God's revelation of wisdom with confidence.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the question arises which role Christian wisdom can play in a pluralist society. Given the fact that Christian faith has lost its self-evidence and has become optional in a world full of other equally attractive options, bidding for the public's favor,<sup>64</sup> it is not realistic at all to expect that people would embrace Christian faith as their only source of wisdom. Moreover, most humans of our times feel a resistance to let themselves guide by one school of wisdom or even by any such school. Instead, they pick and choose autonomously from the (religious and secular) wisdom traditions with which they are familiar, those elements that, for the time being, fit their specific needs best. This attitude reflects quite well the fact that people see orientation in life predominantly as a matter of tinkering or 'bricolage'. The Church has to accept this reality, even though it contrasts sharply with the fact that Christian wisdom, just like all other wisdom-traditions, are encompassing wholes and result from life-experiences that have been discussed, criticized and corrected throughout the ages. Yet precisely this characteristic can be appealing to contemporary people: since they are seeking for true wisdom in a world with multiple points of reference, some of which lead them astray, it makes sense to learn from traditions that have proven their value, when people need to orient themselves in life.<sup>65</sup>

#### *How to Connect Christian Wisdom to People's Particular Situations?*

If one agrees with the conclusion of the relevance of wisdom traditions in order to give meaning and orientation to one's life, the next crucial question is how they can do so effectively. When trying to answer this question, already hinted at in the previous sections, in the case of Christian faith, this means that this kind of wisdom has to make the connection between Christian doctrine, teachings, sayings, etc. and the concrete situations in which people are leading their lives. In order to introduce this question further, I want to draw the attention to a notable difference between the manifestation of wisdom in earlier times and the present-day.

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<sup>63</sup> For an analysis of the topic of wisdom in *Fides et Ratio*, see Peter Jonkers, *Truth and Wisdom. The Significance of 'Fides et Ratio' for the Contemporary Intellectual Debate* (Rome: Publications of the Pontificia Universita Lateranese, 2005).

<sup>64</sup> See Hellemans and Jonkers, "Introduction," pp. 3f.; Hellemans, "Imagining the Catholic Church," p. 133; Joas, "The Church in a World of Options," pp. 89f.

<sup>65</sup> Pierre Hadot, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2001), p. 165f.

Wisdom used to show itself as something rather theoretical, focused unilaterally on the universal principles of the good life, thereby failing to take into account human passions and the complexities of everyday existence. It thus appeared as a collection of abstract insights, imposed on the contingent world from above. Because of this one-sidedness wisdom often became severed from the concrete lives of people, so that it failed to orient them.<sup>66</sup> In our times, by contrast, wisdom tends to take only the spatio-temporal settings of human lives into account, thereby making itself liable to the opposite one-sidedness, namely that it does not critically examine the biases and prejudices of these settings, and does not bother to relate them to the universal teachings and principles. Consequently, such a kind of presumed wisdom risks to be nothing more than a justification of existing life-orientations.<sup>67</sup> It is clear that neither of these one-sided approaches qualifies as true wisdom, albeit because of different reasons. Their popularity, then and now, probably stems from the fact that they give humans the illusion of being able to find an easy solution, albeit in opposite ways, to the existential conflicts that haunts them each time when they try to relate general teachings of wisdom to their need for orientation in contingent situations.

In order to answer the question how to connect general principles of the good life to the contingencies of people's lives, I take Martha Nussbaum's book, *The Fragility of Goodness*, as my starting point.<sup>68</sup> In the tenth chapter of that book, she contrasts Aristotle's views of non-scientific deliberation or practical wisdom with Plato's idea of theoretical wisdom or episteme. According to Plato, moral rules form a deductive system of rationality are concerned throughout with universals; these rules are the final authorities against which particular moral decisions should be measured. Aristotle, by contrast, distinguishes between theoretical knowledge or episteme, which is about general principles and unchangeable entities, and practical wisdom, which is concerned with the ultimate particular fact.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, for Aristotle the appropriate criterion of correct choice is that the person of practical wisdom is a thoroughly human being, i.e., someone who does not attempt to take up a stand outside of the

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<sup>66</sup> Wolfgang Welsch, "Weisheit in einer Welt der Pluralität" *Philosophie und Weisheit*, Willi Oelmüller (ed.) (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1989), p. 227.

<sup>67</sup> Brenda Almond, "Seeking Wisdom: Moral Wisdom or Ethical Expertise" *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Stephen C. Barton (ed.), p. 199.

<sup>68</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness. Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics. The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Jonathan Barnes (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1142a23-4.

conditions of human life, but bases her judgment on a long and broad experience of these conditions.<sup>70</sup> This shows that Aristotle assumes the meaningfulness and value of our everyday human lives, and tries to discover an account of our underlying moral commitments, which does justice to our moral experience. He does not downplay the importance of the common good and the universal moral rules that follow from it, but recognizes that these rules are not the only standards for moral decision in contingent situations. Rather, universal rules are like the leaden ruler of Lesbian architecture, which was not rigid but could be adapted to the shape of the stone.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, for Aristotle the values that are constitutive of a good human life are plural and incommensurable, and therefore they cannot be measured and applied univocally, as if morals were a kind of *technè*. In contrast to Plato's view, Aristotle thinks that there is no single common notion of the good that practical wisdom only needs to apply in order to pass a correct moral judgment in specific situations. Instead, the best human life should be conceived as a life inclusive of a number of different constituents, each being defined apart from each of the others and valued for its own sake; each virtue is defined separately, as something that has value in itself. To put it concretely: "If I should ask of justice and of love whether both are constituent parts of *eudaimonia* [...], I surely do not imply [...] that we are to hold them up to a single standard, regarding them as productive of some further value. [...] Something can be an end in itself and at the same time be a valued constituent in a larger or more inclusive end." To choose a value "for *its own sake* (for the sake of what it itself is) not only does not require, but is actually incompatible with, viewing it as qualitatively commensurable with other valuable items."<sup>72</sup>

All this means that, for Aristotle, principles alone fail to capture the fine detail of the concrete particular. In order to count as practical wisdom, general principles must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself, by a faculty that is suited to confront it as a complex whole.<sup>73</sup> This faculty is practical wisdom, which is a matter of balancing between universal rule and particular situation, until one reaches a moment of equilibrium. In order to do this balancing properly, a wealth of practical experience of particular situations is needed,<sup>74</sup> since general principles as such

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<sup>70</sup> Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 290.

<sup>71</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1137b29-32.

<sup>72</sup> Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 297.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 300f.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Song, "Wisdom as the End of Morality," *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?*, Stephen C. Barton (ed.), pp. 300f. This conclusion is in line with Aris-

lack the concreteness, flexibility, and respect for the complexity that is needed to judge these situations correctly. Yet, these principles have a distinct though limited usefulness. As summaries of the wise judgments of others, they are guidelines in moral development for people who do not yet possess practical wisdom and insight. These principles even guide virtuous adults in their approach to the particular, helping them to pick out its salient features. When there is no time to formulate a fully concrete decision, and to scrutinize all the features of the case at hand, it is better to follow a good summary rule than to make a hasty and inadequate concrete choice. Furthermore, rules give constancy and stability in situations in which bias and passion might distort judgment. In sum, rules are necessities because we are not always good judges.<sup>75</sup> Finally and most importantly, “the particular case would be surd and unintelligible without the guiding and sorting power of the universal. [...] Nor does particular judgment have the kind of rootedness and focus required for goodness of character without a core of commitment to a general conception – albeit one that is continually evolving, ready for surprise, and not rigid. There is in effect a two-way illumination between particular and universal.”<sup>76</sup>

For Paul Ricoeur, who has also pondered a lot on the importance of practical wisdom, but from a contemporary perspective, the rift between universal moral principles and the complexity of concrete, day-to-day life implies that ethical conflicts are inevitable. They can only be dealt with appropriately, though never solved once and for all, by ‘a moral judgment in situation’, which is the essence of practical wisdom.<sup>77</sup> Practical wisdom “consists in a capacity [...] for discerning the right rule [...] in difficult situations requiring action. The exercise of this virtue is inseparable from the personal quality of the wise human being [...]. There is a close tie between prudence and ‘singular things’.”<sup>78</sup> The need for practical wisdom arises when the universalism that is claimed by moral principles, is confronted with the recognition of the positive values belonging to the (particular) historical and communitarian contexts of the realization of these

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totle’s definition of moral virtue: “Moral virtue is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a *logos*, the one by which the person of practical wisdom would determine it.” See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b36-7a2.

<sup>75</sup> Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness*, p. 304.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 306.

<sup>77</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 249.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Reflections on the Just* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 54.

same rules.<sup>79</sup> The characteristics of practical wisdom can be summarized as follows:

1) It always upholds the moral norm, although it may be applied differently according to the particulars of the situation; 2) it is the search for a just mean, less in the sense of a compromise than an attempt to find a common ground; 3) so as not to appear arbitrary, it should seek the advice of others, especially competent, wise, experienced people.<sup>80</sup>

In his study, Ricoeur gives several examples of how practical wisdom operates in these situations. Wisdom introduces equity as a corrective of the one-sided generality of the law in its application to a particular situation. "Equity [...] is another name for the *sense* of justice, when the latter traverses the hardships and conflicts resulting from the application of the *rule* of justice."<sup>81</sup> It also senses the fine dividing line in Kant's second categorical imperative that tends to separate its universalist version, represented by the idea of humanity, from its pluralist version, represented by the idea of persons as ends in themselves, and gives preference to the latter over the former in the name of the solicitude that is addressed to persons in their irreplaceable singularity.<sup>82</sup> A final example of practical wisdom concerns the current discussion of human rights which, although they have been ratified by just about every state, are nevertheless suspected of being the fruit of the cultural history of the West. In order to avoid that this discussion ends in a complete impasse, practical wisdom has an essential task: it has to assume the paradox between maintaining, on the one hand, the universal claim attached to a limited number of values, and on the other hand, to submit this claim to discussion on the level of the convictions incorporated in concrete forms of life. A wise judgment in situation consists in recognizing that other potential universals are contained in so-called exotic cultures, in admitting that there is a possible truth in the proposals of meaning that are at first foreign to us.<sup>83</sup>

All this means that the moral judgement in situation of practical wisdom remains a fragile one, always open to reconsideration, and that

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<sup>79</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 274.

<sup>80</sup> David Kaplan, *Ricoeur's Critical Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 113. Quoted in Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other. Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (Lanham/Boulder/New York/London: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 85.

<sup>81</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 262.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

practical wisdom can never propose, let alone impose one single response to people's quest for a truthful life orientation. Moreover, because such a judgment in situation has to be made in a context of plurality, the conviction that seals this judgment benefits from the plural character of the underlying debate; a wise person is not necessarily one individual alone.<sup>84</sup>

### Catholic Social Teaching as an Example of Christian Wisdom

In conclusion, I want to draw the attention to Catholic social teaching, which is, in my view, a paradigmatic example of how the Church can connect the general values of Christian faith to the specific situations of individuals and societies. According to the encyclical *Deus caritas est* "the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live."<sup>85</sup> This quotation shows that the Church, in order to actualize the fundamental (Christian) value of justice in the lives of societies here and now, does not opt for a uniform top down or purely technical model, but rather for a dialogue with those who take its moral guidelines to heart, and look for ways to put them into practice in diverging societal contexts. Obviously, the Church's prime mission is "to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest."<sup>86</sup> Yet at the same time the Church explicitly recognizes that it is the state's responsibility to answer "the question of how justice can be achieved here and now."<sup>87</sup> Hence, in order to connect the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching with the contingent opportunities and constraints of specific civil societies, the Church puts its trust in the prudence of men and women at a local level, thereby taking for granted that the outcome of this mediation will differ from society to society. By taking this approach, the Church values two important characteristics of practical wisdom. First, practical wisdom is a matter of wise people, who are able to prudently connect general moral principles to particular situations, thus expressing moral judgments in situation. Second,

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>85</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas est* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006), p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

the Church recognizes that these judgements are inevitably fragile ones, always open to reconsideration as a result of a more refined insight in the implications of general moral principles, or as a result of a more accurate assessment of the particular situation.

The idea of societal participation is a good example of how one of the principles of Catholic social teaching is connected with the contingencies of the social sphere. According to the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, social participation is the typical implication of the principle of subsidiarity, a principle with a long standing tradition in Catholic social teaching. This principle stipulates that “all societies of a superior order must adopt attitudes of help (“subsidium”) – therefore of support, promotion, development – with respect to lower-order societies.”<sup>88</sup> In this way, intermediate social entities can properly perform the functions that fall to them, without being absorbed and substituted by entities of a higher level, e.g., the state. The importance of this principle is that people are protected from abuse of power by a higher-level authority. In order to put this principle into practice, “appropriate methods for making citizens more responsible in actively ‘being a part’ of the political and social reality of their country are needed.”<sup>89</sup> Hence, the characteristic implication of the principle of subsidiarity is participation. The *Compendium* defines this notion as “a series of activities by means of which the citizen, either as an individual or in association with others, whether directly or through representation, contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”<sup>90</sup>

Herewith, the *Compendium* recognizes that answering the question how the principle of subsidiarity is brought about, in other words, how a participative democracy is organized, depends on the social and historical contexts of the society in which this principle is implemented. But, at the same time, the *Compendium* also stresses the universal importance of the participation: “every democracy should be participative.”<sup>91</sup> Because participation is one of the standards of a humane society, initiatives that could jeopardize it “are a source of concern and deserve careful consideration.”<sup>92</sup> Times and again, the *Compendium* warns of the dangers of inade-

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<sup>88</sup> John Paul II, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), p. 186.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191.



quate or incorrect practices of participation. It also expresses its concern about attitudes “that cause widespread disaffection with everything connected with the sphere of social and political life.”<sup>93</sup> The example of participation shows that the Church’s social teaching is indeed an expression of practical wisdom: this teaching makes a careful transition from a universal principle to the contextual situation of a concrete society, resulting in an inevitably fragile judgment of situation, made by people who are active in this field on a local level.

Against this background, it is no surprise that not only church-members, but also many secular people have received Catholic social teaching very positively. They appreciate not only the value of the fundamental principles of this teaching, summarized as Christian personalism, i.e., the intrinsic dignity of the human in her relation to other human beings and society, the physical world, and to God. They also admire the ways, in which countless individuals have practiced these principles, as well as the many judgments in situation, through which wise persons in sometimes very difficult and even tragic circumstances have tried to apply these principles. These observations substantiate the conviction, expressed in title of this chapter, namely that the Church can serve the world through wisdom: revitalizing wisdom traditions in Christian faith.

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**Part II**  
**Theologizing the New Realities**





# Living Catholicity Differently: On Growing into the Plenitudinous Plurality of Catholic Communion in God<sup>1</sup>

PAUL D. MURRAY

## Introduction

The forerunner to the current volume, *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers* (2015), analysed the contemporary situation of the Catholic Church in North America and Europe as one minority choice amidst a welter of options. Any long-lingering, post-Christendom aspiration for totality has been doubly vanquished by secularism and post-modern pluralism. Joseph Ratzinger presciently recognised in 1969 that the Church was to become a ‘little flock’.<sup>2</sup> With this, a prevailing attitude of *commitment if, only, and for as long as something works for me* further erodes any sense of inherited loyalties and transgenerational identity. Somewhat paraphrased, the conclusion of the 2015 study was that the Church needs to become more attentive, imaginative, and responsive in effectively linking with the actual lived concerns and needs of the

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<sup>1</sup> The argument of this chapter about the nature of catholicity and its implications relates to a larger, multi-stranded project on which I am currently engaged under the overall title, *Catholicism Transfigured: Conceiving Change in the Church*. Thus far, various essays have appeared relating to this larger project which will finally issue in full-length, monograph treatment. I am grateful to Nicholas M. Healy, Gerard Loughlin, Greg Ryan and Linn Tonstad for their respective insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See Joseph Ratzinger, “What Will the Church Look Like in 2000,” Idem, *Faith and the Future* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1971), pp. 89-106 (pp. 103-105); compare Karl Rahner, “Church of the Little Flock,” Idem, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1974 [1972]), pp. 29-34 (pp. 30, 34).

Catholic faithful.<sup>3</sup> Only so will its distinctive offer be heard as having any continuing value.<sup>4</sup>

The twin concerns of the current volume, *Envisioning Futures for the Catholic Church*, are: a) to ask what changes are required to the Church's 'internal organization' and formal teaching if it is to be capable of demonstrating such greater responsiveness and lasting appeal; and b) to examine what "orientations...theology and theologians" can offer in this regard.<sup>5</sup> The intention is to pursue these concerns in relation to the lived reality of the Church and not simply at the level of idealised constructs.<sup>6</sup> Implicit within this is recognition of the diversity of experience, perspective, and conviction which *de facto* operates within the Church in relation to practically any significant matter.

The specific purpose of this chapter, 'Living Catholicity Differently', is to examine what resources there are for living this intra-Catholic pluralism well: in a manner that holds identity and inclusiveness together, in what I have elsewhere referred to as a relationship of 'dynamic integrity'.<sup>7</sup> Presupposed here is that identity, stability, and continuity ('integri-

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase "effectively linking with" allows for the critical scrutinising, even subverting, of "lived concerns and needs," e.g., by showing them to be distorted, self-frustrating, and in need of being resituated within a wider frame. Each specific contextual concern and felt need raises the question as to how Catholic communities should best read and engage the world in a manner which respects and reflects the "dynamic integrity" proper to Catholic tradition. Compare George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-liberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984); Paul D. Murray, "A Liberal Helping of Postliberalism Please," *The Future of Liberal Theology*, Mark D. Chapman (ed.) (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 208-218; Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), pp. 120-155, 156-175. On "dynamic integrity," see footnote 7 here.

<sup>4</sup> See Hellemans and Jonkers, "Introduction," here, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 4. Relevant here are: Paul D. Murray, "Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice: On the Transformative Task of Systematic Ecclesiology," *Modern Theology* 30 (2014), pp. 251-281; and Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), particularly pp. 3, 25, 32-49.

<sup>7</sup> See Paul D. Murray, "Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development: A Post-foundationalist Perspective," *Faithful Reading: Essays in Honour of Fergus Kerr*, Simon Oliver, Karen Kilby, and O'Loughlin (eds.) (London: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 193-220, particularly p. 215. Whilst 'dynamic integrity' has some resonance with Francis Sullivan's evocative phrase, 'creative fidelity', it goes beyond the concern to find what Newman called 'elbow-room' (or air to breath) through nuanced interpretation of the existing web of Catholic doctrine and

ty') and freshness, creativity, and contextual specificity ('dynamism'/ 'dynamic') are each authentic to Catholic tradition.<sup>8</sup> Where the former relates most obviously to the internal coherence of the tradition, the latter relates most obviously to the tradition's extensive coherence with what is otherwise known of the world and the ever new circumstances within which the tradition is lived. But each has implications for the other: an adjustment in any one part of an integrated web of Catholic thought and practice – as configured at a given time and in a given context – will require potential adjustments in other parts.<sup>9</sup>

The resources identified here as bearing on the fruitful living of this *intra*-Catholic pluralism range across the conceptual-doctrinal and ecclesiological, through the structural and procedural, to the spiritual, habitual, and dispositional. The aim is to identify the elements in a systematic theology and practice of intra-Catholic diversity, debate, and disagreement. The hope is that this might be of service to the Church locally, regionally, and universally, on the journey towards becoming more truly Catholic:<sup>10</sup> a communion of communities<sup>11</sup> which can genuinely think and act *kath'olou*, in accordance with the whole truth of things in the complex simplicity of Christ (Eph 1:22; 1 Cor 15:28); inspired and effected by the Spirit, who is promised as leading the Church into the fullness of this complexly simple truth (Jn 16:3).

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allows for a greater degree of substantive reconfiguration in the light of fresh data, concerns, approaches, and concepts: see Francis Sullivan, *Creative Fidelity: Weighing and Interpreting Documents of the Magisterium* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996). For John Henry Newman on 'elbow-room', see "Letter to Emily Bowles" (May 19, 1863), *The Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman, XX*, Charles Stephen Dessain (ed.) (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970), henceforth L&D, p. 447; also "Letter to W. J. O'Neill Daunt" (June 17, 1863), p. 476.

<sup>8</sup> See Paul D. Murray, *Reason, Truth, and Theology in Pragmatist Perspective* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), pp. 152-60.

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller articulation of the coherentist account of Catholic theological rationality that guides this chapter, see *Ibid.*, particularly pp. 91-161; Idem, "Discerning the Dynamics of Doctrinal Development," *op. cit.*; Idem, "Searching the Living Truth of the Church in Practice," *op. cit.*; Idem, "On Valuing Truth in Practice: Rome's Postmodern Challenge," *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8 (2006), pp. 163-183.

<sup>10</sup> For the Church as *in via*; always on the way to becoming visibly again what it most deeply already is, see Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission, Third Phase (ARCIC III), *Walking Together on the Way: Learning to Be the Church – Locally, Regionally, Universally* (Erfurt: in press).

<sup>11</sup> See Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. Rowland C. De Peaux OPraem (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992 [1987]).

Alternatively stated, by presenting a constructive account of catholicity as a conceptual and practical resource for the beneficent living of intra-ecclesial plurality, this chapter can be viewed as providing an ecclesiological correlate to and something of the theological infrastructure for the coherentist account of Catholic theological reasoning which is assumed throughout (see no. 9 here).

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first, *‘Living catholicity as an all-inclusive identity’*, provides vision and orientation in the form of a first-level theological reading of catholicity and *intra-Catholic* plurality. The second, *‘Discerning catholicity: the principles of Catholic life’*, extracts and extrapolates relevant systematic principles from Johann Adam Möhler’s (1796-1838) hugely influential – although somewhat idealised – understanding of Catholicism as a living diversity held in harmonious unity.<sup>12</sup> The third, *‘At what price? Assessing the cost of living catholicity between ecclesial idealism and experienced tensions’*, turns from the register of systematic principles to ask how this all works in practice. With particular reference to the experience of gay and lesbian Catholics, the question is raised as to whether the cost is unacceptably high in relation to contentious matters. The fourth, *‘Growing into the fullness of catholicity: on becoming more fully the Catholic Church’*, explores what structural and procedural changes are necessary if the Church is indeed to become more responsive to the extensive demands of catholicity and more capable of living *intra-Catholic* plurality without suffering the costs either of fracture or of premature judgment and merciless exclusion. Here initial acknowledgment is made as to what might be learned from other Christian traditions in these regards. The fifth, *‘The spirit of Catholicism: on becoming Catholic people’*, complements the fourth and completes the argument by exploring the kind of individual ethic of communion that needs to be nurtured in Catholics if we are indeed to live *intra-Catholic* difference well and be able “to remain on speaking terms with each other and

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<sup>12</sup> See Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism: Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, translated by Peter C. Erb (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), henceforth *Unity*. For one example of Möhler’s influence on 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic ecclesiology, see Yves Congar, *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1984 [1982]), particularly pp. 13, 100, 129, 149-152. For further on Möhler’s influence on Congar, see footnotes 25 and 27 in the present essay; also Paul D. Murray, “Expanding Catholicity through Ecu-  
menicity in the Work of Yves Congar,” *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*, Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (eds.) (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 457-481, particularly pp. 458, 465-466, 469, 479.

to move forward in and with the Church” despite these, at times sharp, differences.<sup>13</sup>

### Living Catholicity as an All-Inclusive Identity

Deriving from the Greek adverbial phrase *kath'holou*, ‘according to the whole’, it is commonplace to say that ‘Catholic’ simply means ‘universal’.<sup>14</sup> Whilst there is some truth in this, it can be seriously misleading to move too quickly to a straightforward quantitative equation of ‘Catholic’ with spatio-temporal ‘universality’ without engaging the deeper Christological and pneumatological roots of the qualitative fullness in communion towards which catholicity is orientated.<sup>15</sup> Without this deeper appreciation, catholicity as universality – and, most specifically, catholicity as a *universal unity*, or a *unified universality* – tends toward a narrowed, staid uniformity and the requirement of conformity thereto. The classic example in modern Catholicism is the defensively anti-modernist homogeneity which Rahner referred to as the Pianine ‘monolithismus’.<sup>16</sup> Within this narrowed frame, as more broadly within the formal counter-Reformation Catholicism that prevailed from the Council of Trent to the Second Vatican Council, diversities of perspective, practice, articulation, and judgment represented error *tout simple*.<sup>17</sup> The counterintuitive argu-

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<sup>13</sup> Hellemans and Jonkers, “Introduction,” here, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., see “The word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal’ . . .,” Pope John Paul II, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Chapman, 1994 [1993]), §831, henceforth *CCC*, available at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P29.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P29.HTM). It is important to acknowledge that, having defined ‘catholic’ as ‘universal’, the *CCC* immediately continues: “in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole’.”

<sup>15</sup> For the contrast between the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of catholicity, see Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom: A Study of the Problem of Reunion*, trans. lated by M.A. Bousfield (London: Bles, 1939), pp. 93-95; also Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man*, trans. Lancelot C. Sheppard (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988 [1950]), pp. 48-51; and Avery Dulles, SJ, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), particularly pp. 30-47, 68-105.

<sup>16</sup> See Karl Rahner, “Theology and the Church’s Teaching Authority after the Council,” *Theological Investigations IX*, henceforth *TI*, trans. Graham Harrison (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), pp. 83-100 (p.86); Idem, “The Second Vatican Council’s Challenge to Theology” (1966), *Ibid.*, pp. 3-27 (p.6).

<sup>17</sup> See the “Syllabus of Errors” that was published together with Pope Pius IX’s “Encyclical Letter Condemning Current Errors. *Quanta Cura* (December 8, 1864), available in Latin at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-ix/la/documents/encyclica-quanta-cura-8-decembris-1864.html>; and in English at: <http://www.papal>

ment of this chapter is that the needed corrective to this recurrent capacity for Catholic reduction is *more not less* catholicity; but more of a catholicity alive to the full “breadth and length and height and depth” (Eph 3:18) of what Catholicism is situated within and called to signify.<sup>18</sup>

The first extant uses of the adjective ‘*katholikos*’ in relation to the Church – suggesting wholeness or fullness – are in the ‘Letter of St. Ignatius of Antioch to the Smyraeans’ and the ‘Martyrdom of Polycarp’. Following statements about the importance of avoiding heresy by maintaining communion with the local bishop – who is, in turn, in communion with all the other Catholic bishops – St. Ignatius states: “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.”<sup>19</sup> The precise meaning is unclear. Is the attributed wholeness, or fullness, specifically a feature of the Church’s teaching when compared with that of the heretical sects? Or does it pertain to the universal extent of the Church in comparison with the localised character of the heretical groups? There is a similar lack of clarity in the ‘Martyrdom of Polycarp’, where we find references to: the “bishop of the Catholic Church which is in Smyrna...” (§xvi, p. 42); “the Holy and Catholic Church in every place...” (p. 39); and to “...the whole Catholic Church throughout the world ...” (§viii, p. 40).<sup>20</sup>

Where some patristic scholars interpret these texts as identifying the Church’s wholeness or fullness primarily with the authenticity and purity of its teaching, others interpret them as primarily referencing the Church’s geographic unity and totality.<sup>21</sup> But perhaps the choice is a false one. What is clear is that for St. Cyril of Jerusalem, writing in the fourth Christian

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encyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm and <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9quanta.htm>. Compare Raymond F. Bulman and Frederick J. Parrella (eds.), *From Trent to Vatican II: Historical and Theological Investigations* (New York: OUP, 2006); and Darell Jodock (ed.), *Catholicism Contending with Modernity: Roman Catholic Modernism and Anti-Modernism in Historical Context* (London: CUP, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> See Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, pp. 30-105.

<sup>19</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, “The Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyrnæans,” §8, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds.), rev. Arthur Cleveland Cox (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/T&T Clark, 1996 reprint), pp. 86-92 (p.90); also *Ibid.*, §§ 4-7, pp. 87-89.

<sup>20</sup> The Church of Smyrna, “The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers I*, pp. 39-44; also *Ibid.*, § xix, p. 43.

<sup>21</sup> See Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 14, referencing J.N.D. Kelly, “‘Catholic’ and ‘Apostolic’ in the Early Centuries,” *One in Christ* 6/3 (1970), pp. 274-87 (pp. 274-80).

century, it was entirely natural to hold these together in the first two of his five-point explanation as to why the Church is called Catholic:

It is called Catholic then because it extends over all the world, from one end of the earth to the other; and because it teaches universally and completely one and all the doctrines which ought to come to men's knowledge, concerning things both visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly...<sup>22</sup>

The basic sense conveyed by the fleeting references both in the 'Letter to the Smyraeans' and the 'Martyrdom of Polycarp', is of there being a wholeness, or fullness, in Christ within the great Church Catholic, in contrast to the partiality to be found in the heretical groups. This resonates with de Lubac, who finds the primary reference being to a fullness of truth about humanity in Christ which pertains to all people.<sup>23</sup> In Newman's terms, the concern is to maintain the space for 'Catholic fullness' and not to settle for any lesser, partial truth.<sup>24</sup> Or as Congar put it, again displaying Möhler's influence, whilst particular individuals or groups within the Church may manifest a real, particular insight into truth, this can only ever be partial when compared with the fullness of truth given to the Church as a whole.<sup>25</sup> As we find in the Second Vatican Council's 'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church', *Lumen Gentium*:

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<sup>22</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, "Lecture XVIII. On the Words, and in One Holy Catholic Church, and in the Resurrection of the Flesh, and the Life Everlasting," §23, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, series 2, VII*, trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (eds.) (Grand Rapids/Edinburgh: Eerdmans/T&T Clark, 1996 reprint), pp. 134-143 (pp. 139-140).

<sup>23</sup> See de Lubac, *Catholicism*, pp. 48-50, in particular: "the accent is on neither the spatial nor the dogmatic sense; it is on the unity and totality of the divine sphere," p. 48, no. 2; and "The Church is not Catholic because she is spread abroad over the whole of the earth and can reckon on a large number of members. ...For fundamentally Catholicity has nothing to do with geography or statistics." pp. 48-49.

<sup>24</sup> See John Henry Newman, "XII. Milman's View of Christianity," in his *Essays Critical and Historical, Volume II*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1888), pp. 186-248 (p. 233).

<sup>25</sup> See Yves Congar, "Second Condition: Remain in Communion with the Whole Church," in Idem, *True and False Reform in the Church*, trans. Paul Philibert (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011 [1968, 1950]), pp. 229-264 (pp. 229-232); also idem, *Divided Christendom*, p. 43; compare Möhler, *Unity*, § 35 (pp. 167-168). The receptive ecumenical principle – that each tradition needs to attend to learning from the particular truths of others – follows as a logical correlate to catholicity thus understood. See Paul Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the*

In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed for Congar, as for Möhler, heresy represents precisely “the erection into a system of undue or partial emphasis on a particular point of view.”<sup>27</sup>

Whilst ‘*katholikos*’ itself is not to be found in the Greek New Testament, the basic notion of fullness in Christ and the Spirit is certainly to be found there and at multiple levels.<sup>28</sup> Resonant with 1 Cor 15:27 and alluding to Psalm 8, the writer of Ephesians tells us that God “has put all things under his [Christ’s] feet and has made him the head over all things” (Eph 1:22), the one who fills all things (see Eph 1:23), and who is “the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19). Nor does this represent any after-thought: it has always been in God’s plan “for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10). But nor either, for the writer of Colossians, is it a purely prospective reality: “all things in heaven and on earth were created...through him and for him” (Col 1:16). Thus it is that “in him all things hold together” (Col 1:17), who “is all and in all” (Col 3:11), and in whom “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Col 1:19; also 2:9). Again, for the author of the Fourth Gospel, Christ is the Spirit-filled incarnate Word of God, through whom “All things came into being” (Jn 1:3; also 1:10) and have “life” (Jn 1:4), who is “full of grace and truth” (Jn 1:14), and from whose fullness, in turn, “we have all received, grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16). This entire cosmic sweep is brought together in the Book of Revelation’s description of Christ as the “Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13); the one through whom and in whom all things have their source and find their fulfilment.

As such, the Word of God in Jesus Christ is believed to echo and resound in all of creation and in all times and places. So it is that Justin Martyr and other early Christian theologians, reworking an idea drawn

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*Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), no. 13, henceforth *LG*.

<sup>27</sup> Congar, *Divided Christendom*, p. 29; also p. 44; and Congar, “L’hérésie, déchirement de l’unité,” *L’Église est une: hommage à Moehler*, Pierre Chaillet (ed.) (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1939), pp. 255-269; compare Möhler, *Unity*, § 18 pp. 123.

<sup>28</sup> For unique New Testament uses of ‘*kath’holou*’ and ‘*kath’holes*’ see Acts 4:18 & 9:31 respectively.



from Stoic philosophy, could speak of there being ‘seeds of the word’ (*logoi spermatikoi*) in the world.<sup>29</sup>

It is this that forms the intrinsic relationship between Catholic fullness in Christ and the Spirit and the spatio-temporal category of universality. As variously written into the deep fabric of creation in all its variegated particularity, the whole truth of things in Christ and the Spirit touches on all things, all times, and all places. Christ in the Spirit, we might say, is the *universal particular*; or, in Avery Dulles’ terms, ‘the concrete universal’.<sup>30</sup> It is not simply that “in the particularity and contingency of his [*Jesus*] human existence the plenitude of divine life is made available.”<sup>31</sup> Reflecting explicitly on the cosmic Christ of the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline writings, Dulles writes: “If Christ is the universal principle of creation and redemption, he has, so to speak, a cosmic catholicity.”<sup>32</sup>

It is this that manifests in the intrinsic Catholic missionary impulse. The concern to spread recognition of and response to the person of Christ to all times and places flows directly from this deep-rooted conviction about the universal relevance of Christ as the deepest story of all things. As Congar, the Church’s ability and impulse “to extend over the whole world...is in virtue of the universal assimilative *capacity* of her constituent principles.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, it was “plain” for the fathers of the Second Vatican Council that such missionary activity both “wells up from the Church’s inner nature” and “perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion.”<sup>34</sup> Due to this impulse, from its earliest days the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8 & 13:47, citing Isa 49:6), and Christ’s universal significance was reflected

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<sup>29</sup> See Justin Martyr, “Second Apology,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers. I*, pp. 188-193 (§§ 8, 10, 13, pp. 191-193); idem, “First Apology,” *Ibid.*, pp. 163-87 (§ 46, p. 178); compare Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), no. 44, hence-forth *GS*.

<sup>30</sup> Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, pp. 9, 38. There is an echo here, whether conscious or not, of Hegel’s use of this term, in contrast to the notion of ‘absolute universals’, to speak of the multifarious specific instantiations of substance universals – and, hence, the universal Spirit – as being in and through ‘particularity’ and ‘individuality’. See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969 [1831]), pp. 603-604; also Robert Stern, “Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15(1) (2007), pp. 115-153; Gillian Rose, *Hegel: Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone Press, 1981), p. 207.

<sup>31</sup> Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Congar, *Divided Christendom*, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes* (1965), no. 6, henceforth *AG*.

in the geographic and ethnic universality of the community which came to call itself the Catholic Church. Pope Paul VI expressed this eloquently during his 1970 Apostolic Pilgrimage to West Asia, Oceania, and Australia:

...the Church, by virtue of her *essential catholicity*, cannot be alien to any country or people; she is bound to make herself native to every clime, culture, and race. Wherever she is, she must strike her roots deep into the spiritual and cultural ground of the place and assimilate all that is of genuine value.<sup>35</sup>

The Church cannot, without lived contradiction, become a community “closed in on herself.”<sup>36</sup>

In turn, this conviction about the intrinsic universal significance of Christ explains not only the worldwide spread of Catholic Christianity but also its involvement with every aspect of human life and culture. In Catholic understanding, following in the way of Jesus, living in the Spirit of Christ, is not about privileging special ‘spiritual’, explicitly ‘religious’, spheres of life, with the rest viewed as secondary. It is not simply a Sunday affair but an everyday reality; not simply about things done in church but about living in the world with the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), concerned with the entire gamut of human life: from conception to death and beyond; from home to polis, and all between.<sup>37</sup> Catholicity properly represents an extensive and encompassing vision, orientation, and practice with global reach, rooted in and impelled by the creative, redeeming, transforming action of God in Christ and the Spirit.

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<sup>35</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Radio Message to All People of Asia from Manila” (November 29, 1970), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* LXIII (1971), pp. 35-40 (p. 39), available at: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/speeches/1970/documents/hfp-vispe-19701129popoli-asia.html>, emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (hereafter CDF), “*Communiois Notio*. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion” (May 28, 1992), no. 4, available at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc28051992communiois-notioen.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc28051992communiois-notioen.html), here citing St. Cyprian, *Epist. ad Magnum*, 6: PL 3, 1142; also ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, no. 55.

<sup>37</sup> It is this core recognition that integrates de Lubac’s vision of Church and humanity in *Catholicism* with his account of graced nature and associated location of the life of grace in ordinary human existence in his 1946 *Surnaturel: études historiques* and, in turn, the quite remarkable sweep of his otherwise seemingly disparate engagements; see also Idem, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (London: Chapman, 1967 [1965]).

At the heart of catholicity, then, is no straightforward, undifferentiated universality but a concern for *both* universality *and* particularity; indeed, for a universality that *is* the holding of the diverse localities, the diverse particular centres, of Catholicism in gathered, configured communion.<sup>38</sup>

A very significant degree of diversity is already evident within and amongst the New Testament churches.<sup>39</sup> With this, the Lukan vision of Christianity as radiating out “beginning from Jerusalem”<sup>40</sup> is off-set by the Markan instruction “[G]o, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you” (Mk 16:7), implying the existence of a continuing Jesus community and nascent Galilean church without any reference to a prior Jerusalem mission. Indeed, the Lukan Pentecost narrative itself proclaims not a reversal of the cacophonous dissonance of Babel through the restoration of monoglot uniformity but the achievement of a complex polyphonous praise and multiply specific harmonic resonance in which “each one heard them speaking in the native language of each.”<sup>41</sup>

It is with good precedent, then, that there has always been significant internal plurality within the Church, whether we think of the tension between Antiochene and Alexandrian approaches in the patristic period, or of the difference between St Bonaventure and St Thomas in 13<sup>th</sup> century Paris concerning the use of Aristotelian philosophy; with the latter, in turn, resonating with the contemporary contested preference either for more Platonic ways of proceeding (for which read *explicitly theologically oriented* but potentially *idealised*), or for more Aristotelian ways of proceeding (for which read *naturally oriented* and *empirically responsible* but potentially *reductionist*).<sup>42</sup> Similarly, we might think of the 16<sup>th</sup> cen-

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<sup>38</sup> ARCIC III identifies this inextricable interweaving of the local and the universal with the practice of baptism, see ARCIC III, *Walking Together on the Way*, § 51; echoing CDF, *Communio Notio*, § 10.

<sup>39</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York/London: Paulist/Chapman, 1984); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977); Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); and in wider scope, Oscar Cullmann, *Unity through Diversity: Its Foundation, and a Contribution to the Discussion Concerning the Possibilities of Its Actualization*, trans. M. Eugene Boring (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988 [1986]).

<sup>40</sup> Lk 24:47; also vv.49, 52-3; and Acts 1:8.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 2:4-12; compare *AG* no. 4, where multiple references are given to the recurrence of the Babel-Pentecost contrast in the early fathers.

<sup>42</sup> This tension manifested most prominently in the public debate between the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, when Prefect of the CDF, and Bishop Walter Kasper, subsequently Cardinal President of the Pontifical Council for the Promo-

tury debate between Jesuit and Dominican theologians in relation to Molinism; a debate which was formally left open by order of Pope Paul V in 1607.

At a more practical level, despite the respective attempts of the Gregorian reform in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the Tridentine reform in the 16<sup>th</sup> century to suppress local liturgical rites – more ‘successful’ in the latter regard, with the liturgical experience of most Catholics by the time of the Second Vatican Council being one of unbroken uniformity – in reality there have always been multiple liturgical rites operating within catholicism at any one time. In the contemporary Church, this is most obviously so in relation to the various Eastern Rite Catholic churches,<sup>43</sup> particularly when coexistent alongside Latin Rite parishes in diaspora communities in Europe and North America. In turn, further liturgical pluriformity was explicitly reintroduced by the permission granted by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 for the ‘Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite’ (the version of the Tridentine Roman Rite issued by Pope John XXIII in 1962) to be celebrated alongside the ‘Ordinary Form’ as revised by Pope Paul VI in 1969.<sup>44</sup>

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tion of Christian Unity, as to whether the ‘universal Church’ is to be thought of as having ontological priority over the diverse local churches, or whether they are inextricably interdependent and mutually implicated in the reality of each other, see Walter Kasper, “On the Church: A Friendly Reply to Cardinal Ratzinger,” *America* 184 (2001), pp. 8-14; Joseph Ratzinger, “A Response to Walter Kasper: The Local Church and the Universal Church,” *America* 185 (2001), pp. 7-11; also Kilian McDonnell, “The Ratzinger/Kasper Debate: The Universal Church and Local Churches,” *Theological Studies* 63/2 (2002), pp. 227-250.

<sup>43</sup> Of course, the distinctiveness of the Eastern Catholic churches is not simply liturgical but also canonical, structural, and sacramental (in as much as married men are ordinarily admitted to presbyteral ordination), see Second Vatican Council, *Orientalium ecclesiarum* (1964), available at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iivaticancouncil/documents/vat-ii decree19641121orientalium-ecclesiarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/histcouncils/iivaticancouncil/documents/vat-ii decree19641121orientalium-ecclesiarum_en.html). Speaking in 1977, Pope Paul VI said: “E proprio nelle Chiese Orientali si ritrova storicamente anticipato e esaurientemente dimostrato nella sua validità lo schema pluralistico.” [“It is precisely in the Eastern churches that the validity of the pluralistic scheme has been historically anticipated and comprehensively demonstrated” *my own translation*]. Pope Paul VI, “Discorso ai Partecipanti alle Celebrazioni per il IV Centenario del Pontificio Collegio Greco” (April 30, 1977), available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1977/april/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19770430\\_pont-collegio-greco.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1977/april/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19770430_pont-collegio-greco.html); also *LG* no. 23.

<sup>44</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, “*Summorum Pontificium*. Apostolic Letter given *Motu Proprio* on the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970.”

However, whatever internal diversity has long been authentic to Catholicism, it is undoubtedly the case – particularly so in comparison with the preceding Pisan era – that since the latter half of the twentieth century the degree of theological and practical pluralism within Catholicism has experienced a significant quantum shift upwards.

On the one hand, there has been the demise of Neo-Scholastic philosophy and theology as an imposed common frame,<sup>45</sup> from which strait-jacket each of the major 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic theologians sought escape.<sup>46</sup> When combined with the proliferation in the surrounding intellectual milieu of potential conceptual and methodological dialogue partners, it is little wonder that a seemingly irrevocable plurality of perspective, approach, and position has been introduced into contemporary Catholic theology and ecclesial self-consciousness. Karl Rahner well referred to this situation as one of ‘gnoseological concupiscence’,<sup>47</sup> wherein no individual, no matter how learned, is capable of achieving integration of all that is to be known and of all the ways in which what is to be known can be known.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand, as also noted by Rahner, there has been the fundamental shift in Catholic self-consciousness to being a genuinely ‘world church’; a shift that was effected by all the world’s bishops gathering for full deliberative involvement in the four annual sessions of The Second Vatican Council as leaders of their own local churches (*LG* no. 23). In Rahner’s terms, this represented “a first assembly of the world-episcopate,

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(2007), available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu\\_prio/documents/hfben-xvimotu-proprio20070707summorum-pontificum.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/motu_prio/documents/hfben-xvimotu-proprio20070707summorum-pontificum.html).

<sup>45</sup> See Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977).

<sup>46</sup> See Fergus Kerr, OP, *Twentieth Century Catholic Theologians: From Neo-scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Oxford/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007); Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (eds.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth Century Catholic Theology*; Mark Schoof, OP, *Breakthrough: Beginnings of the New Catholic Theology*, trans. N. D. Smith (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1970 [1968]).

<sup>47</sup> See Karl Rahner, “Reflections on Methodology in Theology,” *TI*, XI, pp. 68-114 (pp. 70-74), and frequently throughout his essays in *TI*.

<sup>48</sup> Significant also here is Nicholas Rescher’s recognition that full knowledge of anything remains elusive in this order due both to intrinsic limits of resource and the infinite number of ways in which even a finite reality can be understood, see Nicholas Rescher, *A System of Pragmatic Idealism, I: Human Knowledge in Idealistic Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), pp. 50-59, 63-74, 93-94, 136-140, 210-215, 260-264, 275, 279, 296; Idem, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 181-182, 189-196, 210, 249, 318-319, 330.

not acting as an advisory body to the Pope, but with him and under him as itself the supreme teaching and decision-making authority in the Church.” As such, this was “a world-council with a world-episcopate such as had not hitherto existed and with its own autonomous function.”<sup>49</sup>

In the light of this experience and in keeping both with *Lumen Gentium* and the Council’s ‘Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes*’, regional associations of bishops’ conferences, such as the *Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano* (CELAM) and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC), became significant forces pursuing the contextual adaption and inculturation of Catholic pastoral, liturgical, and missiological practice relative to local needs and circumstances.<sup>50</sup> In this regard, it is notable that Pope Francis has consistently emphasised the role of local churches in discerning and implementing Catholic practice that is appropriately fit for context.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, he routinely incorporates quotations from national and regional bishops’ conference documents in his own teachings, thus according them a *de facto* authority (e.g., *EG* no. 51).

As a world-faith lived in relation to the diversities of culture and context, the variegated texture of global Catholic expression, albeit within recognisable patterns,<sup>52</sup> is both inevitable and proper; particularly so in light of the universal significance and relevance of Christ. But apprecia-

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<sup>49</sup> Karl Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council,” *TI*, XX, pp. 77-89 (p. 80).

<sup>50</sup> See *AG* no. 22; *LG* no. 13, 23; *GS* no. 44.

<sup>51</sup> See Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Today’s World.” (November 24, 2013), no. 16, 32, 33, 40, 49, 115-118 and no. 44, henceforth *EG*, available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francescoesortazione-ap20131124evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francescoesortazione-ap20131124evangelii-gaudium.html). For analysis, see Paul M. Murray, “*Ecclesia et Pontifice*: On Delivering on the Ecclesiological Implications of *Evangelii Gaudium*,” *Ecclesiology* 12 (2016), pp. 13-33. Also significant is Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, On Love in the Family.” (2016), no.3, available at: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apostexhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apostexhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf). For something of the controversy provoked by these statements, see Edward Pentin, “Full Text and Explanatory Notes of Cardinals’ Questions on ‘*Amoris Laetitia*’,” *National Catholic Register*, available at: <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/full-text-and-explanatory-notes-of-cardinals-questions-on-amoris-laetitia>.

<sup>52</sup> As to what counts as ‘recognisable patterns’ is itself a matter of discernment and judgment within the *sensus fidelium*, in which the faithful as a whole should appropriately participate and not simply bishops, theologians, and the Vatican curial instruments of the episcopal magisterium, see Ormond Rush, *The Eyes of Faith: The Sense of the Faithful and the Church’s Reception of Revelation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009).

tion for the intrinsic diversity and specificities of Catholic life and the pressures this exerts on catholicity needs to be pressed down deeper yet: beyond the collectivities of culture and community to the level of each and every individual as held within and called to live into the superabundance of God as source, sustainer, and consummation of all that is;<sup>53</sup> and to the level, consequently, of each and every individual as called into being to show forth a partial, particular but irreducibly important something of the plenitudinous ‘all in all’ of the communion of God in Christ and the Spirit, albeit as generally confused and refracted by sin in this order.

In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul writes of each member of the Church, the body of Christ, having specific and essential functions to perform which, howsoever humble in appearance, deserve honouring by each of the other parts (1 Cor 12:12-30). Immediately prior to this, he writes of each of the baptised being in receipt of diverse specific gifts of the Spirit which are always given for the good of the whole.<sup>54</sup> Each of these recognitions pertaining to the life of the Church in this order can be situated within and seen as realised reflections of the earlier-sketched Christo-Pneumatocentric cosmic vision of all things from all eternity being ordained to be created through and forever oriented towards the ‘all in all’ of Christ, the Word, in the power of the Spirit. In a Catholic vision of the world, the importance of the individual thing-in-relation, the individual person-in-communion, whose every hair-on-head “has been counted” (Lk 12:7; Matt 10:30), is not just a matter of this order but of eternal significance, through creative intent and anticipated fulfilment. As we find in Ephesians 1:4-6:

[H]e chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Consequently, it is not just in key moments, movements, and individuals that seeds of the Word and the impress of the Spirit are to be found. Rather, potentially at least, it is in and through all things. Each and every

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<sup>53</sup> In the first article of the prima pars of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas tells us that the proper subject of theology is God and “all things...relative to him as their origin and end.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1, *Christian Theology (1a.1)*, Thomas Gilby (ed.) (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1963), 1a.1.7, pp. 25-27 (p. 27).

<sup>54</sup> 1 Cor 12:7; also 1 Cor 12: 4-11; and Eph 4:7, 11-12.

particular word spoken is only possible as an analogical sharing in the one Word – even when the form of this sharing is one of ugly and untruthful contradiction – and each and every act performed is only possible as an analogical sharing in the one acting of the Spirit.

In this regard, when posing the question as to why there are so many different kinds of things, St. Thomas' response is significant. His argument is that the purpose of each type of created thing is to manifest something of the goodness of God but that each finite thing can only do this partially and inadequately and so God creates a great multiplicity of types of things, so that together creation can more adequately manifest God's goodness.<sup>55</sup> For present purposes, the interesting point is St. Thomas' conviction that each different kind of thing variously discloses something of God's goodness. By analogous extension and in the light of St. Thomas' aforementioned teaching of God being the origin and end of *all* that is (see footnote 53), we can say that in Catholic understanding it is not only each *type of thing* but each and every *particular thing* – precisely in its irreducible particularity – which can disclose a particular something of the superabundant and infinitely generative goodness of God's being in Christ and the Spirit. Indeed, a Catholic vision might even be taken to suggest that it is in this irreplaceable capacity to disclose a particular something of God that the true identity of each thing consists.

In the early chapters of the revised edition of his modern classic, *Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton gives eloquent expression to this Pneumato-Christo-centric vision of the significance of each and every particular thing as alive in and with Christ and the Spirit and as called to manifest this.<sup>56</sup> He writes of “the Life who dwells and sings in the essence of every creature and in the core of our own souls” (p. 20); and more personally, “God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself” (*sic.*, p. 29). In this Catholic vision of things:

No two created beings are exactly alike. And their individuality is no imperfection. On the contrary, the perfection of each created thing is not merely in its conformity to an abstract type but in its own individual identity with itself (p. 23).

And again:

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<sup>55</sup> See St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 8, *Creation, Variety, and Evil*, Thomas Gilby (ed.) (London/New York: Eyre & Spottiswoode/McGraw-Hill, 1967), 1a.44-49 (1a.47.1), p. 95.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, rev. edition (Wheathampstead: Anthony Clark Books, 1972 [1962]).



Therefore each particular being, in its individuality, its concrete nature and entity, with all its own characteristics and its private qualities and its own inviolable identity, gives glory to God by being precisely what He wants it to be here and now, in the circumstances ordained for it by His Love and His infinite Art.<sup>57</sup>

One of the shaping influences on Merton's understanding of the particular 'thisness' of things was the writings of the Jesuit poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins; most notably Hopkins' original notion of the unique 'in-scape' of each thing, which was in turn encouraged by Hopkins encountering Duns Scotus' (1266-1308) notion of the '*haecceity*' of things.<sup>58</sup> As Hopkins expresses this in 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire':

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:  
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;  
Selves – goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,  
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.*

And for the explicitly Christocentric depth dimension to this:

I say more: the just man justices;  
Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;  
Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is –  
Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places,  
Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his  
To the Father through the features of men's faces.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24. There is significant resonance here with Newman's famous meditation: "I am created to do something or to be something for which no one else is created; I have a place in God's counsels, in God's world, which no one else has..." Newman, "Part III. Meditations on Christian Doctrine. Hope in God – Creator. March 7, 1848," *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman*, William P. Neville (ed.), second edition (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1893), pp. 399-401 (p.399).

<sup>58</sup> See Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 24; compare Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Journal, 1866-1874," *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, Catherine Phillips (ed.) (Oxford: OUP, 1986), pp. 191-222, particularly pp. 195, 204, 205, 211, 214, 215; John Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia VII. Ordinatio II. Distinctione 1-3* (Civitas Vaticana: 1973), d. 3, p. 1, q. 4, no. 76; and d. 3, p. 1, q. 2, no. 48.

<sup>59</sup> Hopkins, "As Kingfishers Catch Fire," *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 129.

Which is balanced in ‘God’s Grandeur’ by recognition of the Spirit’s energising of such Christic showings:

And for all this, nature is never spent;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;...

...

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.<sup>60</sup>

In a true Catholic vision and sensibility, then, according to which each and every particular thing is spoken into being through the one Word in the one Spirit, we are compelled to understand each as called to express a particular something of this meaning and life. Merton bears repeating, “God utters me like a word containing a partial thought of Himself.”<sup>61</sup> Or to transpose this into the coherentist terms introduced earlier: in this vision of reality in Christ and the Spirit, each is to be viewed as an irreplaceable *datum* – albeit generally distorted by sin, even near-radically so – within the Spirit-held and Spirit-impelled gathering of all in complex configured communion in Christ (see Eph 1:8-10 & 22-3), who as “the way, and the truth, and the life” *is* the living truth of things (Jn 14:6). Each is called into being as a particular shard and a particular refraction of the one true light that is Christ;<sup>62</sup> to be fashioned as particular living pixels in the living

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<sup>60</sup> Idem, “God’s Grandeur,” p. 128. In “The Windhover” Hopkins brings the Christic and the Pneumatic into conjunction: dedicated “to Christ our Lord,” Hopkins offers the image of a kestrel hanging steady, “rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing” (“hovering by flying just enough into the wind to be held still,” Greg Ryan), in a manner suggestive of Christ as the true Windhover, leaning into, held by, and alive in the Spirit, see Gerald Manley Hopkins “The Windhover,” *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 132.

<sup>61</sup> Merton, *Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> Of Christ as the one true light, see Jn 1:9; 8:12; 9:5, compare Jn 9:1-41. On the calling to be light in this light, see 1 Thess 5:5; Eph 5: 8-9 & 13-14; Matt 5:14-16; compare Mk 4:21 & Lk 8:16-17. For the image of the human as a refracted shard of the light of Christ, see John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, ‘Mythopoiea’ (1931), in his *Tree and Leaf* (London: Harper Collins, 2001 [1964]), pp.83-90 (p. 87), where he writes of:

Dis-graced he may be, yet is not dethroned...

man, sub-creator, the refracted light

through whom is splintered from a single White

to many hues, and endlessly combined

in living shapes that move from mind to mind.

I am grateful to Adam Shaeffer for drawing my attention to this wonderful piece.

icon that is the Church, so as together to reflect and disclose the glory of God in and as the face of Christ.<sup>63</sup> It is entirely in accordance with this logic to recognise that even allowing for its general imperfection, and messy sinfulness, it is properly the case that Christian life is uniquely lived by each of the baptised and the story of faith uniquely performed, ever afresh.

This all serves to give a dual orientation to the Catholic vision. On the one hand, the implication, as St. Thomas recognised, is that on account of the partiality of any particular showing (and before also taking account of the effects of sin), it is only together, in configured relationship, that the glory of God's superabundant goodness can shine in the round through the created order – 'like shining from shook foil' in Hopkins' terms<sup>64</sup> – and, presumably, only fully so in the gathered and redeemed communion of saints, which is the Church victorious.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, however, it is also necessarily the case that this shared-shards-shook-shining in the round is only possible as the total gathering of each and every one of these particulars in redeemed communion, each of which is of eternal significance: "This Jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, is immortal diamond."<sup>66</sup> It follows that the shared-shards-shook-shining in the round of creation's Christo-Pneumato-catholicity would be correlatively diminished by the absence of any one of these particular 'immortal diamonds'.<sup>67</sup> Each of these points is essential to a genuine understanding and living of the all-inclusive identity of catholicity.

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<sup>63</sup> Compare 2 Cor 4:4 & 6. Were one technically able to produce it, a fitting icon of the communion of saints in the risen Christ would be a face of Christ in which each fragment of mosaic, each pixel, were composed of a different particular face of the people of God. Even more fitting would be if one were able to digitise this in such a fashion as each fragment-face, each pixel-person, could change for those of other members of the people of God, with the overall iconic visage altering accordingly in its specific presentation but always within a recognisable pattern and form.

<sup>64</sup> Hopkins, "God's Grandeur," *Gerard Manley Hopkins*. The context is:

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;"

<sup>65</sup> For an excellent discussion of the communion of saints as the gathering of all things in Christ and the Spirit, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (London: SCM, 1998).

<sup>66</sup> Hopkins, "That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection," *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, pp. 180-181 (p. 181). I am grateful to Greg Ryan for reminding me of this particular piece.

<sup>67</sup> See "This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, 'I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me'." Jn 18:9; also Jn 6:39 & 17:12.

If, then, catholicity is about universality, it is a universality that is inextricably associated and intertwined with – not simply balanced by – particularity; indeed, a universality which consists and exists precisely as the gathering of diverse particularities – geographic, temporal, and personal – in configured communion. Similarly, catholicity thus understood is not simply about the balancing of the competing pulls of centred identity and expansive inclusion. Rather, Pneumatic-Christic inclusivity *is* the identity of catholicity. For in Christ “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female...” (Gal 3:28), such differences have been overcome, as structural divisions, precisely through there being both Jew and Greek in Christ, both male and female, and – scandalously and for too long – both slave and free, each of equal dignity and each with equal access. By extension, in Christ there is neither lay nor ordained, neither celibate nor married, neither heterosexual nor homosexual because in Christ there is both lay and ordained, celibate and married, heterosexual and homosexual, each of equal dignity and each with equal access to the grace and love poured out for us in Christ through the Spirit.<sup>68</sup>

As such, the concern for extension, completeness, and inclusivity is not a matter of adapting to the mores of modern secular, liberal culture. On the contrary, it is Christo-pneumato-logically grounded and required. As Dulles puts it:

Christianity is inclusive not by reason of latitudinarian permissiveness or syncretistic promiscuity, but because it has received from God a message and a gift for people of every time and place, so that all can find in it the fulfilment of their highest selves.<sup>69</sup>

All well and good, but if people die for lack of vision (Prov 29:18), it is equally the case that vision alone is not itself life but necessary inspiration and orientation *for* life which then requires transposing *into* life through principled discernment in relation to the specificities of context and circumstance. Having gained such vision and orientation in this first section of the chapter by pursuing a first-level theological, ecclesial, and spiritual reading of catholicity, we now turn towards what it might mean to live this in practice by seeking after some salient principles for the discerning and living of catholicity. What are the parameters within which this unfolds? What are the reference points and accountability-checks which need to be kept in view? What are the habits of mind which need

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<sup>68</sup> See 1 Tim 1:14; also 2 Cor 13:14; and Titus 3:6.

<sup>69</sup> Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 9.

to be practised? Such questions are here taken forward in conversation with Möhler's early ecclesiological work, whilst recognising and seeking to move beyond the romantic-idealist orientation and ecclesial idealism with which it is itself marked.

### Discerning Catholicity: The Principles of Catholic Life

Möhler's analysis of *Unity in the Church* as the core *Principle of Catholicism* (see § 12 here) is in two parts. The first part pursues a retrieval of what Möhler understands to be the vital inner, spiritual dynamics of Catholic life and unity, with chapters in turn on 'Mystical Unity', 'Intellectual Unity', 'Diversity without Unity', and 'Unity in Diversity'. As complement to this, the second part focuses on the external structures of Catholic unity and the essential role of order, episcopacy, and papacy as its visible instruments, with chapters on 'Unity in the Bishop', 'Unity in the Metropolitan', 'Unity in the Total Episcopate', and 'Unity in the Primate'. Taken together, Möhler is best understood here both as wanting to renew Catholic ecclesial self-consciousness with something deeper, more vital than the typical juridical institutional formalism of post-Tridentine ecclesiology and, by implication, as wanting to present this retrieved and renewed Catholic principle as most attractive and fitting – more so than the culturally dominant Protestant alternative – for his contemporary context which was reacting against the arid rationalism and individualism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century *Aufklärung*.<sup>70</sup>

In pursuit of this dual aim, Möhler assimilated and employed an unusually wide range of sources and culturally resonant influences – the latter generally without explicit reference – in such fashion as renders *Unity* a somewhat opaque and challenging text for today's reader. At one level it presents as a reflection on the history and dynamics of Catholic theology in the first three centuries, recounted through frequent citation of patristic sources in what might be regarded as an early forerunner and part inspiration for the *ressourcement* movement. At another level, Möhler was strongly influenced by the Romantic reaction to the age of reason and the emerging thought-world of German idealism – particularly through Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) – with its convictions concerning the unity of all things, material reality as the expression of the self-consciousness of absolute subject, or Spirit, and the individual human subject as reflecting and sharing in this process of self-conscious partici-

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<sup>70</sup> See Peter Riga, "The Ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler," *Theological Studies* 22 (1961), pp. 563-587.

pation in differentiated unity.<sup>71</sup> Also significant at this point was Friedrich Schleiermacher's experientially-grounded approach to Protestant systematics as an account of the distinctive self-consciousness of the Evangelical Church.<sup>72</sup> These various contemporary influences encouraged the Möhler of *Unity* similarly to adopt a primarily pneumatological and experientially-grounded approach to his passionate presentation of Catholic wholeness; an approach which he saw as cohering with the way in which people come to faith through the action of the Spirit in the body of the Church.<sup>73</sup>

Möhler's argument essentially consists in idealistically contrasting what he regards as appropriate and inappropriate forms of intra-ecclesial diversity: where the former enrich and constitute the communion of the Church, the latter breach the Church's essential unity by separating off from it. He presents a four-step case in support of this position through the four chapters constituting the first part of the work.

In Chapter One, '*Mystical Unity*', the first step is to retrieve an understanding of Christian life as consisting first and foremost not in mere doxastic assent or moral adherence but in spiritual, 'mystical', participation in the life of Christ through the personal indwelling of the Spirit,<sup>74</sup> who forms each together into the 'spiritual unity' of the Church as 'the body of Christ'.<sup>75</sup> For Möhler, this 'mystical unity' is the Church's central truth across generations and the Church's core calling (§ 3, p. 85; § 7, p. 93). Nothing can be intentionally allowed to compromise or breach it; anything that does is to be regarded as the work of another, alien, spirit to that of the Holy Spirit of Christ (§ 3, p. 86). Equally, however, the true mystical unity of the body of Christ is no mere uniformity or commonality. The Spirit forms each in their uniqueness into the living body of Christ, "*by a direct imprint in himself or herself*" (§ 4, p. 87). As he later puts it in the fourth chapter, "each individual is to continue as a *living* member in the whole body of the Church...his or her characteristic...will never die in the whole" (§ 35, p. 167). On the contrary, "Single individuals grow and the whole flourishes," leading him, somewhat optimistically, to claim "No constraint of individuality comes from *the Spirit* of the Catholic

<sup>71</sup> E.g., see Möhler, *Unity*, § 31, p. 153 and § 8, p. 97; also footnote 82 here.

<sup>72</sup> The first edition of Schleiermacher's *Der christliche Glaube* had been published by Reimer of Berlin in 1821, with the subtitle *Nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange dargestellt*, ["Presented in Accordance with the Principles of the Evangelical Church"], see Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube, 1821-1822 Studienausgabe*, Hermann Peiter (ed.) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984).

<sup>73</sup> See Möhler, *Unity*, § 1, p. 81; § 6, p. 92; § 8, p. 97; § 10, pp. 101-102.

<sup>74</sup> See *Ibid.*, § 4, p. 89; § 8, pp. 96-98; and § 42, p. 185.

<sup>75</sup> See *Ibid.*, § 1, p. 82-83; § 2, p. 84; and later § 40, p. 179; § 42, p. 186.

Church.”<sup>76</sup> With individuality thus, supposedly, fulfilled and resituated in the Church, he describes the Christianising process, again very idealistically, as “the destruction of all self-seeking” and “the greatest expansion of our individual lives, because all believers live in us and we in them.”<sup>77</sup>

In Chapter Two, ‘*Intellectual Unity*’, Möhler’s second step is to present both the essential role of doctrine as “the conceptual expression of the Christian Spirit” (p. 96) and the dynamic nature of the ‘living word’ of tradition (*ibid.*), which as the movement of the Spirit in the Church (§ 16, p. 117) is brought to understanding in that same Spirit in the communion of the Church (§ 8, p. 97). However, for all that each individual will appropriate the living word of tradition in a properly individual way, the essential thing, following the paradigmatic example of the apostles, is for this never to fall into separation from the totality of all valid understandings in the Church: “none formed a separated life. They all saw themselves as a whole, and the solution, as long as it was possible, was given over to the totality (Acts 15).”<sup>78</sup> Consequently, it is necessary for each “to compare his opinion with that of the others” and to seek for harmony with “the whole” (§ 10, pp. 100-101). Indeed, in a manner again resonant with a coherentist approach to truth evaluation, the validity of any particular understanding is to be assessed with reference to “the totality of all contemporary believers and to all earlier believers as far back as the apostles.”<sup>79</sup> The key principle is that “truth is in unity and love.”<sup>80</sup> Just as

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, § 42, p. 186. As we shall probe later, gay and lesbian Catholics, amongst others, would generally not recognise themselves within this rose-tinted account of ecclesial existence.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, § 4, p. 88. For further example of Möhler’s highly idealised account of Church life, see § 4, p. 89. Throughout there is little indication given of the distorting effects of sin within the habits, relationships, structures, and modes of understanding of Church life.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, § 10, pp. 100-101; also § 10, pp. 101-102; § 7, pp. 93-95. Reflecting his cultural context, for Möhler the dialectic always concerns the relationship between the individual and the whole. Today this would more likely be posed in terms of the relationship between diverse local ecclesial communities and the universal Church.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, § 10, p. 102. One might, however, entirely endorse this position whilst asking what it actually means in practice? Which groups in the Church *de facto* carry out this assessment? Which groups should be included in this task but currently are not? And as will later be asked, how are the faithful to proceed when the very structures for appropriate Catholic – i.e., whole-Church – scrutiny are themselves serving to narrow deleteriously the range of Catholic experience and understanding considered relevant to this task?

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, § 10, p. 103. Once again, whilst agreeing with this principle, one cannot help but hear the sound of ecclesial idealism, prompting the question as to what

“the whole Church is a type of each of her members” so, in like manner, “each of the members is to become conscious of his or her character as counterpoint and impression of the whole” (§ 12, pp. 108-109). Whether, however, this can allow for the real significance of faithful difference is a moot point to which we shall return.

Having established that the Church’s variegated mystical union (Chapter One) must manifest in differentiated doctrinal unity (Chapter Two), Möhler’s third step in Chapter Three, ‘*Diversity without Unity*’, is to press for clearer perspective on the true character of Catholic unity by contrasting it with heresy. Key here is that he views heresies not as utter falsities, completely alien to Catholic truth but as partial truths which are turned into errors through distorted appropriation as total truths (§ 18, p. 123). On the one hand, heresy arises from the detaching of reason from the common life of faith in which it is properly situated and to which it is subordinate (§ 18, pp. 123-124). On the other hand, variously drawing support from St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Clement of Rome, St. Cyprian, and Tertullian, Möhler regards heresy as an act of egotistical separatism which assumes that truth can best be found from without the bounds of the Church.<sup>81</sup> In contrast to Catholic truth, “According to its essence heresy is divisive and its principles are not capable of establishing unity” (§ 32, p. 158).

With this analysis in view, the argument culminates in Chapter Four, ‘*Unity in Diversity*’, with a positive discussion of the diversity that properly characterises Catholic unity and truth. Crucial here is a contrast Möhler draws between ‘*antitheses*’ (*Gegensätze*) and ‘*contradictions*’ (*Widersprüche*) (§ 46, pp. 194-198). Whereas true but contrasting antitheses, or distinctions, “can be found in unity,” contradictions disrupt and fracture by setting parts against the whole (p. 196). Reflecting what he has said about the partial truths of heresy becoming error by egotistically being pressed as total truth, he allows that an unacceptable, fracturing contradiction can be reclaimed as a reconcilable antithesis as long as it foregoes the desire “to live by itself” and enters “into community” through “a return to the Church” which “in her unity contains all antitheses and is all-embracing” of “all Christian truth of both contradictory schools.”<sup>82</sup> In this regard he makes frequent use of musical imagery in order to speak of the “blending of the different tones of instruments and voices” in Catholic

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happens when, as is generally the case, things do not function perfectly in this manner?

<sup>81</sup> See *Ibid.*, § 18, p. 124; § 27, pp. 143-147; also § 40, p. 178; § 41, p. 181; § 44, p. 190.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, § 46, pp. 196-197; also § 46, p. 198; § 40, p. 178.



truth (§ 40, p. 179). Most significantly, having reflected on the way in which “A choir is formed from the voices of different persons... each in their own way joined in one harmony” (§ 46, p. 194), he extrapolates:

Thus it is possible and always necessary that believers...reflect the infinity of the possible developments in the Christian religion, and thus preserve and activate life through the free play of many individuals moving in harmony (§ 46, p. 198).

As this suggests, both the influence of philosophical idealism and Möhler’s tendency towards highly idealised portrayals of the Church are again close to the surface throughout this analysis.<sup>83</sup> For example, as regards the latter, in § 44 we find:

Thus an infinite mass of individualities develop freely and untroubled beside one another in this matter. The Church looks upon all externality as given by the Spirit so as to form and act in the Spirit and to reveal the Spirit. All these differences, however, are enlivened by one Spirit which binds all in joy and peace (§ 44, p. 193).

An inspiring vision, perhaps, but does it ring true? By contrast, seeking to engage all of this in more synthetic, critical, and constructive perspective, is it possible to extract and extrapolate any salient principles from Möhler’s analysis which are of lasting significance for the discerning and living of Catholic truth today, even if such principles stand in some tension with each other? And what are the limitations of what he leaves us with?

Perhaps first is his emphasis on reconciled unity in the Spirit as the fundamental God-given life, core calling, and defining instinct of the Church, in which each lives her/his particular contribution to the communion of the Church in the communion of God. This goes to the heart of the Catholic spirit and presents it as attractively as possible. Equally, whilst this helpfully views significant diversity as essential to the Church’s

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<sup>83</sup> As regards the former, see pp. 194 and 196. Peter Erb follows Harald Wagner in finding “clear parallels” between Möhler’s *antithesis/contradiction* contrast and Schelling’s 1802 work, *Bruno*, see Peter Erb, “Introduction,” *Unity*, pp. 1-71 (pp. 48-49), citing Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Bruno, oder über das göttliche und natürliche Prinzip der Dinge. Ein Gespräch* (1802), in *Schellings Werke*, 3, Manfred Schröter (ed.) (München: Beck and Oldenbourg, 1927), pp. 109-228, and Harald Wagner, *Die eine Kirche und die vielen Kirchen: Ekklesiologie und Symbolik beim jungen Möhler* (Munich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1977), pp. 177-181.

shared life, his situating of this recognition within his paramount emphasis on Catholic unity serves also to contain such diversity. A high premium is placed on the need to avoid this innate ecclesial diversity reaching breaking point and uncontained fracture.

Second, given that heretical contradictions are to be understood as valid but distorted contrasts, when faced with the challenge of a fresh or dissonant position, the Church's proper instinct should not be to protect the current configuration by outright rejection of the challenging voice. Rather, the properly Catholic instinct should be to seek to discern aright the partial truth at issue and to seek to accommodate it within an appropriately reconfigured understanding of Catholic unity.

Third, Catholic unity, Catholic communion, is properly understood as a dynamic rather than static reality; something living and growing rather than exhaustively determined. As Möhler's organic imagery for both Church and doctrinal development each begin to suggest and as his Tübingen mentor and colleague, Johann Sebastian Drey, drew out more explicitly, the specific contours of Catholic communion are being pressed, expanded, and appropriately reconfigured in relation to the specificities of circumstance and the fresh partial perceptions of the total truth of things in Christ and the Spirit which come to view there.

Fourth, the proper discerning and living of Catholic truth in communion takes time and requires patience, both on behalf of the Church as a whole and on behalf of those offering a challengingly alternative perception to that which currently represents the settled mind of the Church on a given issue.<sup>84</sup>

Fifth, the Church should not feel panicked into moving too quickly to premature judgment on contentious issues before Catholic conversation has been granted the time and space it needs to run its course and come to appropriately discerned judgment. Möhler himself advocates something like this principle, albeit again through a highly idealised historical perspective (§ 40, p. 179).

Sixth, the need to allow sufficient time and space for Catholic conversation to run its course also means ensuring that all parties who need to participate in these conversations – “the faithful at large, pastors and theologians,”<sup>85</sup> what Möhler refers to as the “totality of all contemporary believers” (§ 10, p. 102) – indeed have access and opportunity so to do. As the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen Gentium* recognised (no. 12), it

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<sup>84</sup> See International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014), no. 71, available at: [http://www.vatican.va/romancuria/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/romancuria/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

is, most fundamentally, the body of the Church as whole that enjoys the gift of infallibility; and as is recognised in the 2014 International Theological Commission document on the *sensus fidei*, this includes those whose perspectives are dissonant with the Church's currently prevailing understanding.<sup>86</sup>

These six constructive principles for the discerning of Catholic life – either derived from Möhler's argument in *Unity*, or extrapolated from it as close implications – provide, I suggest, the beginnings of a framework of responsibility-checks for the faithful living of dynamic Catholic unity, albeit with some inevitable tensions between them. They have, nevertheless, still been articulated at a level of considerable generality, and in Möhler's case, as regards the fifth at least, on a somewhat idealised plane.

This charge of ecclesial idealisation has recurred throughout the current reading of Möhler's understanding of Catholic unity. To take just four examples: in § 4 Möhler describes ecclesial existence as being free from "the dark cloud of sin" and as representing the "destruction of all self-seeking;" an account smarting with tragic irony and dangerous self-delusion in the light of the clerical sexual abuse crisis. In § 44 he describes the Church as an "infinite mass of individualities...enlivened by one Spirit which binds all in joy and peace;" a vision which stands recurrently contradicted by lived historical reality – most recently in the acrimonious public questioning of Pope Francis by the four 'dubia' Cardinals (see footnote 50 here) and the associated vitriolic tone of many websites purporting to be guardians of Catholic orthodoxy. In § 40 he presents the Church as only moving to doctrinal definition when forced so to do; a presentation that rings hollow when compared with the attempts by Pope John Paul II and the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to ban, by sheer force of authority, any discussion of the possibility of women's ordination before the debates and discernment pertaining to this matter had properly been allowed to run their course. Finally, in § 42 he assures us that "No constraint of individuality comes from *the Spirit* of the Catholic Church" in a manner that jars starkly with the experience of Catholic people of difference, sexual and otherwise.

So what in practice might it mean to seek to live by the principles articulated here? What are Catholics to do when things do not function perfectly and when the lived reality of the Church falls far short of Möhler's ideal type? How are Catholics to proceed when the very structures, processes, and habits intended as providing the means for whole-Church Catholic scrutiny and discernment are themselves serving to narrow deleteriously the range of Catholic experience and understanding which are

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<sup>86</sup> See *Ibid.*, no. 80, 123.

considered permissible in relation to this task, “systematically straining out gnats and swallowing camels?”<sup>87</sup> Can an ecclesiological vision and associated habitus and principled framework for action explicitly shaped in service of the harmonious unity-in-diversity of Catholic truth genuinely allow for faithfully dissident voices of unresolved difference? In an ecclesiological structure and habitus in which the magisterial organs of the hierarchy are, as currently construed, the sole formal arbiters of the balance of Catholic truth, will there not be a near inevitable default to the suppression of dissent and the coercion of conformity to the current configuration of Catholic teaching?

Bradford Hinze rightly presses such questions sharply and directly in relation to Möhler’s otherwise attractive-sounding and understandably highly influential organic account of the intrinsic diversity in harmonious unity of Catholic truth. As he writes: “by celebrating the symphonic truth of Catholic Christianity, does Möhler suppress tension, conflict, and dialectical movement in the life of the Church in the interest of the melody and harmony orchestrated by the hierarchy?”<sup>88</sup> And again:

Are there not times when individual critical and creative voices challenge the church for the sake of the whole and when communities find ways to inculcate the living Gospel in local churches that can teach the universal church something about the fullness of faith? Must these contributions be discredited as expressions of egoism and sectarian pathos?<sup>89</sup>

The next section accordingly asks after who pays the price of Catholic unity as currently configured and whether it is unnecessarily and unacceptably high.

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<sup>87</sup> James Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” in Idem, *Faith beyond Resentment: Fragments Catholic and Gay* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2001), pp. 170-193 (p. 180), extracted from a series of questions focussed on the need for religious authorities “to develop the self-critical habit of the sort which asks ‘Are we succumbing to the institutional tendency to bind up heavy burdens on people’s backs and not lift a finger to help them?’ ‘Have we been trapped by our own arguments into systematically straining out gnats and swallowing camels?’ ‘Has our insistence on a certain sort of continuity of teaching led us to confuse the word of God with the traditions of men?’”

<sup>88</sup> Bradford E. Hinze, “The Holy Spirit and the Catholic Tradition: The Legacy of Johann Adam Möhler,” *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (eds.) (New York: Crossroad, 1997), pp. 56-74 (p. 82).

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

### At What Price? Assessing the Cost of Living Catholicity between Ecclesial Idealism and Experienced Tensions

Here the focus turns from a framework of somewhat abstracted systematic principles for living the intrinsic diversity in communion of catholicity, to asking how this currently works in Catholic practice in relation to highly contentious matters. Various specific cases could be focussed on, such as artificial contraception, the roles of women in the Church – particularly so in relation to ordained ministry – and the range of LGBT issues. Drawing heavily on James Alison’s work, the specific focus here will be on the significant tension that exists between formal Catholic teaching concerning homosexual orientation being ‘intrinsically disordered’ and the widely recognised reality – albeit formally denied, suppressed, and smothered in ambiguity – that the Church, like the world, is at once heterosexual and homosexual; indeed, that in some respects this is more the case in relation to the Church than wider secular society.<sup>90</sup>

As an insider to Catholic clerical culture, Alison refers to “a discretely, but nevertheless, thoroughly, gay-tinted clerical system” within Catholicism and draws the implication: “...unlike many Protestant groups, as Catholics we have never really had the option available to us of seriously pretending that we didn’t know any gay people, or that there weren’t any gay people in our Church.”<sup>91</sup> Nevertheless, despite this *de facto* ‘rainbow’ character of Catholicism, Catholics who have come to understand themselves to be gay or lesbian – and who might well experience significant acceptance as such by other Catholics – are placed in an excruciatingly destructive spiritual and psychological tension. On the one hand is their experience of the Church as the household and nursemaid of faith, through whose people, sacraments, and traditions God’s love and grace has been mediated. On the other hand is their sure knowledge that formal Catholic teaching judges not only their acts to be ‘objectively disordered’ but their very identity as gay or lesbian which, in the self-understanding of many gay and lesbian people, is part of who they are and how they relate to others. It is little wonder, then, that for the gay or lesbian Catholic who seeks to hold appreciation for the Church as a true minister of grace toge-

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<sup>90</sup> For the teaching, see *CCC*, §§ 2357-2358, at: <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/P85.HTM>. For the widespread ambiguity and hypocrisy, see Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp. 187, 189 and 186.

<sup>91</sup> James Alison, “The Gay Thing: Following the Still Small Voice,” *Queer Theology*, Gerard Loughlin (ed.) (Oxford/Malden: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 50-62 (p. 52); also *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51; and “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp. 191-2; compare Donald B. Cozzens, *The Changing Face of the Priesthood* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), particularly Chapter 7.

ther with adherence to this specific teaching on homosexual orientation as an intrinsic objective disorder, it can lead to a tortured state of tension between a self-harming attempt to deny, repress, and reorient one's sexuality and a self-loathing recognition of one being what ought not to be.<sup>92</sup>

In some respects, this state of tension might be thought as exceeding, in objective terms, that which might be experienced either by contraceptive-using Catholics vis-à-vis the traditional ban on 'artificial' contraception,<sup>93</sup> or by Catholics aggrieved by the ban on discussing women's ordination to the presbyterate. In the former case, whatever the rights and wrongs of current teaching, the judgment concerning the intrinsically disordered nature of all acts of artificial contraception is precisely a judgment concerning the moral status of acts and not concerning the intrinsic state of the persons who engage in such acts. Similarly and again regardless of its rights and wrongs, Catholic teaching concerning the impossibility of female presbyteral ordination is no longer premised on an Aristotelian denigration of women as intrinsically inferior – although such cultural misogyny can be assumed still to operate in the Church, as in society – but rather on an admixture of arguments concerning: i) symbolic representation, based on questionable assumptions both about gender complementarity and about Christian iconography; and ii) the Church's perceived lack of authority to break with precedent. By contrast, many gay or lesbian Catholics find themselves judged by current Catholic teaching as 'objectively disordered' in their very persons.

Nor, as alluded to earlier, is it adequate to seek to soften the force of this by claiming that Catholic moral theology distinguishes between the attraction – 'orientation' – to same-sex sexual relations and the person who experiences such attraction, viewing the former both as accidental to the latter and as intrinsically objectively disordered in a way that the person who experiences such attraction is not in her/himself.<sup>94</sup> As Alison identifies, this attempted distinction is premised on a dogmatically-driven claim about empirical human nature, to the effect that homosexual orientation always represents a misdirection, a 'disordering', of what is properly, if confusedly, a heterosexual orientation.<sup>95</sup> By contrast, the empirical evidence is that a considerable number of gay and lesbian people do

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<sup>92</sup> See Alison, "On Not Being Scandalised," pp. 187-188; and "The Gay Thing," p. 53.

<sup>93</sup> Pope Paul VI, "*Humanae Vitae*. Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth" (1968), available at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html).

<sup>94</sup> See Alison, "The Gay Thing," p. 56.

<sup>95</sup> See "The Gay Thing," pp. 58-59.

indeed experience their homosexuality as innate to who they are and not an accidental distortion of something else;<sup>96</sup> indeed, that seeking to suppress and reorient their homosexuality in a heterosexual direction would be to do violence to themselves.<sup>97</sup>

The first section of this chapter culminated in a vision of Catholic communion as a complex, dynamic reality poised between the configured whole of currently perceived Catholic truth and the anticipated whole truth of all things in Christ and the Spirit. It presented catholicity as a state of lived tension between two responsibilities: the responsibility to maintain diversified Catholic communion by not pushing to breaking point; and the responsibility to become fully Catholic by including the truth of each. Catholicity thus appeared as a dynamic equilibrium: between the holding of all in centred, settled, mutual recognition and shared adherence to what is core; and an expansiveness which will stretch to recognise, gather, and include the totality of the real but always partial and irreducibly unique showings of the truth of God in Christ and the Spirit in the distinct ‘thisness’ of each and every particular person – indeed, each and every particular created thing. In the case, however, of identity-constituting, same-sex orientation, we encounter the current formal limits of this defining Catholic capacity to recognise, gather, and include as God-given the varied particular created ‘thisnesses’ of people of difference.

Nevertheless, standing in significant contrast to Catholicism’s formal incapacity to recognise and affirm same-sex orientation as a created difference is the widespread informal recalibration which has occurred over recent decades in Catholic homes, parishes, presbyteries, seminaries, and religious houses throughout the global North. Amongst the factors which have been in play here, are: tectonic societal shifts in attitude which extend far beyond the Church; the significantly higher number of gay and lesbian people who now feel able to be open about their sexuality; the comparatively higher frequency of opportunities for first-hand encounter and conversation with people of settled confidence in their sexual difference; greater cognisance of the violence that is done to the psychological health and lives of homosexuals, potentially to death, by the imposition of exclusively binary understandings of human sexuality and gender; and prayerful reflection on how the love of God appears to be moving and calling the people of God in this regard. As a consequence, the particular differentiated ‘thisnesses’ of same-sex orientation and same-sex physical intimacy in the context of stable, loving relationships – each still profoundly problematic for official Catholic group-think – have come to be seen as

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<sup>96</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>97</sup> See “On Not Being Scandalised,” pp. 190, 192; and “The Gay Thing,” p. 60.

being, in themselves, relative non-issues for many global North Catholics, perhaps the majority, for whom it has become “self-evident that the constructs which shore up the CDF’s position are not of God.”<sup>98</sup>

Also notable here are the indications that this sea-change in actual Catholic thinking about same-sex orientation and partnerships has similarly occurred amongst many members of the hierarchy as well as laity.<sup>99</sup> As one supporting factor here, Alison points to a tension which he believes many clergy increasingly feel “between the Church’s new-found human rights teaching” condemning “unjust discrimination against gay people,” on the one hand, and the continuing official negative judgment on “homosexual inclination and acts,” on the other. As he views things: “As the momentum to take the former seriously grows, and hierarchs find themselves having to take positions on changes in civil legislation city by city and country by country, the latter becomes increasingly arcane and irrelevant.”<sup>100</sup>

For significant numbers of clergy and laity alike, “something which seemed to be holy and sacred” – that is, the exclusive maintenance of strictly binary accounts of human sexuality and gender – is coming to be viewed as “neither holy nor sacred, but a way of diminishing people.”<sup>101</sup> In relation to formal Catholic understanding, this situation poses the challenge as to whether Catholicism can learn “that something which appeared to have been commanded by God cannot in fact have been commanded by God, because it goes against what any of us can see leads to human flourishing.”<sup>102</sup> It is significant that Alison himself introduces the category of catholicity and, by implication, the need for the Church to continue to grow in the way of catholicity, in the context of reflecting on the felt tension between the Church’s condemnation of discrimination against gays in the register of human rights and the Church’s continuing negative judgment on homosexual orientation. He muses, “. . . it is at least possible that the ambiguity produced by the creative tension between the two nudges us towards Catholicity.”<sup>103</sup>

So Catholic teaching on homosexual orientation brings into focus *both*: 1) the perennial tension that exists between the relative stability of Catholic communion in currently configured identity and the recurrent re-configuring of that identity with dynamic integrity through the gathering

<sup>98</sup> “On Not Being Scandalised,” p. 186.

<sup>99</sup> See *Ibid.*, p. 191.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>101</sup> “The Gay Thing,” p. 56.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> “On Not Being Scandalised,” p. 190; also “The Gay Thing,” p. 50.



of all in the truth of God in Christ and the Spirit; *and 2*) the specific role that a faithfully dissenting minority can have in showing the need for some aspect of Catholic understanding and practice to be reformed and renewed if it is truly to serve charity, truth, and virtue and to protect against violence and evil. With this, *3*) it has also brought into sharper focus that the default instinct of the magisterial representatives and authorities in the face of challenge is to protect the system as currently configured, even when this requires a certain amount of double-think.

Viewed in purely human terms, this latter instinct for system preservation is understandable (as distinct from justifiable). Quite apart from the likely continuing force of relatively suppressed homophobic anxieties, even amongst some who are themselves of homosexual orientation, there is a more pervasive and deep-seated, if entirely wrong-headed, anxiety in Catholic group-think, which assumes that accepting that the Church has been misguided in any one aspect of its teaching will thereby totally undermine any claim at all on the Church's behalf that it receives divine guidance and can teach with divine authority.<sup>104</sup> I describe this pervasive anxiety as 'wrong-headed' in as much as: a) the claim to being guided by the Holy Spirit and to being able to teach with divine authority does not require the Church to maintain that it is always correct in all respects; and b) by ironic contrast, it is in fact the near-total inability of the formal Catholic mind-set to accept the need ever to revise its teachings, even when relevant empirical data strongly suggest the need so to do, which, for many, places the Church's credibility as an authoritative teacher in question far more surely than would any appropriate admission of error in some specific regard. In matters of truth discernment, strident defensiveness and rejection of all challenge and critical scrutiny erodes rather than supports credibility.<sup>105</sup>

Further, admixed with these negative motivations for preserving the system as currently configured is the somewhat more positive concern, à la Möhler, to maintain – as the core calling and most fundamental reality of Catholicism – the balance of unity at all levels of Catholic life, both within the local diocesan churches and between the diverse local and particular churches of the Church universal. But even this, in itself more positive, concern is ambiguous. Its unfortunate shadow-side, as Bradford Hinze was earlier quoted as recognising, is that it too readily leads the hierarchy to seek to suppress and marginalise what are perceived as challenging voices which threaten to disrupt the *status quo*. Again, however, there is a sharp irony and self-frustrating logic at work here: the very

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<sup>104</sup> See "On Not Being Scandalised," pp. 174, 176.

<sup>105</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 175-177, particularly p. 176.

course of action designed to prevent *potential* rupture through the suppression and marginalising of those calling for the reconfiguring of some aspect of Catholic teaching and/or practice, in fact issues in the *certainty* of many finding themselves disenfranchised and alienated from Catholic life. Either way, Catholicism is diminished and effectively fractured.

The seriousness of this situation – relative both to: a) the intrinsic quality and truth of Catholic life, and b) the credibility of the Church’s witness as to what it means to live difference for mutual flourishing – is such that it is incumbent both upon those with formal, hierarchical responsibility for the structural, procedural, and habitual dimensions of the Church’s life, and upon those in faithful dissent each to seek respective ways to live unresolved Catholic difference beyond either hardened exclusion or frustrated and destructive anger. Best taken as place-holders, the final sections of this already over-long chapter trace the beginnings of a way ahead in each of these regards; beginnings which require further essay-length pieces for full and adequate treatment.

### **Growing into the Fullness of Catholicity: On Becoming More Fully the Catholic Church**

Cognisant of the fact of significant and seemingly ineradicable *intra*-Catholic plurality, this chapter has explored the concept and associated practice of catholicity as a critical-constructive resource for supporting a renewed practice of diversified Catholic communion. Where the first section presented an extended vision of catholicity in its various inter-related aspects and distinctions, and where the second explored what ecclesiological principles this might imply, the third asked after what all of this means in the context of long-term, serious dissensus. Accordingly, this current section begins the process of asking after the relevant institutional responsibilities and associated structural, procedural, and habitual implications in relation to such contexts of long-term Catholic dissensus.

A three-fold recognition-cum-conviction arises out of the argument of the chapter thus far and guides what is to follow. First is the recognition that the current substantive dissensus between formal Catholic teaching on homosexuality and the alternative prayed and considered judgment of a significant and growing number of lay and ordained Catholics is neither going to go away nor be quickly resolved. Second is the recognition that this represents a serious dissensus precisely *within* the Church and not simply *between* the Church and society construed as *alien other*. Third is the recognition and conviction that the hierarchical responsibility to hold the Church together, to maintain the Church in communion, is not about ensuring the fossilised preservation of teachings which become redundant

for fear that relinquishing them will cause scandal but, rather, should be about ensuring that ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me’ (Jn 18:9).

With all of this in view, what might it mean for the Church at local, regional, and international levels to seek, in its structures, procedures, and habits to become more responsive to the extensive demands of catholicity, more capable of living catholicity differently, without suffering the cost either of fracture or of premature judgment, alienation, and loss through widespread disenfranchisement? As *Gaudium et Spes* no. 44 reminds us, even those structures which are of the *esse* of the Church, as determined directly by Christ in Catholic understanding, can be and need to be adapted to time and context. Six points will be sketched in brief here, each requiring considerable further scrutiny, development, and delineation in subsequent work.

The first concerns the need to give time and space – as much time and space as humanly possible – for consideration and mutual learning concerning a novel or contested point prior to moving to judgment. Likely motivated by the dual anxiety to close down the prospect of disagreement and to project an image of Catholic clarity, the Catholic institutional habit is to be slow in learning – indeed, generally somewhat resistant to learning – and to be overly quick in issuing teaching. In the context, however, of sustained, substantive dissensus we need to become the opposite: more committed to and faster, more agile, more docile in Catholic learning; and significantly slower in moving to Catholic teaching.

As correlate to this, the second concerns the urgent need for all relevant parties to be given access by right, norm, and routine to the relevant conversations of the Church rather than for this to be largely by discretion. As Newman noted, “Truth is wrought out by many minds, working together freely.”<sup>106</sup> By contrast, despite *Lumen Gentium*’s teaching on the *sensus fidelium* and the right of laity to make their opinions known, Catholic decision-making is still canonically structured by a strict demarcation between the *ecclesia docens* and the *ecclesia discens*, with the latter having, at best, a purely consultative contribution to make. The Second Vatican Council’s ‘Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church’, *Christus Dominus*, emphasised that the bishops are not the primary initiators of action; indeed, that if all action were left to them their task would be utterly impossible. Rather, as Avery Dulles puts it, their “proper role is...to recognize, encourage, coordinate, and judge the gifts and initiatives

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<sup>106</sup> Newman, “Letter to Robert Ormsby,” (March 26, 1863), *L&D XX*, pp. 425-426.

of others.”<sup>107</sup> This needs to be understood as pertaining not only to the practical initiatives of laity but also their distinctive experience and prayed and reflected insights into the demands of faith in given contexts. For this to become both normal and effective, it needs to be moved from the relatively discretionary and occasional manner in which it currently operates to becoming a matter of routine requirement. With that, it needs to be developed beyond the purely consultative level at which it currently functions, without any responsive accountability, and be integrated into the Church’s deliberative decision-making, whilst presserving the appropriate executive function of priest in parish and bishop in diocese. Something of this appears in view in Pope Francis’ call for synodality to characterise the Church’s entire life at every level.<sup>108</sup> Much could fruitfully be learned here by listening into the various differing relevant experiences and approaches of other Christian traditions.

Third, also implied by the first, is the need for Catholic practice to retrieve a much clearer differentiation of the various levels of authoritative teaching and to avoid elevating things prematurely to the vague and ironically undefined level of ‘defined’ teaching. The latter attribution should be reserved for the settled understanding of the Church arrived at through relevant conversations having been allowed to run their course to consensus. Should some pastoral necessity or potential ecclesial crisis (e.g., the Church’s unity and stability) require that a *pro-temps* judgment be given prior to the Church’s conversations having run their course and arrived at settled consensus – which can, as history teaches, stretch over decades and longer – then we need to develop means of clarifying that this is a provisional judgment with authority *pro-temps*.

Fourth, with this there is need also for it to become both normal and universal to draw clearer distinctions between: a) authoritative teachings which are binding on all, in all places, in the same way; and b) teachings which can be specific to particular churches in the light of cultural appropriateness, history, local tradition, and the like. There is again potential here for fruitful receptive ecumenical learning on Catholicism’s behalf.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church*, p. 125, referring to Second Vatican Council, *Christus Dominus* (1965). *Christus Dominus* refers eight times to the ministry of bishops as one of enabling and twice to the role of coordination.

<sup>108</sup> See Pope Francis, “Address Commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops” (October 17, 2015), at: [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

<sup>109</sup> Compare Archbishop Rowan Williams’ plea for the Catholic Church to embrace a more modest account of what it is necessary for all to hold in common in his “Address to the Rome Willebrands Symposium” (November 19, 2009), avail-

Lest, however, this should conjure the spectre of cultural relativism – another frequent anxiety point in magisterial teaching during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI – we need to remind ourselves that such a facility already exists as normal for the Eastern Rite Catholic churches where, for example, the theologically-argued maintenance of the binding norm of a celibate presbyterate for Latin Rite Catholic churches does not apply. This is an example of a genuine theological pluralism within the global Catholic communion and not simply of pastoral appropriateness; as too are the different decision-making structures which operate under the distinct Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Rite churches. As earlier noted, such real ecclesial pluralism within Catholicism has become far more manifest over the past fifty years with the migration of diasporal Eastern Rite communities to Western countries, with their own geographically overlapping but distinct episcopal jurisdictions, each in full communion with the other across their theological, canonical, and pastoral differences. With this in view, is it impossible to imagine a situation in which some of the current ‘hot button’ topics of potential Catholic division (e.g., women in ministry) might be similarly dealt with?

Fifth, combined with the third point above, there is a need to move from tending to view all dissent under the register of heresy and potential excommunication, or schism, to viewing it as an inevitable, normal, and even necessary and useful aspect of proper Catholic conversation short of settlement. The implication is that any perceived transgressions relative to the current articulation of non-irrevocably defined positions should be treated with a certain lightness and case-by-case appropriateness.<sup>110</sup>

Sixth, moving from the case of theologians who might judge it to be appropriate to continue to probe and challenge publicly some aspect of non-infallible Catholic teaching, and focussing instead on the many lay people and clergy who might find themselves in practical dissonance with some such teaching, it is necessary for the Church to continue to have confidence in the priority of mercy and to offer pastoral support and encouragement on this basis.<sup>111</sup>

As already noted, each of these points requires considerable development. Even then, they would not provide a sufficient answer to the question as to what it might mean for the Church, institutionally, to take re-

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able at: <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/766/archbishops-address-at-a-willebrands-symposium-in-rome>, where he asks “Is there a level of mutual recognition which allows a shared theological understanding of primacy alongside a diversity of canonical or juridical arrangements?”

<sup>110</sup> See Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” p. 184.

<sup>111</sup> See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*.

sponsibility for living substantive difference well. They do, however, begin to indicate the kind of institutional virtues, habitus, procedures, and structural changes which are required if Catholicism is going to be able to live catholicity differently through long-term disagreement without this necessarily leading to fracture or alienation. As complement, the final section turns now to ask after the correlative virtues and *modus operandi* which might be relevant for those individuals and groups who find themselves both in principled dissent from some aspect of current Catholic teaching and convinced that the health of the Church's life and witness requires that it be brought into the open.

### **The Spirit of Catholicism: On Becoming Catholic People<sup>112</sup>**

This fifth and final section completes the argument by exploring the kind of ethic and spirituality of disagreement in communion which, in some fashion or other, needs be uniquely nurtured in and by each nascent Catholic person in contexts of deep-seated disagreement if we are indeed to be able "to remain on speaking terms with each other and to move forward in and with the Church" despite these, at times sharp, differences.<sup>113</sup> More precisely, whilst also of more general relevance, the particular way these modes of Catholic living in contexts of principled ecclesial disagreement are articulated here is most specifically oriented to those who become convinced that a situation of informally reflected yet widely lived dissent needs to be explicitly developed into a more formally reflected challenge to some aspect of current teaching. Further, given that such principles of Catholic personhood and ecclesial existence need to be discerned, owned, and embodied in the particular circumstances of each individual Catholic life, it is inevitable that as articulated here they reflect the perspective and experience of the author and may not readily translate, in every detail, into others' particular circumstances. That said, some interesting implied modes of living catholicity in the context of unresolved ecclesial difference do flow directly from the Catholic ecclesiological principles earlier extrapolated from Möhler's work.

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<sup>112</sup> Compare Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, trans. Justin McCann (London: Sheed and Ward, 1929 [1924]). For the notion of being a Catholic person, see Rowan Williams and Philip Sheldrake, "Catholic Persons: Images of Holiness. A Dialogue," *Living the Mystery: Affirming Catholicism and the Future of Anglicanism*, Jeffrey John (ed.) (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1994), pp. 76-89.

<sup>113</sup> Hellemans and Jonkers, "Introduction," p. 10.

First, for example, we might identify the need for the Catholic dissident to resolve not to end in exclusion and separation. Indeed, once one has been gripped, as Möhler was, by the fundamental vision of sharing in the living communion of God in Christ and the Spirit in the communion of the Church and once one has awoken to this as the Church's deepest calling and mission bar none, then 'resolve' is the wrong verb. For it is not that one resolves, as if by force of will, to maintain Catholic communion in spite of its various lived contradictions. Rather, it simply becomes unthinkable – particularly after testing by long and serious consideration to the contrary – that one would allow things to end in exclusion and separation. But nor need that mean settling either for the suppression of one's dissent in a life of repressed frustration, or for a frightened conformity which always plays it safe. On the contrary, the combination of a deeply-held dissent and a living Catholic conviction can issue in a sense of resolved clarity about needing both to live difference in open view and to seek to move the contested issue from the margins of Catholic conversation by bringing it closer to the centre.

Second, given it is reconciled unity in the proper diversity of living Catholic communion to which one aspires and not simply the victory of one's position, then it behoves one to attend closely and fairly to the details of the teaching to which one is opposed and to whatever is of truth in it. The hermeneutics of suspicion have their place given the pervasive nature of sin and its corrupting effects. But they need to be balanced by and situated within a hermeneutic of charity, which also seeks to interpret decisions and teachings in their best light and in accordance with their best intentions – as Alison models in his remarkable reading of the CDF Notification against Sister Jeannine Gramick and Father Robert Nugent – with a view to asking as to what can be learned from them that still needs to be incorporated into a potential new configuration of Catholic teaching and practice.<sup>114</sup>

Third, as well as seeking after the partial if, perhaps, somewhat confused truth in a teaching to which one is opposed, it is vital that one also avoids any acrimony on one's own part and any demonising of one's opponents. The goal for which one is ultimately working is not their silencing or elimination; nor simply their grudging accommodation to long-term unreconciled difference. Rather, the ultimate goal is that of conversion, reconciliation, and renewal with one's sisters and brothers in Christ precisely in and through a significant difference which once had the capacity for division.

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<sup>114</sup> See Alison, "The Gay Thing," p. 50.

Fourth, as this implies, one needs to be actively patient: not passive, nor resigned, but actively patient. In a Catholic mind-set, it is better to achieve genuine reconciled unity in diversity by the long route than it is to gain a pyrrhic victory by a shorter one. The point is that it can be one thing to win a theological argument about the need for and possibility of a specific proposed change to Catholic teaching and quite another thing to win the hearts, minds, and support that are required in order really to establish change in the will, habits, and practice of the Church. As Newman recognised, “Great acts take time.”<sup>115</sup>

What, however, about situations when the current configuration of the Catholic system appears utterly intransigent – in Alison’s terms, ‘incurable’ – but one’s Catholic conviction and sense of vocation forecloses separation? Does not a combination of the first and fourth of these principles of living catholicity differently inevitably reduce one to mere passivity and to suffering in silence?

Here I think that Alison, deeply shaped through close engagement with and long reflection on the strangely Christologically-rooted work of René Girard, indicates a way to make transformative act of passion endured. For Alison, as for Girard, the repressive and exclusionary violence that exists in a system is both consequence and indicator of a false ‘sacred’ being in thrall. In Alison’s words, “The blessed who are not scandalised by Jesus understand that in each generation there will be attempts to shore up the sacred violently – that is just how things are in our fallen planet.”<sup>116</sup> The appropriate and necessary response to the recognition of such systemic violence is to seek to expose the idol, the false sacred, by bringing its cost into clear view in the hope that its guardians can hear and be converted by the ordinary peace and blessing of which the idol is a distortion.<sup>117</sup> However, the reactionary violence of the false sacred is such that seeking to expose its cost will likely – near inevitably – mean that one will oneself more deeply come to bear and manifest that cost in one’s own person and bodily, material existence. Of course, martyr-complexes are to be avoided; as too pain and suffering, whenever they can be so avoided without cost either to others or to one’s own integrity. Nevertheless, in Alison’s Girardian analysis, rather than always prioritising the avoidance of suffering from such reactive violence, the nonviolent way of the gospel – which seeks after the victory of peace *with not over* one’s opponents – is, on occasion at least, precisely to accept the likelihood of such suffering

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<sup>115</sup> John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 264.

<sup>116</sup> Alison, “On Not Being Scandalised,” p. 181.

<sup>117</sup> See *Ibid.*



and be prepared to bear in love the wounds of the false sacred in one's own bodiliness. The hope is that this will serve a transformative pedagogical function by evoking repentance and leading to renewal and reconciliation. In Alison's words:

The Christian faith enables us to inhabit the space of being victimised not so as to grab an identity but, in losing an identity, to become signs of forgiveness such that one day those who didn't realise what they were doing may see what they were doing and experience the breaking of heart which will lead to reconciliation.<sup>118</sup>

Seeking first to embody this in his own life and options (in the context of current Catholic teaching on homosexual orientation), Alison then offers this to others as the way in which to seek to live substantive unresolved Catholic difference transformatively. His fascinating and challenging analysis can well be understood as being driven by a creative re-appropriation of the category of sacrifice and sacrificial living, not as a transactional purchase or punishment but as a performance of love which transforms passion into transformative act.

This could be fruitfully deepened and extended, beyond what Alison himself does, by identifying a dynamic of life-giving, self-giving at the heart alike of: i) the life and ministry of Jesus unto death and resurrection; and ii) Christian understanding of the eternal Trinitarian life of God. In the latter regard, whilst in the eternal life of God this dynamic of life-giving, self-giving is from fullness unto fullness and so free from all threat of diminishment, when transposed into the conditions of finitude, material existence, and a sin-strewn world, it can be seen as bringing inevitable risk, likely resistance, and the potential for suffering in its wake, as in the life of Jesus. Nevertheless, as the life-giving, self-giving of God, it is always ultimately creative and transformative. Viewed in these terms and whilst steadfastly refusing any false mysticisms of the cross, which would treat suffering as a good and necessary thing in its own right (either as discipline, or atonement, or necessary means of divine salvific action), this nevertheless opens a way to actively embracing and living unavoidable suffering in a manner analogous to the practices of contemplative prayer and fasting. Just as contemplative prayer and fasting can be lived as intentional, loving sharings in the one act of God's life-giving, self-giving – in the conviction that they share in and can be vehicles for the transformative character of that act – so too can unavoidable suffering be lived as such a sharing in the costly life-giving, self-giving of God in this order.

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

Indeed, to press this further: if the living heart of Catholicism consists, as I believe Möhler correctly perceived, in sharing in reconciled communion in diversity in the one living communion of God in Christ and the Spirit, then living catholicity, being and becoming a Catholic person, consists in growing into conformity with this one loving act of divine life-giving, self-giving in and through the particular circumstances of one's life. This includes the unavoidable suffering and reactive violence that will be encountered there; particularly so, for present purposes, the act of suffering for the Church in love. Clearly this is dangerous terrain. If offered as specific advice to another, it risks making a glibly pious and, potentially, deeply damaging insertion into the particularities of their circumstances without appropriate insider-feel for the constraints and possibilities which those circumstances entail. In the Anglican context, Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris ask whether the 'immense sacrifice' the Church of England is asking of gay men and women is unacceptably high?<sup>119</sup> In reply and by way of conclusion, I offer three thoughts.

First, beyond identifying conformity to this dynamic of life-giving, self-giving as the most basic movement of Catholic existence and beyond seeking to discern for oneself how to live and grow within this dynamic, it must be for each to discern the contours of its call, cost, and promise in the specificities of his/her own life and circumstance. Whilst it might be proper to draw attention to this general dynamic and its call on each person's life and whilst it might, therefore, be proper to invite another to consider its potential relevance for them in general, it can never be proper to assume to tell another in any given circumstance that they should proceed in this manner rather than through some more active means of resistance and work for change. Similarly, whilst, in relevant circumstances, Alison might be able to advocate an approach such as this to other gay men as an act of like-to-like ministry, it could never properly be directly and specifically advocated by a straight man to gay and lesbian people without that being in danger of being complicit in appearing to diminish the intolerable extent of the systemic sacred violence that is being endured.

Second, as to what grounds of hope we might have for believing that over time the Church will continue to learn, as it has learned on many previous occasions, to live catholicity differently: here it is helpful to remind ourselves that it is not sin and failure which should surprise us, whether within the Church or without, but the miracle of grace which, amidst sin

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<sup>119</sup> Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris, "Introduction," *An Acceptable Sacrifice? Homosexuality and the Church*, Duncan Dormer and Jeremy Morris (eds.) (London: SPCK, 2007), pp. 1-7 (pp. 6-7).

and failure, is capable of reorienting and opening us further to the true dynamic of divine life-giving, self-giving in which we are held and of bringing this forth in anticipatory showings of transformed holiness. In this purview, the divine-human reality of the Church is such that whilst, viewed in one way, it is a human institution subject to sociological norms and pressures like any other institution, it is not just a human institution *tout court*. Most fundamentally, the Church is the miracle of grace in corporate, institutional form. The conviction of faith, sustained in hope through the witness of lives transformed in love, is that, over time, this miracle will keep winning-out through love, in and through the suffering which this entails.

Third, as sobering counterpoint to that note of ecclesial hope, lest it should return us to the complacency of an ecclesial idealism which would blind us and numb us to the reality of things: it needs be recognised that, realistically speaking, this spiritual practice of living catholicity differently is, as articulated here, a possible *modus operandi* only for the hardcore committed minority who are prepared to live with the tensions of sustained unresolved difference and to suffer in love for them. Whilst the judgment of faith might assure us that this costly practice of living Catholic difference will bear its fruit over time, we can be equally sure that it will not serve immediately or directly to stem the flood of people away from the Church. For many, current Catholic teaching on homosexuality is just one of the issues making the Church an irrelevance and leading them not to anything as formal or intentional as schism or heresy but simply, and most desperately, to the inability to hear the Church's preaching as the Good News of Jesus Christ (Mk 1:1). As such, learning to live catholicity differently is not simply a matter of life and death – sometimes quite literally – for Catholic people of difference, it is a matter of life and death for the health and witness of the Church as a whole.

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## 5.

# A less Eurocentric Theology: Advantages, Tasks, and Challenges<sup>1</sup>

JOHANNA RAHNER

*Ultimately, the native can only be preserved and developed when we are brave enough to encounter the foreign (Karl Rahner).<sup>2</sup>*

### We Are Children of the Council

Are we not all ‘children of the Council’? I am one for sure. I was born shortly after the first session had ended, in 1962. Thus, I know the Second Vatican Council only from what people have told me; one could say that I participate in a collective cultural memory. I ‘remember’ the Council in the same way that I ‘remember’ other epochal events that happened 50 years ago – the Cuban missile crisis, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the movement of 1968. I remember the Council because people have told me about it and because I know the images, those spectacular images that even today tell us that this Council was the first one in the history of the Church which, through its presentation in the media, became an event of worldwide importance. A world event that showed that the Catholic Church was a world church and that it wanted to be a church for the world. At this Council, the Catholic Church experienced not only its own plurality and multidimensionality, but the Council itself was an event of a ‘world society in the making’. Especially the initial words of the *Council Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* took this historical background into consideration and took its theological relevance seriously. “In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions.”<sup>3</sup>

For the majority of the Council fathers, the concrete historical experience in Europe provided the background for this realization of an emerg-

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: Christian Henkel, Tübingen University. All quotations have been translated from German, except those where an English text is referenced in the footnote.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Rahner, “Austausch statt Einbahn. Ritenstreit – neue Aufgaben für die Kirche,” *Entschluß* 38 (1983), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Nostra aetate* (1965), no. 1.

ing world church, as Cardinal Koenig pointedly noted after the Council “from a Eurocentric church that had grown after the devastation of Europe in the last war, after the end of the European colonial empires and the resulting independence of the non-European continents, a world church emerged and made an impressive entrance at the last Council. The Church of Christ with the Petrine office has put down its European gown, or it is at least still busy doing it.”<sup>4</sup> But what does such an emergence, or ‘realization’, of a world church mean?

Quite rightly, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann once called the Catholic Church one of the oldest global players. At least we could call it a “worldwide, multi-culturally rooted organization with a global infrastructure,”<sup>5</sup> even before the term ‘globalization’ was known. We can do this because, from the beginning, the Church has understood itself as “independent from territorial boundaries and with a worldwide mission.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the spirit of the Gospel is always the ‘spirit of universalization’.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the idea of a universal salvation is the key concept of the Judeo-Christian tradition. This universality can assume a deeper ecclesiastical meaning in the idea of a holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

But the ambiguous history of the Church’s missionary outreach shows that this ‘drive’ towards universalization is a double-edged sword: Over centuries, the worldwide mission of the Church has been understood in such a way that it became “the conduct of an export business that sold the European religion to all parts of the world without wanting to adapt this product – just like the supposedly superior [European] culture and civilization”<sup>8</sup> according to Karl Rahner. Ottmar Fuchs calls this, quite vividly, a “hegemonic universalization”<sup>9</sup> that ultimately prevented, or at least hin-

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<sup>4</sup> Franz König, “Kollegialität statt Zentralismus,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, Heft 4 (1999), p. 177.

<sup>5</sup> Wilhelm Guggenberger, “Universale Kirche und Neue Weltordnung. Zehn Thesen zur politischen Kraft des Evangeliums angesichts der Globalisierung,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 120 (1998), p. 422.

<sup>6</sup> Franz Xaver Kaufmann, “Globalisierung und Christentum,” in *Das II. Vatikanum. Christlicher Glaube im Horizont globaler Modernisierung*, Peter Hünermann (ed.) (Paderborn; München; Wien; Zürich: Schöningh, 1998), p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Guggenberger, “Universale Kirche und neue Weltordnung,” p. 421.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner, “Über eine theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils,” in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie* Bd. 14 (1980), p. 288.

<sup>9</sup> Ottmar Fuchs, “Pastoraltheologische Reflexionen globaler Katholizität,” in *Inkulturation als Herausforderung und Chance. Dokumentation des 1. Dialogforums der Partnerdiözesen Poona und Eichstätt. Grundfragen – pastorale Herausforderungen – Erfahrungen aus Partnerschaften*, Michael Heberling, Gerhard Rott and Horst Sing (eds.) (Aachen: Riese Springer, 2001), p.185.

dered, the move towards a true catholicity in the sense of a transcultural universalization. This is the reason why the words of Pope Benedict XVI in Brazil<sup>10</sup> – when he argued that the history of the peoples of South America had been shaped by an inner longing for the advent of Jesus Christ – have caused quite a stir and drew some criticism. But as always, there is some grain of truth in these words. Because wherever Christianity becomes inculturated without destroying what had been there before but rather bringing out the best in it – based on the fundamental principle of the Catholic Theology of Grace: “*Gratia praesupponit naturam, non destruit sed perficit*,” grace supports nature, it does not destroy it but brings it to perfection – it can be experienced as the liberating message towards which human beings have always been oriented in their inner selves. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that the Catholic Church has for a long time, maybe even too long, hesitated to incorporate the change of perspective that necessarily follows from this observation. Johann Baptist Metz has appropriately characterized this change as one from a “mono-centric Christianity of Europe and North America” to a “culturally poly-centric world Christianity.”<sup>11</sup> Indeed, until this day the Church hesitates, wavers, and struggles with an appropriate definition of the relationship between the one Church of Christ and its multi-faceted existence in real history.

In harmony with the economy of the Incarnation, the young churches, rooted in Christ and built up on the foundation of the Apostles, take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (cf. Ps. 2:8). They borrow from the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and disciplines, all those things which can contribute to the glory of their Creator, or enhance the grace of their Savior, or dispose Christian life the way it should be.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Address of Pope Benedict XVI., Conference Hall, Shrine of Aparecida; May 13, 2007,” <https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/de/speeches/2007/may/documents/hfben-xvispe20070513conference-aparecida.html>.

<sup>11</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Einheit und Vielheit: Probleme und Perspektiven der Inkulturation,” *Concilium* 25 (1989), p. 337. Cf. also Johann Baptist Metz, “Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche,” *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Franz-Xaver Kaufmann and Johann Baptist Metz (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau; Basel; Wien: Herder, 1987), pp. 93-123.

<sup>12</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Ad gentes* (1965), no. 22.

These words mark the beginning of the famous passage in the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Mission Activity, Ad Gentes*. In this decree the Council fathers commit themselves to the task at hand. Meanwhile, this passage has developed an unprecedented explosive force as it touches the self-understanding of the Catholic Church; in light of the challenges of late modernity, we still have not fully realized its potential. The principle of 'accommodation' or 'inculturation', which is presupposed here, demands something that is best described as the necessary precondition for the emergence of a world church in the wake of Vatican II. At the same time, there are theological consequences following from that principle. Moreover, the concrete assignments that result from this principle also correspond with the public reception of the Council as an event of world history, whose impact still affects us all.

### The Heritage of Vatican II

It is one of the main insights of Vatican II that it wants to approach the topic of 'church' in a new and different way. The fundamental perspective on the Church changes from an inside to an outside view when the Church discovers the world 'out there' as a relevant 'locus theologicus'.<sup>13</sup> The Council presents a twofold definition of the essence of a church that is facing the world: it is in the world and yet not of it. This definition leads to a different identity of the Church, it emphasizes the Church's ex-centric essence. Therefore, the Council uses the term 'sacrament'<sup>14</sup> to define the important and all-encompassing fundamental understanding of the Church. As an intellectual concept that runs through the text, the term 'sacrament' makes apparent the double relatedness of the Church towards God and towards the world, while reflecting on the function of the Church in the history of salvation. As a 'sacrament for the salvation of the world', the Church has a function for the world, but it does not get fully absorbed in it. At the same time, the Church shows that there is a salvific history within this world because the Church is a part of it. The Church does not exist for itself, but for its mission for the salvation of all human beings. This is why it is a 'sacramentum salutis', in particular because it is also a 'sacramentum unitatis', that is a sacrament for the union with God and

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<sup>13</sup> Hans-Joachim Sander, "Der Ort der Ökumene für die Katholizität der Kirche – von der unmöglichen Utopie zur prekären Heterotropie," *Die Dokumente des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils: Theologische Zusammenschau und Perspektiven* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2006), pp. 186-200 (p. 198).

<sup>14</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* (1964), no. 1.

between all humans. Its service is demanded both by God and by the world.

From this follows a central element of conciliar and post-conciliar theology: a change in the relationship between church and world that the Pastoral Decree of the Council, *Gaudium et spes*, emphasizes.<sup>15</sup> *Gaudium et spes*'s main theme is a perspective from the outside because the Church is addressed "in light of human affairs. It understands itself from the perspective of the people that live here and today. This is why its constitution is pastoral. [...] [Pastoral] is not just one concept amongst many but it is the process that is significant and constitutive for the Church coming into its own."<sup>16</sup> The needs of and threats to the human race, which are outlined in the document, are the outside impulse for this dialogue. Part of that implies for theology to gain an appropriate understanding of the situation, an evaluation of what happens in the world in which the Church and faith exist and in which and for which the Church must fulfill its mission.

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

The 'signs of the times' are, according to Hans-Joachim Sander, "position fixes in the midst of these times, that uncover what is being silenced and yet representative for the struggle for humanity and dignifying conditions."<sup>18</sup> This first of all means that religion and faith are no longer to be developed according to criteria from inside the Church; they are also shaped by the challenges of the 'signs of the times'. In the words of the *Pastoral Decree*: "For the human person deserves to be preserved; human society deserves to be renewed. Hence the focal point of our total presen-

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<sup>15</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), no. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Sander, "Der Ort der Ökumene für die Katholizität der Kirche," pp. 188f.

<sup>17</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Hans-Joachim Sander, "Kommentar zu *Gaudium et spes*," *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, Bd. 4, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum – Unitatis Redintegratio – Christus Dominus – Optatam Totius – Perfectae Caritatis – Gravissimum Educationis – Nostra Aetate – Dei Verbum* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2005), p. 868.

tation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.”<sup>19</sup>

Humans set the agenda. This, however, means that “the ‘signs of the times’ are not just attractive ‘starting points’ for a theology that ostensibly wants to show its up-to-datedness. Rather they are instances of testing, deducing, and verifying Christian belief.”<sup>20</sup> From now on, we can no longer search our identity just within the churches or the denominations. The identity of the Church is defined, in a challenging way, particularly ‘from outside’.

To quote Mario von Galli: The *Pastoral Decree* does not mean

that the Church administrates an eternal, unchanging, super-natural ‘teaching’ that it just has to lower into the times, like a tea-egg, in order to infuse the lives of the people with power. It rather means that the Church has to listen to the times and discern, with its powers of the discernment of the spirits, where the word of God, his seed, grows within the human race. It grows outside of the Church as well. It grows wherever man becomes more human. The Church has to recognize this growth, welcome and foster it, and through the fullness of its message steer it towards the final goal of humanity. The Church’s attitude towards the world must be not to condemn in the first place, but to recognize the acting of God in all humans and at all times. [...] the Church has to fulfill this challenge in the spirit of the gospel; that means not governing but serving.<sup>21</sup>

The comfortable identity of the ‘stronghold of eternal truths’, which the Catholic Church displayed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by using the image of a hierarchical ordered *societas perfecta*, is being replaced by the uncomfortable situation of a continuous journey. This is, of course, dangerous and unsettling, first of all for the Church itself, but then also for the way in which we do theology. “The Church moves from an absolutistic position of unreachable and untouchable sovereignty to a position where it becomes related to salvation in a singular way, a position where limitations to solidarity are not acceptable. This kenotic structure in solidarity with the whole human race and especially with the oppressed and suffering

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<sup>19</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no 3.

<sup>20</sup> Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “...radius illius veritas...” (NA 2). *Theologische Perspektiven im Horizont radikaler Entgrenzung*, *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 130 (2008), p. 306.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Rahner, *Reformation aus Rom. Die Katholische Kirche nach dem Konzil* (Tübingen: Wunderlich, 1967), p. 115.



becomes a principle for building the Church in the decree *Gaudium et spes*.<sup>22</sup> From now on, being and essence of the Church are determined by its tasks: “Task-orientation as a principle of constituting the Church would mean to let the risk of the present, which can be experienced on a daily basis, enter into the center of the pastoral realities and concepts, in so far as no pastoral practice can succeed without taking these risks seriously.”<sup>23</sup>

The resulting method of the *Pastoral Decree* is the decisive challenge for theology as a churchly discipline. It is the point of contact for a ‘new way’ of doing theology that Karl Rahner has described as the ‘disconcerting’ heritage and therefore an important theological challenge in *Gaudium et spes*. Rahner said this not only because the text turns the established basic principles of doing theology on their heads, but also because he missed in the text a well-founded ‘gnoseology’, i.e., a dogmatically sufficiently founded epistemology of the ‘signs of the times’.<sup>24</sup> The approach of *Gaudium et spes* does not just reverse the order of doctrine and pastoral, but it builds upon the reciprocity between the gospel and the questions of our times. It thus dares, in a reasoned but preliminary and revisable form, to speak by taking over the ‘pastoral logic’ that roots in the discovery [that] the significance of faith positions [...] [lies in] their social, political, and religious realization in the actual present,” i.e., significance comes ‘from the outside’.<sup>25</sup>

In order to be able to act – that is a way of acting without which the Church would not be what it needs to be – [the Church] needs to understand the situation in which it lives. Of course, such an understanding of the situation might come with the aid of the Spirit and it may, as a knowledge of the Church, take on a somewhat charismatic character, i.e., differ from a merely profane understanding of a historical situation, a profane analysis of the times, the society, etc. And it may also be feasible that in such a moment of realization, when a yet unfinished theoretical analysis of the situation is finalized (despite the fact that it will always be incomplete) and becomes the

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<sup>22</sup> Rainer Bucher, “Auf ihm bestehen, nicht ihm verfallen. Die katholische Kirche auf dem religiösen Markt,” *Euangel* (2017), p. 4, <https://www.euangel.de/ausgabe-2-2017/werkzeuge-auf-dem-pastoralen-markt/auf-ihm-bestehen-nicht-ihm-verfallen> (accessed January 8, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Karl Rahner, “Zur theologischen Problematik einer ‘Pastoralkonstitution’.” in Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke, Bd. 21/2: Das Zweite Vatikanum. Beiträge zum Konzil und seiner Interpretation* (Solothurn; Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2013), pp. 904-922.

<sup>25</sup> Sander, “Kommentar zu *Gaudium et spes*,” p. 653.

basis for decision and action, there will be a point where we can detect – in the completion [of the analysis] and the transition towards decision and action – the acting of the Holy Spirit. But this does not change the fact that the Church depends on a knowledge that is not part of the revelation and the ‘*depositum fidei*’, in order to be itself and be able to act.<sup>26</sup>

This fundamental change from a general scheme of order that is valid for everyone to a ‘series of places’ of understanding, different ‘nuclei of crystallization’ of the gospel,<sup>27</sup> leads to an inner plurality of Catholicism. Faith needs to inculturate itself, i.e., the Church must recon with situational, historical, and linguistic differences, but also with a difference of mentalities and cultures as factors of its belief and its preaching. But this is precisely where the Church becomes aware of its true catholicity: I have already mentioned that, according to Wilhelm Guggenberger, the Church is “a world-wide, multi-culturally rooted organization with a global infrastructure”<sup>28</sup> that mediates between the local and the global. The true meaning to being Catholic is not just a global or geographically universal expansion of a unified norm. It rather means a shared ‘matrix of faith and life’ that has to ‘incarnate’ and inculturate continuously. Based on this dynamism, ‘catholicity’ can no longer be found in the idea of universality but in a communality of differences.<sup>29</sup> This opens a space for the recognition and appraisal of differences in this *one* Catholic Church:

Such a mission requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence and harmony, through the full recognition of lawful diversity. Thus all those who compose the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds which unite the faithful are mightier than anything dividing them. Hence, let there be unity in what is necessary; freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case.<sup>30</sup>

On the outside, this new foundational perspective becomes effective in a twofold way:

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<sup>26</sup> Rahner, “Zur theologischen Problematik einer ‘Pastoralkonstitution’,” pp. 915f.

<sup>27</sup> Sander, “Kommentar zu *Gaudium et spes*,” p. 837.

<sup>28</sup> Guggenberger, “Universale Kirche und neue Weltordnung,” p. 423.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, no. 13.

<sup>30</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 92.

On the one hand, these guidelines require the preaching of the gospel and the mission to recognize the ability of every human being to discern the truth, to respect the decisions someone takes according to his or her conscience, to strictly refuse the use of coercion and force when it comes to matters of faith, as the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* explicitly states. Either truth convinces by itself or it does not. On the other hand, mission, i.e., the preaching of the faith, is no longer a one-way street. The Church is not just ‘subject’, while the others are only ‘object’ of the mission. It does not evangelize others, it evangelizes itself.<sup>31</sup>

The preacher becomes a listener because every churchly mission principally follows the *Missio Dei*, which has already – in a conscious or unconscious way – reached the local community.<sup>32</sup> Before the missionary arrives, God is already present. This shows that the direction of speaking and asking in mission and preaching is being reversed. The world, the others, do not just learn from the Church but the Church also, and in particular, learns from the world.

Whoever sees the world just from the perspective of mission and (re-) evangelization has actually not allowed himself to come near the real challenge that is present in *Gaudium et spes* and its post-conciliar reception. He has not accepted the ‘revolution’ of this document. In the words of Gotthard Fuchs: “We have to turn our ears to the wind and we have to let them tell us what the language of their longing, but also the language of their needs and desperations is [...]. There are whole landscapes of biographies that in this sense are not visited by the Church or that are not inhabited at all. Where are we (as a church) listeners, taking the approach of *Gaudium et spes* really seriously?”<sup>33</sup> The fundamental dynamics of this new, listening ‘dogmatic theology of the pastoral’<sup>34</sup> takes on a new dynamism under Pope Francis where, in the shape of a hermeneutics of graduality, it becomes a central principle of the teaching of the Church and its pastoral implementation.

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. especially: Pope Paul. VI., *Apostolic Exhortatio Evangelii nuntiandi* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), no. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation. Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue*, May 15, 1991, esp. no. 29ff. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html).

<sup>33</sup> Gotthard Fuchs, “Neuer Bedarf an Spiritualität: Ein Gespräch mit dem Theologen Gotthard Fuchs,” *Herder Korrespondenz* 59 (2005), p. 449.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Bucher, “Auf ihm bestehen, nicht ihm verfallen.”

## From the Center to the Periphery: A Pontificate That Has Changed Many Things

‘Roman centralism’ – for some a synonym of reform gridlock, reactionary actions, the *omertá* etc. For others an example of a powerful and, in all situations of crisis, effective form of governing the global player ‘Catholica’, that with just 2000 employees in its headquarters has managed to assemble about one billion Catholics under one roof. A look at the historical merits of this model makes one thing apparent: The organizational centralization of the Catholic Church can be viewed

from a world-historical perspective as a rather successful strategy to adapt to the modernization of politics and society [...]. Having Rome at the center allows Catholics to better withstand the political pressure of nationalistic usurpations, a fact that in the Wilhelmine Germany of the culture wars (*Kulturkampf*) has spurred the suspicion that Catholics are unpatriotic. [...] The Roman Church is the only organization that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has reached the status of a ‘global player’, a status for which large corporations and states strive until this day. It has proven successful as a transnational authority in two World Wars. The Curia became internationalized decades before the boards of large corporations did the same. The transnationality of Catholicism has played an important part in the independence of religion as a subsystem of society. Today, in the age of factual globalization, it is the only world religion that can serve as a model for a player that can act globally. Under Pope John Paul II [...] it also started various initiatives for an ecumenical dialogue. All things considered this is an impressive record!<sup>35</sup>

Of course, what we see, at first glance as an unchangeable basic signature of the Catholic Church (which often styles itself as an eternal sacral institution, legitimized by God) is ultimately a development of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore dependent on a self-styling of the Church in a particular anti-modern way, which can be observed to this day. Meanwhile, the world of late modernity has become more complex, the different powers in society, economy, and politics have become increasingly penetrable, considering the different ways in which they are tied together. The social and political reality at the local level develops in an increasingly heterogeneous way and the religious scene worldwide turns into a wide

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<sup>35</sup> Franz Xaver Kaufmann, “Römischer Zentralismus: Entstehung – Erfolg – Gefahren,” *Orientierung* 66,10 (2002), p. 116.

field of individualized quests for meaning and different spiritual offers that respond to that. Even the development of different local churches within the Catholic Church is not unaffected by this development. Rather, its dynamics have already led to an inner pluralization of the Catholic world. For the Council fathers at the time of the Second Vatican Council, this was, at most, a distant horizon they could see in the future. But today, the things that had their merits in the past increasingly become a burden even on a day-to-day level: “If the Roman Church still thinks it can eschew [...] institutional ‘checks and balances’ to compensate for the human susceptibility to error, it displays a sacral self-understanding that today is less and less convincing and that denies itself when it makes the wrong assessments and the wrong decisions.”<sup>36</sup> However, the explosive theological nature of the topic does not allow for a solution of the problem on a purely pragmatic level. A structural self-stating of the *Catholica* that is centered only on the papal office is also theologically insufficient.

In the light of the aforementioned challenges for a globalized *Catholica* in the late modern world, it becomes apparent what the Catholic Church loses when it does not bring this potential to fruition for its own ecclesiology. That certainly is the reason why these problems develop a new dynamism under Pope Francis: “[...] Nor do I believe that the papal magisterium should be expected to offer a definitive or complete word on every question which affects the Church and the world. It is not advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory. In this sense, I am conscious of the need to promote a sound ‘decentralization’.”<sup>37</sup> Such a ‘subsidiary’ form of the office of the unity of the universal Church that does not just rely on the responsibility of the institutions at the periphery but that forcefully demands it<sup>38</sup> is an ideal that has been entertained within Catholic circles but that has remained a desideratum, not just on the structural level.

Pope John Paul II in his post-synodal writing *Pastores gregis* (2003) had chosen his words carefully

In the Synod Hall the question was raised whether the relationship between the Bishop and the church’s supreme authority could be treated in the light of the principle of subsidiarity, especially with

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>37</sup> Pope Francis, *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium*, no. 16. This quote and the following ones are taken from: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

<sup>38</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 30f.

regard to relations between individual Bishops and the Roman Curia. [...] The Second Vatican Council, while never employing the term ‘subsidiarity’, did encourage a sharing between Church structures and opened the way for new reflection on the theology of the episcopate, and this is bearing fruit in the concrete application of the principle of collegiality to ecclesial communion.<sup>39</sup>

Pope Francis’ words are more striking:

We have made little progress in this regard. The papacy and the central structures of the universal Church also need to hear the call to pastoral conversion. The Second Vatican Council stated that, like the ancient patriarchal Churches, episcopal conferences are in a position ‘to contribute in many and fruitful ways to the concrete realization of the collegial spirit’. Yet this desire has not been fully realized, since a juridical status of episcopal conferences which would see them as subjects of specific attributions, including genuine doctrinal authority, has not yet been sufficiently elaborated. Excessive centralization, rather than proving helpful, complicates the Church’s life and her missionary outreach.<sup>40</sup>

Under Pope Francis there is talk about the importance of the periphery, about the necessary pluralization, contextualization and inculturation of what is Christian, or Catholic. This attitude is theologically rooted in the context of Latin America: It is the indispensable intrinsic value of the concrete societal, ‘local’ ‘incarnation’ of Christianity. Here Pope Francis changes the emphasis to leave more room for diversity without fearing an inner pluralization of Catholicism. Synodality is one magic word, contextuality, or inculturation, is the other one.

In the affirmation of the freedom of religion, in its reconfiguration of the understanding of the revelation, and in its pneumatological revision of the understanding of the Church the Council rediscovers the central category of the dignity of the human person. This is why the basic principles of modern democratic statehood are now part of the theological core business. The first challenge, thus, is the question about participation and communication and the establishment of the necessary structures, in the

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<sup>39</sup> Here quoted according to: Pope John Paul II, *Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation Pastores gregis*, March 16, 2003, no. 56, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_20031016pastores-gregis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_20031016pastores-gregis.html).

<sup>40</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 32.

sense of basic principles of representation, differentiated decision-making power, and shared responsibility. Closely related to that is the designing of communication structures that are open for dialogue. But dialogue means: “Courage for an antagonism in the Church, for a true pluralism of the charisms, the tasks and the functions.”<sup>41</sup> All this has been vehemently demanded and practiced by Pope Francis:

What the Lord is asking of us is already in some sense present in the very word ‘synod’. Journeying together – laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome – is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice. [...] A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘says to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7). [...] Only to the extent that these organizations keep connected to the ‘base’ and start from people and their daily problems, can a synodal Church begin to take shape: these means, even when they prove wearisome, must be valued as an opportunity for listening and sharing.<sup>42</sup>

But Pope Francis does not leave it at a dynamization of the structures; the intended change goes deeper. Only a plurality, an openness for different currents of thought, “can enable the Church to grow, since all of them help to express more clearly the immense riches of God’s word. [...] Let us never forget that ‘the expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning’.”<sup>43</sup> Therefore,

[u]nity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. [...] Each

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<sup>41</sup> Karl Rahner, “‘Lösch den Geist nicht aus!’,” in Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 7 (1966), p. 88.

<sup>42</sup> The whole text can be found under: Pope Francis, “Ceremony commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops,” October 17, 2015, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html).

<sup>43</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 40.

country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For ‘cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle [...] needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied’.<sup>44</sup>

The changes that go along with this are dramatic because they reconstitute the doctrine and how we approach it. *Amoris laetitia* further develops its theological ideas on a close relation between dogmatic and pastoral theology, teaching and life, and on the theological acknowledgement of the concrete ways of life that the *Pastoral Decree* of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, has rediscovered and reinstated as the central methods of teaching and pastoral care in the ‘Church in the world today’. The hermeneutics that Pope Francis proposes for the context of the life of Christian marriages and families allows in this field of pastoral action to take into account the concrete life situations as a theological point of reference. Thus, it allows to take seriously the existential challenges and needs as a measure for the acting of the Church – because complex life situations need complex solutions and not simple answers from the catechism. The change in hermeneutics that *Amoris laetitia* puts into effect, must be taken seriously and should be applied to the question of decentralization towards a less Eurocentric theology. But before we apply these criteria, that is look at their reception inside the Church, we have to take a look at the conceptual challenges that go hand in hand with the realization of a world church.

## Challenges

### *Being Catholic in the Age of Authenticity*

We are living in an ‘age of authenticity’ (Charles Taylor).<sup>45</sup> Here individual faith practices and the individual responsibility for one’s faith – together with the need for its personal appropriation, responsibility, and practice – mark the starting point and the center of religious beliefs. Even the denominational priorities seem to have shifted fundamentally, because the classic paradigm of the ecumenical movement seems to have reached its limits. “This approach cannot work in functionally very differentiated

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<sup>44</sup> Pope Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Amoris laetitia*, April 8, 2016, no. 3, quoted from: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. especially Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 473-505.



societies, and it becomes an illusion in societies without one normative tradition, where the faith of the individuals is increasingly a matter of individual choice.”<sup>46</sup> My own lifestyle is not determined by my religious or denominational orientation, I rather search for a form of spirituality that fits my lifestyle. I measure my faith practices by how much I benefit from them. “The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this. [...] But if the focus is going now to be on my spiritual path [...] my placing in the broader ‘church’ may not be that relevant for me.”<sup>47</sup>

Today belonging to a church or a denomination – if that is still the case – says more about one’s individual social identity than about a belief system, God, or church. What matters is: “I have to discover my route to wholeness and spiritual depth. The focus is on the individual, and on his/her experience. Spirituality must speak to this experience. The basic mode of spiritual life is thus the quest”<sup>48</sup> and the religious existence of the pilgrim is related to that. The churches react to this changing ‘demand’ with a pluralization and flexibility of ‘offers’: “Churches have gone along with this global tendency of pluralization and individualization by deconstructing to some degree their all-embracing traditions and adapting them to the preferences and shopping habits of contemporary individuals [...]. The monolithic religious institutions and traditions have lost ground as standards and landmarks of religiosity, and the ideals of authenticity and self-spirituality have taken their place.”<sup>49</sup>

“For many people today, to set aside their own path in order to conform to some external authority just doesn’t seem comprehensible as a form of spiritual life. The injunction is, in the words of a speaker at a New Age

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<sup>46</sup> Anna Marie Aagaard, “Ecclesiology and ethics,” *Studia Theologica* 55 (2001), p. 161.

<sup>47</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 486f.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 507f: “Moreover, the seekers in this case are the heirs of the expressive revolution, with its roots in the reactions of the Romantic period against the disciplined, instrumental self connected to the modern moral order. This means [...] also that they are seeking a kind of unity and wholeness of the self, a reclaiming of the place of feeling, against the one-sided pre-eminence of reason, and a reclaiming of the body and its pleasures from the inferior and often guilt-ridden place it has been allowed in the disciplined, instrumental identity. The stress is on unity, integrity, holism, individuality; their language often invokes ‘harmony, balance, flow, integrations, being at one, centred’.”

<sup>49</sup> Peter Jonkers, “Are there any Good Reasons for Our Attachment to Religious Traditions?,” *The Catholic Church and Modernity in Europe*, Pancratius Beentjes (ed.) (Wien; Zürich; Berlin; Münster: LIT, 2009), p. 207.

festival: ‘Only accept what rings true to your own inner Self’.<sup>50</sup> It is only logical that “[t]his kind of search is often called by its practitioners ‘spirituality’, and is opposed to ‘religion’. This contrast reflects the rejection of ‘institutional religion’, that is, the authority claims made by churches which see it as their mandate to preempt the search, or to maintain it within certain definite limits, and above all to dictate a certain code of behavior.”<sup>51</sup> The actual question for the “future of North Atlantic religion” is therefore: will there be a connection “between modes of quest and centers of traditional religious authority, between what Wuthnow calls dwellers and seekers?”<sup>52</sup> But the future in the core territory of Latin Christianity remains unclear: “The fading contact of many with the traditional languages of faith seems to presage a declining future. But the very intensity of the search for adequate forms of spiritual life that this loss occasions may be full of promise.”<sup>53</sup>

To describe this future, Taylor refers to Mikhail Epstein’s term ‘minimal religion’,<sup>54</sup> which Epstein introduced for ‘post-atheistic’ Russia and whose premises, for good reason, bear resemblance to Karl Rahner’s concept of a ‘third confession’, which he introduced in the 1970s. Taylor talks about a spirituality of people that grew up amidst a militant atheistic regime and which kept all confessional options (which were equally unknown) at an equal distance.

‘Minimal religion’ is a spirituality lived in one’s immediate circle, with family and friends, rather than in churches, one especially aware of the particular, both in individual human beings, and in the places and things which surround us. [...] But because this religion was born outside of any confessional structures, it has its own kind of universalism, a sort of spontaneous and unreflective ecumenism, in which the coexistence of plural forms of spirituality and worship is taken for granted. Even when people who start with this kind of spirituality end up joining a church, as many of them do, they retain something of their original outlook.<sup>55</sup>

Karl Rahner already summed up the phenomenon of the ‘third confession’ in the 1970s: “Above and beyond a mere human relatedness and tol-

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 489.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 508.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 532f.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 533.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 533-535.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 534.

erance, it allows for and demands everything that already happens today in ecumenical closeness and common ecumenical acting. [...] What unifies the third confession [...] is what God gave all Christian churches in Jesus Christ and which all accepted, from which they all lived, and which became the living seed from which a full unity can eventually blossom.”<sup>56</sup> However, we still have to find criteria for the description of what is shared by all and for the quest for common answers to the questions of the time, which Karl Rahner – in light of a change in the talking and preaching to a secular, pluralistic, and atheistic world – saw as the yardstick for a future ‘ecumenical’ confession.

Late modernity makes it rather doubtful that the result is an enlightened, religiously and culturally pluralistic humanism as a core belief. In the light of an abandonment of tradition in our time, which is characteristic especially for Christianity in the secularized and highly developed societies of the North, and a pluralism that for socio-political reasons alone has become irreversible, (post-confessional) religious identities today are constructed from a *mélange* of sociological, political, and secondary-religious points of difference but not from theological criteria. This shows two risks:

On the one hand, post-confessional identities mirror the fractured mentalities, and non-simultaneities of the surrounding societies and stabilize them instead of critically challenging them. Such differences, resting on sociological grounds, are much more difficult to handle in coexistence of religions than the traditional differences in theological teaching. How and on what basis can we legitimize the criteria according to which we judge the others? On the other hand, we find that post-confessional identities define their belief through exclusion, by interpreting the differences they experience not with a view towards unity but towards dissociation. They feel the need to declare the differences to be the crucial marks of distinction. Every attempt to relativize such differences attacks the root of the identity and is therefore being ruled out from the beginning. Every ‘different view of how things are’ necessarily stands outside of the common foundation. The drawing of the boundary between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ threatens to become more and more apodictic. Thus, a crucial tendency becomes obvious: There is a shift towards traditionalism. “For the foreseeable future [...] the dominant theological tone of emerging world

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<sup>56</sup> Karl Rahner, “Dritte Konfession?,” *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. 12 (1975), pp. 568-581; now in: Karl Rahner, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 27 (Solothurn; Düsseldorf: Benziger, 2002), p. 145.

Christianity is traditionalist, orthodox, and supernatural. This would be an ironic reversal of most Western perceptions about the future of religion.”<sup>57</sup>

*The Growing of a Structural and Mental Anti-Modernism as a Phenomenon in Religion Worldwide*

In the post-Vatican era, all status groups were facing the same problem: The central idea of the Council, i.e., acting in the world and with the world, had pulled down the old bastions of Catholicism and thus again forced the question of identity upon the Church. As a reaction to this bewilderment, one side re-established the difference between Church and world as the blue-print of true catholicity. That side consciously styled itself in a sharp contrast to the other possible option – i.e., the opening up of Catholicism in a critical, but basically friendly acceptance of modernity – by brandishing this option as sycophancy *vis-a-vis* modernity and the menacing self-destruction of the Catholic principle. Behind the frequently reiterated rhetoric of a strong confessionality, an anti-modern stance becomes apparent. Over the last couple of years, it has not only gained influence in the Roman Catholic Church but has also affected other denominations. Its manifestations are manifold and reach from fundamentalist biblicism, which denounces all attempts of reading Scripture historically as a betrayal of the Christian truth and simply applies the Bible in an unmediated way to the modern age, over a, politically speaking, pre-enlightenment nationalism that confuses the *proprium christianum* with political and national interests and sometimes mistakes natural law with prejudice, right up to an institutional anti-modernism, which gives theological justification to anti-democratic structures, placing them high up as metaphysically legitimated sacred institutions, which will then passionately be adulated with the incense of a sacred and exclusive mystical cult.

The anti-modern religious program does not shy away from denouncing the secular world as a culture of untruth and relativism, and suspecting it of being filled with decay and destruction. Looking at it more closely, though, it proves itself to be the child of just this mentality of modernity to which its proponents are so violently opposed. They implicitly drink from the cup they formally reject. Religious identities that draw on mechanisms of exclusion do not only prove to have mastered the instrument of late modern, consumer-oriented profile marketing, they also generate a form of relativism. For both, anti-modern fundamentalism and late modern relativism, refuse any rational reflection and foundation of their own

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<sup>57</sup> Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 9.

ideas. One side does this because it considers this form of rationality as (no longer) possible, the other side still rejects it as unnecessary. Ideas, however, that cannot be based on reasoning degenerate into mere opinions, regardless of who holds them. These people tend to totally dismiss the quest for truth, turning it into a matter of ‘taste’. Yet, it becomes clear that wherever that happens, a purely instrumental, i.e., economic ratio reigns. If such opinions can only be maintained within a tribal context, that is to say in a trusted group of like-minded people, a strategic political alliance will prove to be a necessary and ideal means to provide for and enforce its members’ own interests. And one will not be too choosy in finding strategic allies.

### *Globalization and Inculturation*

“All too often, statements about what ‘modern Christians accept’ or what ‘Catholics today believe’ refer only to what that ever-shrinking remnant of Western Christians and Catholics believe. Such assertions are outrageous today, and as time goes by, they will become ever further removed from reality.”<sup>58</sup> The backside of the self-realization of a world church, the change from a Eurocentric to a polycentric church, is the demand for a de-Europeanization of Christianity, or, in a more positive wording, an inculturation that is not characterized by the “spreading to the European culture throughout the whole world” but by the “inculturation of the one gospel in different cultures.”<sup>59</sup> Theology has borrowed the terminology and models for this phenomenon from cultural anthropology: Adaption and accommodation, assimilation and transformation, acculturation and transculturation.<sup>60</sup> “Theologically, these processes receive names like indigenization and contextualization, incarnation and inculturation. For some decades now, there is a lot of talk about interculturality.”<sup>61</sup>

Especially the 1950s neologism ‘inculturation’ shows a dynamic that is, actually, part of the basic metaphor of Christianity, namely ‘incarnation’, i.e., the steady Christian testimony to God becoming man in Jesus of Nazareth. Incarnation thus becomes a model of inculturation as the

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Giancarlo Collet, “Katholischer Aufbruch oder zentralistische Wiederkehr? Zur Bedeutung des II. Vatikanischen Konzils für die Weltkirche,” *Theologie der Gegenwart* (Münster: Regensberg, 2014), p. 221.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Giancarlo Collet, “Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragestellung für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragestellung für ein neues Problem?,” *Theologie der Gegenwart* (Münster: Regensberg, 2015), p. 134.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134f.

gospel takes root in other cultures<sup>62</sup>: “In a strict theological sense, the only reason for inculturation is the imitation of Christ. Because the son of God shaped his incarnation in a way of dialogue, we are called to imitate him and his mission in the very same way.”<sup>63</sup> Therefore, Pope Francis points towards the dynamics that is described by the term incarnation as an inner ‘movens’ of the necessity for inculturation: “We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous.”<sup>64</sup>

However, Johann Baptist Metz observed something that should make us critical towards an all too uncritical praise of inculturation: The idea of a polycentric church also hinges on the question if there is a “real cultural polycentrism” because

the question comes to the fore whether the macro-cultural plurality in our world is in fact decreasing, whether it is – slowly but surely – dissolved or absorbed by the profane Europeanization of the whole world [...]. Western rationality with its technology and its cultural and information industry spans the whole globe and does not just change the practices but also the mentality of the peoples [...]. Is there even enough cultural identity and resistance against the world-encompassing process of European civilization?<sup>65</sup>

Or are the non-European peoples and cultures caught in an inescapable and “Eurocentric maelstrom?”<sup>66</sup>

This critical question points towards a dynamic that is characteristic for the phenomenon of globalization. ‘Globalization’ first of all signifies “the universalization of the cultural paradigm of the West that is closely linked to economic expansion and is accelerated and supported through the highways of information transfer (the internet) and the digital simultaneity in culturally non-simultaneous societies. [...] The globalization of information goes hand in hand with a uniformity of culture.”<sup>67</sup> Its central

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>63</sup> Martin Ott, “Inculturation – revisited: New challenges for the ‘local’ in the ‘global’,” *Journal of constructive Theology* (1998), p. 91.

<sup>64</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 117.

<sup>65</sup> Metz, “Einheit und Vielheit,” p. 337.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Josef Estermann, “Interkulturelle Philosophie und Mission. Wege zwischen Fundamentalismus und Globalisierung,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 53 (1997), p. 285.

distinctive mark is to compress time and space.<sup>68</sup> Thus, globalization also tends towards a homogenization of cultures, or, at least, their hybridization. However, we find a striking asymmetry since the flow of data is asymmetrical, “mainly from the West to the rest and [...] this is leading to a cultural homogenization under a Western (mainly American) hegemony.”<sup>69</sup>

Of course, upon close inspection this characterization turns out to be too simplistic, since we can also discern a movement in the opposite direction: “Although there are some indications that we are heading towards something like a global culture, there has been a resurgence of particularism, ethnic, religious, and cultural [...]. In the late twentieth century, we are witnesses of – and participants in – a massive, twofold process involving the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism.”<sup>70</sup> Globalization, thus, can be linked to two opposing developments: First, there is a homogenization of the contexts in which people live – the striving for a ‘Western way of life’ that ultimately elevates the hegemonic structure of a culture that is oriented to the West and influenced by Europe and North America to the desirable ideal and, thus, just takes over and, at the same time, internalizes the colonial story; contrary to this homogenizing trend, we can also discern a drift towards an individualization and tribalization of the world we live in. Globalization and regionalization are just two sides of the same coin, just like the interpenetration of universalization and particularism: “[...] concomitant with the trend toward a global culture, there is simultaneously a trend toward the resurgence and enhancement of particular cultures.”<sup>71</sup> This, however, challenges the agenda of a world church that wants to become less Eurocentric and questions its method of inculturation in various ways. We can ask very pointedly: “Is there a need for (local) inculturation if the process of globalization is speeding up in such a way?”<sup>72</sup>

Especially since the model of inculturation is taken for granted – “[t]he idea of adapting religious practice to local conditions sounds, at worst, harmless and, at best, essential for any evangelic endeavor”<sup>73</sup> – every criti-

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 8.

<sup>69</sup> T. Howland Sanks, “Globalization, Postmodernity and Governance in the Church,” *Louvain Studies* 28 (2003), p. 199.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, in recourse to Roland Robertson, *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1992).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>72</sup> Ott, “Inculturation,” pp. 99f.

<sup>73</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 126.

cism draws suspicions of displaying a latent imperialism, an attitude of intellectual hegemony, or a lacking respect for plurality and difference. But at a time “where ethnic identities and nationalities search for religious legitimization,” it is “especially important to become more critical.”<sup>74</sup> Because the model of inculturation has its problems: “[O]n the basis of the necessity to make room for differences [it has] sometimes paved the way for an uncritical, even romanticizing view of the local”<sup>75</sup>. Thus, we have to take the dangers of an ideologization or totalization of the particular seriously.

At the same time, we have to make explicitly apparent the complex challenge of the search for a sustainable epistemological basis to value inculturation and the dynamics that follow from that. Johann Baptist Metz is rightfully skeptical about an idea that is closely linked to a ‘de-Europeanization’ of Christianity, i.e., ‘de-culturation’. According to him, such a model turns Christianity into an empty cipher without history and context “above all culture as well as ethnically innocent,” a “gnostic” ideal that can easily wear different cultural gowns. But a “Christendom that is pre-existent to all culture and history, a culturally divested, a culturally naked Christendom does not exist.”<sup>76</sup> Christianity cannot shed its European culture like a dress on the outside. Because as long as “the Church understands itself as the herald and representative of the salvation that has become incarnate in the flesh of history, it cannot shed the ‘contingency’ of its historical life; for the sake of truth it is bound to memory.”<sup>77</sup> And this “culture that the churchly Christendom cannot shed [...] is the European, Western culture that was formed from Jewish and Greek-Hellenic traditions.”<sup>78</sup> But if it cannot shed its Western culture, the Greek-Hellenic tradition and inculturation, then, Metz asks, how can the Catholic Church become a polycentric world church? How can there be true inculturation that is not just “a tactically camouflaged expansion of the West?”<sup>79</sup>

In turn, Metz suggests adhering to two principles that spring from the Western-European culture and the Jewish and Greek-Hellenic tradition and that represent a form of universal responsibility, which must be fundamental and mandatory for a polycentric world church. It cannot, and it

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<sup>74</sup> Robert J. Schreiter, “Globalisierung, Postmoderne und die neue Katholizität,” *Ökumenische Rundschau* 53 (2004), p. 153.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Metz, “Einheit und Vielheit,” p. 338

<sup>77</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche,” *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 76 (1986), p. 143.

<sup>78</sup> Metz, “Einheit und Vielheit,” p. 338.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*



must not discard them: “It must on the one hand, and based on the gospel heritage, understand and prove itself as a religion that, in the name of its mission, seeks freedom and justice for all. And on the other hand, it must understand itself as a religion that develops a special culture from its biblical heritage, namely a culture of recognition of the others in their otherness, i.e., the creative recognition of an ethnic and cultural plurality.”<sup>80</sup> Metz derives two central options from this: one is the ‘option for the poor’ and the other is the ‘option for the others in their otherness’.<sup>81</sup> Both must be actualized as a ‘ferment of a hermeneutical culture’. They preserve the heritage of a Eurocentric church. Moreover, this heritage can even be called to witness against itself, if we honestly look back at our history. At the same time, the reality of the global ‘South’, that Philip Jenkins so fittingly describes, becomes visible in these options: “Christianity is deeply associated with poverty. Contrary to the myth, the typical Christian is not a white fat cat in the United states or western Europe, but rather a poor person, often unimaginably poor by Western standards.”<sup>82</sup>

Here we can discern the Euro-centrally founded and yet universal claim of Christianity, within which the global becomes visible in the shape of a theological cosmopolitanism as a positive dimension of the transregional character of Christianity.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, the character of Christianity entails concrete political options that, on the one hand, are rooted in the midst of the Gospel and, on the other hand, are part of the globally shared – or should we say suffered – ‘signs of the times’. Here “the tendency towards universalism that the European spirit has internalized [connects to] [...] the wisdom and the experiences of suffering in other cultures.”<sup>84</sup> Such an approach does not just revive the traditional forms of a universal hegemony through its options, it rather bestows upon the other an indispensable appraisal of herself/himself. It respects the otherness of the other and is capable to acknowledge and to preserve plurality through that. At the same time, it also describes the ‘global’ threats and challenges that transcend contexts and offers solutions to them. In this perspective, it demonstrates a new approach for a “‘universal’ theology in a globalized world.”<sup>85</sup> Today, we really need to find a new balance between the global

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340.

<sup>82</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 256.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Schreiter, “Globalisierung, Postmoderne und die neue Katholizität,” p. 151.

<sup>84</sup> Metz, “Einheit und Vielheit,” p. 340.

<sup>85</sup> Schreiter, *The new catholicity*, p. 115.

and the local, which Robert Schreier emphasizes as the sign of a ‘new catholicity’.

Theology stands today between the global and the local. The global is not the same as the old universal or perennial theologies. Despite the homogenizing aims of globalization, local situations remain robust in their resistance. And there is no ‘local’ any more that is not touched by powerful outside forces. In fact, the local itself increasingly cannot be defined simply in territorial terms. Theology must find ways of embracing both the global and the local if it is to be a faithful and credible voice for belief.<sup>86</sup>

### *Economization and Pentecostalization*

As mentioned before, the Roman-Catholic Church is the only internationally positioned global player. In addition, through its competency in rituals and public self-staging, which it has perfected over the centuries, the Church has a strong presence in the media.<sup>87</sup> For the other churches on the market, there is often only one rational counter strategy, namely sharpening the profile of their ‘brand’ on the basis of local demand.<sup>88</sup> From the perspective of the customer, a plurality of churches is much more sensible as a market strategy than the project of unity. Because only “competing churchly actors can offer all Christian products,”<sup>89</sup> the confessional variety can cater much better to the needs of an economized and globalized late modernity with its specific rationales of supply orientation, competition, sales opportunities, trademark marketing, value of brand recognition, and acceptance by the customer. And on the market of possibilities, whoever practices confessional identity by successful

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> The Church thus structurally resembles a modern institution that can effectively bind its members and that is very dynamic and flexible while at the same time having great amounts of symbolic capital at her disposal. It is thus well ‘positioned’ on the ‘market of opportunities’.

<sup>88</sup> In Germany, the EKD tried the label ‘church of freedom’, which stylizes our longing for freedom and individuality as the late-modern signature of being a Protestant. In this understanding, Roman-Catholicism is left with the strategy of ‘pretentious piety’, which might be attractive for the media but is nothing more than a colorfully masked event-culture behind which heteronomy and clericalism are lurking.

<sup>89</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Graf, “Ökumenische Selbstaufhebung des Protestantismus?,” *Jenseits der Einheit. Protestantische Ansichten der Ökumene*, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (ed.) (Hannover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 2001), p. 206.

‘branding’ has an advantage. But one thing should make us skeptical: The market forces often just produce a monopoly of products that have been designed with only consumption in mind. And, moreover, to be recognized in the market one needs to be unambiguous. Therefore, the range of different denominations is reduced to the significant and unambiguous ones. At the same time, the market forces in the end just meet the demands they have produced themselves.

From this perspective, the ecclesial productivity of the Christian communities of the South and their charismatic-Pentecostal self-staging is unsettling. The Pentecostal movements might go so far as to say that they are the ‘Southern way’ of being Christian, but one can rightfully dispute whether the true future of Christianity can be found there. The churches might be packed, and the communities might be lively, but there remains a question: Under what conditions? An offer that is designed for maximum recognition and placement in the market is a mirror of a late modern, consumer-oriented profile marketing, just like every religious identity that trusts in exclusivity and, with that, in the mechanisms of exclusion. “Questions of religious truth are being interpreted as mere questions of identity and questions of identity are being interpreted as questions about a market profile.”<sup>90</sup> A ‘culturally hegemonic capitalism’ is on its way to become the dominant culture because

the logic and the mechanisms of the market can be found in an increasing number of subsystems of society, where they subvert and reshape the logics of these systems [...]. The culturally hegemonic capitalist is sovereign, not primarily because he uses a stately machinery of power, but because he takes control over humans on a much more effective level, [namely in an area] which affects who we are: He takes control over our hopes and desires, our fears and needs. He already designs the joys and the hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the people today only to satisfy them tomorrow. He provides languages and pictures for this and he provides fulfillment: concrete and palpable.<sup>91</sup>

But the pressure to succeed is enormous and the competition is powerful. Thus, we cannot underestimate the dangers: “The reign of capitalism also means for religions a popularization as a depletion of the religious center. The fringes of the spectrum of religious participation are being

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<sup>90</sup> Thomas Schärtl, “Amerikanisierter Katholizismus? Ein Blick aus den USA zurück nach Deutschland,” *Stimmen der Zeit* 230 (2012), p. 464.

<sup>91</sup> Bucher, “Auf ihm bestehen, nicht ihm verfallen,” p. 2.

strengthened, i.e., complete distance from religion and religious fundamentalism, as we can see – though this not being the only example – in the U.S.A.”<sup>92</sup> This, however, strengthens those mechanisms and practices within the denominations that do not bear the label of ‘religious enlightenment’ or even ‘enlightened Christianity’. The result is an incommensurability of world views: “Beliefs like the ones that appear in this type of emerging Christianity in the South seem too simple and super-naturalistic for a Western intellectual.”<sup>93</sup> The societal context also leads to an extensively cultivated, group-dynamically powerful mixture of religious community building and politico-economic lobbyism or tribalism. It leads to a ‘Gospel of Prosperity’ designed according to the principles of economic liberalism that, with its ‘Health and Wealth’ message, mistakes relationships of dependence and utility based on ‘tribe and bribe’, which are strengthened by the religious communities themselves, as divine predestination. “Global South Christians retain a very strong supernatural orientation and are by and large more interested in personal salvation than in radical politics.”<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, one becomes immune against a change in the global economic system, which (not just according to Pope Francis) for theological and social-ethical reasons, presents one of the biggest challenges for all churches today. A ‘Gospel of Prosperity’ is not just counter-indicative, it also stabilizes the system. Such an immunization is also dangerous on the economic level. In an almost paradoxically concrete application of Max Weber’s thesis on Calvinism, evangelical Pentecostals do not see striving for riches and coming into money through one’s own accomplishments as a structural sin that needs to be criticized, but as something worth striving for. In the Pentecostal communities even the common people can raise in status, become pastors and thus make money. Pentecostal churches are for people who want to climb the social ladder.

The forced competition on the market of denominations, which in the end only produces consumer-oriented and thus increasingly theologically haphazard ecclesial products, can only be won by adjusting the product portfolio. Who then cares if the longing for wonders (springing either from social misery, pre-enlightened mentality or a rediscovery of the emotionality and wholeness/bodylines of the religious<sup>95</sup>) is satisfied pneu-

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>93</sup> Giancarlo Collet, “Von der heutigen Notwendigkeit ‘paulinischer Kühnheit’: Weltkirche auf dem Weg zur kulturellen Vielfalt,” *Orientierung* 73 (2009), p. 59.

<sup>94</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 8.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Michael Schüssler, “Gott erleben und gerettet werden? Praktiken und Affektstrukturen des pentekostalen Christentums in europäisch-theologischer

tologically or mariologically, that is by Pentecostals or Catholics, if, in either case, we use a theology of revelation that creates an immediate, eventful, and spectacular shortcut between the experience of God and his reality?<sup>96</sup>

At the same time, the institutional drift that comes with such a ‘marketing strategy’ is not harmless at all. In the turning events of one’s own life, one searches for the power of the religious wizard and shaman of the spirit, which is deeply rooted in the history of religion and thus existentially very plausible. The subtle power of the pre-modern numinous-sacred appears here to be unbroken or, at least, it is being unashamedly revived. The main ritual actors are no longer interpreted from a theologically sound, inner point of reference. They are seen in a framework of usefulness, i.e., based on functionalization and exploitation as means to an end, and judged according to their market value. Of course, they present themselves in the style of a ‘spiritual elite’, as ‘middlemen’ for salvation and healing who have found a shortcut to the relation with God and on whose “blessing depends prosperity in every-day life.”<sup>97</sup> This is why sacral service providers are not just spiritually but also economically successful. A theologically halfway appropriate ‘theology of the offices’ cannot be maintained in the wake of such dynamics.

Yet another phenomenon is constituting an important challenge: Pentecostalism turns out to be “a collective strategy for survival [...] that millions of Latin-American women use.”<sup>98</sup> Former alcoholics that are now born-again Christians are better fathers in their families and the strict social control and traditional morals of the community have their share in the success of a new family model. That means a clear advantage to survive in societies where 50-60% of women are single mothers, sometimes from three to four different men, and where the ‘demon of machismo’ still dominates gender relations. The “emphasis on domestic values has had a transformative and often positive effect on gender relationships.”<sup>99</sup> The Pentecostal communities thus demonstrate, in particular, the religious and churchly appreciation of the service of women in practice. In doing so, they mobilize the women’s potential in their communities and enhance their leadership roles as well. The “new churches play a vital role in re-

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Perspektive,” *Gerettet durch Begeisterung? Anfragen und Veränderungspotential durch pentekostal-charismatische Religiosität* (2018, in press).

<sup>96</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Schärtl, “Amerikanisierter Katholizismus?,” pp. 469f.

<sup>98</sup> John L. Allen. *Das neue Gesicht der Kirche. Die Zukunft des Katholizismus* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), p. 430.

<sup>99</sup> Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, p. 89.

shaping women's lives, in allowing them to find their voices."<sup>100</sup> In the light of the hesitant response to the question about gender justice and the appreciation and representation of women in leading churchly offices in the Catholic Church – as we see, for example, in the vehement dispute over the admission of women to offices in the Church – the dynamic development in the Pentecostal communities might put competitive pressure on the Catholic Church.

### Future Tasks and Chances

After describing the contextual challenges in becoming a Catholic world church, we now have to take a closer look at the future tasks and chances related to this change of perspective. Obviously, they aim at a structural dynamization of the Catholic Church, but they also have to address the issue of a viable criteriology with regard to the upcoming changes.

#### *Beyond Unity – Catholicity as a Project*

A look at the history of the Catholic Church after the Reformation reveals something important: The inner plurality, which had been a good tradition in the medieval church, has been reduced to an ideology of uniformity during the confessional age, which began with the Reformation. In the 'long 19<sup>th</sup> century', uniformity became stylized as an anti-modern marker of identity. The competition between denominations in the same geographical area forced the Church to define, normalize and uniformize herself in an exclusive way.<sup>101</sup> The ability for internal debate, argument, differentiation, and relativization was lost because it was re-labeled as a negatively connoted external phenomenon. Following this logic, confessional identity became a group identity and the self-understanding of the

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<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Whoever has looked at the intellectual variety and the broad spectrum of medieval-scholastic tracts on justification and grace, will recognize what a loss the merely exclusivist option of the Council of Trent and the following theological narrowing of the Counter-Reformation meant for the Catholic understanding of grace and justification, not to mention the plurality of ecclesiological concepts. The plurality of churchly structures and liturgical forms that had seemed natural for medieval theologians, had vanished from the Catholic world stage after the post-Tridentine enforcement of uniformity – much to the detriment of Catholic identity!

Church was defined as a ‘tribal ecclesiology’,<sup>102</sup> within which there was no room for inner differentiation because that might question one’s strictly demarcated identity. After the Reformation, the Catholic Church and its variety of theological positions (and not just that!) became widely impoverished. It is the question of truth itself that suffers in such a situation because the legitimate diversity of truth within one’s own church becomes increasingly invisible. As a result, plurality is degraded to an outside phenomenon. Wherever internal plurality and diversity become alien concepts, each and every difference must seem secondary and differentiation is forever questioned and at risk. In this situation, diversity is here never taken for granted, but always remains fragile because one doesn’t feel at home in it. In contrast, when ‘home’ is defined as including diversity and excluding monotony, one can fruitfully accept one’s heritage. But that is a virtue that has to be learned anew in the Catholic self-understanding. It is necessary for a criteriology of diversity that can champion the ideal of legitimate plurality towards the outside world, precisely because it is also legitimized internally and, hence, does not represent an ideal of uniformity that is way out of proportion.

However, a look at the current situation shows that we are running out of time to rediscover this virtue. It might be too late to prepare the Catholic Church for the future even as the uniform shape of the Church and the Catholic ideal of unity are fading away. To recognize that there is room for internal pluralism in the Catholic Church, means not only resisting a simplistic dualistic definition of Catholic identity, but also creating a dynamic Catholic denominational identity that is no longer fixed forever, but is fluid. What is Catholic is then understood as including plurality and not as monotonous exclusivity. ‘Regionalization’ becomes one of the new main features of Catholic identity.<sup>103</sup> Now the Catholica rediscovers inside its walls something that it has been missing for such a long time, namely the plurality in the unity of the Church, which goes beyond a uniform church.<sup>104</sup> Precisely at this point Joseph Ratzinger’s old vision took shape, when he spoke, in 1969, about the possibility of different Ecclesiae (‘patriarchates’ or ‘mainline churches’), distinguished by their local background or their confessional point of origin<sup>105</sup> – a vision that

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History. Vol. II: Comparative Ecclesiology* (New York; London; Continuum, 2005), esp. pp. 1-9. And Idem, *Vol. III: Ecclesial Existence* (New York; London: Continuum, 2008), pp. 3-5.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. the special issue of *Theologische Quartalschrift*, vol. 1, on “Dezentralisierung der Kirche”/ Decentralization in the church (2016).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Das neue Volk Gottes: Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie* (Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1977), p. 142.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 142f.

ultimately does not annihilate the different identities, but retains them and tolerates them under the (single?) premise of a ‘unity with the Pope’ as a unity in plurality.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, if the aspects I have just mentioned are put into practice, they will fundamentally change the Catholic Church, its structure, and its teaching. We have to respond to challenges that we have not yet understood ourselves. The necessary ability to understand one’s own plurality and to work out a hermeneutic of plurality on that basis will become the main challenge in the future – as we can learn among others from the bishops’ synods of 2014 and 2015. Will we as Catholics ever be able to see differentiation not as an evil, but as a positive value? One thing should be clear: To be really fruitful, we need this differentiation. But what distinguishes fruitful from fruitless differentiation? Maybe it is the ability to make the experienced difference transparent towards a presupposed unity. Can ‘unity’ and ‘freedom’ go together?

After the Council had ended, Karl Rahner emphasized this as the decisive heritage of the Council.

In the history of thought, what is really surprising and wonderful with this Council in freedom is that it was possible to reach a joint conclusion in this freedom. [...] Of course, such unity in liberty has been here and there painstakingly fought for and won by leaving questions open or by having something that might at first sight seem like a foul compromise. But true unity in real liberty has also been realized. [...] Here, it turns out that the Church’s unity and fidelity to her own history even today does not result in immobility, and that the freedom of thought does not fray out in empty talk and absent-mindedness.<sup>107</sup>

The principle of ‘one not without the other’, i.e., the typical ‘*et ... et*’, has always been a tried and trusted Catholic principle! In contrast, exclusive features have the appealing characteristic of providing us with identity markers. But the two basic principles that become apparent here – ‘delimiting identity’ and ‘opening integration’ – are not just opposed to one another. In their indispensable and unsolvable dialectics, they mirror

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<sup>106</sup> Ratzinger also wrote about the danger of a latent ‘centralism’ that might come with a pluralization that emerges from one reference point (the papacy) and is only legitimized from that point. Cf. Ratzinger’s historical sketch on the dispute about the mendicant orders and its relation to the late-medieval-modern papacy (*Ibid.*, pp. 49-71; esp. pp. 53-55).

<sup>107</sup> Karl Rahner, *Das Konzil – ein neuer Beginn* (Freiburg im Breisgau; Basel; Wien: Herder, 1966), pp. 7f.



the tense dynamics of catholicity. Only in the universality of the ‘*et ... et*’ catholicity becomes ‘catholic’. Here it becomes apparent that catholicity can no longer be just a static description of the essence or a fixed feature of the Church, but must change into a job description, a future project.

*At the Periphery – A New Ecclesial Localization*

“The path of the Church, if we want ‘to plan’ it, probably leads by way of an analysis of those places where the Church ‘functions’ in post-modern contexts – and that is in the sense of its mission to be ‘a sign and an instrument for salvation’.”<sup>108</sup> If we want to stay within that theological imagery, we can conclude that the Church is ‘everywhere’. It can be found in every place because the change of perspective that took place at the Second Vatican Council, namely to understand faith no longer from the Church, but from God’s plan of salvation. This makes apparent that religion and faith are not just to be developed according to the Church’s inner criteria, but also and especially in accordance with the challenges that follow from the ‘signs of the times’. The ‘locality’ of the Church changes and with it her (self-)understanding. The identity of the Church becomes a precarious one. “Where no man-made place can be the foundation of the Church, this is where the place of the Church is to be located”<sup>109</sup> – these are the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who links this analysis to the modern ‘placelessness’ of God, which we have defined at the beginning. But, as Bonhoeffer further argues, the ‘placelessness’ of the Church must not lead to a church that looks for ‘privileged’, i.e., comfortable places.

We quickly encounter solutions to this problem that try to defuse the challenges and dangers that come with this situation by new safeguards, by a re-staging of the Church as a counter-reality or a separate word. Against the confusing and seductive plurality of opinions, which are seen as symptoms of decline, some Catholics want to hold on to an authoritative testimony of the truth (or whatever they think this is: from a ban on the contraceptive pill to clerical celibacy), which offers orientation and thus enables them to counter the threatening facelessness and even in-differentism within Catholicism. Thus, they have to discard everything that obfuscates this function of the Church as a sign or that just seems to make the required uniformity less clear. Then, the ‘dialogue’ with the world is just an aggressive call to the truth that makes it necessary to object vehemently against the culture of falseness (an identity-establishing other-

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<sup>108</sup> Bucher, “Auf ihm bestehen, nicht ihm verfallen,” p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Das Wesen der Kirche,” in Idem, *Werke. Bd. 11* (München: Kaiser, 1994), p. 248.

ness). Today, in some circles, this option is welcomed as the basic signature of Christianity: What is decisively Christian is what marks a difference. Against ‘ingratiating oneself with the *Zeitgeist*’ and the threatening self-secularization of faith, exclusive identity markers of what it means to be faithful, are constructed and metaphysically charged. They all mirror something like a longing for a sacred lost paradise, an other-world.

But true theological placelessness is of a different nature. Following Bonhoeffer’s analysis, it does not signify an under-, over-, or even counter-world but a permanent foreign land, an existence in exile that is near and far at the same time. This placelessness of the Church corresponds to God’s place in the world. Let us take a closer look at Bonhoeffer’s line of argument again: We cannot be honest “without realizing that we need to live in the world *‘etsi deus non daretur’*. And this is precisely what we realize – before God! God himself forces us to understand this. Thus, our own becoming of age leads to a more truthful understanding of our situation before God. God makes us realize that we need to live as people that have to cope with a life without God.”<sup>110</sup> The actual context of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s famous dictum, which we have quoted before, reveals the consequences: The fact that God is not necessary for this world and that he cannot be experienced in this world, mark the position of being faithful and thus being church. The direction is clear: it is at the margins, at the periphery. Because, to quote Bonhoeffer again, only where “one is completely without a place, when one is at the periphery, there is the critical center of the world.”<sup>111</sup> This is why it is precisely the ‘signs of the times’ at the periphery, at the margins that – according to what Pope Francis so empathetically demands – show us the way to an alternative place of the Church in the world today: “[...] not just towards the geographical margins, but towards the margins of human existence, towards those of the mystery of sin, those of pain, those of injustice, those of ignorance, those of the failing of religious practice, those of thinking, those of every conceivable misery.”<sup>112</sup>

Those places become significant “wherever we expect a messianic healing of damaged life.”<sup>113</sup> We need to talk about an inner and an outer

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<sup>110</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “Widerstand und Ergebung,” in Idem, *Werke. Bd. 8* (München: Kaiser, 1998), pp. 191f.

<sup>111</sup> Bonhoeffer, “Das Wesen der Kirche,” pp. 248f.

<sup>112</sup> Jorge Mario Bergoglio, “Rede im Vorkonklave,” March 27, 2013, quoted according to: <http://blog.radiovatikan.de/die-kirche-die-sich-um-sich-selber-dreht-theologischer-narzissmus> (accessed January 8, 2017).

<sup>113</sup> Christoph Theobald, “Zur Theologie der Zeichen der Zeit. Bedeutung und Kriterien heute,” *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die Zeichen der Zeit heute*, Peter Hünemann (ed.) (Freiburg im Breisgau; Basel; Wien: Herder, 2006), p. 82.

resistance against a culturally or politically inspired disposal of faith and politics by those striving for power; we need to talk about a self-critical re-vision of our own structures towards trustworthiness, justice, and freedom; we need to talk about an inner connection between the modern striving for autonomy and freedom and the dimension of responsibility; and we especially need to talk about trusting the “natural God-competence” of every human being, as Johann Baptist Metz once put it in reference to Karl Rahner.<sup>114</sup> In the future, theology, and with it the Church, are most convincing whenever they listen to what people have to say, about themselves, about the world, about their hopes and desires. Such are the indispensable questions that strike humans wherever they feel that they are not really at home in this world.

The identity of the Church, even of faith, is slipping through our fingers, i.e., we have to re-define it, we have to wrestle with the question what it means to believe and who or what the church is. One criterion is at hand:

I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurt, and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the center and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures. If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life.<sup>115</sup>

From a global perspective there is one fundamental option tied to this: Christians are asked

to offer a different version of globalization in opposition to the scandal of the segmentation of humankind into winners and losers, according to which all humans should have a place at the table of the riches of the planet and according to which they should arrange their lives in close communion with nature in a humanly decent way. According to a word of Pope John Paul II, Christians should offer a

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<sup>114</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft* (Freiburg im Breisgau; Basel; Wien: Herder, 2011), pp. 108ff.

<sup>115</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 49.

‘globalization of solidarity’ against a ‘globalization’ of profit and misery. This in turn means a radicalization of the ‘preferential option for the poor’ in the sense of an advocacy for the excluded and the losers of the current ‘wave of globalization’.<sup>116</sup>

Christianity’s contribution to globalization lies precisely in an option for the excluded,<sup>117</sup> a “globalization of solidarity without exclusion.”<sup>118</sup> A ‘new catholicity’, therefore, “must be present at the boundaries between those who profit and enjoy the fruits of the globalization process and those who are excluded.”<sup>119</sup> Ottmar Fuchs illustrates this well when he talks about “a (counter-)globalization that is oriented towards a humanization and solidarization of the world”<sup>120</sup> and when he emphasizes the closely knit network of inter-diocesan and inter-country partnerships that has emerged in German dioceses over decades as a functioning model of a process of communication that is necessary for such things to happen: “The Catholic world church already is and could become even more one thing: namely a space of solidarity that emerges from the local church, where global relationships can be experienced.”<sup>121</sup>

*Beyond Hegemony: Europe’s Heritage as a Permanent Task*

An enlightened Catholic European would now become increasingly skeptical in the face of an ever growing Catholic ‘praise of plurality’. Thus we need to openly ask: Do we need to worry about the future of the accomplishments of European churches and theologies – that is the time-honored ‘logocentrism’ of European religiosity that does not just encompass inwardness and internalization (Charles Taylor would call it ‘reform’<sup>122</sup>) and with it individualization and pluralization, but that also calls for the ancient Christian ideal of the compatibility of faith and reason and for the standard of a theological science that is open to dialogue and that em-

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<sup>116</sup> Josef Estermann, “Weltkirche und ‘Globalisierung’. Die Rolle des Christentums im ‘globalen Dorf’,” *Jahrbuch für kontextuelle Theologien* (Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2002), p. 171.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>118</sup> Address of Pope John Paul II, United Nations Headquarter (New York), October 5, 1995, quoted according to [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_05101995\\_address-to-uno.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno.html)

<sup>119</sup> Schreier, *The new catholicity*, p. 130.

<sup>120</sup> Fuchs, “Pastoraltheologische Reflexionen globaler Katholizität,” p. 187.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, esp. pp. 61ff. On the concept of logos in this regard cf. Schüssler, “Gott erleben und gerettet werden.”

braces its scientific base and its freedom and, in that sense, is an ‘enlightened’ and ‘enlightening’ science (in all its disciplines) – within the Catholic Church? Or is it so crucial in its original usefulness for Christian faith and the Catholic Church that it needs to be preserved even in a pluralized, multi-perspectival, catholically plural, and ecumenically diverse denominational landscape, so that it does not risk being denounced either as Eurocentric, or as colonialist, or as obviously fruitless for faith? Especially the ‘age of postmodern fragmentation’ raises the question “if, in a plurality of cultural and religious worlds, which we accept as irrevocable, there is still one compulsory, and in that sense truth-apt, criterion for communication [...]: How can the universalism of human rights and the idea of non-negotiable and indispensable cultural differences within the human race be combined without a mutual relativization that would lead towards a plurality without relations and thus to ever new conflicts and eruptions of violence?”<sup>123</sup> – admittedly, that is a ‘typically Eurocentric’ question.

With Johann Baptist Metz we can conclude that Europe is “the cultural and political homeland of a universalism that, at its core, is not Eurocentric but strictly anti-Eurocentric.”<sup>124</sup> It is a “Europe of political enlightenment” with a universalism that seeks freedom and justice, that lays the foundation for “a new political and hermeneutical culture that aims at the recognition of the subjective freedom and dignity of all human beings.”<sup>125</sup> This entails a culture of remembrance that is guided by the epochal rift that goes with the name of ‘Auschwitz’ and that, as culture which is sensitive to suffering, strengthens – or is even nourished by – an ethics of conviviality.<sup>126</sup> A church that has its roots in Europe is therefore

first and foremost accumulated experience, long-term memory, the memory of an elephant, in which many, all too many, things are stored. Liberating as well as burdensome memories, light and darkness. Theology is not indifferent outside of or above this memory. It gains its critical competency by questioning the canonic memory that the Church represents, whether or not and in what sense the Church’s memory of God and its dogmatic image of Christ have become

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<sup>123</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Das Christentum angesichts des Pluralismus von Kultur- und Religionswelten,” *Edith-Stein-Jahrbuch*, Bd. 4 (1998), p. 81.

<sup>124</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, “Europa in der einen Welt,” *Renovatio* 2 (1993), p. 95.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 98f.

disenfranchised from the memory of suffering of human beings, from the daily *memoria passionis*.<sup>127</sup>

This memory must be preserved, its treasure must be recovered, always re-vitalized, and applied to the current challenges. One thing quickly becomes apparent: Only as an enlightened, bilingual, cross-border worker between church and society, between faith and science, between universal aspiration and concrete situational challenges, between past and future can theology become an appropriate, if not the only tool for a religiously founded ideological criticism, both against a politically or culturally impregnated mentality with pseudo-religious or even metaphysical aspirations, which confuses the Christian core with political-national, ethnic, or racist interests, and against a fundamentalist religiosity that confuses politics, economy, culture, and faith. The crucial method that is required for this criticism to take place in late modernity is an ability to speak both to the inside and to the outside, it is a dialogical existence: “In a world where communication, information, and knowledge [...] define the landscape, it is vital that the Church incorporates communication more consciously in its sense of catholicity.”<sup>128</sup>

That obviously also encompasses a substantially and concrete, i.e., locally verifiable, content of the communicative process, one that Johann Baptist Metz, in particular, outlines with the concept of a sensitivity for suffering. But an identity-establishing connection can only be discerned when “the culturally monocentric European church history [becomes visible] as an important and remaining part of the original history of a culturally polycentric world church.”<sup>129</sup> Because that truth “has to be clearly developed and represented in a culturally polycentric world church.”<sup>130</sup> An acknowledgement of Europe’s guilty history, as the negative backside of a connection that must never be given up, is part of that, as well as a ‘reformatory’ history of awakening that leads towards both – the Western-European model of being a church and that of the churches of the global South – being church and becoming more and more a unified church in the shape of a ‘bruised church’ at the ‘fringes of human existence’.

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<sup>127</sup> Metz, “Das Christentum angesichts des Pluralismus von Kultur- und Religionswelten,” p. 86.

<sup>128</sup> Schreier, *The New Catholicity*, p. 128.

<sup>129</sup> Metz, “Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche,” p. 143.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

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6.

# New Theological Practices for the Contemporary Catholic Church

NICHOLAS M. HEALY

## Introduction

The following is a theological inquiry into contemporary theological practices within the Roman Catholic Church. I argue for a more complex understanding of what constitutes theological practice than usual, one that more accurately reflects the multiple ways theology is actually done. The argument is framed primarily by the issue of lay dissent, construed broadly as the self-distancing of a significant number of Catholic laity from the church-leadership's teaching.<sup>1</sup> My thesis is that lay dissent is both necessary and beneficial for the life of the Church and its mission to the world.

Since this is a theological treatment of theological practices, the argument and proposals are governed by theological principles. The dominant theological principles here – though not always on display – are, first, that the Holy Spirit maintains and guides the Church, and, second, that this principle should be reflected in the church's organization, the lives of its members, and all its activity, including its theological practices.<sup>2</sup> From a theological perspective, and perhaps from some other perspectives, too, it is worth recalling that, if the first principle is not true, then the Church is very likely not worth belonging to, or not for the reasons it usually offers. But if the first principle *is* true – and according to the second principle, any theological inquiry must assume it is – and if it is forgotten, overlooked or distorted by some of the church's teachings and practices,

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<sup>1</sup> 'Church-leadership' refers to those clerics who have the authority to define and/or to make known the official teaching and practices of the church. It thus includes priests.

<sup>2</sup> "A true pneumatology describes and comments on life in the freedom of the Spirit and in the concrete communion of the historical church, the essence of which is neither in itself nor in its institutions." Nikos Nissiotis, cited by Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1997), p. 157; Congregational ethnography may work with such a pneumatology when it looks attentively at particular congregations on the assumption that it may find what Christian Scharen calls 'wisdom embodied in practice', Christian Scharen, "Ecclesiology From the Body," in *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, Pete Ward (ed.) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 52. The focus here, though, is not on congregations but on individuals and their 'wisdom'.

then it is likely the Church will *seem* as though it is not worth belonging to, even though in truth it is. How the Church might display its belief in the truth of the first principle is the overall concern here.

### **The Problem: New Catholics?**

That the Roman Catholic Church<sup>3</sup> is in difficulties today seems obvious to many people, though what the difficulties actually are may be far less clear. For the Church to be in difficulties is nothing new, of course. In the past it has faced many obstacles to the fulfillment of its primary task of living and proclaiming the Gospel. Some challenges have come from outside, such as persecutions, various kinds of cultured despisers, and, more recently, a more general disdain for, or lack of interest in, the Church and its teaching. But perhaps the most significant challenges arise from within the Church. In the view of some churchpeople, one contemporary challenge is the group whom I will call, for want of a better label, the ‘New Catholics’.<sup>4</sup> New Catholics are lay people who think of themselves as Catholics and who go to church, whether occasionally or very frequently.

Like other Christians, their faith and the effort they put into the Christian life may be anything from barely there through moderate to very intense. For some of them (though not all), their lives may be oriented not so much around the Church but around their family or career or something else, or they may not focus on anything in particular. But what distinguishes them as a group, besides their having neither any theological training nor a leadership role, is that they have to a varying but significant degree an affective,<sup>5</sup> cognitive and/or practical critical distance from the church-leadership's teaching. Their kind of self-distancing may not be especially new, but it is arguably more common and more open in recent decades, and for various reasons is less controllable by the church-leader-

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<sup>3</sup> The argument here must be restricted to the Roman Catholic Church since its problems and their possible solution are in significant ways unlike any other.

<sup>4</sup> The name, ‘New Catholics’ is purposely non-descriptive and neutral. Descriptive labels, such as ‘Choice Catholics’, may imply the cafeteria analogy, as well as individualism and consumerism, and also suggest a ‘liberal’ view regarding abortion (as in ‘pro-choice’). New Catholics are not necessarily liberal. They may well disagree with the church-leadership on capital punishment, neo-liberal economy policy, or immigration. The label has nothing to do with nineteenth-century New Catholics, also known as German Catholics.

<sup>5</sup> For a valuable theory of religious emotion and its bearing upon church membership, see Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

ship than ever before. So in that sense, at least, they could be said to be a new problem.

New Catholics are sometimes called ‘cafeteria-catholics’, implying they pick and choose among the various offerings of the Church, selecting only those things that make them feel good and require little or no effort. The metaphor suggests they are like self-willed and thoughtless children who reject the vegetables at the school cafeteria, and choose sugary things instead, even though they have been told by their wiser parents and teachers that the former are good and the latter bad. The phenomenon of New Catholicism is often explained by suggesting that, rather than being proper Catholics, such people are in-thrall to modern individualistic, consumerist, and secular culture. So New Catholics are sometimes thought to be the primary vehicle through whom anti-Christian elements are brought into the Church that undermine its authoritative teaching and practice and disturb the more orthodox laity.

### Seekers

Negative views of the New Catholics may perhaps be due in part by confusing them with the Seekers phenomenon. As I will use the term here,<sup>6</sup> Seekers understand themselves to be on a quest for an authentic spirituality in the form of a personal relation to the transcendent, a relation which they believe to be incompatible with ‘organized religion’. They refuse the Church’s institutionally prescribed teaching and practices (its ‘rules’ or ‘organization’) by which one may come to grow closer to God by the grace of the Holy Spirit.<sup>7</sup> Probably because of this refusal, this phenomenon has had little response of a positive nature from theologians and clergy. Among the more flamboyant characterizations of Seekers, yet not untypical in its substance, is that of Nicholas Lash: “When people say... that they are more interested in ‘spirituality’ than in ‘religion’, they usually seem to mean that they prefer the balm of private fantasy, the aromatherapy of uplifting individual sentiment, to the hard work of thought and action, the common struggle to make sense of things, to redeem and heal the world.” Thus, “the ‘spiritual’ floats free from fact and calculation and

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<sup>6</sup> The literature is not always consistent. See Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers, “Introduction: The Contingent Meeting of a Catholic Minority Church with Seekers,” in *A Catholic Minority Church in a World of Seekers*, Staf Hellemans and Peter Jonkers (eds.) (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> For an ethnographically-based account of this phenomenon, see Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

responsibility, massaging in fantasies of feeling the bruised narcissism of well-heeled individualists.”<sup>8</sup> Lash may be right about a few Seekers, but it seems unlikely that most of them are lazy, narcissistic, wealthy, or especially individualistic, and quite possible that a few traditional Catholics are. It might be more accurate to say that most Seekers are looking for something they are aware of missing, but do not know quite what it is. If so, the Church may be able to help them, for it has the means to do so, as I will suggest later.

New Catholics may reflect some of the cultural changes that have made the Seekers possible, and they have drawn similar opprobrium. But the two groups are different in important ways. New Catholics’ ‘religion’ is ‘organized’ to some degree, and by the Catholic Church, too, even though they have some critical distance from its leadership and traditions. They have been baptized, which has significant theological implications, especially when it is combined with their ongoing allegiance, however half-hearted it may be for some, and with their acceptance of the church’s doctrines and practices, however limited. New Catholics are indeed influenced by non-Christian culture. But everyone is influenced thus, including theologians and the church-leadership, the latter with sometimes unfortunate effects, a few of which will be discussed below.

### **New Catholics’ Theological Practice**

It seems likely that New Catholics will be a significant presence within the Church for some time to come. So perhaps a first response should be to try to understand them rather than to reject them with variations on the venerable church tradition of anathematizing the dissenter. One important step to understanding them is to acknowledge that New Catholics do not see themselves as a problem for the Church; they see the problem, if indeed there is one, as lying elsewhere. Consequently there is no point in addressing them as if they are the problem which they need to fix by becoming more properly Catholic. Nor will their self-distancing from the church-leadership disappear by developing normative social-theoretical accounts of the church as a cultural-linguistic system distinct from others by the formation of its members in Christian-specific virtues, or as a tradition of inquiry that can out-narrate rival traditions.<sup>9</sup> If supported by a

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 34 and 93.

<sup>9</sup> The language here draws from George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre



proper pneumatology, such social theories can be appropriate for those Christians, sometimes called ‘Dwellers’, for whom the Christian life is constituted by their desire and efforts to live in full accordance with the church’s teachings and practices.<sup>10</sup> But New Catholics have a defining reason for their self-distancing to which such theories do not, and perhaps cannot, adequately respond.

The issue for the New Catholics, and perhaps the primary reason why they live at some varying distance from the church-leadership, is that they do not believe the leadership is a sufficiently reliable source of truth and guidance to give themselves over to it without critical reflection. Those New Catholics who know a little history are likely to conclude the Gospel was not displayed, and ordinary Christian lives were distorted, to note just a few examples: by Pope Urban II’s call for the first Crusade, by the divisiveness of the Reformation and the subsequent religious wars, by the failure to censure the destructive conquest of South America, the acceptance of slavery, the conditions of those who lived in the papal states, and the defensiveness of the *Syllabus of Errors* and the church culture it reflected. And everyone is aware not only of pedophilia and similar depravities among clergy and religious, but also of the bishops’ systemic failure to respond morally and humanely. These and other failings were not those of the church’s lay members; they were committed or enabled by the leadership and its own culture and formation practices.<sup>11</sup> To note these various errors is not to indulge in judgment of those who lead. Theirs is an extraordinarily difficult and often thankless task, and doubtless there were reasons for those decisions that seemed good at the time to those conditioned by their formation and self-understanding. The point here is simply to acknowledge that the leadership *has* erred, and not infrequently, and that most ordinary Catholics are aware it has erred.

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Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) and Idem, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990).

<sup>10</sup> The distinction between Dweller and Seeker originated, as far as I know, with Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1998), especially pp. 1-18. One of the background concerns of the present essay is to complexify this simple dichotomy by taking into account the New Catholics, who fit within neither category.

<sup>11</sup> “A celibate, male, clerical culture impervious to outside scrutiny has created the worst scandal in the history of American Catholicism.” Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 259. See also Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2016), pp. 215-248. The clerical culture and its adverse consequences are not limited to the USA, of course.

From this awareness New Catholics have reasoned or intuited in something like the following way: We have good grounds for thinking the church-leadership in the past has been confused and erroneous at times, even with regard to some very significant teaching and practices. We must therefore assume that the leadership will be confused, internally conflicted,<sup>12</sup> and erroneous at times today, too. And so we cannot and, indeed, should not, accept the claim made by the leadership – explicitly at times, and often implicitly by the force of its teachings and the church-leadership's culture and practices – to the effect that it is always and necessarily right. Nor is the church-leadership always nearer to the mark than anyone else. So we cannot in good conscience simply believe the leadership's teachings and follow its moral rules unquestioningly. Instead, we may reasonably conclude that when we are uneasy about something the Church teaches or does we should try to discern a response that seems right, at least for us and who we are and what we have experienced as a particular person or family. We therefore think through our response for ourselves, perhaps looking around for help from sources outside the Church to make an appropriate decision. Or we might simply ignore something the Church teaches, perhaps intuitively, or without much thought, because we may feel there is something wrong with the teaching, but we do not have the theological tools to reason out quite what it is.

### Three Kinds of Theological Practice

New Catholics do not simply choose whichever is the easier path (though, like everyone else, they do sometimes). They reject what appears to them to be a dubious teaching or mistaken rule in light of what they believe is good and true, and significant or relevant. They seek truthfulness and authenticity.<sup>13</sup> Their attempts at discernment constitute a kind of theological practice, one distinct from two more familiar kinds. All three have different methods and intermediate goals even as they share the same primary concern: to achieve a better understanding of the Gospel in order to live it better.<sup>14</sup> The usual kind of theological practice is, of course, academic theology. This requires extensive training to develop critical in-

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<sup>12</sup> Dissent may be increasing within the Curia itself at the time of writing. See Cécile Chambraud, "Au Vatican, la guerre est déclarée," *Le Monde*, April 14, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). A particular concern for truthfulness will lead to a rather different form of the Christian life from that which privileges certainty.

<sup>14</sup> This is admittedly a very broad-stroke account of contemporary theological practices that must omit substantial historical and other differences and overlaps.

sight, and is thus usually practiced by professionals who teach in universities and similar institutions. Its products are read mostly by other professional theologians, and discussed in the journals and at professional conferences. Their work is judged for its intellectual rigor, scholarship, innovation and insight. But its influence within the Church is usually indirect, as a kind of trickle-down effect. Most academic theology (like this essay) consists of many lower-tier background works that, cumulatively, may occasionally enable a significant theological advance.

A second kind of theological practice we can call ‘institutional theology’, which is practiced by a few members of the church-leadership, usually some of its bishops and their assistants.<sup>15</sup> This practice is enacted within a clerical-pastoral setting and set forth in institutional documents, such as conciliar statements and papal encyclicals, which are read by clergy, some academic theologians and a few other members of the Church. Institutional theology is intellectually rigorous, but its critical edge primarily serves the tradition and, above all, the pastoral needs of the Church. Thus it may seek to open or close certain avenues for academic theology (e.g., women priests; *sensus fidelium*). Although its theological productions can prompt or permit changes or indicate a development of doctrine, it generally moves more slowly than academic theology does (reflecting the curial adage: *pensiamo in secolis*).

The view among those who enact one or other of these two theological practices seems to be that both are necessary and by and large mutually beneficial, in spite of regular disagreements between them. This is reasonable, but it is inadequate that it leaves out of account a third practice, the theological activity of the vast majority of Catholics. We can call their theological practice, ‘ordinary theology’, following Jeff Astley’s important work.<sup>16</sup> Ordinary theology is practiced by all Christians, not only self-distancing New Catholics but Dwellers and non-Catholics alike, as well as academic and institutional theologians when they are not practicing their particular form of theology. Ordinary theology is often practiced alone, perhaps in prayer or reflection, or in the midst of everyday realities when a situation calls for a decision, or in discussions with family members or friends.

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<sup>15</sup> Institutional theology, though closely related, is not quite the same as the church-leadership’s teaching since the former requires a theological rationale, whereas the latter may simply be taught without any rationale, e.g., as a homily or a catechism.

<sup>16</sup> See Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis (eds.), *Exploring Ordinary Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013).

New Catholics' version of ordinary-theological practice is to reflect (deliberately or more intuitively) before accepting, rejecting or modifying a church-teaching that seems problematic. The critical stance of their practice is not unlike that of academic theology, but with a relatively more local, personal or existential concern, and without the training and the intellectual rigor. New Catholics' theologizing may in varying degrees be confused, self-serving and wrong. But that does not mean it cannot be called theology, since no definition of 'theology' or 'theological practice' stipulates that it must be always good and true. Professional theology is not infrequently confused, self-serving and wrong. Academics may sometimes be unable to think outside their own school of thought, thereby diminishing the complexity, strength and appeal of the Gospel, and – contrary to the very project of academic theology – reducing engagement with those with whom they disagree to mere rebuttal. They may be confused about the relation between their career and their work. They may bark loudly up various wrong trees, following academia's tendency to assume the latest new theory explains everything. Institutional theology is also confused, self-serving and wrong at times, as noted earlier. And to say all this is, again, not to condemn anyone or to accuse those who fail to do good theology of being stupid, sinful or unchristian. It is merely to press the point that, because all theological reflection is fallible in all kinds of ways, we should acknowledge that we all may make significant mistakes and errors of judgment. And if that is so, we cannot reject New Catholics' theological conclusions out of hand just because they are not always unconfused, selfless and correct.

New Catholics' theological practices reflect their assumption that the church-leadership's teaching is insufficiently reliable for it to be simply obeyed, especially when it insists on beliefs or practices that seem unreasonable or unwarranted. But, as with academic theologians, the New Catholics' dissent from some of the church-leadership's teaching does not make it impossible for them to stay in the Church. Indeed, they seem to consider the church's teaching and practices to be valuable, otherwise they would leave for other denominations. This in itself could be grounds for hope that a more fruitful way of incorporating New Catholics within the life of the Church could be found. But, to repeat, because of their dissent, New Catholics are usually considered a problem or worse by the church-leadership, by some academic theologians, and by some Dwellers.

### **Ultramontane Ecclesiology**

To habilitate New Catholics' dissenting theological practices within the Church it will help to begin by considering, if all too briefly, a little of

the history of the self-understanding of the church-leadership as inscribed within official ecclesiology. Each ecclesiology has particular implications for the theology of the person and for the Christian life.<sup>17</sup> Since the Reformation, Catholic institutional ecclesiology, with the support of some Catholic academic ecclesiology, has so privileged the social over the individual that the traditional understanding of persons and their responsibility before God has been undermined. This trend seems to have begun as a response to the chaos of the Reformation, during which the church-leadership sought to establish the Catholic Church as the ark of salvation in a sea of uncertainty and error. This was probably a well-intentioned pastoral move designed to inhibit lay people from succumbing to non-Catholic churches' errors, the acceptance of which, as many then believed, would endanger their salvation. But the move came with a heavy emphasis on the authority and certainty of church teaching. With the subsequent rise of modern secular society, the need arose to establish the truth of Christianity over against the many beguiling falsehoods of the modern world. So the church-leadership responded by making its teaching absolutely unchallengeable by enemies outside and dissenters within. The dogmas of the church-leadership's infallibility – of the Pope when defining doctrine *ex cathedra*, and of the authentic teaching of the ordinary *magisterium* – guaranteed that Catholic teaching and practice is absolutely certain, and all dissent unthinkable.

This absolutist tendency reached its climax in the ultramontanist ecclesiology of Pope St. Pius X. Pius has been described as the 'first Pope of the people', and, again, it was no doubt his pastoral solicitude that led him to shield the laity from doubt and error and their eternal consequences by requiring 'an undeviating devotion to papal directives, an absolute ultramontanism'.<sup>18</sup> Thus his often-cited declaration in *Vehementer Nos*:

the church is the mystical body of Christ, ruled by the Pastors and Doctors – a society of men containing within its own fold chiefs who have full and perfect powers for ruling, teaching and judging. [...] It follows that the church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the Pastors and the

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<sup>17</sup> Arguments based upon patristic practices that support this assertion can be found in Nicholas M. Healy, "Henri de Lubac and the Christian Life," in *The T&T Clark Companion to Henri de Lubac*, Jordan Hillebert (ed.) (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017); and in Idem, "The Church and the Christian: Their Theological Interdependence," in *Theologies of Retrieval*, Darren Sarisky (ed.) (New York: Bloomsbury/T & T Clark, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997/2006), p. 321.

flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.<sup>19</sup>

If, for the laity, complete obedience to their clergy is indeed their ‘one duty’, it would seem that to be obedient is all they need for their salvation; making spiritually-significant decisions for oneself would be unnecessary and wrong. If that is what Pius meant to say, it is difficult to see how the laity could or should achieve anything beyond a more consistent obedience. Without the possibility for ongoing reflection and decision-making, the lay person is rendered permanently infantile, unable to develop into an agent-self<sup>20</sup> who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, might in time contribute something of her or his own to the life of the Church. Moreover, if obedience is sufficient (‘the one duty’), as well as necessary, it could be thought that sanctification is achieved solely in the obedient act. This would suggest a parallel with one version of the Lutheran doctrine in which faith as such justifies and, since justification is merely forensic, it has no real effect with the person.<sup>21</sup> It is quite likely that Pius himself had in mind something more than such sheep-like obedience, for otherwise his teaching would seem to rule out the possibility of progressive sanctification, which is arguably an essential element of the traditional Catholic understanding of the Christian life. Persons are sanctified in the midst of their sinfulness and error by love for their neighbor and community, by their participation in the sacraments, by thoughtful prayer and repentance, and above all by the Holy Spirit, who works within them to convert them through the course of their experience to a wiser and more deeply personal life. This is the law of the Spirit of life and freedom in Jesus Christ (Romans, 8:2). Obedience to the inner working of the Holy Spirit both requires and makes possible our response as personal agents.

Ultramontane Catholicism was able to reassure the laity that their pastor’s teaching is absolutely true, and that it is sufficient, if followed

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Pius X, *Vehementer Nos*, par. 8, February 11, 1906; [w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/.../hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_11021906\\_vehementer-nos.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/.../hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html).

<sup>20</sup> For a sophisticated and theologically-informed account of the self-as-agent, see Oliver O’Donovan, *Ethics as Theology*, vol. 1; *Self, World and Time*, and vol. 2, *Finding and Seeking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013 and 2014).

<sup>21</sup> On Lutheran justification, see Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), especially pp. 173-82.

obediently, for their salvation. But this certainty came at the cost of a reductive ecclesiology. Yves Congar remarks that, within ultramontanist “the Spirit was seen, on the one hand, as the principle of holy living in the souls of individuals – this was the ‘internal mission’ – and, on the other hand, as guaranteeing the acts of the institution, especially its infallible teaching.” He concludes that such an account “certainly does not constitute a pneumatology.”<sup>22</sup> Lacking a proper pneumatology, ultramontanist ecclesiology cannot make room for a genuinely theological anthropology, nor for an adequate account of the Christian life. Instead, the individual lay person is portrayed as little more than a product of the Church by a religious social theory that, ironically, parallels in that regard other social theories of its time, especially those of Emile Durkheim and materialist Marxism. All three are examples of the ‘science of unfreedom’, in Zygmunt Bauman’s phrase,<sup>23</sup> in that they cannot account for the individual as a moral and spiritual subject.<sup>24</sup> About eighty years after Pius X’s *Vehementer Nos*, Cardinal Ratzinger remarked on the danger of drawing ecclesiology too close to social theory: “The social dimension [...] rooted in deepest mystery has often sunk to the merely sociological so that the unique Christian contribution to the right understanding of history and community has disappeared from sight.” The consequence is that “instead of a leaven for the age, or its salt, we are often simply its echo.”<sup>25</sup> Charles

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<sup>22</sup> Congar continues: “By pneumatology, I mean something other than a simple dogmatic theology of the third Person. I also mean something more than, and in this sense different from, a profound analysis of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in individual souls and his sanctifying activity there. Pneumatology should, I believe, describe the impact, in the context of a vision of the church, of the fact that the Spirit distributes his gifts as he wills and in this way builds up the church. A study of this kind involves not simply a consideration of those gifts or charisms, but a theology of the church that becomes a ‘full pneumatology’ only when it is not ‘restricted by its concentration on the institution.’ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Freedom* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1988), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> I am indebted to James Laidlaw here. He extends this critique into more contemporary social theories, including that of Pierre Bourdieu. James Laidlaw, *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), especially pp. 3–23. See also pp. 55–87 for a critical but not unappreciative treatment of MacIntyre. Not all social theories are ‘sciences of unfreedom’, of course.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Introduction,” Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 12. Ratzinger comes at the issue from a somewhat different but related angle, writing on

Taylor has argued that “strong personal faith and all-powerful community consensus cannot ultimately consist together.” The primary mistake of ultramontanist was that it did not grasp “how contradictory the goal ultimately is, of a Church tightly held together by a strong hierarchical authority, which will nevertheless be filled with practitioners of heartfelt devotion.”<sup>26</sup>

### Seekers Once Again

Although we are no longer in the era of ultramontanist, significant remnants of that era persist, especially within the institutions and culture of the church-leadership. With this in mind, we return for a moment to the Seekers. Their rejection of ‘organized religion’ should not be construed as simply a reaction to hierarchical control, but as a rejection of the contemporary consequences of ultramontanist’s reduction of the Christian life. Seekers do not reject authority, order and formation simply as such. They, like many other contemporaries, are happy to give themselves over to their fitness trainer, their spiritual or financial adviser, or some other guru or consultant they trust, provided only that doing what they are told has the desired results. To them, the Roman Catholic Church does not seem to be where they may find the kind of help and guidance that will issue in their spiritual growth. The church-leadership continues to promote devotional practices for the laity that can be appreciated only after lengthy formation, if at all, such as the Rosary and Novena. It has quickly taken over more popular interventions of the transcendent – visions of deceased loved ones, Mary, or Padre Pio, and the like – and organized them so as to prevent any dangerous over-enthusiasm.<sup>27</sup> The church’s practices – even including some of the sacraments – are too often presented less as opportunities for spiritual growth than as obligations.

So perhaps Seekers are not so unreasonable in their rejection of the Church as a spiritual way for them. This is a shame, to say the least, because there are moves here and there, even within academic theology, to overcome this reduction and routinization of the spiritual within the Christian life. Nicholas Lash, whom I quoted earlier against the Seekers, argues for recovering what he finds missing within the contemporary Church: “in

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the same page against the ‘sociological leveling’ of the church to a ‘community where there is no more room for the personal dialogue between God and the soul’.

<sup>26</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: Belknap/Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 466.

<sup>27</sup> For brief but insightful accounts of Padre Pio and other examples, see Orsi, *History and Presence*, pp. 26-31.



suggesting that Christianity should be a kind of school of silence, an academy of attentiveness, I am suggesting that our task, as Christians, is to help each other to acquire the courage to be still, to keep our eyes open in the dark. Gethsemane would be the paradigm of the attentiveness we need. In the garden, Christ remained attentive to the Father's silence."<sup>28</sup> Lash's suggestion may well be compatible with what Seekers are looking for. The work of Karl Rahner, SJ, was often concerned with those we now call Seekers, not least his work from the 1930s and 1940s on prayer. More recently, another Jesuit, Roger Haight, has published a couple of books on Catholic spirituality that are specifically directed towards Seekers.<sup>29</sup> The quality of such work indicates there are rich resources within the tradition that may well appeal to Seekers. What remains lacking is what is vital: active and sustained support by the church-leadership for these and similar efforts.<sup>30</sup>

### Varieties of Formation

Remnants of ultramontane culture make it difficult for the church-leadership to understand New Catholics. Those who undergo clerical formation become accustomed to being obedient to authority, which may lead them to presume they are owed a similar obedience from the laity. The higher church-leadership has found it difficult to respond constructively to those whose life-experience is different from theirs, especially women. A tendency to moralism persists, too, including a preference for deontology that is often joined with what has been described as “a nostal-

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<sup>28</sup> Lash, *Holiness*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Karl Rahner, SJ, *The Need and the Blessing of Prayer* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), and *Encounters with Silence* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999); both books, though written for Catholics, are suitable for Seekers. Roger Haight, SJ, *Spiritual and Religious: Explorations for Seekers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), and *Christian Spirituality for Seekers* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2012). The aesthetic approach of Hans Urs von Balthasar, a theologian often considered to be opposed to theologians like Rahner and Haight, could also be appealing, especially perhaps for Seekers who are ex-Catholics.

<sup>30</sup> An exception among the church-leadership is Pope Francis, who, not incidentally, is also a Jesuit. See, for example, his Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§ 15, 24 and 71, November 24, 2013, <http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apostexhortations/documents/papa-francescoesortazione-ap20131124evangelii-gaudium.html>.

gic confidence in the epistemological and persuasive force of the natural law.”<sup>31</sup>

Yet the Church has recovered much of the traditional and more humane understanding of lay formation, and has developed it somewhat further in the direction of lay responsibility and freedom. Vatican II encouraged an active and genuinely personal role for the laity, especially with the ‘lay apostolate’,<sup>32</sup> though what that phrase means concretely still remains rather underdeveloped. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches the final authority of each person’s conscience, reflecting the long-standing doctrine that “the dignity of the human person implies and requires” one to “follow faithfully what [one] knows to be just and right.”<sup>33</sup> Especially noteworthy is the document published in 2014 by the International Theological Commission on *Sensus fidelium*.<sup>34</sup> The Commission argues that lay persons have “an instinct [*instinctus*] for the truth of the Gospel, which enables them to recognize and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice, and to reject what is false” (2). Their ‘instinct’ is a “knowledge by empathy, or a knowledge of the heart,” rather than an “objective knowledge, which proceeds by way of conceptualization and reasoning” (50). It enables lay people to distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental. An example of what is accidental are those Marian devotions that are not in line with “an authentic cult of the Virgin Mary” (64). Their Catholic instinct may move laity to “deny assent even to the teaching of legitimate pastors if they do not recognize in that teaching the voice of Christ, the Good Shepherd” (63, citing John 10:4-5). A fairly robust pneumatology undergirds the document, together with a firm acknowledgement that it is Jesus himself who is the good Shepherd, to whom alone we owe absolute obedience.

Such developments are moves in the right direction, but they make it clear that traditional lay formation is necessary for any dissent to be

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2, Norman P. Tanner, SJ (ed.) (Washington, DC: Sheed and Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990); Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), no. 31-34.

<sup>33</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 1994), §§ 1780 and 1778.

<sup>34</sup> International Theological Commission, “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*,” 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/romancuria/congregations/cfaith/ctidocuments/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/romancuria/congregations/cfaith/ctidocuments/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html). Numbers in parentheses in the text refer to paragraphs in this document.

legitimate.<sup>35</sup> Unless one is a well-formed Dweller Catholic, one is unlikely to have acquired the *instinctus* that will prompt one to reject a teaching or practice correctly. And it appears that one can dissent only from a teaching or practice that is to some degree mistaken, so the dissenter actually confirms the church's authentic teaching rather than rejects it. Carefully thinking through an issue and finding it necessary to dissent from what one knows is an authoritative teaching – the New Catholics' theological practice – is explicitly rejected.

### Formation and Choice

At issue here is the relation between formation and personal decision or choice. There are various kinds of formation, though here we can consider only four, and only as ideal types: ultramontane, traditional lay, religious and New Catholic. Ultramontane formation, at its extreme, is limited to the lay person becoming accustomed to being obedient. Decision – even if it is *for* a particular church-teaching – is incompatible with ultramontane ecclesiology. There is neither need nor reason to make a choice; one simply obeys. Traditional Catholic lay formation is by and large an adaptation for the laity of monastic formation, and can be far more personal and spiritual. Formation of this traditional kind is, of course, necessary for both Dwellers and New Catholics alike, since one cannot live as a Catholic without taking a good number of Catholic beliefs and practices for granted as true and good, and having them become a part of one's identity. One significant difference between lay and religious formation, besides the many other differences, is that those who enter a religious order make two clear and explicit choices that lay Catholics do not. First, as adults and after some preparation, they make a choice for the religious life rather than the lay or clerical. This first choice opens up another: they decide which one among the many versions of the religious life will best fit them and enable them to grow in holiness.<sup>36</sup> Unlike the laity, religious choose to devote themselves to particular form of an ordered way of life within a community of those who have made the same choice. And because these personal decisions are real choices, and freely made, religious are able to commit themselves to complete obedience to their community's leadership.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Sensus Fidei*, e.g., §§ 89-91, 97, 99 and 101.

<sup>36</sup> Of course, these two decisions may, concretely, be one. I separate them here to bring out the fact that the religious makes choices from an array of possibilities.

<sup>37</sup> Here I refer to traditional notions of monastic obedience, which ruled out questioning or discussion, at least in the novitiate. Obedience has changed sig-

The relation between a religious and her community's leadership is therefore formally similar to the relation between a successful Seeker and the spiritual director and community he has chosen. Both the religious and the Seeker have sought, found, and given themselves over to what they had been looking for, namely a particular kind of spiritual direction and community which they believe best fits their particular spiritual needs.<sup>38</sup> Because religious and Seekers have chosen particular ways of life their formation is formally unlike that of ordinary Christians, who have only the default way, which they have not chosen but can only continue to accept, to some varying degree.<sup>39</sup> For Dwellers, the default way may well be far more than merely sufficient, especially if they belong to a parish that suits them. But New Catholics must continue to seek a particular way of being Christian because, unlike religious, cleric, Dweller, or even Seeker, there is no ordered way of life already established for them to choose. New Catholics must construct their own way of life within their church and world as they, like everyone else, "strive, not without divine grace, to lead an upright life."<sup>40</sup>

New Catholics do not have anything like the kind of support religious have – a community of like-minded, a structured way of living, and expert spiritual direction. They must develop their own resources to supplement those available within the Church. This is only in part because of their critical distance from the church-leadership. It is also necessary because the Church does not offer anything like adequate support for ordinary Catholics. Michael Banner points out that in the Church "we currently lack [...] a coherent and perspicuous account of the practice of the Christian life, which would, in a space of cultural contestation, describe and sustain this form of life as a particular way of being human in the world,

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nificantly within contemporary religious life. For a thorough discussion, see Sandra Schneiders, I.H.M., *Buying the Field* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2013), pp. 355-511.

<sup>38</sup> See Gert Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life*, trans. James D. Mixson (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2016), in which the kind of decisions religious made then suggests 'choice' and 'needs' are quite appropriate, if not used negatively. There are, of course, also major differences between religious and Seekers.

<sup>39</sup> This difference can be compared with the difference between people who are content to be citizens of the country in which they were born, and those who seek citizenship in another country for a particular reason. The religious are very much more likely to have the commitment and enthusiasm that goes with that their decision. That can be had by the ordinary Catholic, too, of course, but it is perhaps less likely.

<sup>40</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 16.

in conscious and therapeutic dialogue with other accounts.”<sup>41</sup> Neither the church-leadership nor institutional theology have been able to develop an account of “the normal passage of the life course, and its more general shaping and structuring by a conception of what it is to be human.” And Christian ethics has “little or nothing to say” about this, too.<sup>42</sup> So New Catholics must become in effect their own ethicists and spiritual directors, given the appalling shortage of effective priests and lack of any appropriate spiritual direction in most parishes. They have no choice but to work out their salvation for themselves – not apart from the Church, to be sure, but also by using whatever they find from elsewhere that help their quest to live truthfully and well as Catholic Christians. By such theological practices and lived experimentation, they may, and arguably often do, acquire some genuine Christian wisdom.

### Background Assumptions against New Catholics

Within a ‘modern’ social-theoretical ecclesiology that lacks an adequate pneumatology and anthropology, and tends towards moralism, New Catholics may appear to be willful, individualistic antinomians. Within an ecclesiology that is properly pneumatological, their way is both reasonable and necessary if they are to live as mature Catholics in the freedom of the new law of the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> Critical reflection and decision about what to do and become is what humans normally do, and it is as thoroughly social as it is thoroughly personal. An anthropologist, Michael Lambek, remarks that ethnographers “commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good.” This kind of discernment “is part of the human condition,” and is “intrinsic to speech and action” and “to human character formation.”<sup>44</sup>

When judged by normative ideal accounts of the Christian life sometimes advanced by academic theologians, New Catholics may appear to be lazy, self-indulgent, third-rate Catholics who seek what Dietrich Bon-

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<sup>41</sup> Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life*, p. 28. This makes the Christian life more difficult for Dwellers, of course, but that is another, and very complicated, topic.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 108.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Lambek, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*, Michael Lambek (ed.) (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 1.

hoeffer called 'cheap-grace' rather than genuine 'discipleship'.<sup>45</sup> But perhaps the meaning of 'disciple' should be determined by the gospel accounts of those disciples chosen by Jesus. Like New Catholics, and everyone else, the twelve were not ideal. They were sometimes confused, self-serving and wrong. Even though their 'spiritual director' was Jesus himself, one of them betrayed him, and a couple of them got their mother to ask Jesus to assign them seats either side of him at the eschatological banquet (Matthew 20:20-22). St. Peter's faith was not always rock-like, he reproached Jesus for not looking on the bright side (Matthew 16:21-23), he fell asleep in the Garden at a very bad moment like all the others, and then he denied Jesus three times.

Given the ordinariness of the twelve as portrayed in the gospels, it seems unreasonable to demand of ordinary Christians that they must live according to an ideal that the original disciples did not come anywhere near attaining. We have the gifts of the Holy Spirit, to be sure, but they had the presence of the Son.<sup>46</sup> Perhaps those who consider Bonhoeffer's understanding of cheap grace and discipleship, or their Catholic versions, to be normative do not take sufficiently into account the distinction between an exhortation and a normative ideal. That Bonhoeffer did not make the distinction himself is reasonable, given his prophetic vocation. The prophetic genre erases the distinction since the prophet represents God's judgment. An ideal description of the Christian life can be a great support for those *in extremis*, for those who are called to martyrdom are assured by that ideal that their suffering and death perfects their sanctification. For ordinary Christians an ideal description may be useful, but only as exhortation, as a measure against which to recall one's sinfulness and push oneself to strive to lead a better life. The ideal cannot be normative for them, for they are not called to achieve it.<sup>47</sup> Christ came to save ordinary

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<sup>45</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 43-76.

<sup>46</sup> The word 'disciple' used outside the four gospels only in *Acts*. There St. Luke uses the word to refer to the members of the ideal community he seeks to portray. The apostles in *Acts* are not without flaws, as St. Paul admits of himself elsewhere.

<sup>47</sup> Besides too easily gliding from exhortative ideals to normative ideals, another problem with ideal descriptions is that they may often be skewed, perhaps unwittingly, in favor of the specific form of the Christian life the author of the description has chosen. For a criticism of St. Thomas Aquinas in this respect, see Nicholas M. Healy, 'Thomas Aquinas and Karl Barth on the Christian Life: Similarity and Differences', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 69:3 (August, 2016), pp. 251-266.

rather than ideal people, those who are often sinful and confused, wayward and self-centered, as the twelve disciples were at times. Saints are not the norm; they are the exceptions that prove the rule that ordinary Christians are true disciples of Jesus.

### **New Catholics: A Gift for the Church**

Thus far I have tried to clear a space, as it were, for the theological activity of New Catholics within the Church. I have argued that they have little alternative, if they wish to continue to live and flourish as Catholic Christians, than to do what they do, and that what they do is reasonable and should be tolerated. We now move beyond mere toleration to note a few examples of New Catholics' more important contributions to the Church. One contribution has already been discussed, namely their rejection of ultramontanist and its contemporary remnants, especially the church-leadership's attempts to reduce the lay form of the Christian life to little more than following a moral code and adhering to a belief system. New Catholics have helped to block the church-leadership's attempt to introduce into the life of the Church the inhumane and anti-Christian consequences of a modern social-religious theory. Another contribution is that, in searching for a way of living appropriately for who they are and their particular situation, they have brought to light some of the problems associated with traditional lay formation, revealing it to be too standardized, limited and quite inadequate.

Because New Catholics' theological practices are enacted within a very broad range of contexts, they have sometimes discerned and avoided some of the mistakes made by the more contextually-restricted and theoretical theologies of the academy and the institution. Taken as a group, New Catholics constitute a vast and vastly complex set of experiments in living the Christian life. Their efforts provide the Church with a testing ground for its teaching and practices: whether they can be accepted and lived well, must be rejected as unlivable, or need to be modified. In this they parallel in a concrete form the similarly critical but more theoretical efforts of academic theology, and so may at times anticipate later academic and institutional advances. John T. Noonan argues that "moral theologians are often catching up with what is already established. [...] they do not lead the way" because their training prompts them to discount their experience and rely too much on precedent, whereas "experience and empathy are neces-

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sary before a practice can be definitively known as good or bad.”<sup>48</sup> Noonan offers examples to “demonstrate that the development of moral doctrine can and does occur by human experience leading to better understanding of human nature.”<sup>49</sup> He describes how the church-leadership lagged behind lay Catholics and others in addressing slavery, colonialism, usury, contraception, freedom of religion, and the separation of church and state. He concludes that the development of doctrine “occurs in three ways”: by love and prayer, leading to an empathic identification with others that broadens one’s experience; by “empirical investigation”; and by “the development, intellectual, moral, emotional, and social, of human beings.”<sup>50</sup>

Shifts in moral sensibility that originated among the laity have informed changes in the church’s moral teaching. The ‘seven deadly sins’ of traditional Catholicism reflected the church-leadership’s privileging of monasticism’s focus on self-control through asceticism. That focus is now understood, by many New Catholics, among others, to be but one form of the Christian life, and not an ideal for everyone. Actions or attitudes the church-leadership once considered gravely sinful are now seen to be problems requiring medical help rather than judgment, for example gluttony or anomie. Pride and humility are now treated with far more nuance, following developments in our knowledge and understanding of class, race, gender, and disability. Empathy is now privileged among the virtues, and cruelty has been promoted to a high rank among the deadly vices.<sup>51</sup> As a result it has become more difficult to accept some traditional views about punishment in the after-life, for example, the idea that those in heaven delight in looking down upon those suffering intense and eternal torment in hell.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John T. Noonan, Jr., *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), p. 211.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216. In his review of Noonan's book in *First Things*, October 2005, Cardinal Avery Dulles acknowledged that papal teaching has been nuanced over time, but it has not actually changed and did not need to change because it was always correct. In this, perhaps, Dulles reflected a common belief within the culture of ultramontanist church leaders, namely that its teaching *must* always be correct, and therefore it *is* always correct, and can always be *proven* to be correct.

<sup>51</sup> See Judith N. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1984), pp. 7-44.

<sup>52</sup> For example, St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, 94.1. Empathy and anti-cruelty have quietly been at work in recent decades on doctrines about hell, the salvation of non-Catholics and atheists and, as in this essay,



New Catholics can point to these and other changes to support the possibility that their present dissent from the church's teaching may eventually be in accordance with church teaching. Those who a century or two ago decided fasting on Fridays was not a necessity would, had they lived long enough, have eventually found themselves in accord with the church's teaching. Those who believe that using contraception within marriage is not a sin but often the right thing to do in appropriate circumstances may believe their decision not to obey the church's teaching correctly anticipates a time when the church-leadership will alter that teaching. They may, of course, be wrong and the present teaching will stand, since there is no reason to believe that New Catholics are always leading the way and are error free. Making mistakes, like committing sins, is what everyone does at least some of the time, and what God in loving freedom forgives, quite possibly all the time.

### **The Necessity of Hierarchical Authority**

This essay has argued in support of 'cafeteria Catholics' and has made some rather forthright criticisms of the church-leadership. So a proposal may now be expected that replaces the hierarchical structure of the Church with something else, probably something democratic. That, however, would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. What is true and good cannot be determined by vote and compromise, any more than by decree and obedience. The church-leadership has a considerable way to go before it fully rids itself of ultramontanist, authoritarianism and its own kind of splendid isolationism, and significant reforms are still much needed in leadership formation and self-understanding. Even in its present form, the hierarchical Church is arguably better than any alternative polity, especially one based upon a political, social or cultural theory, whether premodern, modern or postmodern.

In the New Testament churches and throughout the church's history, the church-leadership's function has been to proclaim and teach the Gospel to the Church and the world, and to do so with a unique kind of authority. Church tradition alone – perhaps as a version of Vincent of Lerin's for-

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those of us who are far from ideal. Perhaps they have quite a bit more work to do yet, though they are, of course, not sufficient by themselves as theological criteria. Empathy is not exactly new, since loving one's neighbor as oneself and the golden rule both seem to imply the need for it. But it seems to have been forgotten, perhaps partly as a consequence of a centuries-long focus on exhortation that changed into a normative ideal that at times lost sight of God's love and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

mula whereby true doctrine is what has been ‘held always, everywhere, and by everyone’ – cannot perform this function because the tradition needs to be authoritatively interpreted in order for it to become the church’s official teaching. The Church regarded as a communal tradition of inquiry is likewise inadequate, because that inquiry is far too conflicted and complex to be taught directly. An authoritative leadership is necessary in order to present the church’s teaching as sufficiently settled, reliable, and livable that it can be the basis for the faith and practice of all Catholics. A convert to Catholicism will need to get to know the main elements of such teaching and practices in order to begin to live as a Catholic. All those engaged in the various kinds of theological practices we have discussed will always need to return to reconsider its teaching, since it is the authoritative and necessary reference-point for all Catholic theology.

### Varieties of Authority

That said, the church-leadership’s authority is limited; it is an authority only of office and function. It does not need to claim that its teaching is always and necessarily good and true, nor should it do so.<sup>53</sup> But it can rightly claim that, because the Holy Spirit guides and maintains the Church in the truth, what it proclaims and teaches is always functionally sufficient, true and good enough for its time and place, in spite of errors and confusions.<sup>54</sup> This construal of hierarchical authority makes room for the other theological practices to have an authority of their own, though of a different kind. An academic theological proposal that challenges a particular teaching of the church-leadership acquires authority when it is well received within its discipline for its expertise, insight and intellectual rigor. But it does not have any direct authority over church proclamation and teaching.<sup>55</sup> A New Catholic’s dissent has authority, but only over the individual dissenting, no one else.

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<sup>53</sup> Nor does it often make such a claim; mostly it is made for it by others.

<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the church-leadership (the ordinary magisterium) could be said to be ‘infallible’ in that, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, it never fails to teach well enough that Catholics (should they wish to) can have an understanding of the Gospel sufficient to live the Christian life well.

<sup>55</sup> Within the church’s teaching it is best not overuse any particular theologian’s work, otherwise its theological authority may encroach too far into authoritative church teaching. Although Thomas Aquinas’s theology could be judged as among the best ever produced, the Church should not become Thomistic, since Thomas’s inadequacies and limitations are then too easily overlooked and other important theologies (e.g., patristic) ignored.

Academic theologians and New Catholics can thus be said to have a ‘local’ authority, as distinct from the hierarchy’s universal (‘catholic’) authority. When one or other of the former concludes that a particular teaching of the hierarchy is mistaken or misleading, their theological practice authorizes them to dissent from it. But, again, since all three – New Catholics, hierarchy and academic theologians – can be confused, self-serving and wrong, ‘authority’ can never refer to something absolute or guaranteed. Rather, ‘authoritative’ here means that it should not be ignored or simply dismissed out of hand by others who disagree, even when at first sight it appears to have no merit. It should be engaged rather than ignored, because it may be prompted by the Holy Spirit, who works throughout the Church.<sup>56</sup>

### The Pneumatological Tension

The diverse practices and functions of the universal and local authorities interact and conflict, and thereby bring about what can be called the ‘pneumatological tension’ that structures and guides the Church’s life and mission. That tension can be difficult and disturbing for all the church’s members. It would be much nicer if we could all agree, or at least agree to ignore one another when we disagree. But the tension is arguably one of the most significant means by which the Church is pushed or led by the Spirit to discern how it should live, and what it should do, in a particular time and place. The pneumatological tension can be lost, or may become the wrong kind of tension, as when academic theologians’ criticisms are ignored or silenced by the hierarchy, or when New Catholics’ dissent is dismissed as an indication of their religious or moral failure, or when an academic-theological school of thought refuses to hear the church-leadership or to acknowledge the functional necessity of its role. In these cases, and in other permutations,<sup>57</sup> there is a failure to acknowledge the authority of the other, a failure that mirrors ultramontanism in unwarrantably ruling out the work of the Holy Spirit in one or more sectors of the Church.

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<sup>56</sup> The position need not in fact be good and true to be prompted by the Holy Spirit, since examination of what is eventually discerned to be an error (such as ultramontanism) can lead to better insights into the nature of the issues within which the error was made. The Holy Spirit works in and through our work, but independently of its quality.

<sup>57</sup> Including among other permutations, New Catholics sometimes too easily dismiss authoritative teaching.

In order to fulfill its primary function, the hierarchy needs to maintain and make use of this pneumatological tension. It usually maintains the tension quite well by its authoritative teaching and proclamation, since that often prompts critical responses and challenges from the various local authorities. But because it, too, finds the tension difficult and disturbing, the church-leadership has often failed to use it, and has tried to undermine it, as we have noted. To the point here, it has failed adequately to seek out, listen, join in with, and address the theological arguments and conclusions of all the various local authorities within and outside the Church, and thus has sometimes failed to take up an open opportunity to lead the Church as a whole to follow its Lord more truly in charity. To be sure, there are some signs that academic theology's critical and constructive material is now valued by the leadership much more than during the ultramontane period, and some of that material has been used in institutional theology.<sup>58</sup> As this essay has argued, the church-leadership, and at least some academic theologians and others, have ignored and dismissed the theological practices of New Catholics, thereby significantly dissolving the necessary pneumatological tension.

### Concluding Suggestions

In order to maintain the Church's pneumatological tension, the church-leadership and academic theologians might consider engaging New Catholics and their theological practices far more than they do at present. The church-leadership could try to find ways of engagement that go beyond the current forms, which are limited largely to instruction. New Catholics and other ordinary laity need help to develop their theological skills so that they may live as Catholic Christians in a more fully personal and spiritual way. Parishes and dioceses might consider open discussions in which the goal is to learn from one another, rather than one-sidedly, and with no requirement of eventual agreement.<sup>59</sup> Academic theologians are beginning to make New Catholics' theology better known through ethnographic studies of congregations and sociological analyses. Statistical research has made it increasingly possible to get at least some idea of what is happening at the level of the individual. There is certainly much more to be done in these areas, particularly the last, in order to get a better sense

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<sup>58</sup> An example would be institutional theology's critical acceptance of some key elements of liberation theology.

<sup>59</sup> This would in some ways parallel at the kind of inter-denominational engagement developed by Paul D. Murray as 'Receptive Ecumenism'. See <https://www.dur.ac.uk/theology.religion/ccs/constructivetheology/receptiveecumensim/>.

of how individual Catholics live as such, in all their immense variety, and how and why they decide their particular path as Catholics. Knowing more will help academic theologians and the church-leadership to understand them, learn from them, and thereby provide more appropriate pastoral care and support for everyone, including the church-leadership and academic theologians.

These are merely a few suggestions from an academic theologian. They are not at all intended as a sketch of an ideal way of being the Church, but just as some possible changes to be considered. It may be that the interplay and engagement of more complex and diverse forms of theological practice will undermine the idea that Catholicism is an impersonal, constricting and spiritless example of ‘organized religion’. If the Church became more clearly what it really is, a unique and rather peculiar community guided by the Holy Spirit, it might become attractive enough for those, who might otherwise wander elsewhere, to stay,<sup>60</sup> and prompt those outside to take a look within.

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<sup>60</sup> Though perhaps not. With regard to these suggestions, Dwellers’ authoritative theological practices, which have not been discussed at all here, need careful and probably lengthy treatment.

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**Part III**  
**Restructuring the Church**



# Seven Characteristics of a Future-proof Parish: The Approach of the Center for Applied Pastoral Research

MATTHIAS SELLMANN

## Introduction

The institutional Christian churches offer a confusing picture within today's European societies. Without a doubt, these important players in history have lost an enormous amount of influence and stature. Even a cursory glance at the history of the French, Italian, Dutch, British or German church reveals a fundamental shift, which can be described, somewhat abstractly but nonetheless accurately, as a shift from 'power' to 'powerlessness'. This characterization of the churches as 'powerless' could be further specified with data, such as dramatic loss of membership, prestige, influence, and financial resources. This diagnosis has been made frequently and need not be repeated here.

'Power' and 'powerlessness' are relative and relational concepts. Of course, the more vibrant the original point of comparison, the more dramatic the analysis of the current weakness will be. A comparison between the present-day Church of England and its sixteenth-century version, at the height of its power, reveals complete decline. Yet, if you take the year 2000 as point of measurement, however, the outcome of a comparison with the present will be quite different. Around the turn of the century, Callum Brown wrote an evocative book called *'The Death of Christian Britain'*.<sup>1</sup> Like a doctor, Brown listed the pathologies of his patient – Anglican pastoral ministry reached only 4 per cent of children; 80 per cent of the British must be regarded as dissociated from the church; there is a lack of funds everywhere etc. – and he concluded with the historic admission: "Britain is showing the world how religion as we know it can die."<sup>2</sup>

And yet, only a few years later, entire conferences in Germany and elsewhere are being dedicated to 'fresh manifestations of church'; the German theologian Michael Herbst states that 'the English patient' has

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<sup>1</sup> Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularization 1800-2000* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

improved a lot;<sup>3</sup> English church leaders are reporting the founding of 2,000 new church congregations;<sup>4</sup> and the entire semantic field of ‘pioneer ministry’, ‘mission-shaped churches’, ‘church for beginners’, and ‘church planting’ has become part and parcel of the vocabulary of new initiatives in innovative pastoral ministry, well beyond the confines of the English-speaking world.

Without describing these developments in greater detail here, and without wishing to idealize them, we can conclude from the example of the Church of England that prophecies of doom should at least specify which point of comparison they have chosen. It helps us realize that the institutional church in present-day European societies will indeed be smaller than in previous centuries. Nevertheless, modern societies continue to have strong and vibrant churches and they are valuable precisely because of their ‘modernity project’ and their ‘post-secularity’ (Habermas).

This contribution will investigate the evidence and traces of change that point to the contours of a potentially future-proof local church. It aims to describe and discuss systematically what a parish with a sustainable future might look like. This will be done from two perspectives: from an empirical one, and from the perspective of pastoral-sociological hermeneutics. The empirical approach will primarily present research projects from the Center for Applied Pastoral Research (‘*Zentrum für Angewandte Pastoralforschung*’, henceforth ZAP), the Bochum Research Institute which has been focusing on the subject of this contribution for more than three years.<sup>5</sup> As regards hermeneutics, Vatican II has established that the theological question of viability cannot ignore the requirements of modern society. Indeed, the ability of the churches to deal with secularity will be

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Herbst, “Dem ‘Englischen Patienten’ geht es besser. Was können wir von der Anglikanischen Kirche lernen?,” in *Gottes Sehnsucht in der Stadt. Auf der Suche nach Gemeinden für Morgen*, Philipp Elhaus and Christian Hennecke (eds.) (Würzburg: Echter, 2011), pp. 3-74; see also the account by Graham Cray, et al.: *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), which sparked off this latest development.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (London: SCM Press, 2012); as well as Maria Herrmann, “Über die Plattenbaukirche,” *Gründer-Handbuch für pastorale startups und Innovationsprojekte*, Florian Sobetzko and Matthias Sellmann (eds.) (Würzburg: Echter, 2017), pp. 408-423, with an extensive bibliography and data on fresh expressions of church.

<sup>5</sup> For this reason the current contribution’s reference literature is primarily based on the works of ZAP scholars. On the ZAP see Zentrum für angewandte Pastoralforschung, “to be zapped [zaept],” at: [www.zap-bochum.de](http://www.zap-bochum.de) (accessed August, 2017).

decisive for the empirical realization of the seven design modules of a future-proof parish that are being proposed here.

**‘The Church Realizes Herself Wherever She Loses Herself’:  
On the Theological Hermeneutics of the Viability of the Church**

*The Absence of a Mobilizing Concept of the Parish:  
A Short Project Report*

Processes of change in parishes and dioceses are often stimulated nowadays by devising pastoral plans. These development plans are prepared locally, ideally by both full-time and voluntary workers in parishes and churches. Usually, a more or less detailed framework is put forward by the diocese as a guideline, thus offering a set of rules on how such a plan can be set up and which core questions it must address. Then local groups are encouraged to imagine the pastoral future of their own parish as clearly as possible; what goals they would like to achieve; how they are going to plan future steps that must be taken etc. In many dioceses, this includes allowing the local parish to recommend to the diocese what real estate can and should be kept in the future, what the parishes’ future allocation of personnel should look like, what is prioritized and what is not prioritized. In principle, work on local pastoral plans is an example of a learning organization, where center and periphery collaborate, which uses local knowledge in a participatory way and proposes solutions. In short, this kind of work involves the entire diocese in an effective dynamic of change.

So much for the ideal and the theory. In a collective project carried out by the ZAP and a large German diocese, the object was to observe and evaluate the first round of work on these pastoral plans. Approximately 60% of all pastoral units, more than 100 of them drafted a pastoral plan in a process that took, in some cases, several years. The diocesan authorities recognized that these plans constitute a dataset that can provide enormous diagnostic expertise, and corresponding strategic precision. The plans provide a blueprint of the church that predominates in the locality, the ambit of local objectives, the theological arguments that are highly prominent, the self-profiles and role profiles, the spiritual interpretations of the perception of today’s society etc. In short: these precious documents, produced as a result of so much effort, promise to provide a great deal of information on the level of willingness to change that one can expect to find in local parishes.

The researcher in charge of this inquiry, Christine Zimmerhof, analyzed more than 100 of such documents, using both the tools of empirical social research – i.e., quantitative and qualitative textual analysis, partici-

patory observation on the spot, interviews – and of organizational education theory of learning organizations. The results were sobering: only about five out of 100 documents could be qualified as truly reliable plans even on the basis of a generous assessment. Specific goals, timelines, distinctions between high and low priorities, information on commitments, details on responsibilities and competences etc. were absent in almost all pastoral plans.

The outcome was summarized in twelve conclusions.<sup>6</sup> What is particularly striking from the perspective of my contribution is that the ecclesiological model of a ‘nearby’, manageable, liturgical community based on the traditional in-crowd predominated in almost all cases. Despite the rhetoric and semantics of pastoral theology and processes of diocesan mission statements, there is hardly any theological imagination locally, nor a mental motivation to change the existing image of the church. It is very clear, nonetheless, that this model is obsolete. However, there is no appealing image, no attractive metaphor, no mobilizing mental focus that could bring about substantial change. In addition, the planning competency of parish staff is, sadly, too often, insufficient.

Zimmerhof concluded that work on pastoral plans can achieve very little under these circumstances; perhaps, the only thing that this work can realize is what is called in the jargon of organizational education ‘adaptive learning’. Adaptive learning optimizes what is already in place – and what could become very valuable in the future. What is urgently needed, however, is ‘change learning’. This form of learning changes the methods of approach, stimulates creativity and innovation, and leads to a reassessment of the goals and a renewal of the organizational culture. But these results are obtained only if a new communal vision can be developed, more precisely an optimistic, more appealing view of the future.<sup>7</sup> This,

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Christine Zimmerhof, *Lernende Organisation Kirche? Die Arbeit mit Pastorkonzepten aus organisationspädagogischer Perspektive (Angewandte Pastoralforschung 6)* (Würzburg: 2018, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. on this Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline. The Art & Practice of the Learning Organisation* (New York: Doubleday, 1990); ‘Metanoia’ is even a key concept for Senge; see also Chris Argyris and Donald A. Schön, *Die lernende Organisation: Grundlagen, Methode, Praxis* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008).

however, is far from being realized<sup>8</sup> in the communities and parishes of the German dioceses.<sup>9</sup>

This brief glance at one of ZAP's projects has thus revealed one important point: the capacity for change at the local and basic level of the church is very limited. What is lacking is a feasible notion of what it means to be a modern Catholic Church in the future, one that is not overwhelmed, but rational and appealing.<sup>10</sup> There is need of an energetic metaphor that, as it were, attracts the future, motivates spiritually, convinces ecclesialogically, and works both culturally and operationally.

In addition to drawing up a profile of a future-proof parish, the need for hermeneutics arises. To put it in fashionable terms: any structural work requires an appealing narrative, framing, a story that is able to captivate people and make them prepared and willing to invest. The work involved needs a vision; the ninety percent of perspiration that is needed requires at least one percent of inspiration.

Although my contribution focuses on the dimensions of structure, practical work, and passing on the inspiration (see Section 2), it is essential first to briefly discuss the equally important issue of narrative framing. This is necessary to ensure that the "characteristics of a future-proof parish" can be situated in the context of a plausible system. Furthermore, the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Christian Hennecke, who has in many publications defined the current German church's deficiency not in terms of money, prestige, or priests, but in the failure of a faith vision; he has then proposed one himself, e.g., in his reflections on his extensive international experience; see: Christian Hennecke, *Kirche, die über den Jordan geht. Expeditionen ins Land der Verheißung* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006), pp. 129-145 and passim. Parts of the Evangelical Church have also acknowledged the lack of motivating images of the Church and the faith; e.g., Isolde Karle, "Reformprozesse in der evangelischen Kirche der Gegenwart: Realität und Visionen," *Gottes Wort in der Geschichte. Reformation und Reform in der Kirche*, Wilhelm Damberg, et al. (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau, et al.: Herder Verlag, 2015), pp. 317-330: "The Evangelical Church in Germany has been compelled since the 1990s [...] to scale down and transform its structures. These structural changes are being called reforms. But they have nothing to do with any religious reawakening or theological realization." (*Ibid.*, p. 317). Cf. also the special issue of *Evangelische Theologie*, Vol. 73 (2013), Ch. 2 entitled "Kirchenreformen im Vergleich" ('Church reform compared'), pp. 84-90.

<sup>9</sup> It is important to emphasize this: many available empirical studies of the current situation of the churches in Germany suggest that the findings for this diocese are not exceptional, but apply in all their particulars to the country in general.

<sup>10</sup> The reference to the 'Catholic' confession is not intended to exclude other Christian confessions and denominations, but is due to the simple fact that the ZAP has so far derived its analyses and experiences almost exclusively from its collaboration with the institutional Catholic Church.

case must be made that – although the empirical part of this contribution is clearly aimed at the situation of the institutional churches in Germany – the hermeneutical horizon is equally applicable to other local churches in Europe. In sum: the challenge described in Section 1 claims to be valid for all secular liberal societies, and many of the characteristics of a modern Catholic Church, which are developed for Germany in Section 2, are also applicable elsewhere.

The keywords of the following hermeneutical outline (for the moment, it cannot be more than that) refer to the following insights<sup>11</sup>:

- *'Modus procedendi' and 'the pastorality of doctrine'*: conciliar theology requires that the road towards developing an appealing vision of the church should not bypass the surrounding culture, but should be mediated by it.

- *'Secularity as an opportunity'*: this theological paradigm shift produces a new relationship of the church vis-à-vis the world. Secularity is not a threat to the church, but the starting point for her activities.

- *'Religious self-determination'*: Culturally, it must be unambiguously stressed that the main trend of liberal European societies consists of a comprehensive notion of personal autonomy. This becomes manifest through the idea of self-determination and self-effectiveness, and also in the field of religion.

- *'The seven dimensions of religious self-determination are the seven dimensions of the future-proof church'*: an analysis of religious self-determination yields seven distinct dimensions. The Church should offer a range of articulations that are relevant to these dimensions.

*'Modus Procedendi' and 'The Pastorality of Doctrine': The Conciliar Turn towards Cultural Exchange*

Older papers on the Vatican II's ecclesial vision argued that, although the Council produced a host of metaphors for the identity of the Church, their contradictory semantic and political implications made it impossible to distil from them a rigorous line that could be used for future planning.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The priority that must be given to the more practical Section 2 has caused us to be unduly brief in Section 1. The reflections that follow cannot therefore aspire to more than to give a brief summary of the argument.

<sup>12</sup> One only needs to think of the debates on the ecclesial metaphors of 'the people of God' and 'communio', even as late as the post-conciliar synod of 1985; on this question, see the theological program surrounding the ecclesiological image semantics of Jürgen Werbick, *Die Kirche. Ein ekklesiologischer Entwurf für Studium und Praxis* (Freiburg im Breisgau etc.: Herder Verlag, 1994), p. 41 and



More recently, attempts have been made to situate the revolutionary character of the Council's theology not so much in the specifics of its content, but rather in its turn towards self-relativizing processes of cultural exchange.

This directs our attention to the last phase of Vatican II. Just before its closing, during the fourth session, more precisely in November and December 1965, the Council fathers adopted a number of texts that conspicuously point in a specific direction: they require the magisterium of the Church to address the question of the Church's mission not just on the basis of her own sources, but to discover the surrounding culture as an equally valid source. The Parisian fundamental theologian Christoph Theobald has called this the '*modus procedendi*' of the magisterium and the 'generative grammar' of revealed knowledge.

The texts in question are *Dei Verbum*, with its shift from an instructive to a participatory understanding of revelation<sup>13</sup>; *Gaudium et spes*, with its theory of the two sources of light, i.e., that the mission of the Church becomes manifest both through human experience and the Gospel<sup>14</sup>; *Ad gentes*, with its model of interpreting enculturation as a mode of incarnation;<sup>15</sup> and *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis humanae*, with their notion of a collective search for truth.<sup>16</sup>

All these texts envisage a Church that must first creatively learn what she is, experiences, and teaches from the surrounding history and culture. Theobald has called this the 'pastorality of doctrine', and regards it as the Council's significant contribution in terms of the history of dogma, and as a driving force for the future. What is at stake here is the question as to what extent the interpretative capacity of the Church's cultural partners, based on their historical perspective, is *constitutive* for what the Church herself acknowledges and professes as her mission.<sup>17</sup> In other – more

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passim; more recently Gregor Mari "Gegenwärtig Glauben Denken – Systematische Theologie," *Ekklesologie*, Vol. 6 (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2011), pp. 79-96.

<sup>13</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (1965), no. 7.

<sup>14</sup> Idem., *Gaudium et spes* (1965), no. 11.

<sup>15</sup> Idem., *Ad gentes* (1965), no. 10.

<sup>16</sup> Idem., *Nostra aetate* (1965), no. 2; *Ibid.*, *Dignitatis humanae* (1965), no. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Idem., *Ad Gentes*, no. 22, which says that Revelation must be 'submitted to a new scrutiny' – and this separately in and by each 'major socio-cultural territory'. On this subject in general see Christoph Theobald, "Rezeption und Zukunftspotentiale des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils," *Vatikanum 21. Die bleibenden Aufgaben des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils im 21. Jahrhundert*, Christoph Böttingheimer and Rene Dausner (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau, et al.: Herder Verlag, 2016), pp. 38-44; Idem., "Zur Rezeption und Fortschreibung von

European – words: what is at stake is the Church’s capacity for synodality with the secularity that surrounds her.

*Secularity as an Opportunity for a Learning Organization*

This means that a church becomes future-proof and obtains an attractive narrative through her capacity for exchange, and even through a kind of lockstep (syn-odos = traveling together) with the surrounding culture. It is necessary to recall briefly but clearly that this proposition has a huge impact on everything that is identified in pastoral theology as secularity, and is therefore usually rejected. European societies are mostly secular and liberal societies; and however diverse the various historical paths that led to this secularity may be – one has only to think of how different Poland and the Netherlands are in this respect – the prominence of the following notion is indisputable: modern man stands in a critical and emancipatory relationship with religion and its institutions.

It has become a commonplace for social science that there is no historical basis for attempts to overburden the theory of secularity with a significance from the perspective of the philosophy of history.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, the adjective ‘secular’ continues to enjoy, in its reception by the Church, its traditionally disreputable connotation, and is often used as an umbrella term for the stereotypical ‘isms’ that pastoral diagnoses of the present advance: nihilism, relativism, individualism, atheism, egotism, etc.

It is necessary to assert, however, that the ‘modus procedendi’ of conciliar theology, if put into practice, will lead to a more relaxed relationship with secular culture. As Christian Bauer, the Innsbruck pastoral theologian has concluded: “The future of pastoral practice perhaps lies [...] less in the religious responsiveness of our time than in the secular meaning of the Gospel.”<sup>19</sup> Instead of struggling against the dynamics of seculari-

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Dei verbum und Nostra aetate,” *Ibid.*, pp. 387-399; Idem., “Tradition als kreativer Prozess. Eine fundamentaltheologische Herausforderung,” *Aneignung durch Transformation*, Wilfried Eisele, et al. (ed.) (Freiburg im Breisgau, et al.: Herder Verlag, 2013), pp. 483-508; Idem., “Jesus – das Evangelium Gottes,” in *Pastoraltheologische Informationen*, Vol. 32, Ch. 2 (2012), pp. 91-99; Idem., *Hören, wer ich sein kann. Einübungen*, Reinhard Feiter and Hadwig Müller (eds.) (Ostfildern: Matthias-Grünewald, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Patrick Pasture, “Religion in Contemporary Europe. Contrasting Perceptions and Dynamics,” in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Vol. 49 (2009), pp. 319-350; as well as: Hartmut Lehmann, *Säkularisierung. Der europäische Sonderweg in Sachen Religion* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Christian Bauer, “Diakonische Mission? Konzilstheologische Inspirationen aus *Gaudium et Spes* und *Ad gentes*,” *Vaticanum 21, die bleibenden Aufgaben*

zation, the program of future-proof Christianity should be to articulate and communicate its own convictions in such a way that they can be expressed and even developed further by ‘religiously unmusical contemporaries’ (Habermas) within the context of their own conceptual world.<sup>20</sup> Secularity thus becomes an opportunity for the Church as a learning organization.<sup>21</sup>

### *Religious Self-determination*

The reference points followed so far – ‘culture as an exchange partner’ and ‘secularity as a learning opportunity’ – can now be differentiated more clearly for the purpose of a strategic definition of the objective. What precisely characterizes the culture of contemporary liberal, secular societies? However unwieldy this question, and however tempting it is to answer it with some platitude from intellectual history, one aspect is unmistakable and can serve as the epochal characteristic of Enlightened European societies. That characteristic is self-determination, autonomy, individual freedom. It is not necessary here to identify the philosophical or historical starting point of this characteristic. It could well be nominalism, Descartes, Kant, the Polish constitution of May 3, 1791, or the French, English, or American declarations of human rights and independence. What is undisputed is that the modernity of states and civil societies can be measured by the criterion of what normative significance they assign to the autonomous individual.<sup>22</sup>

Since its conception, this notion of self-determination has been given countless justifications and applications. It is very prominent in basic rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and free elections. In economics, it is expressed, for instance, in consumer freedom and free enterprise; in the social sphere, the freedom to choose one’s life partner; and culturally in the freedom of organization.

Freedom of religion is the crucial manifestation in the context discussed here. The situation in this respect is surprising and complex.

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*des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils im 21. Jahrhundert*, Christoph Böttigheimer and René Dausner (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2016), pp. 403-425 (417).

<sup>20</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44 uses this concept of a ‘*facultas suo modo exprimendi*’ to describe this process of creative accommodation.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Matthias Sellmann, “Säkularität: Die große Chance modernen Christseins,” *Neue Räume öffnen. Mission und Säkularisierung weltweit*, Gregor Buß and Markus Luber (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Pustet, 2013), pp. 123-143.

<sup>22</sup> On this subject in general see Hans Joas, *Die Sakralität der Person – Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015).

Although the implementation of religious freedom is one of the basic impulses of the Enlightenment, a breakthrough in terms of its effects on the shaping of culture was only identified recently in some European societies. It is not without reason that scholars speak of ‘multiple secularities’,<sup>23</sup> meaning the very diverse paths that the cultural dissolution of a dominant form of religion has taken. Even from a distance, it is clear that the established churches of Scandinavia present a different model than secularist France, corporative Germany, or ‘Catholic’ Italy.<sup>24</sup> However, it would take us too far afield to develop this further here.

Nonetheless, our point is that most national local churches have only encountered a real organizational and identity crisis during the last two or three decades. It is only now that they are beginning to feel the impact of things that have been customary for many years in other fields of individual self-determination – for instance the sexual revolution. The need for the explicitly individual expression of religiosity, the emergence of free choice in the religious field, have taken a long time before they started to affect national local churches.

Now, however, it has become clear and obviously compelling to the churches that, as ‘suppliers’, they are facing cultural partners who will no longer understand or tolerate violations of the principle of religious self-determination. This occurs on all levels: e.g., legal structures that undercut the standards of the secular order; all forms of patriarchal communication; hierarchical structures of internal organizations (laity-clergy/men-women), as well as disregard for cultural customs, such as courtesy or member care.

Without being able to expand on it here, one can observe that the respective churches in many countries will have to undergo enormous change processes so as to be able to address independent religious or even unreligious subjects. The challenge can be summarized as follows: more and more religious leaders are confronted with people who will do as they please, in the field of religion as elsewhere. And just like employers, politicians, and media producers who have to figure out how to run a company, a state, or a program where all participants often do as they like, so churches have to discover how to reach the independent faithful. There are no historical blueprints. It is simply not possible to know how to ‘do’

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Monika Wohlrab-Sahr and Marian Bucharth, “Multiple Secularities: Toward a Cultural Sociology of Secular Modernities,” *Comparative Sociology*, Vol. 11, Issue 6 (2012), pp. 875-909.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. The studies of individual countries in Wilhelm Damberg and Staf Hellemans, *Die neue Mitte der Kirche. Der Aufstieg der intermediären Instanzen in den europäischen Großkirchen seit 1945* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010).

Christianity if all do whatever they please – including the church’s own staff members.

It is not surprising that this causes resentment, which can to some extent also have structural effects within the organization itself. Reminding oneself of the ‘*modus procedendi*’ and recognizing that secular culture offers a great learning opportunity can, however, be a positive first step in the restructuring process. From a theological perspective, this kind of exchange with the surrounding culture should not only be regarded as fidelity to one’s own mission, but also as a source of energy and inspiration, from which new meaning and vitality can accrue.<sup>25</sup>

In order to be able to devise specific strategies of action, the abstract notion of ‘religious self-determination’ will be analyzed in the next section into several dimensions. This is not only to ensure that these dimensions correspond closely – rather than approximately – to this norm, which is a ‘sign of the times’,<sup>26</sup> but also to enable the development of a more precise change profile for parishes and church bodies. It will result in a configuration tool that ZAP has developed: a scheme of seven ways to implement religious self-determination. To ensure enough space for more detailed articulation of each individual point, the following diagram/table must suffice here.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ultimately the theological issue at stake is to utilize recent insights of leadership research. Good leadership does not attempt to motivate employees – it assumes that employees are already motivated. Rather, it attempts to minimize demotivating effects (Cf. Reinhard K. Sprenger, *Mythos Motivation: Wege aus einer Sackgasse* (Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus Verlag, 2014). Analogously, the hermeneutics outlined above can safeguard against viewing religious self-determination only as conceited rejection of the Church and the faith. The interconnection is the other way around: the Church simply assumed that people want to be religious, and in particular creative, ambitious, and responsible. As a provider (in addition to other cultural actors), she therefore makes every effort to create this infrastructure and, in terms of positively valued religious freedom, to do everything that will allow individuals to interpret and shape their lives and their living together in a religious way and to high standards of quality.

<sup>26</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4.

<sup>27</sup> The reflections that follow are further productive developments of former versions of this diagram; Cf. Matthias Sellmann, “Katholische Kirche heute: Siebenfache Pluralität als Herausforderung der Pastoralplanung,” *Katholizismus in Deutschland. Zeitgeschichte und Gegenwart*, Wilhelm Damberg and Karl-Joseph Hummel (eds.) (Paderborn: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015), pp. 113-140; as well as Idem., “Die kirchenbildende Kraft des Wortes Gottes in den aktuellen Reformprozessen der deutschen Diözesen,” *Gottes Wort in der Geschichte: Reform und Reformation in der Kirche*, Thomas Söding, Isolde Karle and Wim Damberg (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2015), pp. 298-316. Whereas the

Free religious self-determination requires the following infrastructural conditions:

<b>Requirement (brief)</b>	<b>Requirement (elaborated)</b>
Spatial organization	Religious self-determination requires clearly defined, specific areas of operation and social forms, in which it can develop itself.
Creative reception	Within the given limits of freedom, religious self-determination, as a style of its own in a form of its own, requires social recognition and communication that is prepared to engage in exchange.
Participation	In order to develop, religious self-determination requires a freely accessible field of opportunities for commitment.
Professionalism	On the supplier's side, religious self-determination requires competency, certainty, clarity, order, and self-limitation.
Communication	Religious self-determination requires accessible, reliable, and comprehensible information from the 'supplier', so that people can make informed choices.
Articulation	Religious self-determination requires the cultivation and development of individual religious styles through the permanent supply of attractive, stimulating, and challenging ways of interpretation.
Innovation	On the supplier's side, religious self-determination requires an effective dynamic against an interpretation of religious tradition that impedes learning from the surrounding culture and internal reform.

This diagram contains nothing that does not follow rigorously from what has been hermeneutically developed so far. It is clear that many dimensions are closely linked. Thus, the requirement of 'innovation management' is of course implied in 'professionalism'; and 'communication' and 'articulation' are closely akin. What is also clear is that each dimension is related integrally rather than in addition to the others. 'Participation', 'reception', or 'spatial organization' not only pervade their own sector, but all sectors. In order to exemplify this, one would have to imagine something like a 'game of sevens', in which each dimension can be a programmatic sign for the six other ones.

There may also be an eighth or ninth dimension. What is more important than lexical completeness is the inherent dynamic that is fed by the learning process of exchange with the religious self-determination of

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previous contributions presented the sevenfold hermeneutic as an analytical working tool, this contribution addresses what must be done to implement it in planning.

secularity. Mental fascination, competency requirements and directions of change can all be deduced from this.<sup>28</sup>

The ZAP emphasizes the implications of its configuration tool – contemporary church development cannot afford to evade any of the challenges stressed here. This means that those participants who do not actively decide run the risk that decisions will be imposed upon them. There is a sense of urgency in each of the outlined aspects, an urgency that assumes normative force in fact. In addition, every ecclesial entity – whether dioceses, orders, large parishes, associations, or hospital groups – is confronted by the challenges stressed in these seven points.

The following will show what the diagram can mean for a future-proof parish.

### **‘Modern Church’ as a Project of Ecclesial Organization: Seven Characteristics of Future-Proof Catholic Parishes**

The insights we have acquired so far can be translated in many ways into specific future models of being a Christian. It would be very rewarding to look, on the basis of this background, at the relevant training programs for pastoral ministry; it would be possible to conduct a transnational comparative analysis; or to examine the bureaucratic rationale of ecclesiastical administration in order to see to what extent it supports the action in the secular space described above.

This contribution investigates the territorial aspect of the institutional Church, and for this reason the focus must be on the profile of a future-proof parish in the sense described above. This is to concentrate on a societal form of Catholic ecclesiality. This is the best known, oldest, most widespread and most prescribed, canonically and dogmatically. This territorial aspect belongs to the design of Catholicism in a most permanent way. At the same time, the parish is also the juridical and social form that, due to the decreasing numbers of ordained ministers/pastors in many local churches, is one of the organizational manifestations that will be transformed most radically.

So how can we imagine a future-proof parish? The backdrop to this endeavor is clear: prospects for the future can arise only from a vigorous and even adventurous exchange with secular religious freedom. Therefore, it is necessary to draw consequences concerning the shape of pa-

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. The ecclesiological guiding notion of ‘creatingspace’ in Matthias Sellmann, “‘Für eine Kirche, die Platz macht!’ Notizen zum Programm einer raumgebenden Pastoral,” *Diakonia*, Vol. 48 (2017), pp. 74-82.

ishes and their practical operation from the seven dimensions described above.<sup>29</sup>

The following section will develop the characteristics proposed on the basis of sociological discourse, and will then draw practical conclusions for pastoral planning. This will be done partially in discursive outlines formulated as challenges. However, the argument as such is quite simple and can be easily summarized here:

Parishes have future prospects to the extent that they are willing to be guided in their pastoral planning by the objective of becoming providers to people's autonomous religious freedom. They will realize this goal in a challenging, dedicated, and solution-oriented way. In order to do this, they will recognize that religious self-determination requires (at least) seven dimensions in order to flourish and to positively reinvigorate both the wellbeing of individuals and of the community. In the first place, there must be forms of religious presence and offering (Spatial organization); these must be respectful of people's own styles and must promote pluralism (Reception); they must be accessible and offer opportunities for the further development of people's own religious styles (Participation); the supplier's facilities must have the advantages of good organization (Professionalism): have clear accessibility to media as well as personal accessibility (Communication); they must surprise and inspire (Articulation); and they must be permanently in flux and willing to improve (Innovation).

That is the short version. The table below – familiar by now – provides a visual overview of the more detailed discussion in the following sections.

<b>Requirement (brief)</b>	<b>Requirement (elaborated)</b>	<b>Characteristics of a future-proof parish</b>
Spatial organization	Religious self-determination requires clearly defined, specific areas of operation and social	The parish offers an attractive and plural ensemble (parochial network) of religious

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<sup>29</sup> At this point it is necessary to pause for a moment from a theological perspective. Future prospects arise first and foremost from the believer's relationship with God, from whom he derives the certainty of faith that the history God is making with them will always be good. Without denying or minimizing this spiritual foundation, this essay begins from a different starting point. In a way it looks at the 'homework' of those who feel responsible for the conditions for the encounter of being a Christian within the institutional churches. This does not promote the 'manufacturability' of pastoral success, nor theological social engineering. The reflections that follow, however, spring from the conviction that vibrant spiritual life cannot be the opposite, but rather the result and even the expression of good and venturesome ecclesial organization.



	forms, in which it can develop itself.	practical and social forms to meet the need for religious self-determination.
Creative reception	Within the given limits of freedom, religious self-determination, as a style of its own in a form of its own, requires social recognition and communication that is prepared to engage in exchange.	The parish enables a diversity of personal transformations and interpretations of the Catholic tradition in a co-creative way, actively promotes this and strategically implements it.
Participation	In order to develop, religious self-determination requires a freely accessible field of opportunities for commitment.	The parish actively and effectively complies with the desire for religious self-efficacy on the level of participation, decision making and commitment.
Professionalism	On the supplier's side, religious self-determination requires competency, certainty, clarity, order, and self-limitation.	The parish guarantees and manifests freedom of religious self-determination through strong leadership and organizational qualities.
Communication	Religious self-determination requires accessible, reliable, and comprehensible information from the 'supplier', so that people can make informed choices.	The parish implements opportunities for media communication, in order to be transparent in its goals and strategies, to relieve staff pressure, and to be ready for alliances with non-ecclesial organizations.
Articulation	Religious self-determination requires the cultivation and development of individual religious styles through the permanent supply of attractive, stimulating, and challenging ways of interpretation.	In all its essential aspects, the parish is experienced as a welcoming portfolio of diverse, vigorous, and authentic religious interpretations, on the basis of which people can discover their own religious style.
Innovation	On the supplier's side, religious self-determination requires an effective dynamic against an interpretation of religious tradition that impedes learning from the surrounding culture and internal reform.	The parish is characterized by systematic innovation management, which structurally and culturally involves all processes, products, and persons in a process of evaluation and improvement.

*The Challenge of 'Spatial Organization': Pastoral Space as a Network of Social Forms, Places, and Occasions*

The shift towards individualization in modern, especially Western European, societies has disrupted the social forms of religion. Astonishingly, the sociology of religion has only recently discovered this phenomenon and begun to develop analytical tools to understand it. For much too long the dominant discourse was that of dichotomy, a discourse derived from Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch, who defined the essential manifestations of the religious field as 'organization' (macro level) and 'community' (micro level). To the extent that the organizational genesis of the mainstream Christian churches belonged to the standard repertoire of the sociology of religion, it was primarily Thomas Luckmann's discovery of 'invisible religion' that turned the focus to those religio-genetic tendencies, which bring the religious creativity of individuals to light. It seemed sufficient to identify the macro and micro levels of the problem to adequately describe the field. The narrative was that of a conflict between a hierarchical, dogmatic, and even sacralized church organization on the one hand, and that of the free, 'ego-tactic' and syncretistic 'tinkering' individual who makes his own choices, on the other hand.

This has obscured the interface level that exists between these two poles. This is the meso-level of the religious field, or more precisely, the social forms of the religious. When we scrutinize this level more closely, a number of clear effects come to light. One does not have to be a prophet to predict that the question whether parishes will be future-proof will be decided on this level.

The proposition is as follows: it is an important characteristic of a future-proof parish to be able to meet the need for religious self-determination with an attractive, diverse ensemble of religious practical and social forms. This ensemble must be capable of being addressed and implemented as a parochial network. This would make it possible to add a promise of identity and belonging to the individual's freedom of choice as regards his or her level of commitment.

This proposition involves several emphases. From the perspective of the sociology of the church its background is that many local churches in the country had to undertake radical spatial alterations in their dioceses. To some extent, spaces of pastoral responsibility and home-building for Christians were considerably extended. New, large parishes emerged from the merger of smaller, in some cases very old parishes; church buildings were demolished, put to different uses or deconsecrated; organizational bodies merged, new models of leadership were established. The

central, although not only<sup>30</sup> driving force behind this development is the crisis of vocations to the ordained ministry. The canonical idea and requirement of the ‘pastor proprius’ as the supporting pillar of each parish can ultimately be maintained only by extending its territory and by taking additional supportive measures (e.g., 517,2).<sup>31</sup>

The most salient consequence of this development is surely that the redrawing of parish-borders will undermine the dominance of the two most prominent Catholic social forms described above. Both ‘organization’ and ‘community’ currently experience that individuals are exercising their exit option. It is no exaggeration to state that these individuals, as the beneficiaries of these two social forms, are not prepared for this. Some are proposing a general critique of society on the systemic level, lamenting for instance the structural imperviousness of modern times to sensitive religious communication. Others, on the interactive level, criticize modern man’s lack of fidelity and commitment, especially among the younger generation. There seems to be a war of attrition going on between the enforced territorial enlargement of parishes and the erosion of organizational and community-based control.

What is easily overlooked is the enormous innovative progress on the meso-level. This is the level where conspicuously new forms of ecclesial presence and commitment are being established. The analytical approach to these forms must surely be more ambitious than to simply view them in terms of dichotomy. New studies are focusing on these new forms, which religious providers can use to coordinate, but also motivate, cultivate, and further develop the need for religious self-determination. The most noticeable forms are hybrid ones.

Two further additions to the traditional theory can be observed: first, a new form of the coordination of human activity has emerged, namely the market. In addition to the coordination mechanism of hierarchical command (organization) and of reciprocal interaction (community), the me-

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to emphasize this: pastoral theological analyses have long pointed to the fact that a theology of the parish that stresses its ‘nearness’ is not in accordance with the impositions of free self-determination, and would therefore be under pressure even if there was no vocation crisis; see for instance Rainer Bucher, “Die Gemeinde nach dem Scheitern der Gemeindeftheologie. Perspektiven einer zentralen Sozialform der Kirche,” *Gemeinde ohne Zukunft? Theoretische Debatte und praktische Modelle*, Matthias Sellmann (ed.) (Freiburg im Breisgau, et al.: Freiburg im Breisgau, 2013), pp. 19-54; *Ibid.*, pp. 122-244 has an extensive debate on this subject.

<sup>31</sup> The solution of constructing so-called ‘sectors’ in the diocese of Poitiers has become famous; see on this Albert Rouet, et al.: *Vers un nouveau visage d’Église; l’expérience des communautés locales à Poitiers* (Paris: Bayard Jeunesse, 2005).

chanism of exchange is now also entering the religious field. Thus, American mega-churches, or the providers of alternative religious markets (with their product range of therapies, courses, or counseling), increasingly focused on member retention, have now also focused on the economic dynamics of the religious scene.

Second, this has caused new popular societal forms to emerge between the systemic macro-level and the interactive micro-level, forms that can count as hybrids of the three classical forms of coordination (hierarchy, reciprocity and market). Examples are religious movements, pilgrimages, religious media contact, events, chaplaincy/ministry such as urban churches or migrant churches.<sup>32</sup> Thus, events combine market effects with periodic interaction; urban churches combine organizational effects with market-based approaches; and pilgrimages combine organization and interaction, etc.

There is a huge rise of what in the past was called ‘chaplaincy’ ministry as opposed to ‘territorial’ parish ministry. This includes initiatives like children’s day care centers, retirement homes, youth shelters, prisons, or welfare centers. These institutions did exist in the old scheme dominated by local church community models, but were primarily appreciated for their pastoral outreach and recruitment functions: kindergarten work was intended to provide for first communicants and catechists; prison and hospital chaplaincy to prove the parish’s diaconal track record; youth ministry to produce missionary effects and prevent the ‘drifting away’ of young people, etc. By contrast, the more recent discussions about these initiatives have reassessed their pastoral significance. They are now considered ‘places of church’,<sup>33</sup> they sometimes even form their own community within the larger parish, and in any case, they are independent places of pastoral activity that are no longer regarded as fulfilling a bridge function towards the so-called ‘core community’.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> On the following see Volkhard Krech, et al., “Typen religiöser Sozialformen und ihre Bedeutung für die Analyse religiösen Wandels in Deutschland (The pluralization of religious social forms in Germany since the 1950s),“ *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 65 (2013), pp. 51-71; as well as Patrick Heiser and Christian Ludwig (eds.), *Sozialformen der Religion im Wandel* (Wiesbaden: Springer vs, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Uta Pohl-Patalong, *Von der Ortskirche zu kirchlichen Orten. Ein Zukunftsmodell* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> This incidentally is an international finding: the ‘fresh expressions’ from Britain and the ‘pastorale d’engendrement’, which features in French discussions (Cf. Philippe Bacq and Christoph Theobald (eds.), *Une nouvelle chance pour L’Évangile. Vers une pastorale d’engendrement* (Bruxelles e.a.: Rélie, 2004),

These changes have so far been realized to various degrees in European local churches. Of course, the underlying theological programs are very diverse. As the above example of the pastoral plans of a large German diocese shows, the road towards realization in Germany is still long, and progress is slow due to several clearly identifiable reasons. Nonetheless the direction and the destination are clear, and they must be mentioned here as the first characteristic of a future-proof parish.

In the future, parishes will cover large territorial areas, but their diverse practical and social forms will ensure that the religiously autonomous subject can choose between coordination-platforms that are more organizational, interactive, or market-based, or a hybrid of these forms. This means it will be easier both for individuals and for groups to translate the Christian tradition into an individual form of transformation.<sup>35</sup>

For the providers of Catholic religiosity this entails a change in the leadership form and its underlying ecclesiological models. Two theological dispositions have, it seems, become obsolete: the ‘disposition of permanence’, which originated in the pre-conciliar stage of church history and defined the parish primarily as a canonical service station providing ecclesial means of grace; and the ‘disposition of proximity’, which, after Vatican II, conceived the local, ‘near’, and manageable community as a sphere of activity of civil society. Both these old models are overburdened because of the new spatial size and the decision-making behavior of religiously autonomous subjects.

The new situation that has emerged could be characterized as a disposition of the ‘occasion’ – a formula that reflects the paradoxical and labyrinthine social order of postmodernity, in which linear planning results are often more accidental than substantial.<sup>36</sup> The corresponding leadership model is that of the parochial network. In this theory, parishes must be modeled as thematic networks, in which ecclesial and secular actors together forge alliances and organize campaigns to realize common goals.

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also clearly accentuate this rejection of a pure bridge function of the newly emerging forms of pastoral presence.

<sup>35</sup> Thus Karl Gabriel, “Religion und Gesellschaft revidiert. Anmerkungen zu einer Religionssoziologie jenseits des Säkularisierungsparadigmas,” *Religion wahrnehmen (FS Karl-Fritz Daiber)*, Kristian Fechtner, et al. (eds.) (Marburg: Diagonal Marburg, 1996), pp. 139–145 (142).

<sup>36</sup> This, at least, is the argument of the German pastoral theologian Michael Schüssler in *Mit Gott neu beginnen. Die Zeitdimension von Theologie und Pastoral in ereignisbasierter Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2013); Schüssler refers for this to Dirk Baecker, *Studien zur nächsten Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013), who likewise presents the concept of a network.

These alliances are entered for a certain period of time and then dissolved. It should be noted that reliable, preferably professional, network management ensures the fitness for purpose and the cohesion of the whole. The underlying spatial concept is not so much territorial as ‘occasional’. This means that communal utilization of space rather than pastoral spatial control or spatial care is increasingly the objective. The individual social and practical forms that exist within the parish intersect with each other and point to each other for their identity. However, these forms also constitute individual starting points for the formation of thematic and personal cross-links with the secular space. The Catholic network parish, and this is entirely new, does not take itself as the point of reference for the secular space, but takes the secular space as a point of reference for itself. The goal is to contribute to the success of individual lives and of communities using the parish’s own religious competencies and offerings.<sup>37</sup>

*The Challenge of ‘Creative Reception’: Continuous Self-Evaluation through Live Contacts with Users and Non-Users*

In order to cultivate and further develop religious self-determination, this need should at least be respected and accepted by the religious entrepreneur. This is immediately evident and is even normal from an ethical perspective.

There are nevertheless two important challenges here: on the one hand, creating openness towards the plurality of ways in which religion and

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<sup>37</sup> The model of parochial networks is both old and new. It is old to the extent that, as Charles Taylor has pointed out, it already existed at the beginning of the primitive church and was even a crucial factor in the successful spread of Christianity in Antiquity. See also the similar points made, also in reference to Taylor, by Hans Joas, *Glaube als Option. Zukunftsmöglichkeiten des Christentums* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2013), pp. 201-218, esp. pp. 212f. What is new is that this model is oriented towards reality. See for a sociological perspective: Rainer Schützeichel, “Netzwerk-Religiosität. Über den Wandel religiöser Sozialformen,” *Sozialformen der Religion im Wandel*, Patrick Heiser and Christian Ludwig (eds.) (Wiesbaden: Springer vs, 2014), pp. 143-165; for the perspective of pastoral planning: Miriam Zimmer, Matthias Sellmann and Barbara Hucht, *Netzwerke in pastoralen Räumen. Wissenschaftliche Analysen – Fallstudien – Praktische Relevanz* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017); as well as Matthias Sellmann, “Von der ‘Gruppe’ zum ‘Netzwerk’. Große pastorale Räume als Chance für eine durchbrechende Vielfalt kirchlicher Sozialformen,” *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge*, Vol. 119, Ch. 3 (2010), pp. 19-23. See for the concept of background space see Sellmann, “Für eine Kirche, die Platz macht!.”

church can be used, will put a strain on a parish's Catholicism that is still dominant in many national churches. On the other hand, the reference to respect and acceptance is only a minimum requirement. It would be truly magnificent, and provide new perspectives for the future if diversity were not only tolerated in Catholic parishes, but also promoted and strategically utilized. Two academic technical terms can be adduced here as a heading for the reflections that follow: 'socially conscious pastoral ministry' and 'user innovation'.

First a general remark on the diversity of religious styles. In recent years, debates between sociologists of pastoral ministry have given rise to the criterion of 'social consciousness'. In 2005, data were collected systematically for the first time in Germany, taking into account the most recent sociological understanding of inequality, specifically the insight that modern life is no longer differentiated according to stratum and class, but to so-called *milieus*. Depending on the definition, milieus are groups of like-minded people that hold similar basic values on similar issues of everyday aesthetics, thus marking their belonging and delimitation in cultural space.<sup>38</sup> Milieus are not groups in the conventional sense of mutual perception and mobilization, but they are retrospective reconstructions by sociological observers, who perceive partially remarkable similarities in behavior from outside. With regard to the analysis of so-called 'social gravitation' within these milieus it can be documented, for instance, that 'conservatives' are disproportionately likely to take their vacation in the mountains, to insist on good manners, have heavy furniture in their homes, read supra-regional daily newspapers, and listen to classical music on the radio. Why? All these expressions in the field of everyday aesthetics result from a social gravitational force that could approximatively be described as 'care and respect for what exists'.<sup>39</sup> Of course, this gravitational force

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. As an introduction Stefan Hradil, *Sozialstrukturanalyse in einer fortgeschrittenen Gesellschaft. Von Klassen und Schichten zu Lagen und Milieus* (Opladen: Springer vs, 1987). The first systematic study of an ecclesial milieu is Carsten Wippermann and Isabel Magalhes, *Religiöse und kirchliche Orientierungen in den Sinus-Milieus* (München/Heidelberg: MDG, 2005). [http://www.mdg-online.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/PDF-Dateien/MDG-Milieuhandbuch\\_Religi%C3%B6se\\_und\\_kirchliche\\_Orientierungen\\_in\\_den\\_Sinus-Milieus\\_2005.pdf](http://www.mdg-online.de/fileadmin/Redaktion/PDF-Dateien/MDG-Milieuhandbuch_Religi%C3%B6se_und_kirchliche_Orientierungen_in_den_Sinus-Milieus_2005.pdf) (accessed August, 2017). It is important to note that the concept of milieu used here is different from the more famous church historical notion of the 'Catholic milieu' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>39</sup> This is just an example; for an extensive sociological and theological analysis of the milieu in Germany see Matthias Sellmann, *Zuhören – austauschen – vorschlagen. Entdeckungen pastoraltheologischer Milieuforschung* (Würzburg: Ech-ter, 2012). Studies of milieus exist for many European societies; see for

also gives rise to the social distinctions of the milieu in question: in the case of ‘the conservatives’ for instance the clear dislike of anything related to the masses, anything vulgar, banal, or hedonistic.

The insights of this kind of milieu research entail a clear critique of the sociological theory of individualization, according to which modern choice societies show ever fewer collectively coherent and communicable lifestyle patterns, so that every subject builds his or her own paradigmatic world. Milieu theory contends that people’s own value systems and choices in everyday aesthetics may be subjectively experienced as highly individual, but are nevertheless predictable to a great degree from an external viewpoint.

It is particularly difficult to accept these findings for one’s own religious behavior. In Germany, the findings of a first study on the church, followed by a number of other studies, turn out to be hard to digest.<sup>40</sup> One’s religiosity, of all things, appears to belong impenetrably to the intimate sphere, where it is jealously guarded, so that it seems to be something unmistakably individual. Is it really possible that religious needs and individual practices too are filtered by social gravitational forces, just like the choice of vacation destinations or political parties?

Relevant studies have done precisely that. To stay with the above example: in their style of church use, ‘conservatives’ are disproportionately likely in a statistically significant way to prefer great cathedrals, solemn masses, organ concerts, established bodies and sophisticated priests, while clearly disliking experimental liturgies, preaching female parish ministers, or motorcycle pilgrimages.

Moreover, it is possible to show that ordinary, everyday parish life excludes very many milieus and their related religious styles. This comes as a shock to many parishes’ cherished self-image as open and accessible

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instance, <http://www.sinus-institut.de/sinus-loesungen/sinus-meta-milieu-weltweit/> (accessed August, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Carsten Wippermann and Marc Calmbach, *Wie ticken Jugendliche? Sinus Milieustudie U27: Lebenswelten von katholischen Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen. Grundorientierung, Vergemeinschaftung, Engagement, Einstellung zu Religion und Kirche vor dem Hintergrund der Sinus-Milieus* (Düsseldorf/Aachen: Bund der Deutschen Katholischen Jugend & Misereor, 2008); as well as Carsten Wippermann, *Milieus in Bewegung – Werte, Sinn, Religion und Ästhetik in Deutschland. Forschungsergebnisse für die pastorale und soziale Arbeit* (Würzburg: Echter, 2011). Very recently, a ‘lifestyle typology’ tool has been launched as an open source tool, see “Typologie der Lebensführung: Sozialstruktur mit Lebensstilen,” <https://lebensfuehrungstypologie.wordpress.com/> (accessed August, 2017).



to all. It has led to the diagnosis of a narrow milieu-based church.<sup>41</sup> It can also tentatively be concluded that the church consists of more than a number of core communities; and increasingly the assessment is gaining ground that other practical and social forms of the church (cf. above section 1.1) can also refer to and express other social gravitational forces. Precisely an enlarged pastoral space can weaken the dominance of local parish Catholicism and create intermediate spaces,<sup>42</sup> which allow for greater Catholic diversity.

The extensive research that focuses on this subject can only be hinted at here. It is clearly aimed at a future manifestation of Catholic parishes in which a specific, normative monoculture of one particular milieu is replaced by a highly valued diversity of individual styles of Catholicism.

This finding gives rise to a more challenging interpretation under the heading of user innovation. Ironically, this term comes from economic science, whose potential role as an equal partner of theology has yet to be discovered. According to the latest insights in business studies, successful commercial enterprises are characterized by the tendency to view the increasing heterogeneity in the demand for their products not as troublesome, but as a resource for innovation. The implied strategy shift, which is as simple as it is effective, is no longer to organize value creation pro-creatively, but co-creatively.<sup>43</sup> New ideas for the production process are no longer paradigmatically developed by research centers that speculate about the requirements of customers 'outside', but through integration of customer knowledge into the ongoing creative process. The integration of

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Matthias Sellmann, "Milieuerengung als Gottesverengung," in *Lebendige Seelsorge*, Vol. 57, Ch. 4 (2006), pp. 284-289. Marius Stelzer's research on the training behavior of pastoral professions has shown how strongly it is marked by a self-enforcing cycle. He has demonstrated that milieu-based professions such as the priesthood or lay pastoral ministry are increasingly capable of recruiting only similar people, and they even structurally embed this in training regulations or internal cultures. See Marius Stelzer, *Wie lernen Seelsorger? Milieuspezifische Weiterbildung als strategisches Instrument kirchlicher Personalentwicklung (Angewandte Pastoralforschung)* (Würzburg: Echter, 2014). It is to be hoped that comparative studies will be carried out to see to what extent this finding of 'narrowing of the milieu' can be observed in other local churches too, e.g., the Netherlands, France or Italy.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. The program of a 'communicative pastoral ministry of the intermediate space', which Michael Ebertz developed in the late 1990s: Michael N. Ebertz, *Zum Umbruch der religiösen Landschaft* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1997), pp. 140ff.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ralf Reichwald and Frank Piller, *Interaktive Wertschöpfung. Open Innovation, Individualisierung und neue Formen der Arbeitsteilung* (Wiesbaden: Springer vs, 2009).

customers into the processes of innovation and development is the central focus. The art of doing business is no longer the skillful prediction of what consumers will be buying tomorrow, but the skillful leveraging of the hidden knowledge that is already there but is not actually being used.

Of course, this is only a heading that covers a wide range of economic intelligence that has not definitively been spelled out as relational intelligence – incidentally this is true not only for the customers ‘out-house’ but also for the building of an ‘in-house’ entrepreneurial culture as a driver of innovation.

Here too, all we can do is offer a brief glance at the enormous scope of this paradigm shift. The analogy between co-creative management and a culturally learning church in Christoph Theobald’s ‘modus procedendi’ (cf. above section 1.2) is theologically electrifying. It is surprisingly easy to read central ecclesiological themes of Vatican II using the hermeneutic of ‘interactive value creation’.<sup>44</sup>

But operative learning courses are even more promising than hermeneutical transfers.<sup>45</sup> Thus there is the possibility, for instance, of recruiting so-called ‘lead users’ for pastoral processes of innovation. This is truly a telling example and an additional characteristic of a modern Catholic Church.

‘Lead users’ or ‘lead customers’ are dissatisfied customers. Their great advantage is that they are engaging neither in boycott nor in unproductive grousing. Instead, they are transforming their dissatisfaction into solutions. In doing so they reveal needs of which the mass market is as yet unaware – they hold the key, therefore to improving products and processes. Typical and well-known examples are the stories of the secretary Betty Nesmith Graham or the pilot Robert Plath. Betty Graham was an amateur painter and was unhappy with the fact that there was no elegant way of

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Matthias Sellmann: “‘Verbreiterung der Löserbasis’ – Ein neuer Blick auf das kirchliche Ehrenamt,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, 3 (2014), pp. 138-143; and Idem., “Kirche als Ergebnis interaktiver Wertschöpfung. Innovationstheologische Seitenblicke auf Betriebswirtschaftslehre und Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil,” *Autorität und Rezeption in der Kirche*, Markus Knapp and Thomas Söding (eds.) (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Wien: Herder Verlag, 2014), pp. 389-404. On this subject see also CIC 1983 § 212.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Florian Sobetzko, *Kirche Neu Gründen. Kairologische Pastoralentwicklung zwischen Krise und Gelegenheit (Angewandte Pastoralforschung 5)* (Würzburg: 2018, forthcoming); as well as Sobetzko/Sellmann: *Gründer-Handbuch* and, with literary poignancy: Florian Sobetzko, *Bodybuilding für den Leib Christi. Lead Customer und Innovationsprozesse in der Kirche*. <https://www.euaengel.de/ausgabe-2-2014/veraenderung-in-der-organisation-kirche-und-die-freude-des-evangeliums/bodybuilding-fuer-den-leib-christi/> (accessed August, 2017).

correcting typos. On one occasion, she therefore brought white paint into the office, thus inventing an early form of TippEx or Whiteout. Robert Plath was unhappy having to lug around bags at railway stations, and at some stage spontaneously fixed his children's rollerblades to the bottom of his suitcase. In doing so he had invented the trolley bag or rolling suitcase.

The reception of diverse styles of church utilization gets a clearly challenging and creative character when the dissatisfaction of church members is productively used to renew the forms of the Catholic Church. There are secular examples of how this might work. Thus, studies<sup>46</sup> recommend idea contests, market exposure in unorthodox surroundings, systematic feedback and complaint management, research of stopgap solutions, targeted contacting of former users etc. What is needed are people who are already willing to try out unexpected and innovative manifestations of church.

The summary of this section's proposition is therefore as follows: it is an important mark of a future-proof parish that the diversity of personal interpretations of the Catholic tradition are not only enabled, but also stimulated and strategically harnessed.

*The Challenge of 'Participation': A Transparent and Intelligent Process and Commitment Structures*

Religious self-determination not only needs to be asserted and claimed – like all cultural needs, it also needs to show itself, contribute, develop. In order to facilitate this, it is essential to have structures that foster a participatory process and support commitment.

When this issue is explored in greater detail, it becomes clear that this demand for a culture of consistent participatory processes within the church's various forms of presence is obvious. Nonetheless, I would like to argue for it in some detail. Starting with Kant and the subsequent developments, participation – together with synonyms such as involvement, inclusion, co-decision etc. – has been identified as the norm in society. This is true both materially and formally. Matching individual and collective

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<sup>46</sup> Eric von Hippel may count as an important researcher. See Eric von Hippel, "Lead users: a source of novel product concepts," *Management science* 32, 7 (1986), pp. 791-805; and *Ibid.*, "Democratizing innovation: The evolving phenomenon of user innovation," *Journal für Betriebswirtschaft* 55.1 (2005), pp. 63-78. See also the video tutorials: Open and User Innovation, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxvd4obm8XM>; and: Lead User Studies – a series of 6 videos with case studies on lead user strategies, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNKrX1QxN6U&list=PLD4C0E9AEDF085119> (accessed August, 2017).

decision-making happens through experiences, processes, and effects of participation, and this is required for the further development of modernity as a project of living together. Political philosophy demonstrates that the norms of communal, good, just, fulfilled, and creative life are nothing other than the norm of participation in life.<sup>47</sup>

This brief reflection already points clearly to the fact that it is not possible to secure future sustainability for parishes without the creation of participatory structures. The more overtly forms of church presence undermine the standard of participation that is the norm in modern societies, and the more plausibly they succeed in these efforts, the more certain it becomes that the acceptance of the church by society will implode. There are good grounds for viewing participation as the litmus test for social acceptability, and this is also true – at any rate in recent years – for religious organizations. It is beyond doubt that because of this lack of participation such organizations get involved in characteristic conflicts, which entail for the Catholic Church both doctrinal and canonical tension – but this does not dispense them from the endeavor.<sup>48</sup> This will have to suffice in this section about the discursive horizon of this characteristic of participation.

If we look at what a participatory parish might look like from the perspective of pastoral planning, two important dimensions come to the fore. On the one hand, it is necessary to optimize participation in the parish's entire decision-making culture and bodies; on the other hand, a structure of opportunities for involvement must be created, which permits volunteers to become engaged actively in the church's local mission.

The first point in particular involves deep-rooted canonical issues. It will ultimately not be possible to avoid a reform of the way in which rights of access, participation and decision-making are guaranteed. It is simply not possible to explain to modern, religiously autonomous people why they should invest their leisure time in meetings and activities without having any substantial influence on the decisions that are made, or why they should deal with an entity that can, on the basis of a change of personnel or simply of attitude, revise decisions that have already been taken. This includes the entire synodal process of a diocese. It is increasingly clear, incidentally, that this call for reform of ecclesial decision-making

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<sup>47</sup> On the following subject see Elisa Kröger (red.), *Wie lernt Kirche Partizipation? Theologische Reflexion und praktische Erfahrungen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2016); darin Matthias Sellmann, "Wie lernt Kirche Partizipation – und von wem? Kirchenentwicklung als Ausdruck von Gesellschaftsentwicklung," *Ibid.*, pp. 403-422.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-419.

structures is being adopted by the Church's own staff, and has also reached the clergy. The oft-repeated complaint that too few applicants are presenting themselves for training for positions in the Church is certainly linked to this problem.

It is therefore a characteristic of a future-proof parish to have a large, diverse range of opportunities for consultation and co-decision-making. It is doubtful that the usual parish bodies such as the pastoral council and the finance council will continue to be dominant. In any case, there will have to be innovations in the institutional culture. The guiding idea here must be that the thoroughly Catholic principle of subsidiarity must be enshrined more strongly and protected more clearly in the individual processes.<sup>49</sup>

Under current canonical circumstances this could mean, for instance, that clerics communicate that they commit themselves in a credible and at least symbolically enforceable way to communal resolutions. This might mean many things: that they are prepared to learn new consultation formats (with regard to time and competency); that more use is made of fixed terms of office, as is the case in religious orders; that higher-level institutions offer greater legal protection to local players in conflict situations, such as a change of pastors; that greater use is made of learning outcomes in the global church, such as 'Small Christian Communities'<sup>50</sup> or the American concept of 'stewardship',<sup>51</sup> the same is true e.g., for social-charitable experiences from participatory urban development, or from innovative forms of participation in the social sphere; that women are given significantly more decision-making powers on all levels; that teams of volunteers get leadership responsibility for the community; that membership of bodies is upgraded from volunteer work to a part-time job; that effective chairing of meetings belongs to the obligatory competency and the training program of leading office holders, etc.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> On this subject see the canon lawyer and systematic theologian Michael Böhnke, *Kirche in der Glaubenskrisse. Eine pneumatische Ekklesiologie* (Freiburg, et al.: Verlag Herder, 2013). His main question is on the foundation of the church hierarchy's authority.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Kröger, *Wie lernt Kirche Partizipation?*, pp. 299-365; and Christian Hennecke and Gabriele Viecens (eds.), *Der Kirchenkurs. Wege zu einer Kirche der Beteiligung. Ein Praxisbuch* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Arnd Franke, *Stewardship. Das bedeutendste Pastoralkonzept in den USA als Inspiration für den deutschen Kontext* (Münster: 2018, forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup> On this subject in general see also the practical reports in Martin Klaedtke, et al. (ed.), *Praxis Partizipation. Voraussetzungen und Wege zu einer Kirche der Beteiligung* (Würzburg: Echter, 2016).

These participation rights that mainly target internal interests must be combined with a variety of opportunities for commitment. The American concept of ‘stewardship’ includes the notion that it is important to gain ‘ownership’, which can also be regarded as joint responsibility, even ‘leadership’ for the secular interests within the parish concerns.

A lot of work has already been done in churches in this respect. It has been recognized, although not yet everywhere, that the motives for commitment to church activities no longer include simply being a kind of ‘helper’ to the pastor. There are clear findings on modern volunteer management, on corporate volunteering, and on the mobilization of volunteers in civil society, which together impinge on a pronounced ecclesial culture of commitment. The mobilizing, motivating, and well-organized coordination of commitment count among the most obvious characteristics of a future-proof parish.

Specific identifiers in this context include: offering formation for volunteer coordinators; using management systems and their basic insights;<sup>53</sup> implementing measures for diagnosing potential; surveying motives and the corresponding modification of structures of opportunity;<sup>54</sup> using transparent ways of advanced training to improve work profiles; developing a feedback culture including volunteers (e.g., annual performance reviews with agreed targets, quality coaching, monitoring procedures); using digital cooperation tools; matching systems; using targeted recruitment campaigns etc.

The third characteristic of a future-proof parish can be summarized as follows: If religious self-determination wants implementation on the level of influence and action, this desire for religious self-efficacy must be met actively and effectively on the level of participation, decision-making, and commitment.

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. Carola Reifenhäuser and Oliver Reifenhäuser, *Praxishandbuch Freiwilligenmanagement* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2013); with the practical application for pastoral ministry in Stefan Moosburger, “Charisma und Kirchenentwicklung oder: Wie geht eine Charisma-first-Strategie konkret?,” *Lebendige Seelsorge* 6 (2014), pp. 403-408.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. e.g., Theresa Reinke and Christine Zimmerhof, *Ehrenamtliches Engagement im Bistum Speyer: Eine Typologie zu Motivation, Merkmalen und Rahmenbedingungen* (zap: working paper no. 6, [http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP\\_Workingpaper\\_6\\_Reinke\\_Zimmerhof.pdf](http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP_Workingpaper_6_Reinke_Zimmerhof.pdf)); and Idem., *Ein Kompetenzmodell für Hauptamtliche als Beitrag zur Förderung ehrenamtlichen Engagements in der Gemeindepastoral im Bistum Speyer* (zap: working paper 7, [http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP\\_Workingpaper\\_7\\_Reinke\\_Zimmerhof.pdf](http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP_Workingpaper_7_Reinke_Zimmerhof.pdf)) (accessed August, 2017).

*The Challenge of 'Professionalism': High-Quality Leadership and Organization*

Although groundbreaking, Niklas Luhmann's work on religion failed to deal with one particular analytical dilemma that becomes especially apparent when we speak about organization and professionalism from the perspective of the sociology of religion. On the one hand, Luhmann has shown that religious communication, because of its strong individual nature and the impossibility of factually verifying it, is so prone to misunderstanding that it must be secured more clearly through organization and convention than any other area.<sup>55</sup> On the other hand, it is just as clear that religious convictions, in particular, are likely to resist organization.<sup>56</sup> The tension between these two things gives rise to a dynamic that has fueled the discourse on this matter until today. This entails the peculiar situation whereby religions lose what is peculiar to them because they yield to the pressure to organize or they end up with nothing left of their own because they evade organization.

The problem culminates in the question of professionalism. It can be shown here that the most religions can hope for is to develop untypical organizations.<sup>57</sup> Religious professional roles are untypical in the sense that they can only be formalized up to a point. A priest has a vocation, not 'just' a profession; the same is expected to be true of full-time lay employees. Again, the positions seem diametrically opposed: on the one hand it is precisely because of the fact that the role of the priest cannot be reduced to economics that it is capable of inspiring great trust. The risk of this personal investment is rewarded, so to speak, because the beneficiaries of the priest's work are prepared to enter into an exceptionally precarious intimate communication with him – for instance by making a general confession or by telling him their religious experiences. On the other hand, it is becoming clear, ever more painfully, that religious ministers experience identity stress when congregations fail to confirm them in this

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<sup>55</sup> Thus Danièle Hervieu-Léger has shown that the high virtuoso experiences of pilgrims involve a need for social validation and expression: Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion en mouvement: le pèlerin et le converti* (Paris: Edition Flammarion, 1999).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Niklas Luhmann: "Die Organisierbarkeit von Religionen und Kirchen," *Religion im Umbruch*, Jakobus Wössner (ed.) (Stuttgart: Enke Ferdinand, 1972), pp. 245-285; Cf. on the subject in general Hartmann Tyrell, et al. (ed.), *Religion als Kommunikation* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Martin Petzke and Hartmann Tyrell, "Religiöse Organisationen," *Handbuch Organisationstypen*, Maja Apelt and Veronika Tacke (eds.) (Wiesbaden: Springer vs, 2012), pp. 275-306.

special role, and increasingly treat them simply as religious service providers, whom they might otherwise wish a fulfilling civilian life.<sup>58</sup>

The case becomes even more complex when we realize that the churches in liberal European societies have increasingly lost the status that gave them unquestioned authority and – what might be called – *auto-poiesis*. The crisis perception of the institutional churches can be trenchantly summarized as follows, using the conceptual pair, ‘institution’ and ‘organization’:<sup>59</sup> the churches are faced with the revolutionary challenge of no longer being ‘institutions’, even though they still feel and act in this way; and of having to become religious ‘organizations’, even though they have no experience of this and are as yet unable to perceive themselves in this way. A mode change is required in the internal culture, from ‘power/potestas’ to ‘leadership/auctoritas’. The condition of institutional Catholicism, currently experienced as unsatisfactory and ineffective, thus has its grounding in the discrepancy between self-perception and outside perception. The Church continues to stage herself according to the customary mode of the ‘institution’, whereas secular public opinion is treating her according to the mode of an ‘organization’. Specifically, this means that from the outside, people explicitly expect service provision, quality, self-regulation, transparency, compliance with norms, customer focus. Because the Church is hardly accustomed to this, the result is noticeable distress caused by the transformation. Thus, the outside perception of the Church as an organization appears to degrade it.<sup>60</sup>

It is only very slowly being realized that proactively engaging with this cultural learning experience can provide new opportunities for the Church. This does not mean selling out her essentially religious mission, but it can very evidently lead to developing this mission further. Even

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. On this topic the wide-ranging empirical study by Klaus Baumann, et al. (ed.), *Zwischen Spirit und Stress. Die Seelsorgenden in den deutschen Diözesen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> It must be noted that the reference here is to ‘institution’ as in Arnold Gehlen’s concept of ‘background fulfillment’ and ‘organization’ as in Luhmann’s concept of ‘uncertainty reduction through decision’; see for a more extensive treatment Sellmann, “Katholische Kirche heute,” pp. 119-123.

<sup>60</sup> An international analysis would be valuable here. The proposition outlined above suggests that this distress, caused by cultural transformation, emerges particularly in two types of local church: on the one hand in churches that were acting in a highly institutional way and that are now vulnerable to resentment – for instance probably the Polish, Spanish or Irish churches; and on the other hand, churches that were propped up by strong organizational resources provided by the state and that are now vulnerable to an identity crisis – such as the German or Austrian churches.



though this wider context cannot be further explored here, it must at least be mentioned that good organization leads to self-limitation of control claims, and that precisely this encourages religious individual interpretation. To put it in system-theoretical terms: organization guarantees the possibility of exclusion, and this must be assessed at least as a negative indicator of freedom.<sup>61</sup>

Karl Gabriel has made a plausible proposal on how this broad theoretical context can be structured. He has shown that churches must follow a threefold logic in their organization. There must be a logic of influence, aimed at society, which shows externally to what extent the Church has adopted the mind-set of modern culture. There must be a logic of membership, aimed at the faithful that internally shows the advantages of strengthening religious communities. Finally, there must be a logic of origins that shows programmatically that the Church is continuing to be consistent with her own tradition and her given system of meaning.<sup>62</sup>

Organizations, of course, cannot act – only their officers can do that. And these are usually professionals. The immense transition of church identity and relevance can also be read as a huge challenge to church leadership. In addition to the abovementioned ways in which the church situates herself in modern society, there are organizational challenges, such as parish mergers or coping with the shortage of priests, which makes church leadership very demanding.

Lively formation activities are ongoing.<sup>63</sup> A fundamental background curriculum is provided by Benedikt Jürgens' research. He leads the 'Arbeitsstelle für kirchliche Führungsforschung' (Center for Research in Church Leadership) in Bochum. Jürgens has broken down the three aspects proposed by Gabriel into three fields of competency and has thus developed an overall approach for church leaders, particularly in the higher echelons of church organizations. He has distinguished three implementations, 'interpretation', 'positioning', and 'management'. Ecclesial 'interpretation' shapes the difference between immanence and transcendence in the complex reality of the Church.<sup>64</sup> It primarily relates to the

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Maren Lehmann, *Inklusion: Beobachtungen einer sozialen Form am Beispiel von Religion und Kirche* (Frankfurt am Main: Humanities Online, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Karl Gabriel, *Modernisierung als Organisation von Religion*, Idem., et al. (ed.), *Institution – Organisation – Bewegung. Sozialformen der Religion im Wandel* (Opladen: Springer vs, 2009), pp. 19-37, from 31f.

<sup>63</sup> See for Germany the work of Benedikt Jürgens and Tabea Diek: *Professionalisierung von Führung. Qualifizierungsangebote für leitende Pfarrer in den deutschen Bistümern* (zap: working paper no. 4, [http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP\\_Workingpaper\\_4\\_Juergens\\_Diek.pdf](http://www.zap-bochum.de/content/ZAP_Workingpaper_4_Juergens_Diek.pdf)) (accessed August, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, no. 8.

Church's logic or origins, and activates theological competency. Ecclesial 'positioning' shapes the difference between Church and world. It primarily relates to the Church's logic of influence, and activates communication competency. Thirdly, ecclesial 'management' shapes the difference between the Church and her particular organizational form (*compago visibilis*). This implementation of leadership primarily relates to the Church's logic of membership and requires organizational competency.

Interpreting, positioning, and managing as three meta-competencies are then concretized in clear formation programs. From the perspective of theology, it must be made clear that the Church strives for transcendence; from that of communication, the Church's profile in relation to other organizations in society must be drawn up; and from that of management, reliable and binding framework conditions must be developed.<sup>65</sup>

This brief glance at one example of ongoing practical research should be sufficient to demonstrate that professional leadership will be an important characteristic of a future-proof parish. Future-proof parishes are parishes that are led clearly and transparently; they are led on the basis of accessible structures and of a participation-driven internal culture, not on that of charisma or goodwill. Such parishes open up and guarantee the freedom of interpretation upon which sophisticated religious self-determination depends, precisely because it stimulates a framework that channels the chaos of exuberant religious claims. The parish itself depends on similar frames that are set from above, i.e., by diocesan leadership, so that it too can utilize the free subsidiary scope it has as an organization. A lot will also have to change in this area of central management.<sup>66</sup>

The characteristic to be distilled from this is as follows: The freedom of religious self-determination is guaranteed and signaled by high-quality leadership and organization.

*The Challenge of 'Communicating': Impact, Transparency, and the Ability to Form Alliances That Correspond with Possibilities*

If religious organizations wish to be providers of infrastructure for religious self-determination, they must operate in the field of communica-

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<sup>65</sup> On this subject in general see Benedikt Jürgens, *Führungskompetenz für den deutschsprachigen Katholizismus. Projektbericht der Arbeitsstelle für Kirchliche Führungsforschung* (zap: working paper 9, forthcoming). Also available in English, Idem., *Leadership Skills for German-speaking Catholicism* (Bochum: 2017).

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Thomas Suermann de Nocker, *Anmerkungen zur Steuerungslogik der Kirchenentwicklung – Organisationsentwicklung in der Kirche aus der betriebswirtschaftlichen Perspektive strategischer Veränderungsprozesse* (2016). <http://tsdn.info/?download=1020> (accessed August, 2017).

tions using the four validity claims of understanding-oriented communication that Jürgen Habermas has formulated. A communicative presence enhances the likelihood of achieving continuing consensus if it is comprehensible, true, correct, and authentic. The criterion of ‘comprehensibility’ relates to formal language; the criterion of ‘truth’ to the objectivity of the facts asserted; the criterion of ‘correctness’ to the relational level, and the criterion of ‘authenticity’ or ‘truthfulness’ to the subjective inner world.

Habermas has deployed this scheme against an alternative type of social action, which he calls strategic action, and which is primarily characterized by the fact that the opportunities for mutual access to communication are asymmetrically distributed.<sup>67</sup>

Habermas’ concept has sparked off intense debate, the length and scope of which at least permits us to think that he has provided a valid starting point for further understanding. What is certain is that his primary achievement has been to identify the prominence of communicative standards, particularly in systemically differentiated and democratic societies.

The sociology of religion has established that religious convictions become fragile if they must adhere to the conditions of systemic logic, primarily because their symbolical medium of communication – ‘faith’ – is so easy to assert and so difficult to validate socially. To put it differently: the barriers of convertibility between faith and other mediums of communication are so low that they seem interchangeable. At the same time, this is also the advantage of the religious system: it must set comparatively few preconditions for participation, and can therefore include more roles than any other functional system in modern society.<sup>68</sup>

If we combine these two concepts, which are rather disparate in their theoretical backgrounds, we may conclude, with regard to the future sustainability of parishes, that they too can make relatively high cultural validity claims, as long as these are accompanied by excellent communication. Comprehensibility, truth, correctness, and authenticity can also be highlighted from a religious perspective – and ideally not as a burdensome obligation, but in proactive utilization of aesthetic, technical, and content-related possibilities.

This opens quite challenging perspectives that point technically to the whole field of good and effective public relations. No doubt one has to

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<sup>67</sup> On this subject in general see Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, Vols. 1-2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1981).

<sup>68</sup> This is a summary of Niklas Luhmann’s famous argument in *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, André Kieserling (ed.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000).

contend that many church actors still stand at the beginning of this endeavor. Let us look briefly at some of our key, specific concepts:

‘Comprehensibility’ is a cliché, but one borne out by standard church-related surveys, that the linguistic code of church representatives is often described with the uncomplimentary adjectives ‘boring and long-winded’, ‘unnecessarily complicated’ or ‘formulaic’.<sup>69</sup>

‘Truth’ has proven inadequate, particularly in the context of church scandals concerning the abuse of vulnerable children, embezzlement of funds, or the abuse of employees, communications, and especially PR handling of crises.

‘Correctness’ deals with the level of commitment. Surveys show that it is always experienced on the personal level, but much less so on the organizational level. The core values of dioceses, church authorities and offices testify to an anonymity and a distance, which is not unusual, but which should nonetheless be changed given the Church’s generally bad image. It is particularly evident that the competency of pastoral campaigns is little used.<sup>70</sup>

‘Authenticity’ concerns the entire world of cultural agents of persuasion – politics, NGOs, art, but also companies with specific branding strategies – and is experiencing a sharp learning curve in this field. This is due to the extraordinary rise of social networks and decentralized communication in the digital space. Paradoxically, this is making authenticity a requirement of mass communication. The motto might be: if digital content is to be experienced as authentic, it must be well-planned and well-orchestrated. Religious organizations especially are confronted with their limits in this respect because their credibility is substantially linked to personal trust in the genuineness of the actors in lead roles.

However, great dangers almost always also have the potential for surprising communication gains. As this last aspect of ‘authenticity’ is so new, volatile, and risky for the churches, and also because it, in a way, en-

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<sup>69</sup> Cf. The charge expressed by communication consultant Erik Flügge, which almost immediately became a bestseller in the German-speaking world: Erik Flügge, *Der Jargon der Betroffenheit. Wie Kirche an ihrer Sprache verreckt* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 2016).

<sup>70</sup> It is noticeable, for instance, that many organizations that are comparable to the church (like the armed forces, the national railways, or labor unions) depend on costly employer branding campaigns focusing on the relatively small generation Y that is currently coming onto the labor market – and how low-key similar church initiatives are performing in comparison. On pastoral campaigning, see Michael Swiatkowski, “Pastorales Campaigning. Die Öffentlichkeit elektrisieren,” *Lebendige Seelsorge*, Vol. 67, Ch. 5 (2016), pp. 344-349.

compasses the previous three criteria, a number of further reflections on this subject are appropriate.

The newest means of digital communication, such as Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, Instagram etc. have definitively replaced the traditional pattern of supplier-receiver communication. More and more voices are predicting the end of linear, media-based communication. The future will see fewer formats that synchronize media consumers in time, content, or medium. The experience of international or national ‘camp fires’ around which all the world gathers will remain the prerogative of exceptional events such as football world championships or the European Song Contest. Apart from that, different audiences will be segmented per medium, or an audience within a particular theme will be differentiated according to time (through streaming and time shifting). The fundamental stimulus of media consumption has also become pluralistic. In addition to the familiar need for self-affirmation through media content, there are now also the motives of identity management (through self-presentation) and the experience of self-efficacy (through traffic).

For the providers of media content, this means above all two things: they have to adjust to the specific logic of digital formats and mediums; and they have to be logistically prepared for the fact that communication only starts after the content has been broadcast. Perhaps the most strenuous learning process for social networks is that many other people want to participate in the transmission – by posting questions or comments or by sharing or embedding messages. Precisely this user-generated content offers opportunities for distribution that cannot be improved linearly, particularly for communication that claims to be authentic.

First-hand analyses have shown that the conceptual understanding of religious authenticity is changing.<sup>71</sup> The digital researcher Jan Kuhn has condensed the need for innovation, including for faith communication, in the following pairs of adjectives: authentic and personal; dialogical and multiplied; diversified and near; delocalized and time-shifted.<sup>72</sup> These adjectives can, for instance, also be given specific application in a parish by becoming trained on how to do good content marketing. This consists of three interrelated implementations: information (hygiene marketing), consultation/assistance (hub marketing), and entertainment/ enthusiasm

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Ansgar Kreuzer and Christoph Niemand (eds.), *Authentizität – Modewort, Leitbild, Konzept. Theologische und humanwissenschaftliche Erkundungen zu einer schillernden Kategorie* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Jan Kuhn, “Authentizität muss man gut inszenieren,” *Lebendige Seelsorge*, Vol. 67, Ch. 5 (2016), pp. 335-339.

(hero marketing). These concepts may look strange, but they are clearly pointing to the way forward.

The following picture emerges when this is translated to the parish: as an informative presence, it should have a well-maintained home page as a starting point and a reliable, always up-to-date signal of accessibility. This home page should also incidentally demonstrate the parish's capacity to form alliances in the secular sphere. As a consultancy presence, serial tutorials could be displayed, for instance in the form of videos featuring the different groups in the parish that organize events; or as a series of images on the history of the parish church; or as a weekly presentation by the lectors of what next Sunday's readings mean to them personally. Finally, we come to the hero dimension – surely the least well-known aspect of church media presence so far. This should attract and involve the viewer emotionally; this is where enthusiasm and faith are communicated, as well as the advantages of being an active part of a strong community. The hero content of a parish could include testimonials, for instance from the altar boys as they return excited from their summer trip; or a series of spiritually inspiring images on Instagram, with a request to everyone to post powerful images of their own; or a campaign organized by the parish together with others to combat poverty in the neighborhood.

We have every reason to be excited about the communicative energy and imagination of parishes once they have discovered the digital world. The resulting characteristic of a future-proof parish is: It uses the opportunities that media communication presents in order to be transparent in its goals and strategies, to relieve staff pressure, and to become capable of forming alliances with non-church organizations.

### *Brief Intermezzo*

Two questions might justifiably be asked at this point in the implementation of the program. First, where must the motivation for all these partially quite drastic change measures come from? And second, is there a method of putting these findings, which we know are still far from being realized, into practice? The first question touches on the apparent deficiency that we are proposing an ambitious program of change that may even be convincing on a conceptual level, but that does not involve faith, relationship with God, or the spiritual life. How can the proposal be safeguarded from becoming social engineering? Should the transformation of the Church not be a different process than the transformation of a business or a government agency?

In other words, it is not enough simply to list the advantages of a future-proof parish, motivational and methodical qualities must also be in-

cluded. Both aspects have, in fact, already been alluded to – the first in the theological reflection on the ‘*modus procedendi*’, and the second in the section on ‘professionalism’. Nonetheless, they are more explicitly addressed in the following two challenges.

*The Challenge of ‘Articulation’: Attractive and Inspiring Performances at All Levels*

The sociologist Hans Joas has made what is surely one of the most important contributions to the irreplaceable and enormous significance of religious semantics and presence in modern knowledge societies. I am referring to his theory of the development of value adoption. There is no space to explain this at length here, but it is necessary to include a concise discussion of it. It directly demonstrates the importance of requiring specific religious articulation.

Joas shows that value adoption does not arise from cognition or opinion formation; nor from ethical convictions or the effects of socialization. Of course all these factors do contribute. But according to Joas, experiences of self-transcendence and self-commitment are decisive. In these experiences, the subject is itself ‘seized’; it does not actively generate them herself; and both their impact and their interpretation take place afterwards. Joas has explained that such experiences of self-transcendence can be had, for instance, by observing beautiful scenery, in sports, sex, love, and art, but also in routine, violence, or demagoguery.<sup>73</sup>

It is an important aspect of his theory that these are basic experiences that require a consistent interpretation. It is precisely here that religious semantics can show its potential. According to Joas, religions are specialized in expressing experiences of self-gain through self-transcendence. It is precisely for this purpose that they have a store of concepts, teachings, rituals, reflections, tips, images, and stories’.

This is the dimension of articulation. It fills the empty space between ‘experiencing’ and ‘interpreting’, and in the case of religion it cultivates the dynamic of the need to transcend oneself. This allocation of relevance itself already constitutes a rich field of activity for religious providers. It

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Hans Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997). This book has given rise to intense theological and sociological debate; see for instance Bernhard Laux (ed.), *Heiligkeit und Menschenwürde. Hans Joas’ neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte im theologischen Gespräch* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2013); Hermann-Josef Große Kracht (ed.), *Der moderne Glaube an die Menschenwürde. Philosophie, Soziologie und Theologie im Gespräch mit Hans Joas* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014).

is precisely the increasing and increasingly conscious contingency of the modern conditions of life that nourishes the need for meaningful offerings of interpretation of identity and existence.

Always a neo-pragmatic, Joas has been able to extract from this basic approach even more action-guiding orientations. They, too, are electrifying for pastoral ministry in modern societies. Joas has described four possible ways in which basic experience and interpretative articulation can be related: a) someone has an experience, and it is interpreted conventionally; b) someone has an experience and becomes aware that no real interpretation is available, but that this must first be sought; c) someone encounters an interpretation, and this clarifies retrospectively that he or she has had an experience which has so far remained un-interpreted; d) someone encounters an interpretation, which makes a particular adventurous experience possible.<sup>74</sup>

In each of these cases religious interpretations can demonstrate their potential, especially in cases c) and d). Religious language games and convictions can provide the courage to confront certain older experiences or to have new experiences. People can be encouraged to take the risk of promising another loved person that they will invest in their relationship with them until death (sacrament of matrimony) by first contemplating the religious idea that God himself has promised them the same qualitative relationship. Or perhaps the encounter with the tradition of Jesus can inspire someone to non-violently confront the spirals of conflict as a risk worth taking.

The key aspect of Joas' argument with these pragmatic turns is that religions are not only good for placing one interpretation of life alongside a random number of other ones. In a very definite way, they are also able, like nothing else in life, to motivate people to undertake varied, adventurous actions, and thus significantly to increase their range of creativity and optionality.

All these things are ethically ambivalent, as Joas has clearly observed. It is superfluous to point out that religious convictions can also have retrograde effects on society. Nonetheless it is undeniable that precisely this service of interpretation, leading to greater variability, intensity, and self-experience, can hugely enrich modern society.

The initially abstract need for religious self-autonomy is just as much reliant on this supply as it is on the dimensions that have been developed so far. What is at stake is not just *that* people wish to be religious, but also

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Hans Joas: "Über die Artikulation von Erfahrungen," Idem., *Braucht der Mensch Religion? Über Erfahrungen der Selbsttranszendenz* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 2004), pp. 50-62.



how they want to be religious. Individuals desire suggestions, examples, and space in order to discover their own religious style and their power. Specifically: they must be able to find religious places and be captured by their atmosphere; they must hear stories that excite them; see images that rouse unimaginably great things in them; meet people who unsettle them in a productive way; hear words that they want to repeat; smell scents that enchant them; attend rituals that stimulate them; hear teachings that convince them; touch materials that seem more to them than surfaces; encounter generosity that impresses them without embarrassing them. All of this to show that it is possible to feel at home if they are prepared to transcend themselves.<sup>75</sup> The result of this is that they want to express themselves, build, perform, sing, write, paint, build, found, travel – be generous themselves. The power to commit oneself, also to the transformation of the Church, can be found in the experience that others are committed, and in accounts of this commitment.

Supplying power through religious inspiration is also an important characteristic of future-proof parishes.<sup>76</sup> Such parishes have jettisoned the almost proverbial unintelligibility of pastoral and doctrinal speech and are able to communicate in a language that activates and touches people. In all kinds of ways, they inspire individuals to find their own personal story within the big Catholic narrative, thus adding to the great story. Liturgies of all kinds, spaces, encounters, testimonials, but also forms of media presence such as videos and chats can become vehicles of an integrated performance whose purpose above all is to allow many people to begin designing their own religious self-determination.<sup>77</sup>

The parish can be experienced in all its fundamental forms as an inviting portfolio of varied, powerful, authentic religious interpretations that can help to find one's own religious style.

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<sup>75</sup> See for instance the ZAP project SilentMOD in 2016, which opened up Northern Europe's most famous sacred building, Cologne Cathedral, in a multi-sensory way: Michael Swiatkowski, et al. (ed.), *SilentMOD, Multisensorische Erfahrung im Kölner Dom* (Köln: Bachem, 2017).

<sup>76</sup> An exciting aspect is the huge importance of church music – this is truly one of the most crucial tools for pastoral quality enhancement; according to Thomas Wienhardt, *Qualität in Pfarreien. Kriterien für eine wirkungsvolle Pastoral (Angewandte Pastoralforschung 3)* (Würzburg: Echter, 2017).

<sup>77</sup> What this could look like in the increasingly distinct field of urban pastoral ministry has been shown by Veronika Eufinger, "Marketplace, Fallow Ground and Special Pastoral Care. What Christian Churches in Germany know about the City – an Interdenominational Comparison," *Religious Pluralism and the City. Inquiries into Postsecular Urbanism*, Helmut Berking, et al. (eds.) (London: forthcoming).

*The Challenge of 'Innovation': The Road from Good Ideas to Sustainable Structures*

It may seem like a tautology at the end of this paper to identify 'innovation' as a separate point. The whole concept breathes the idea of renovation and even purification, which GS 21 mentions as the criterion of whether the church is able to represent the Triune God.

The art of innovation involves more than having a program or an attitude, or simply having a good idea. Innovation is also a method, and having it determines whether the new is simply proclaimed or actually realized. The insight that many pastoral formats are unsustainable has in recent years given rise to a whole scene of people who have pioneered new forms. They go by many names: scouts, pioneer ministers, seekers, church planters, local church developers, innovators or even 'ecclesio-preneurs'. This scene is international, casually ecumenical, and unorthodox. Its goal is not just to perform individual experiments of new pastoral initiatives, but to implement a culture and a routine of innovation in the everyday life of the church.

A recent founders' handbook that reflects many of these movements and experiences offers a kind of conceptual and methodical summary.<sup>78</sup> It is essentially the work of Florian Sobetzko, a pastoral professional, who is able to combine both fundamental ecclesiological, international and economic findings in his work. The latter field of learning in particular has given Sobetzko original and previously unknown suggestions that through their interest in future sustainability offer pastoral ministry a connection with the experiences of secular processes of change.

This handbook recommends five competencies that must be adopted to implement innovation: breaking up – thinking through – trying out – spreading – implementing. In technical terms, these five steps can be described as: identity – ideation – application – diffusion – innovation management. Competencies 2, 3, and 4 belong to the essence of this method, 1 and 5 constitute bottom-up and top-down framework conditions.

The logic of this approach reflects an interesting development in economic discourse on how successful entrepreneurs act. Research by the Indian economist Saras D. Sarasvathy has surprisingly found that few entrepreneurs follow the usual approach of a fully-developed business plan when they are trying to realize a business idea. Instead, the scarcity

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. Sobetzko and Sellmann, *Gründer-Handbuch*. Plans are afoot for an English translation. See also *Gründer Handbuch* Seelsorge, "Gründerhandbuch, für pastorale Startups und Innovationsprojekte," [www.gruenderhandbuch-seelsorge.de](http://www.gruenderhandbuch-seelsorge.de) (accessed August, 2017).

of resources, the magnitude of the risk, and uncertainty about market demand ensure that they take a much more modest approach. Sarasvathy has called this effectuation, contrasting it with the management approach of causation.<sup>79</sup> Entrepreneurs act fast and invest more in small-scale trials of their business idea than in great success. The image of the fridge has proven to be useful here: if you are planning to cook, you can either write the perfect menu down on a grocery list, and then go and find the ingredients; or you can look inside the fridge and start with what you can get without much effort. The four principles of effectuation are ‘tool orientation’ (rather than goal orientation), ‘affordable loss’ (rather than maximal gain), ‘co-creation/communal goal achievement’ (rather than competitive orientation), and ‘serendipity’ (rather than risk management).

It must be observed that these paradigms (causation and effectuation) are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other. During the start-up phase, however, advantages of effectuation such as error tolerance, quick real-life trialing, and immediate network building with stake- and shareholders appear to be paramount.

Its conceptual underpinning is a theory of entrepreneurial opportunity. This can also explain the three basic steps of ideation, application, and diffusion. The art of entrepreneurship can therefore be defined concisely as: turning market uncertainty into utilizable opportunities. Three different variants of this art can be distinguished according to the degree of uncertainty. Many entrepreneurial opportunities only have to be recognized (opportunity recognition = diffusion) – and the field can be flooded with ready-made concepts. If the uncertainty is greater, opportunities have to be discovered (opportunity discovery = application) – before new products can be developed for existing requirements or new markets can be opened for existing products. If the uncertainty is complete, virtuosity is required: this demands the creation of opportunities (opportunity creation = ideation) – creating new solutions and new demand for new target groups.

Anyone who has retained a modicum of tolerance for economic concepts and does not indulge in the usual reflex of saying that the Church cannot be compared to a business will immediately appreciate the potential applicability of these brief outlines of effectuation and opportunity

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. Saras D. Sarasvathy, “Causation and effectuation: Toward a theoretical shift from economic inevitability to entrepreneurial contingency,” *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26, Issue 2 (2001), pp. 243-263; idem, Nicholas Dew, et al.: “Three Views of Entrepreneurial Opportunity,” *Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research* (New York: Springer vs, 2003).

recognition, discovery, and creation.<sup>80</sup> In analogy to commercial enterprise, the crisis of the Church can also be conceived as uncertainty: it is unclear for an increasing number of ‘products’ what the supply or demand will be. This crisis requires the ability of turning uncertainty into opportunities, also on the level of pastoral methods.

Neither the concepts connected with effectuation nor the handbook leave any doubt that this involves hard work and small steps rather than huge successes. For instance, orientation on the so-called ‘ecclesiopreneurship canvas’ involves following a trajectory including ten specific ways of testing a pastoral business model.<sup>81</sup> But the reward that lies ahead is a way out of the spiral of complaint and of the fatalistic view that the Church is bound to disappear from modern societies.

Thus, we have a seventh characteristic of a future-proof parish: such parishes are characterized by systematic innovation model of management, which requires the involvement both structurally and culturally of all processes, products, and persons, in a movement of review and improvement.

### Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed seven characteristics of parishes that understand themselves as sponsors of ambitious and humanizing religious self-determination in all of their dimensions: it is a demanding and comprehensive program of change for church organizations. But let no one say that our day and age can bring only darkness and tentative stumbling. There are paths that point towards the future. A program for action can be established and developed. The key aspect of the proposals advanced here is that this path promotes a modern Catholic Church, not against the grain of modern secularity, but in harmony with it – and this to the benefit of the lives of modern individuals and communities.

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<sup>80</sup> For an extensive treatment see Sobetzko, *Kirche Neu Gründen*.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Florian Sobetzko and Ursula Hahmann, *Die Ecclesiopreneurship Canvas. Die Gründerleinwand für pastorale Innovationen*, [www.futur2.org/article/die-ecclesiopreneurship-canvas/](http://www.futur2.org/article/die-ecclesiopreneurship-canvas/) (accessed August, 2017).

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## The Running of a Multicultural World Church in Global Times

MASSIMO FAGGIOLI

### Introduction: Ecclesiology and Governance

In the fifty years since the end of the Second Vatican Council and the beginning of the post-conciliar period, there have been different phases in the activity of reform and institutional change of the Catholic Church. Especially during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the Church went through a period of evident moments of change, but also of contradictory signals: the changes in the style of the papacy under John Paul II, for example, were a contribution to the globalization of the Church. But at the same time, already during John Paul II and especially during Benedict XVI the idea of change in the Church was under the umbrella of the stark contraposition two idealtypical understandings of the Church – “continuity and reform” versus “discontinuity and rupture.” This created a difficult environment for the very idea of change and reform in the Catholic Church.<sup>1</sup>

The Church of today lives in a different moment, even though chronologically not distant from the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Since the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Francis, the intellectual ambiguity about “continuity and reform” versus “discontinuity and rupture” has vanished from the horizon and it has become clear that the choice is between reform and restauration. Francis’ papacy and its awareness of the multicultural and global turn of Catholicism has made evident that reform and restauration are incompatible choices. Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s fidelity to Vatican II has made manifest that Catholicism today is in need of reform: in some sense, our present time is about re-accepting – once again, more than fifty years after the Vatican II – the idea of “reform” in and of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See the famous speech to the Roman Curia of Pope Benedict XVI, December 22, 2005, on the two hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council: [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2005/december/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia.html).

<sup>2</sup> See Angelo Maffei, “Ecclesia semper reformanda. Le lezioni della storia e il significato ecumenico,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, Antonio Spadaro and Carlos Maria Galli (eds.) (Brescia: Queriniana, 2016), p. 147.

But Pope Francis has also made clear in his pontificate that the Catholic Church needs to be governed. We are past the delusions of a purely communitarian, self-governing Catholicism where the supposedly pure spiritual quality of the members of the Church is a safeguard strong enough against the corruption of the institutional level. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been a particularly important learning moment for the Church: the sex abuse crisis has shown the corruption of the system, but also the urgent need for an effective Church government. The election of Pope Francis in March 2013 was also part of a change in the perception of the importance of Church government, after the 27 year of charismatic pontificate of John Paul II and the crisis in papal governance under Benedict XVI.<sup>3</sup>

From the point of view of the relationship between ecclesiology and governance of the Church, the pontificate of Pope Francis is a complex mix. The conciliar Catholicism of Jorge Mario Bergoglio is partly a recovery of Vatican II and partly the reckoning with the shortcomings of Vatican II. Francis' view of the Church is one that has fully received the ecclesiological shift of Vatican II and makes a creative synthesis between what Vatican II settled, what talked about but did not settle, and what Vatican II did not even talk about.<sup>4</sup> Francis has recovered in particular one of the intuitions of Vatican II in terms of theological method: the idea of collegial-synodal process over bureaucratic decision, of spiritual discernment over magisterial authoritarianism, and of open-ended thinking over the obsession about continuity as opposed to discontinuity.<sup>5</sup>

This shift embodied by Francis has become visible especially with the two-year synodal process celebrated in October 2014 and October 2015 with the gathering of bishops in Rome, a long synodal intersession between the end of the first synod and the beginning of the second, and the reception of Francis' post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* published in April 2016. Both the synods of 2014-2015 and synodal intersessions on the topics of marriage and family have been an absolute first since the creation of the Bishops' Synod by Paul VI on September 15, 1965, at the beginning of the fourth and last session of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis' synodal process has shown a few features of the present

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<sup>3</sup> See Andrea Riccardi, *Governo carismatico. 25 anni di pontificato* (Milano: Mondadori, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> About this see Massimo Faggioli, *Pope Francis. Tradition in Transition* (New York: Paulist, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> See Antonio Spadaro, SJ, "Intervista a Papa Francesco," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3918 (19 September 2013), 449-77. English version: "A Big Heart Open to God," *America* (19 September 2013).

state of the Catholic Church – the difficulty in lifting the veil on the shallow consensus the bishops were supposed to have and to finally address the call to reality that challenges many assumptions about the life of Catholics. But the synodal process has also highlighted the emergencies in the governance of the global Catholic Church. This is something that Pope Francis himself acknowledged with the speech of October 17, 2015 – the most important speech of a Pope on synodality and the synodal Church to date.<sup>6</sup>

The acknowledgment of the theological and institutional emergencies and the need for a new phase in the governance of the global Catholic Church require also a new phase in the reflection of theologians in this moment of new open spaces in the life of the Church. The attempt to re-inculturate the Catholic Church in a multicultural world must be also a re-inculturation of the Church from an institutional point of view, not only theological: the global turn of the Catholic Church does not affect only the linguistic and symbolical level, but also the life of its institutions. This is the reason for a new appraisal of the relationship between the potential of Vatican II and the needs of the governance of today's Church. This means having in mind the necessity for the Church to be an agent of evangelization in a multicultural world and not just preservation of the institutional self.

This essay tries to capture four essential tensions for a new ecclesiological appraisal of the issue of Church governance – collegiality and synodality; institution and community; ministry and people of God; center and periphery – and to offer a few suggestions for the reform of the Catholic Church in a multicultural, global world.

### Collegial and Synodal Church

Pope Francis has opened the door on the need for a shift towards a more collegial and synodal Church. Collegiality is one part of the unfinished business of Vatican II, and one of the most important fruits of Vatican II. However, it has also, to a large extent, remained a symbolic fruit. The way it was phrased at Vatican II (in the third chapter of the constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*) and the way it was received and institutionally implemented after Vatican II require now substantial updates in

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, "Address at the ceremony commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, October 17, 2015," [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_2015101750-anniversario-sinodo.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_2015101750-anniversario-sinodo.html).

light of a key theological dimension of the Church, “synodality,” that was not directly addressed at Vatican II.

It is true that Vatican II was instrumental to the decision of Paul VI to create the Bishops’ Synod in 1965, but the Bishops’ Synod is an instrument of papal primacy and of episcopal collegiality, and not an instrument of the Church’s fundamental “synodality” – the particular communal way of the Church to prepare, formulate, receive, and understand decisions in and for the Church. It is no surprise that at Vatican II there was no talk of synodality in the sense the word means today. The ecclesiological shift of Vatican II was dominated by the debate on episcopal collegiality in *Lumen Gentium*: but in the documents of Vatican II collegiality remains limited to the level of the episcopate. But at the Bishops’ Synod of 2015 Francis showed us a remarkable example of a reception of Vatican II that expands on the basis of the *intentio legentis* (the eyes of those who read Vatican II in their actual existential and cultural situation) and of the needs of the Church: not only with his abovementioned speech of October 17, 2015, but also with his leadership of the Bishops’ Synods of 2014 and 2015.

The first dimension to be considered is therefore the relationship between collegiality and synodality. “Episcopal collegiality” at Vatican II means that the papacy and the college of bishops work collegially in order to develop reflections necessary for the government of the Church. On the one hand, at Vatican II collegiality is technically a *modus operandi* that the Pope chooses, not the bishops.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, collegiality is typical of a “guild,” of a separate group – only the bishops.

Furthermore, Vatican II did not articulate properly the relationship between *collegio episcoporum* and *communio ecclesiarum*,<sup>8</sup> and already at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it became clear that collegiality had been inte-

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<sup>7</sup> “But the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is understood together with the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter as its head. The pope’s power of primacy over all, both pastors and faithful, remains whole and intact. In virtue of his office, that is as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole Church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power. The order of bishops, which succeeds to the college of apostles and gives this apostolic body continued existence, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church, provided we understand this body together with its head the Roman Pontiff and never without this head. This power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff:” Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), no. 22.

<sup>8</sup> See Hervé Legrand, “Les évêques, les Églises locales et l’Église entière. Evolutions institutionnelles depuis Vatican II et chantiers actuels de recherche,” *Revue de Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 85 (2001), 461-509.



grated with synodality.<sup>9</sup> The incompleteness of Vatican II about collegiality and synodality was made worse by the practices of the post-conciliar Popes. The college of bishops has been largely seen as the rubber stamp of papal primacy. Episcopal collegiality has meant (until Francis) something “affective” without being “effective.”<sup>10</sup> Pope Francis made no mystery about the need for collegiality to become effective. On April 1, 2014, in a letter to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis spoke of the synod as an institution in terms of “affective and effective collegiality,” adding a significant “effective” to the more typical (in the post-Vatican II period) “affective.”<sup>11</sup>

There is here a direct link between collegiality and governance that affects the position and power of the central government of the Church in the Vatican. The Roman Curia was created in the Middle Ages to strengthen the power of the Pope, but in recent times the Curia in its actual state has, in fact, damaged the authority of the Pope in the global Church. The Roman Curia has proven a liability for the authority of papal primacy because of the link between the primacy and the identification of the Curia as part of the primacy, in a culture of government that left collegiality only the demonstration of the bishops’ affection for the Pope, and made no room for synodal expressions of the whole Church’s participation to the decision-making process.

There is little doubt that one of the long-term ecclesiological trajectories for the Catholic Church is towards a *synodal Church*: in the Church there are some issues that deserve to be a matter of a larger process of reflection and discernment, not just limited to the Pope and the bishops, but involving the clergy and the laity, especially women. The non-episcopal component of the Catholic Church (priests, monks and brothers/sisters in religious orders, laity) have received fewer and fewer opportunities to express themselves on some pressing issues thought out and decided in the Vatican. The Roman Catholic Church today is expected to be less clerical with more lay faithful and women in leadership positions; the discon-

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<sup>9</sup> About this, see *Synod and Synodality. Theology, History, Canon Law and Ecumenism in New Contact. International Colloquium Bruges 2003*, Alberto Melloni and Silvia Scatena (eds.) (Münster: LIT, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> About this distinction, see Joseph A. Komonchak, “The Roman Working Paper on Episcopal Conferences,” in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical and Theological Studies*, Thomas J. Reese (ed.) (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1989), pp. 177-204.

<sup>11</sup> The letter of Pope Francis to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Synod of Bishops, April 1, 2014, in “Bollettino: Sala stampa della Santa Sede,” April 8, 2014, <http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2014/04/08/0251/00559.html>.

nection between some magisterial pronouncements and large portions of the world Church is also a fruit of a lack of synodality in the Church.

On the other hand, there must be the development of a synodality not only in the universal Church, but starting from the real life of a Christian community, in the local Churches – in the diocese and the parish. To this universal and local levels of synodality correspond two different forms of actuation of the synodal Church: an “informal synodality” (a style of cooperation of all the baptized in the mission of the Church) and a “formal synodality” (ecclesiastical institutions and moments in the life of the community that develop the synodal dimension of the Church), “synodality can hardly exist without institutional moments and procedures of implementation: it is not just about listening, but consulting and seeking advice.”<sup>12</sup>

### Church as Communion and Church as Institution

Vatican II meant a shift in ecclesiology from an institutionalist and juridical view of the Church to a more biblical, spiritual, and communal understanding of the Church. But we cannot forget that the Vatican II took place at a moment in time when the Church as an institution felt still very sure of itself. The debates and the final documents approved at Vatican II framed the life of the Church largely in institutional terms, that is, a Church whose leadership was *clerical*, whose articulation was more *territorial* than personal, and whose *public standing* was as both partner and counterpart of the nation-state, which between the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had replaced the empires. It is therefore an institution that at Vatican II was changing, but whose role was not entirely different from the role the institution had for the members of the Church during the previous centuries.

Vatican II started to reform the institutional configuration of the Catholic Church, which has been changing during the post-Vatican II period even if the institution has resisted adapting to the new conditions and pretending that the Church structures that were created for European Christendom can still serve the global Catholic Church today.

One of the typical products of the pre-Vatican II era was the concordats, bilateral juridical agreements between the Holy See and a nation-state that guarantees the Catholic Church some privileges (that other churches and religions do not enjoy) and guarantees the state the loyal

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<sup>12</sup> See Alphonse Borras, “Sinodalità ecclesiale, processi partecipativi e modalità decisionali. Il punto di vista di un canonista,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, pp. 207-232, esp. pp. 212-213.

cooperation of the Church. The future of this juridical tool, typical of the Catholic tradition, was not part of the debate at the Second Vatican Council; concordats between the Holy See and important states (Italy in 1929 and Germany in 1933, just to name two) are not going to be abrogated soon.<sup>13</sup> But this does not mean that the Catholic Church can ignore the deeply changed conditions of co-existence between Church and state.

It is clear that global Catholicism is going to remain a greatly diverse community of communions, all living in different juridical and political situations around the world. What is important to emphasize here is that the change that has affected the Church has affected its partner, the nation-state in an even more profound way. The 1960s were, with decolonization, the age of the final collapse of the colonial empires and the rise of new states. Fifty years later, the idea of nation-state is in a deep crisis and the Church needs to understand that its role changes now that the other member of the couple, that is, the nation-state, is in this serious crisis. Historically, Church and state/empire have coexisted for centuries and we need to think about what kind of Catholic Church there can be in states that are failed, semi-failed, members of strong international communities or isolated from the international community, and so on with the all possible variations that political scientists can provide. At more than fifty years from Vatican II it is clear that the Church in the world of today lives in profoundly changed conditions: just to name a few, secularization and neutrality of the state towards religion, the end of the “Constantinian age,” and the growing religious pluralism in most states around the globe. All these changes, and especially the crisis of both the Church and state in the sense of the end of the domination of politics by the nation-state and the end of the control of religion by the institutional churches and religious organizations, now challenge the institutional framework described by the bishops for the Church in the first half of the 1960s. In this sense it is true that Vatican II put to an end the Tridentine era more than opening a new era.<sup>14</sup>

This is to say that we need, at fifty years, to rediscover the complex mix of institutional and communal aspects of the Catholic Church. The institutional side of the Church is the one that is supposed to be vigilant

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<sup>13</sup> See *Enchiridion dei Concordati. Due secoli di storia dei rapporti Chiesa-Stato* (Bologna: EDB, 2003); Romeo Astorri, “La politica concordataria della Santa Sede dopo il Concilio Vaticano II,” in *Fede e diplomazia. Le relazioni internazionali della Santa Sede nell’età contemporanea*, Massimo De Leonardis (ed.) (Milano: Educatt, 2014), pp. 303-20.

<sup>14</sup> About this see Paolo Prodi, “Europe in the Age of Reformations: The Modern State and Confessionalization,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 103, No. 1 (Winter 2017), 1-19.

on abuses. A purely communal and congregational Catholic Church is something that is not adequate to the concrete, historical experience of the members of the Roman Catholic Church. This is not a call to keep the status quo or to over-institutionalize the life of the Church. There are recent experiences within Catholicism that are an almost perfect example of the need for the Church to let the Spirit work. The phenomenon of the “new ecclesial movements” corresponds to the need for the Church to see itself not only organized with a territorial system but also with a personal criterion, in communities not necessarily defined by a territory but defined by the people, the members of that community. The new movements also brought in a new kind of leadership in the Church that is not clerical. The Roman Catholic Church today is less based in the structures of Church government (dioceses), less institutional and territorial, and it relies more on movements, groups, and associations that have a varied relationship with the institution and its local and central government, also due to an increased mobility of the faithful.<sup>15</sup> The sympathy of the post-Vatican II papacy towards the new forms of Christian life in “movements” and associations has been translated only in a limited way in the central government of the Church, limiting also the transparency and accountability of some of these new ecclesial bodies (e.g., Legionaries of Christ). But the relationship between the Church as an institution and these new movements is complex: they need each other and the charisms of these new movements flourished originally within the institutional Church.<sup>16</sup>

When it comes to the *communio* of the Church, the turn to a global and multicultural Catholicism requires a rethinking of the modality of this communion. On the one hand, it is necessary to avoid the substitution of the ecclesiology of the “people of God” with the ecclesiology of the communion: people of God remains a fundamental concept for Catholic ecclesiology. On the other hand, what becomes more urgent now is the rediscovery of the *communio ecclesiarum*, the horizontal communion between different local Churches, as “expression of the *communio fidelium* at the structural level.”<sup>17</sup> This is the ecclesiological side of the quest for a new balance between the necessary unity of the Church and the possible multi-

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<sup>15</sup> About this see Massimo Faggioli, *Il vescovo e il concilio. Modello episcopale e aggiornamento al Vaticano II* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *Sorting Out Catholicism: Brief History of the New Ecclesial Movements* (Collegetown MN: Liturgical Press, 2014) and Idem, *The Rising Laity. Ecclesial Movements since Vatican II* (Mahwah NJ-New York: Paulist Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> About this see Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “La chiesa in cammino, per configurarsi come popolo di Dio,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, esp. pp. 75-78.

plicity and diversity of the local Churches. This means, on the practical level, a recovery of the role of the national and continental bishops' conferences.<sup>18</sup> More generally, it requires from the Church the awareness of the impossibility to make of the *communio ecclesiarum* a much more vertical *communio ecclesiae*. In the text of *Lumen Gentium*, chapter III, "the relationship between *collegium episcoporum* and *communio ecclesiarum* remained very weak: the *communio ecclesiarum* did not develop beyond the mere *communio episcoporum*." During the post-conciliar period, "the discipline about the statute of the bishops' power and of the local Churches gave more and more priority to the *communio ecclesiae* and which tended to absorb in itself the *communio ecclesiarum*."<sup>19</sup>

### Catholicity of the Center and of the Peripheries

This new emphasis on the *communio ecclesiarum* is now more important than before, not only because of the magnitude of the globalization of the Catholic Church, but also because of the quality of this globalization. It is the turn of the Catholic Church towards the south of the world, but also towards a world that is more urbanized than before, where the existential quality of a life of faith is experienced mostly in urban settings. This cosmopolitan experience of Pope Francis, the first Pope born in a 20<sup>th</sup>-century *megalopolis*, expresses the transition of Catholicism to a new understanding of the compenetration of religious and secular, of global and local, in a multiplicity of diversities.<sup>20</sup>

In this sense, Pope Francis' reform of the papacy is a first step: two visible changes can be seen in the new ways the Pope teaches<sup>21</sup> and the new relations between the Pope and the central government of the Catho-

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<sup>18</sup> About this see Carlos Schickendantz, "Le conferenze episcopali. 'Questo auspicio non si è pienamente realizzato' (EG 32)," in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, pp. 347-366, esp. pp. 364-366.

<sup>19</sup> See Hervé Legrand, "Communio ecclesiae, communio ecclesiarum, collegium episcoporum," in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, pp. 165, 173 (translation mine).

<sup>20</sup> About this see Carlos Maria Galli, *Dio vive in città. Verso una nuova pastorale urbana* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014) and "La riforma missionaria della Chiesa secondo Francesco," in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, pp. 37-41.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Gaillardetz, "Doctrinal Authority in the Francis Era," *Commonweal*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/doctrinal-authority-francis-era>; Severino Dianich, *Magistero in movimento. Il caso papa Francesco* (Bologna: EDB, 2016).

lic Church in the Vatican.<sup>22</sup> But this reform of the center will have to be followed by a new pattern of relations between the institutional center of the Church and the geographical peripheries distant from Rome. One clear necessity is a strengthening of the mid-level of Church authority between the local (diocesan) and the universal (Rome), that is, the continental level. This is required not only by the redefinition of the importance of the nation-state for the Catholic Church. Most likely, this will be less important, in the future than it was at the time of the Second Vatican Council. However, it has a growing importance on the transnational and continental level for issues like evangelization, migrants and refugees, etc. This is required also because one of the lessons the Catholic Church can learn from its own past is the history of the CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano) and its profound impact on Latin American Catholicism in the last sixty years.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, the Roman-Vatican model of evangelization, with the Congregation of Propaganda Fide in charge of “mission territories,” shaping the cultural and geopolitical perception of the *catholica* in Rome, has not really changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not even after Vatican II.

There are three major changes that happened in the global Catholic Church during these last few decades: the turn to the south and to the poor; the turn from the illusion of a self-sufficient Catholic subworld to the commitment to peaceful coexistence in a plural world; the globalization of Catholicism in the sense of less emphasis on the national level of the Churches to the supranational and to Catholicism as a movement more than institution.<sup>24</sup> These shifts will not be reversed soon and the future of Catholicism depends on them. One way to address them is to go back to the moment when these trends became apparent to the Church leaders gathered at Vatican II.

Vatican II represents a clear step towards a less centralized and an ecclesiological balanced relationship between the center and the local churches. The council does so, not only in *Lumen Gentium*, but also from the very first document it approved, the liturgical constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium*.<sup>25</sup> The liturgical constitution stresses the importance of the local Church through the biblical and patristic renewal, which points to

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<sup>22</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, “The Roman Curia at and after Vatican II: Legal-Rational or Theological Reform?,” *Theological Studies* 76, No. 3 (2015), 550-571.

<sup>23</sup> See Andrea Riccardi, “Lezioni dalle riforme del XX secolo,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, p. 112.

<sup>24</sup> See Riccardi, “Lezioni dalle riforme del XX secolo,” pp. 114-121.

<sup>25</sup> See Massimo Faggioli, *True Reform. Liturgy and Ecclesiology in Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2012).

the roots of early Christianity as a communion of local communities; through the rediscovery of the Eucharist as the very heart of the Church; through the empowerment of the local bishop as first celebrant within the local Church. But Vatican II was a first step. This new role of the bishops in the life of local Churches was supported by the final outcome of the liturgical debate, and not by the quite active (later during the unfolding of Vatican II) bishops' lobbying in favor of an institutional *decentralization* in the global Catholic Church (that is, more autonomy from Rome for the bishops) and *centralization* in the local church (abolition of the immovability for parish priests (pastors), and more control of the religious orders active in the diocese). The same caution is visible in the constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, where chapter III on episcopal collegiality is only an opening towards a different modality of the use of papal primacy, and where collegiality of the bishops is founded on their belonging to the universal collegium, and not on their being bishops of a local Church. The Bishops' Synod as it is described in *Christus Dominus* par. 5 (following Paul VI's motu proprio *Apostolica Sollicitudo* of September 15, 1965), finally, is not an instrument of decentralization: rather, it was conceived as an important but limited instrument for the cooptation of the bishops with papal power.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, the same decree *Christus Dominus* provided the Church with the first groundbreaking text on the episcopal conferences, which the Second Vatican Council wanted to become operative in every country.<sup>27</sup> This is where the trajectory towards decentralization was, after a promising start during the 1970s, interrupted under John Paul II and Benedict XVI. It probably has to be resumed for the future of the governance of the Church – together with new leadership from Popes in the con-

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<sup>26</sup> “Bishops chosen from various parts of the world, in ways and manners established or to be established by the Roman pontiff, render more effective assistance to the supreme pastor of the Church in a deliberative body which will be called by the proper name of Synod of Bishops. Since it shall be acting in the name of the entire Catholic episcopate, it will at the same time show that all the bishops in hierarchical communion partake of the solicitude for the universal Church”: Second Vatican Council, *Christus Dominus* (1965), no. 5.

<sup>27</sup> “In these days especially bishops frequently are unable to fulfill their office effectively and fruitfully unless they develop a common effort involving constant growth in harmony and closeness of ties with other bishops. Episcopal conferences already established in many nations have furnished outstanding proofs of a more fruitful apostolate. Therefore, this sacred synod considers it to be supremely fitting that everywhere bishops belonging to the same nation or region form an association which would meet at fixed times”: *Ibid.*, no. 37.

temporary Church. It is difficult to imagine this as temporary and will probably remain a marker of Catholicism for a long time.<sup>28</sup>

There is no one key word for the new articulation of the relationship between center and periphery. Collegiality was the buzzword of the Second Vatican Council, but the post-Vatican II period learned that it has to be tempered and completed with *synodality*. The post-Vatican II reforms worked also because they were mandated from a strong universal level: localism is not necessarily the panacea for what does not work in the governance of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, it is true that in the last three decades the local level has been almost constantly and unnecessarily weakened. The manifest humiliation of the prerogatives of the Bishops' conferences (such as in the recent case of the new English translation of the Missal) must be a thing of the past. The excesses of centralization are clearly part of Francis' experiences with the institutional Church.<sup>29</sup>

There is one aspect that is crucial for future relations between center and periphery, an aspect that the Second Vatican Council did not address and on which the post-Vatican II theological debate has been cautious, if not circumspect. We must imagine a future of conciliar life in a church where the number of bishops, with the right to participate and to vote in a general council, exceeds five thousand. One additional problem is that almost half of all the Catholic bishops today are titular bishops or emeriti. It is not only a matter of logistical problems of a council with thousands of participants (now they would be almost twice as many as the bishops at Vatican II) and of the technological solutions to this problem – provided that a council of the Church is also a spiritual and sacramental act that cannot be reduced to a videoconference or a WikiCouncil. It is primarily a matter of “*theology* of ecclesial representation, not of *jurisprudence* [with the goal of] not distorting the sacramental nature of the episcopacy and allowing for the call of a council of representatives.”<sup>30</sup> There is surely the need to imagine new forms of collegiality, and the urgency to imagine a new form of conciliarity – at the universal level and/or at the continental level. This is one of the issues that has not received attention from the Church's legislation *nor* from theological debate.

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<sup>28</sup> About the evolution of papal power see Klaus Schatz, *Papal Primacy: From Its Origin to the Present* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1996).

<sup>29</sup> See Pope Francis, “*Evangelii Gaudium*. Apostolic Exhortation to the Bishops, Clergy, Today's World” (2013), no. 16 and 32.

<sup>30</sup> Severino Dianich, “Primato e collegialità episcopale: problemi e prospettive,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, p. 282 (translation mine).



## Church as People of God and Leadership/Ministry

The modern emphasis on leadership has become pervasive in our political discourse, but also in the vocabulary of our education system. There is a tension between the old idea of membership and citizenship on one side, and the urge (that sometimes becomes an obsession in the age of neo-authoritarianism and crisis of democracy), on the other side, to identify, emphasize, and rely on leadership. The ideas of leadership and membership/citizenship both apply to the Catholic Church: *citizenship* in the sense of responsible, individual and collective subjectivity in the communion of the faithful, and *leadership* in the sense of visible and accountable role of guidance in the Church that discerns the signs of the times and is attentive to the Holy Spirit and to the leadership of the whole people of God.

This relationship between leadership and citizenship is at the same time old and new in Church history. What is certainly new is the emphasis in our culture about leadership. The first few years of the post-Vatican II period were marked by an ecclesiology of the people of God that stressed the need for a collegial and collective leadership in the Church of the whole people of God. This was clearly a reaction to centuries of clericalism. In the second phase of the post-Vatican II period, one of the counterbalancing contributions of John Paul II was certainly the assertion of an old-style clerical leadership of the Church that was not contradicted, for the most part, by the laity and lay movements in the Church.

The pontificate of Francis is casting a new light on the relationship between leadership and people in the Church. It is clear, on the one hand, that the Church needs leadership. On the other hand, the ecclesiological debate since the Second Vatican Council and also the tragedy of the sex abuse crisis has shown the kind of leadership the Church needs. Francis has renewed the Church's confidence in the idea of leadership because he embodies a sense of leadership that is not loyal to the institutional status quo but is a prophetic leadership. He has spoken repeatedly on the kind of leader the Church needs, focusing especially on clerical leadership speaking in unforgiving terms about the counter-witness given by many in the hierarchy.<sup>31</sup>

The issue becomes more complicated when we have to figure out the other part of the picture. The fact is that it has become difficult to identify "the people" in the Church as well as in our political discourse. The 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See for example Pope Francis' speech to the bishops during his visit to Mexico, on February 13, 2016, <https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2016/february/documents/papa-francesco20160213messico-vescovi.html>.

century was the age of the mobilization of the masses in the nation state as well as in the Church. That age has been replaced by a much more fragmented social and ecclesial body. It used to be easy to identify the Catholic elite with the clergy, Catholic intellectuals, and Catholic political leaders; it was customary to see in the lay leadership in the Catholic Church the remnants of a Catholic lay elite engaged in politics, in the business world, in culture, and in academia. Now the leadership role of the clergy is in deep trouble, and there are Catholic lay leaders whose voice matter more than many bishops and cardinals together, but they are no longer part of the old Catholic lay elite. On the other hand, “the people” for the Church is still important but much more as a theological idea (the people of God) than as a homogeneous, socially tangible reality. Fragmented ideologically, socially, and ethnically, the globalization of Catholicism has to deal with the need to redefine who its people are.

One of the unexpected consequences of Vatican II was the beginning of a very profound change of elites in contemporary Catholicism. Understanding the consequences of this is a huge task that runs below the surface of Francis’ pontificate. Francis is aware of the change in the elites in the Catholic Church that took place in the last fifty years, more or less. It is interesting to look at the way he addresses two key players in the arena where the battle for Church leadership takes place: the bishops and the new ecclesial movements. Francis addresses bishops in a way that reveals the Pope’s take on the shortcomings of the “episcopal” ecclesiology of Vatican II. But the bishops are not the only ones being told about the illusions of their eternal leadership in the Church: Francis’ addresses to the Catholic movements (Communion and Liberation, Neocatechumenal Way, etc.) always contain the idea that the Church does not need elites that are isolated from the rest of the ecclesial community.

All this tells us that while the theology of the priesthood and the way priests are selected and trained have not changed in these last fifty years, the very meaning of Church leadership and of the people has changed significantly. It will suffice here to note the deep and probably irrecoverable crisis of the identification between clergy and Church leadership. The second millennium saw this identification being created beginning with the “Gregorian revolution” of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The third millennium is probably going to get rid of this identification: partly acknowledging the lived theology of our communities, partly discussing theologically and ecclesologically the need for a redefinition of Church leadership and ministry.

In this sense, an inescapable challenge is the issue of the ministry and leadership of women in the Catholic Church – a real *Ernstfall*. The successful revolution of the new role of women in society calls for a response

of the Catholic Church that goes beyond the initial reception of this movement by the Second Vatican Council and post-Vatican II Catholicism. There is no doubt that “the theological reflection and magisterial hermeneutics have received only, in a limited way, the paradigm shift.” Most of all, it is time to “become aware of what is still largely not reflected on” about the relationship between men and women in the Catholic Church.<sup>32</sup> The ecclesiological and institutional imagination for Church reform cannot avoid the response – in a creative and non-ideological way – to the anthropological issue made evident by the new role of women in society.

### **Governing a Multicultural Catholic Church in Global Times: A Few Proposals**

The last part of this essay consists of a list of proposals that have been part of my studies on Church reform and governance between the Second Vatican Council and the pontificate of Pope Francis.<sup>33</sup> The pontificate of Jorge Mario Bergoglio has cast a new light on the urgency, and at the same time the feasibility, of some of these proposals, which do *not* constitute a complete and comprehensive plan of Church reform, but only an ongoing and developing contribution in the context of other recent proposals.

The most important overarching principle that now Church historians and ecclesiologists point to, when they reflect on the reform of the Catholic Church, is the principle of *synodality* and *collegiality*. This development needs to inspire and transform, from the inside, existing institutions.

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<sup>32</sup> Serena Noceti, “Riforma e inculturazione della Chiesa in Europa. Un annuncio da ricomprendere, una figura di Chiesa da ripensare, un ‘caso serio’ da affrontare,” in *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa*, p. 517 (translation mine).

<sup>33</sup> For some of my previous reflections on theology for Church reform, see Massimo Faggioli, “Institutions of Episcopal Synodality-Collegiality after Vatican II: the Decree ‘Christus Dominus’ and the Agenda for Synodality-Collegiality in the 21st Century,” *The Jurist*, 64, No. 2 (2004), 224-246; Idem, “Le régime synodal comme mode de gouvernement dans l’Église,” *Cahiers de spiritualité ignatienne* 129 (Septembre-Décembre, 2010), pp. 7-19; Idem, “The Regulation of Episcopal Conferences since Vatican II,” *The Japan Mission Journal* 68, No. 2 (Summer 2014) 82-96; Idem, “The Roman Curia at and after Vatican II: Legal-Rational or Theological Reform?,” *Theological Studies* 76, No. 3 (2015), 550-571; Idem, “Per una riforma del governo centrale di una chiesa collegiale e sinodale, a cinquant’anni dal Vaticano II,” in *La riforma e le riforme*, pp. 320-336; Idem, “The Ecclesiology of Vatican II as a New Framework for Consecrated Life,” *Origins* 45, No. 15 (September 10, 2015), 255-262.

It also needs to imagine new institutions or new ways, moments, and venues for the synodal and collegial dimension of the Church to flourish.

Another principle that is necessary to understand the list that follows, is a principle of *institutional humility* and *poverty*, in the sense of the awareness of the risk of “ecclesiological engineering” as the only way to reform the Church. This sense of humility and poverty is the reason that should lead the Church to reform and transform existing institutions before or instead of creating new ones.

### *Papacy and Roman Curia*

The first aspect to be examined for a reform to improve the running of the world church in global times is the papacy. In light of Francis’ pontificate, the papacy *strictu sensu* may be the institution of the Catholic Church that is *not* in urgent need of reform, because there has been no shortage of reflections on institutional changes during the last century and a half. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have been the golden age for a development of the theology and practice of the papal office and of episcopal ministry. The petrine ministry changed profoundly between Vatican I and Vatican II, and this change is accelerating with Pope Francis.<sup>34</sup>

But there are other changes that need to take place in order to reenergize the Catholic Church for the mission of evangelization: spiritual renewal is necessary, but it cannot be an excuse to delay or to avoid institutional change. This is a time of change for the Catholic Church, also at the institutional level which must correspond to the momentous changes in the very body of the Church. The global nature of the Church is made more visible by the fact that membership in the Roman Catholic Church today is much more global, less European and less clerical. Therefore it is time to rethink some of the institutions for the government of the Church that gravitate around the papacy.

The *Roman Curia* is in need of a reform that is theological and not merely institutional. Practically, it is necessary to restore a *term limit* for all Curia officials, with as few exceptions as possible. The Curia is (also) a *career system*, created between the middle ages and the early modern period, that needs serious change. Moreover, a substantial move towards appointing more laymen and women (religious and lay) in the Curia is urgent and expected by the whole Church.

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<sup>34</sup> The most comprehensive series of reforms proposed to Pope Francis is published in the volume *La riforma e le riforme nella Chiesa* (English translation forthcoming by Paulist Press).

It is necessary to implement a real decentralization in favor of national and continental bishops' conferences. But it is also possible to strengthen already existing institutions around the papacy in order to make the papacy a more collegial institution. The Roman Curia must find a balance in the voice of *the Consistory* of cardinals. The issues are the role of the Consistory vis-à-vis the papacy, its composition (who are the members), and the frequency of its meetings. In the midterm it seems possible to leave the Consistory as a tool of the papacy to gauge reactions from the cardinals about particular issues of his choosing, but also on issues brought up by the cardinals. Many of the cardinals are the electoral college of the Pope and it is important that the Consistory gathers *at least once a year*. The personal interaction between cardinals is crucial, it must not take place only at the conclave.

The Roman Curia cannot be an isolated body, or become the counterpart of the Pope, or the bureaucracy of world Catholicism. Pope Francis' institution of the council of nine cardinals should be retained, given that it is a reception of the proposal that emerged at the Second Vatican Council, of a "*Consilium episcoporum centrale*." The C9 created by Pope Francis in April 2013 has had the positive effect of bypassing the Curia (not only symbolically). The institution of the C9 should be retained and solidified. What must be retained in this model is the return to the early-modern consistorial system in an updated form, where the Roman Curia is subject to the oversight of representatives of the local churches who gather periodically, several times a year.

A stronger *separation between the Synod's leadership and the Roman Curia* is advisable, and also a composition of the General Secretariat of the Synod and of the *Council of the General Secretariat more representative of the global Church* – in the sense of also lay members and women. The Bishops' Synod should gather *more frequently*, at least every two years.

The role of *Vatican diplomacy and the nuncios* for their work at the service of the local Churches is as well in need of a new appraisal in light of the ecclesiology of Vatican II. In particular, the procedures for the bishops' appointments must be changed – at least initially from a symbolic point of view, in the sense of more participation of the local churches (clergy, lay, and women) bound to receive a new bishop. This would be in line both with the ancient tradition, with some proposals drafted at Vatican II, and with a correct ecclesiology of the local Church. The role of Vatican diplomacy should be maintained, being one of the distinctive elements of the activity of the Catholic Church as a service to the world and to the world Church. This is most important in an age where there is

a clear need for an authoritative voice speaking on behalf of those who do not have a voice.

### *Bishops' Conferences*

The relations between the Roman Curia and *the Bishops' conferences* must change in the sense of a renewed ecclesiology of the local Church. The issues are related to their relationship to the Roman Curia in terms of the representation of the voices of the bishops. It is important to give the Bishops' Conferences power to interact with the Roman Curia collegially as a conference (national or continental).

This new phase in the role of the bishops' conferences in the life of the Church is required by the new interconnection between mission and inculturation of the Church in its multifaceted global dimension. This new global dimension of the Church makes it impossible to continue in a minimalist and top-down understanding of episcopal collegiality.

Paradoxically, under Francis it seems that the only call for more activity of the bishops' conferences is coming from the Pope: many bishops' conferences are reluctant to take up this invitation. In this situation, there is a *via facti* to be trusted – let the bishops' conferences that are active continue to do their work. But there is also the need for a new series of encouragements coming from Rome about the need of bishops' conferences as an expression – even though partial and analogical – of episcopal collegiality.

Even though technically the continental assemblies of bishops are not “bishops' conferences,” in a future perspective a new impulse is needed also for bishops' gatherings at the continental level.

### *Dioceses and Local Churches*

At the local level, *diocesan synods and particular councils* must find a new voice. Diocesan synods and particular councils must be part of a new consideration of the relationship between center and periphery for a reform of the Roman Curia. It is necessary to revive *the synodal life of the local Churches* with some provision requiring the celebration of diocesan synods and particular councils every ten years at least, with a robust and non-ornamental presence of lay Catholics and women particularly.

In the local Churches it is also necessary to recover the role of *pastoral councils* and *presbyteral councils* for the governance of the Catholic community at the diocesan level.

Concerning the very local level pastoral ministry and episcopacy-centered practical ecclesiology of the post-Vatican II period, it is time to

give new importance to the charismatic element in the *religious orders* present and active in the local Churches. In a global Church that is the defender of the poor and marginalized, it is clear that the religious orders are a prime example of a Church that is not a flight from the world, but a flight from the power structures of the Empires of today.

### *Women in the Catholic Church*

The debate on women deacons, reopened by Pope Francis in August 2016 with his decision to create a special study commission, is only the beginning and part of the most important challenge for reform of the world Catholic Church in global times.

The emergency, for the Catholic Church everywhere but in different forms according to the local situations and cultures, is to find the way to show the ongoing re-thinking of the role of women in a Church, faithful to the Gospel and engaged in missionary renewal. This can begin from, but not end with, a real involvement of women in all offices and departments at the diocesan, national, and universal level.

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## 9. **Religious Life: Candlemas Time?**

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, OP

### **Candlemas**

#### *Decline?*

What is the future of religious life in the West? By this I mean the future in Western Europe and North America of institutes recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, in which men and women live in community, making vows of poverty, chastity and obedience.<sup>1</sup> I shall also keep an eye on other forms of religious life for hints of what is to come. The number of religious has dropped dramatically in the West. In 1965, the year I entered the Dominicans, there were 179,945 religious sisters in the United States. By 2016 this has fallen to just 47,170. Non-ordained religious brothers had dropped in the same period from 12,271 to just 4,119. The number of religious men ordained to the priesthood had halved.<sup>2</sup> Similar statistics could be cited for other countries in Western Europe, though there has been a mild revival in recent years. The lowest point for the entrance of women to religious life in England and Wales was 2004, when there were just 7. In 2014, this had risen to 45.<sup>3</sup>

It may look as if religious life is teetering towards extinction in the old heartlands of Catholicism. But in a book<sup>4</sup> of interviews about the present state and future of religious life, the heads of major religious orders seemed unflustered by the tiny numbers making profession these days in the West. This is partly because of the growth of vocations elsewhere. Also the vast numbers entering after the Second World War were a statistical anomaly. Sister Sandra Schneiders points out that for most of recent history the number of women religious was “nowhere near the post-war high. Indeed it was closer to today’s ‘low point’.”<sup>5</sup> Today’s small number of re-

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<sup>1</sup> *Code of Canon Law* 573.

<sup>2</sup> These statistics are from the website of CARA, the Centre for Applied Research to the Apostolate, based at Georgetown University, Washington, DC.

<sup>3</sup> The National Office for Vocations, for the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales.

<sup>4</sup> Riccardo Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Quoted by Martin Pulson SDB in Gemma Simmonds CJ (ed.), *A Future Full of Hope?* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2012), p. 53.

cruits is exceptionally low but, following a period of uniquely high recruitment, it seems more dramatic than it is.

The crisis of vocations is especially acute in congregations of apostolic sisters. In the past, women were confined to roles that made it impossible for them to exercise their talents for leadership or in a professional life. Religious life liberated them to flourish in ways otherwise denied to them. Today, women have no need to become religious in order to teach, to be doctors or nurses or run complex organisations. Other aspects of modernity militate against religious vocations for women, such as declining birth rates and the rise of feminism. The Church is seen as prejudiced against women, and with the virtual disappearance of sisters from parishes, fewer young women will meet them and so be drawn to the life.

Nonetheless, most religious are not disheartened. Ancient orders have passed through many crises before. Religious communities were decimated by the Black Death. The Great Schism of the papacy and anti-papacy was deeply damaging. The Reformation saw the expulsion or murder of enormous numbers of religious and the loss of half of Europe to Protestantism. The French Revolution and similar turbulence in other countries saw the closure of most religious houses in Europe. The crisis that religious life is living through today is mild compared with others that we have endured. The older religious orders are used to seeing numbers dramatically expand and contract.

These crises are like the extinctions which periodically afflict life on earth, in which most species are wiped out, followed by a new period of creativity. The crisis of the Reformation led to the extinction of most medieval religious orders, but the Counter-Reformation saw an explosion of new congregations responding to the needs of a new world. The Abbot President of the Cistercians thinks that there may have been too many monasteries before this present crisis and closure of many may be a purification of the Order. Anyway, he says, “a preoccupation with the future is not Christian. We should be preoccupied with present and preparing ourselves for eternity.”<sup>6</sup>

It is almost unimaginable that religious life will become extinct in the West. It has been an intrinsic part of the life of the Church for more than one and a half thousand years. Whenever it has been plunged into crisis, it has been reinvented in ways that could never have been anticipated. The desert fathers and mothers led a movement for the renewal of the Church after Christianity lost its radical character when it became the official religion of the Empire. St Benedict founded a new form of monasticism during the chaos of the collapse of the Roman Empire, keeping alive

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<sup>6</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 44.

civilisation in a turbulent time. The mendicant orders appeared in the thirteenth century in response to the development of urban life and the intellectual ferment of the new universities of Paris, Bologna, Oxford, and Salamanca. The Renaissance gave Europeans a new sense of the individual and a thirst for personal experience, to which new orders such as the Jesuits, the Ursulines and the Capuchins responded. The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, when millions of agricultural workers moved to the desolate slums of the cities that mushroomed around the factories, led to an explosion of new congregations devoted to care for the sick and poor.

The Church has an extraordinary talent for institutional creativity. Each of these renewals would have been impossible to predict. A renaissance of the religious life, in forms that we cannot now imagine, is highly probable. Many religious institutes will die and new ones will be born. Some ancient orders will endure, perhaps shrink just as some dinosaurs survived the last great extinction of species by becoming smaller and taking to the air as birds. Will religious be as adaptable as the dinosaurs?

There are already signs that new life is awakening. This vocation has not disappeared from the radar of American millennial women, that is to say, those born after 1981. A survey revealed that a surprising 8% had considered a vocation, at least “a little seriously.” As many as 250,000 never-married Catholic women in the States had “very seriously” considered becoming religious.<sup>7</sup> Sister Nathalie Becquart, Director of *Le Service National pour l'Évangélisation des Jeunes et pour les Vocations* in France, reports an increase of interest in the religious life among the millennial generation. 15% of young French people have considered a religious vocation,<sup>8</sup> as opposed to 10% of the French as a whole: “Without doubt we are entering today into the era of post-secularisation and the youngest are the first actors and carriers of a new spiritual thirst and a new vision of religious life.” The Dutch Province of the Dominican friars had seemed to be teetering towards extinction, but now there is a small but steady stream of young people entering the noviciate. It is too soon to speak of a new spring for religious life in the West, but perhaps it is Candlemas, the feast half way between the shortest day of the year and the

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Johnson SND de N, Patricia Wittberg SC, and Mary L. Gautier, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters: The Challenge of Diversity* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014), pp. 12f.

<sup>8</sup> Sr Nathalie Becquart, directrice du SNEJV, “Quelques éléments d’analyse sur le Sondage Opinion Way réalisés récemment pour la CORREF” *La vie religieuse en France et les jeunes*; ‘l’engagement dans la vie religieuse’ (étude auprès des consacrés de moins de 40 ans).

spring equinox, when winter is loosening its grip and spring is not far away.

It is not yet clear whether the future of religious life will be a renewal of its classic expressions or whether some new forms will come to be. Perhaps both. But if a religious institute tries to recruit new members in order to ensure its own survival, it is unlikely to succeed. Why should any young person give their life so that an institution may putter on for a while? Jesus did not say that he came in order that we may survive and survive abundantly! Death and resurrection, not survival, form the narrative of our faith.

Religious life is renewed when we respond to the crises of our time, whether the transformation of urban life in the thirteenth or nineteenth centuries, or a new understanding of what it means to be human in the sixteenth. How are religious responding to the crises of today? What are the joys and sorrows of the millennial generation?<sup>9</sup> How can we engage with their hopes and fears? Of course soon there will be another generation, the post-millennials, born after 1996 and we are only at the beginning of discerning who they might be and what form of religious life might draw them.

### *Leadership*

David J. Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis conducted an in-depth survey of religious in the United States which, although completed more than twenty years ago, still offers good insight into the challenges of religious life today. They claim that good leadership is indispensable for the fragile new shoots of today to grow into maturity

Authority in religious life, as in the Church itself, is perhaps the most pressing question for religious life to resolve... Several factors inhibit the exercise of effective leadership in religious orders. The nature of authority is widely contested, consensual decision-making processes have little form, membership is generally unwilling to relinquish authority to those given responsibility, and the concept of personal 'call' often eclipses any willingness to work on behalf of the congregational ends.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I take this to refer to those born after 1982. Cf. Johnson, et al., *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> David Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, "The Religious Life Futures Project: Executive Summary," *Review for Religious*, January-February 1993, p. 45.

The individualism of modern Western culture has undermined the authority of those entrusted with the government of their communities.

Prior to the Second Vatican Council leadership was often exercised in ways that infantilised and humiliated religious, especially in women's congregations. But without authoritative leadership, the new shoots that are already tentatively sprouting will be unable to flourish.

A common response to this crisis of authority has been to move from the model of a superior, advised by council or chapter, to a 'leadership team', where several members are elected to bear joint responsibility. Nygren and Ukeritis report that this does not always work well: "Of concern was the increasingly widespread use of consensual processes and team leadership. The findings indicate that, while potentially effective, such approaches can often lead to mediocre management, representing the least common denominator within an organisation. Uninformed implementation of consensual methods often paralyzes the visionary leader."<sup>11</sup> Many religious dislike the term 'superior' which carries the implication that the others are inferiors! But neither may those, not included in the 'leadership team', be content to think of themselves as 'the led'. Nygren and Ukeritis also discovered that men and women religious had different expectations of leadership. Men looked for leaders who could push through new projects; Women prioritized the building of consensus, understandably after some brutal experiences of oppressive leadership in the past.

No one model of leadership will work for all religious communities. There is a vast spectrum of models of government from the paternal figure of a Benedictine Abbot to the centralised government of the Jesuit Society, or the democratic tradition of the Order of Preachers. No model is superior to the others. Each has its place in the complex ecology of religious life. But to respond to the present crisis of religious life, all models of leadership need to be marked by several characteristics.

In my experience, however severe the decline in membership, those in leadership must retain the initiative in forwarding the mission of the community. It is better to close four communities so as to be able to open a new one which looks to the future, than to close three communities so that a Province can stagger on a little longer. If governance becomes primarily reactive to factors outside its control, dynamism is lost and the initiation of anything new becomes impossible. Religious leaders who see themselves as problem solvers will discover ever more problems to solve. Their brothers and sisters may even come to be seen as problems, which would be the death of good government.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

We must dare to try new forms of common life and mission, and not be discouraged by failure. The birth of St Francis' communities of friars embracing radical poverty was preceded by strange bands of poor vagrants, who disappeared. The new experiment which touches religious life today is that of the ecclesial movements. Many are in difficulties and some will fail, but some may survive and flourish.

Pope Francis urged religious not to be afraid to take risks:

We must not be afraid to discard the 'old wineskins': that is, not to renew those habits and those structures which, in the life of the Church and thus also in consecrated life, we recognize as no longer corresponding to what God asks of us today in order to help his Kingdom move forward in the world: the structures that give us false protection and that condition the vitality of charity; the habits that distance us from the flock to which we are sent and prevent us from hearing the cry of those who await the Good News of Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

Those in leadership need to vitalise the common life and mission of their communities. No one will wish to join religious life just to do their 'own thing'. Why give up a life unencumbered by the restrictions of religious life only to find that one can do whatever one wants? At a meeting in America of 'young religious', a flexible phrase, I heard a young religious complain that she had joined her community ten years previously and was still waiting for someone to ask her to do anything! Unless they are sent on mission, religious life is unlikely to attract young people. Like Abraham and Moses the young have the courage to say: 'Here I am!' And like Isaiah, 'Send me!' (Isiah, 6:8). Dare we?

Many religious communities face the loss or death of institutions to which they have given their lives: hospitals, schools, missions abroad, are either being handed over to the laity, the state, or are dying. This causes profound grief to those whose lives have been given to these labours of love. Have their lives have been wasted? Those in leadership will only be able to open the way to creative new missions if they cherish what has been done in the past, celebrating its achievements and commemorating the sacrifices which made them possible. Only then, can a community happily let the past go and be open to the future.

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<sup>12</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the plenary of the Congregation for institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life 27<sup>th</sup> November 2014* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2014).

## Questions of Identity

Millennials interested in religious life seek a community which has a clear identity which resonates with their own sense of identity. If a community has no clear identity, why join it? And if it does not accommodate the sort of identity that the young seek and forge, they cannot be at home in it. So the question of identity is crucial for the future of religious life. We need to know who we are as a community and who are the young who might come to us. Nygren and Ukeritis claimed that “members do not experience an overwhelming sense of clarity concerning their congregation’s policies and procedures.”<sup>13</sup> Vatican II urged religious to return to the original charisms of their institutes. But what does that charism mean in a new world?

### *Who Are the Millennials?*

Our articulation of the community’s identity needs to make sense to the young today and engages the ways in which they themselves form and sustain identity. Who are the Millennials? It is usually claimed that most generations have a more-or-less clear identity. I was born days after the end of the Second World War, and so can just claim to be a Baby Boomer. When I was a student in Paris, scrawled on the walls was the motto of our generation: *‘L’imagination au pouvoir’!* ‘All power to the imagination’. We were succeeded by Generation X, usually defined as those born between 1961 and 1981. Tom Beaudoin called this the ‘latchkey generation’. It was, he claims, shaped by “an irreverent spiritual quest,” suspicious of all institutions, whether political, academic or religious. “We search for faith in the midst of profound theological, social, personal and sexual ambiguities.”<sup>14</sup>

The identity of the Millennial Generation, born after 1981, is harder define. Scott Seider of Boston University and Howard Gardner of Harvard call it the ‘Fragmented Generation’. They write:

Contemporary young Americans have come of age in a climate unlike any previous group of Americans. They have grown up with access to enormous amounts of information from Wikipedia and elsewhere while we, their elders, worry about the veracity of the information coming at them – from Wikipedia, in chat rooms, on My-

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<sup>13</sup> Nygren and Ukeritis, “The Religious Life Futures Project,” p. 25

<sup>14</sup> Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1998), p. 122.

Space, etc. Earlier generations sought guidance and mentorship from singular ‘experts’, while today’s young adults piece together fragments from a multitude of sources.<sup>15</sup>

Frequently millennials typify their generation by refusing to be typecast as millennials! They forge multiple identities. On the web you can create any identity you want. Seider and Gardner assert: “We see young adults who offer one persona at school or work, but project an entirely different identity on Facebook or MySpace. Other young adults create avatars for online worlds like Second Life, who bear little resemblance (or seem to be the diametric opposite) of their first life personas. Still other young adults have told us about joining multiple online dating websites, but crafting very different profiles on each.”<sup>16</sup> On Facebook, one chooses what faces one presents to one’s friends. The typical photo is the Selfie, in which you show yourself with a friend or somewhere exciting. This is how I wish to be seen today! You construct your own brand. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, is always seen in his grey sweatshirts. One can choose to be a Goth or an ecowarrior. People’s gender identities are chosen from an ever more extensive menu. One chooses who one wishes to be.

### *What Identity May They Seek in Religious Life?*

The millennials grow up in this world of multiple identities. Those who are considering religious life may reject or embrace its fluidity, but it is the context in which they will forge an understanding of who they are called to be. Their understanding of their call and of the Church are diverse, as one would expect from the ‘fragmented generation’. This is most evident in the United States where there are two conferences of women religious with different orientations. The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) which includes the majority of congregations, gathers institutes considered to have a liberal orientation. Their members often have discarded the habit and live in smaller communities. The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR) broke away from the LCWR and is identified with the restoration of traditional religious life, frequently with a stress on the habit and fidelity to the Magisterium. A few institutes belong to both conferences. George Weigel asserts that “there can be no denying that the ‘renewal’ of women’s religious life

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<sup>15</sup> Scott Seider and Howard Gardner, “The Fragmented Generation,” *Journal of College & Character*. Volume 10/4, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.



led by the LCWR and its affiliated orders has utterly failed to attract new vocations. The LCWR orders are dying, while several religious orders that disaffiliated from the LCWR are growing.”<sup>17</sup>

It is not so simple. Sister Mary Johnson and her co-authors made a profound study of young women joining religious life today in the United States. They assert that “there are approximately 1,200 women in formation at the present time, about 150 of whom are nuns in monasteries. The remaining sisters are evenly distributed between LCWR and CMSWR institutes. The retention rate across all religious institutes is 50%.”<sup>18</sup> The novices for the former tend to be older than for the latter. In Western Europe, the Church is less polarised than in the States but there is a similar spread of ‘traditional’ and ‘progressive’ visions of religious life, to use over simplistic and but unavoidable labels. Who can guess in what soil the next flowering of religious life will occur? Maybe from both for they are often not so far apart as older religious, marked by polarizations of the last century, believe.

In a world of ever shifting identities, millennials seek a clear identity. The most obvious visible sign is the habit. Many people are attracted to more traditional orders because the habit is still worn: “I saw how happy the sisters were. I also was attracted by the full habit. Many communities had recently removed the habit.”<sup>19</sup> Joanna Gilbert, writing in the English context, quotes a woman aged 29: “Seeing some Franciscan Friars of the Renewal at a youth festival: their bold appearance in habits and sandals! I was struck with a sense of the radical freedom of it, a life so different from contemporary culture that communicated the joy of following Christ in poverty and mission.”<sup>20</sup> Sister Nathalie reports that in France 96% of young professed religious consider that habit to be a good thing, and 99% of those aged less than 30.<sup>21</sup>

Other young people look for institutes which have more discreet signs of identity, perhaps a cross or a badge. Some visible sign of belonging is surely attractive, though not one which suggests a life which is inhuman or oppressive. It would be regrettable if the wearing of the habit became the shibboleth of the genuine religious. Vocations vary. Some are called to an unmistakable visibility, others to be the invisible yeast, like the French worker priests or religious today in China. When I was a chaplain

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<sup>17</sup> “The Sisters: Two Views.” [www.eppc.org/publications/pubID.4758/pub\\_detail](http://www.eppc.org/publications/pubID.4758/pub_detail).

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, et al., *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>20</sup> Simmonds (ed.), *A Future Full of Hope?*, p. 93.

<sup>21</sup> Becquart, “Quelques éléments d’analyse sur le Sondage Opinion Way.”

at London University, I sometimes wore my habit so that students and staff would know that a religious was around, and sometimes did not, so that they could approach me without embarrassment. Once when I entered the crowded main bar of Imperial College in my habit, a horrified silence descended. A student would have been brave to admit knowing me!

The religious of the future will need a deeper identity than that given by the habit. It must be founded on our response to the Lord's summons, who calls each of us by name. Being a Jesuit or a Poor Clare is not a question of making a consumer choice. If it were so, then why should one not make another choice tomorrow, as one might switch one's loyalty to another supermarket? It is recognising the place in which one can best attend to the Lord who calls and sends me.

Our faces are not constructed or chosen but formed in response to the gaze of those who look lovingly at us. Similarly, a religious institute should offer a place in which the young of today and tomorrow may unfold into their identity as those on whom the Lord looks with delight. Sister Nathalie says that the young "construct their identity by experimentation and not by reproduction [of that of their elders]."<sup>22</sup> This is not a question of choosing what identity to put on but how to become the person one is called to be.

For this to happen, we need a renewed theology of vocation, as obedience to the Lord's call to live abundantly. The vow of obedience is not submission to the arbitrary will of one's superiors; it is being conformed to Christ as the one who summons us to freedom and self-gift. The future belongs to those communities which allow young people to face their conflicting desires, to be unafraid of their complexity and gradually attain the simplicity of those who say: "Here I am Lord. I come to do your will."

The millennials are mostly attracted to congregations with a clear adherence to the teaching of the Church, most especially among those entering more traditional institutes. Members of older generations who are critical of the magisterium may be suspected of not being 'properly Catholic'. I believe that a well-founded Catholic identity is more complex than simple adherence to the magisterium. Pope Francis is summoning the Church to be a pilgrim people, unafraid to make mistakes, face doubts and raise difficult questions. He calls all Christians to leave the stuffy world of the sacristy and venture into unknown territory. This is alarming for those who seek a secure and simple Catholic identity. What does it mean

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<sup>22</sup> Sr Nathalie Becquart, "L'aventure autrement, un chemin de miséricorde: Religieux(ses) apostoliques: appelés et envoyés dans un monde en pleine mutation." Given on January 31st 2016 in the Aula Paul VI, during an international conference on 'The Consecrated Life in communion'.

to stress fidelity to the magisterium when the Pope's teaching grates against the sincere convictions of many traditional young Catholics?

It would be regrettable if those attracted to religious life became disconnected from their lay contemporaries who are drawn to a tolerant and open-minded vision of the faith. Such a disconnection has already been noted between some newly ordained priests and the young people in their congregations. Religious life only flourishes when it engages with the crises of the time, whether of society or the Church. A retreat into a Catholic ghetto would be unlikely to lead in the long term to a renewal of religious life.

What is needed is a rich and nuanced understanding of 'Catholic identity'. I have argued at length elsewhere<sup>23</sup> that it is both given and to be sought. It is given in the Word of God, the doctrines of the Church, the teaching of the Magisterium and of the saints. But the Church is the sign and sacrament "of the unity of the entire human race."<sup>24</sup> To be a Catholic is to reach out for a universality of communion and a fullness of truth which we now can only glimpse darkly. A fully Catholic identity needs both the positive embrace of what is given, more typical of the traditional young Catholic, and the yearning for the pilgrimage and exploration which is more characteristic of the 'progressive' congregations, much as I dislike such over simple labels. We need to overcome such ideological polarisations and build communities in which people of different generations or different convictions can live together in mutual affection and enrichment, seeking together to hear the summons of the Lord. Only thus will the millennial religious be able to find an identity which is robust enough to endure in the fluid landscape of today's world and the unknown world that lies ahead.

A community will only flourish if different generations are capable of living together happily. This demands an imaginative sympathy with the adventure that inspires people of another generation. Mine grew up with a strong Catholic identity. The Church permeated every aspect of our lives. Our adventure was to explore the secular world and to break out of any narrow ecclesiastical bubble. But most of the millennials who knock on our doors grew up in that secular world, discovered faith at a later age and are excited by embracing an identity as members of the Church. That is their adventure. If each generation sees its narrative as the contradiction of the other, then a shared life will be painful and uncomfortable. If we

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<sup>23</sup> Timothy Radcliffe, OP, *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* (London: Burns and Oates, 2005), pp. 164-194.

<sup>24</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

can have the courage to imagine the other generation's journey, the charisma will be transmitted and the religious will have a future.

Is this happening? I attend meetings of 'young religious' all over the world, from Chicago and Dublin to the Philippines and Zimbabwe, though the definition of 'young' varies considerably! I do believe that many young religious are moving beyond the sterile polarisations of the past and are open to religious whose narrative is different. Are the older religious willing to respond in kind?

### *Beyond Clericalism*

Sister Gemma Simmonds CJ argues that "the original monastic impulse gave rise to lay movements; only later did it become interwoven (for men) with the priesthood and episcopate, leading thereby to many problems of self-definition and identity, and not only for religious."<sup>25</sup>

Many of the interviewed heads of religious orders complained that the clericalisation of the Church has muddied the distinctive identity of the religious life. Abbot Dom Notker Wolf, Primate of the Benedictines, maintains that although the Benedictines are defined as a clerical order, they are not so: "Saint Benedict always showed a certain reserve towards clericalism; he warned his monks against it. Clericalism is a continual temptation."<sup>26</sup> Friar Michael Antony Perry OFM laments that "in the course of the centuries, the Order has changed, responding to the call of the Universal Church and the needs of the local Church. We have become a clericalised order. Pope Francis has already spoken of this: 'it is one of the ills of the Church, but an ill in which religious priests have been complicit since priests enjoy the temptation of clericalism'."<sup>27</sup> Neither St. Benedict nor St. Francis were priests. The head of the Marist brothers even speaks of clericalism as a virus which is poisoning the Church. One result has been, as noted above, a collapse of vocations to congregations of non-ordained brothers.

At the Synod of Bishops on Religious Life in 1994, many superiors general, especially from the Franciscan Family, argued that canon law should be changed so that non-ordained brethren could be elected to the highest positions and able to have jurisdiction over priests. However, there did not seem to be much sympathy for their pleas, but with the election of Pope Francis maybe this will become possible. He has frequently ex-

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<sup>25</sup> Simmonds (ed.), *A Future Full of Hope?*, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

pressed his horror at a narrow clericalism which undermines the value of other vocations.

Religious institutes need to reaffirm the value of the religious vocation as a distinct calling with its own dignity. Institutes of men which have become clericalised need to reclaim again their original identity. Orders whose founders were priests, such as the Dominicans and Jesuits should reaffirm the importance of the vocation within our fraternities of those not ordained. When I became a Dominican in 1965 there were still thousands of brethren who never sought ordination, known as co-operator brothers. After the Council, in an attempt to give them equal standing within the Order, distinguishing marks of their vocation, such as their particular habit and form of divine office, were abolished. The number of co-operator brother vocations plummeted. Recent General Chapters have urged provinces to value and promote this vocation but with little success so far. It is often asked what is the identity of a lay brother in a clerical order. Rather we must ask what is the identity of a priest in an order of friars, which is to say, brothers. This is not in any way to denigrate the priesthood. To be an ordained brother is to have a particular and fraternal way of exercising one's priesthood.

The stress on the local Church at the Council has meant that the Church is often seen almost exclusively as a network of parishes and dioceses. Many religious seek identity within this structure, whether as priests or as pastoral assistants. However valuable this ministry is, it can suffocate other forms of ministry, other institutions which give a voice and visibility to the non-ordained, and the freedom to experiment with new ways of embodying Christ's love. Bishops should not see religious men and women as staff for the parochial system. The Church thrives, like any institution, when there are numerous counter-balancing structures relating to each other dynamically within the overall embrace of the hierarchy.

*Mutuae Relationes*, published in 1978, gave directives for the mutual relations between bishops and religious in the Church. It is time for it to be renewed. Pope Francis said at a meeting with religious superiors in November 2013 that it "was useful at the time, but now it is out of date."<sup>28</sup> The time is ripe for a new vision of the role of religious in the Church, which protects our distinctive vocation so that it may flourish.

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<sup>28</sup> Reported in *La Civiltà Cattolica* in Jan. 2014.

## The Radical Choice

### *The Summons to Adventure*

The millennials see religious life as a radical decision to follow Christ.<sup>29</sup> If it is not a heroic calling, what is the point, whether this be the courage to embrace a contemplative life or to be sent on mission? In the sixteenth century, religious flocked to preach the gospel in Asia, despite the dangers of sickness and death. Almost half of the Spanish Dominicans sent on these missions died before they arrived of shipwreck, capture by pirates, illness or exhaustion. Hundreds of Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits, to name just a few orders, were martyred.

Our society, obsessed with health and safety, is risk adverse. Do we have the courage to challenge the timidity of our culture and send our brothers and sisters on missions that may cost them much, even their lives? Only if we can articulate such a radical call, the gift of one's life in the perilous adventure of following Christ, we are going to attract vocations who will set the world alight. The death cult ISIS attracts many young, especially converts, because, horrible though its purpose is, it appeals to their desire to give their lives to a heroic cause, especially when their lives seem empty of purpose.

When the Franciscan St. Maximillian Kolbe was asked why he wished to take the place of a young man about to be murdered in Auschwitz, he replied simply 'I am a Catholic priest'. It followed directly from his identity as a priest and religious that he should offer his life. Today many religious face martyrdom. In Homs, in Syria, I prayed at the tomb of Frans van der Lugt, the Dutch Jesuit who refused to flee the violence and was murdered. In Oran, Algeria, Bishop Pierre Claverie, a French Dominican, was assassinated in 1996 shortly after the murder of the Trappist monks of Tibherine, whose choice to remain in the midst of the violence is so movingly portrayed in the 2010 film directed by Xavier Beauvois *Des hommes et des dieux*. The tombs of the monks and the bishop are places of pilgrimage for Muslims and Christians alike, and are covered with flowers. In February 2005, Sister Dorothy Stang, of the Notre Dame Sisters of Namur, was shot by two hired gunmen for her championing of the indigenous people. Four Maryknoll sisters were raped and murdered in El Salvador in 1980, and six Jesuit martyrs, and their housekeeper and child, were massacred on the campus of Universidad Centroamericana, El Salvador, in 1989.

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Becquart, "Quelques éléments d'analyse sur le Sondage Opinion Way," and Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*.

More religious were martyred in the twentieth century than ever before. Martyrdom was the witness to the gospel that converted pagan Rome in the early centuries, and it remains today one of the most compelling witnesses that religious can give. Fra Michael Anthony Perry OFM said: “In baptism, we have renounced the right to have fear.”<sup>30</sup> If religious orders explicitly ask everything, even life, some candidates will flee in fear, but others will hear the voice of the Lord summoning them beyond the illusionary promises of post-modernity. Nothing less than the offer of a radical following of Christ is likely to attract anyone whom we would hope to become a religious.

Nygren and Ukeritis discovered that “that the impulse to generosity among some religious is being eclipsed by self-preoccupation, psychological decompensation, stark individualism, and a lessening of the willingness to sacrifice.”<sup>31</sup> Young people may be drawn to an order by the heroic stories of missionaries of the past but be disappointed by how little is actually expected of them today. A religious of another order told me: “We have only one vow, of comfort.” Not surprisingly his order is not retaining many young people.

The Irish poet Padraig Pearse said: “I have squandered the splendid years which the Lord God gave to my youth – in attempting impossible things, deeming them alone worth the toil. Lord, if I had the years I would squander them again over. I fling them from me.”<sup>32</sup> Religious life in the West will have a future if we dare to ask of the young more than they think that they have to give. If they see that our life is a summons to heroism, whether this means tough work in a slum or a library, or even martyrdom, surely they will come. I was filled with joy when I met young American, Belgian and French Carmelites in a monastery in Syria just a few kilometres from the frontline with ISIS.

The adventure takes many forms. It can be in service of the poorest, in the tough slums of America and Western Europe. The heads of religious orders interviewed came most alive when talking of the mission of their members to the margins. Heinz Kulüke of the Verbiti was passionate about the work of his brothers in the red light districts and rubbish dumps of the Philippines.<sup>33</sup> The Marist, Emili Turú Rofes spoke movingly of the decision of his brothers to remain in Aleppo during the Syrian civil war.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, 66.

<sup>31</sup> Nygren and Ukeritis, “The Religious Life Futures Project,” p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted by Cardinal Murphy O’Connor in Daniel P. Cronin (ed.), *Priesthood: A Life Open to Christ* (London: St. Pauls Publishing, 2009), p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 152.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

Abiding in these desolate places is a sign of our Lord's presence, who promised to remain with us until the end of time (Matthew 28). The French Dominican, Bishop Claverie wrote: "Throughout the dramatic events in Algeria, I have often been asked, 'What are you doing there? Why do you stay? Shake off the dust from your sandals! Come back home!' ... Like his mother Mary and Saint John, we are there at the foot of the cross where Jesus died abandoned by his followers and bitterly mocked by the crowd."<sup>35</sup>

We should not underestimate the courage needed for the adventure of the intellectual life, getting out of one's depths, daring to ask questions to which one has no easy answers, engaging in dialogue with people who have contrary convictions. Serious questioning and study have always been part of the mission of religious. Do we attract the courageous young thinkers of today? Pope Francis invites us to be free of the fear of making mistakes. In June 2013, he told the leaders of CLARA, the Latin American Conference of Religious, that they must not live in fear of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

A documentary by Adam Curtis, *Hypernormalisation*,<sup>36</sup> argues that the contemporary world is in retreat from complexity. Political debate is often reduced to bellowing slogans. Populism is spreading in the West. This retreat from complexity is one of the great crises of our age. Religious communities should be oases of God's peace in which we dare to be true to the complexity of issues, patiently seeking understanding. This was the role of St Benedict's monasteries in the chaotic collapse of the Roman Empire in the sixth century and of the Dominicans and Jesuits in the times of their foundation. It may again be the vocation of religious in the confusing times that probably lie ahead.

Vast numbers of schools, universities, and hospitals in North America and Europe were founded by religious. These have often been abandoned or handed over to lay governance for many reasons: the need for officially recognised qualifications, the complex bureaucracy of the modern state, or a lack of vocations. Many religious have to find their own individual ministries. The loss of a common mission has been one reason for the diminution of vocations to religious life. Why join a congregation to do what one could just as well do alone as a lay person? Mary Johnson and her co-authors note that "millennial respondents strongly prefer working in a state-sponsored ministry with other members of their own institute." 93% of them preferred this, as opposed to 51% of those who belong to the

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<sup>35</sup> Jean-Jacques Pérennès, OP, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria* (New York: Orbis, 2007), pp. 243f.

<sup>36</sup> Available at the time of writing on BBC Iplayer.



generation of the Council. The young, whatever their theological and spiritual preferences, are more likely to join an institute that engages them in common mission. When Sister Donna Markham OP was elected Prioress General of the Adrian Dominican Sisters, her first priority was to re-establish common life (see below), and common mission.

Throughout the history of the Church, congregations responded to the critical needs of the day. The Mercedarians were founded in 1218 to redeem Christian captives from their Muslim captors. To what crises do we respond today? For example, the Sisters of Life were founded in 1991 by Cardinal O'Connor to cherish the importance of every human life. In addition to the three traditional vows, they take a fourth, to protect and enhance the sacredness of human life.

In what other places of pain and despair might congregations launch common missions? Today there are 65 million forcibly displaced people, over half of whom are children. Religious are at the forefront of responding to them. The Marists are in Sicily, the first place in which many refugees arrive in Europe, caring for children and adults.<sup>37</sup> The SVDs have opened many houses to welcome immigrants: "70% of the largest house, at St. Gabriel near Vienna, has been adapted for the welcome of refugees for about 15 years. Now we are equipping a school in Switzerland, which was no longer being used, to give hospitality to families coming from Syria. Also in Germany, where the majority of refugees settle, we have three old houses open for hospitality."<sup>38</sup> Sister Marlene Weisenbeck, of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, coordinates anti-human trafficking efforts among Catholic nuns in the US, and serves as an advisor to the White House. The Paulist Fathers are deeply immersed in the new media. A young French Dominican, Eric Salobir, is the founder of the think tank OPTIC (Order of Preachers for Technology, Information and Communication) and advised President Obama on Artificial Intelligence. If religious are present where a new world is coming to be with its joys and sorrows, vocations will flourish.

### *A Life?*

The Rule of St Benedict asks: "Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?"<sup>39</sup> The millennial generation seeks communities which are alive. A song by John Denver captures this: "I want to live, I want to grow, I want to see, I want to know, I want to share what I

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<sup>37</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>39</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, RB Pro. 15.

can give, I want to be, I want to live.” Intense experiences shared on Twitter or Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram are signs of an exciting life. Something is happening and I am there! These new media spread the news of demonstrations in Hong Kong and protests in Cairo. The Arab Spring was powered by such means.

Pope John Paul II was able brilliantly to communicate to the young the excitement of being a Christian. World Youth Days gave millions of young people a taste of belonging to a Church spread throughout the world in which wonderful things happened. They were transported out of the small and often dull world of the local parish. Youth 2000 is an international initiative, promoting devotion to the Eucharist, Mary and to the teaching of the Church. Its motto is: ‘The Church is alive!’ It attracts tens of thousands of young millennials. Religious life will attract the young if it is indeed seen to offer a life in which one can flourish in God and not just survive. Just before Thomas Merton died in Bangkok, he was asked why he had not pushed Christianity more in his last lecture. He replied: “I think today it's more important for us to so let God live in us that others may feel God and come to believe in God because they feel how God lives in us.”

A British survey of Generation Y, the millennial generation by another name, found that young people feel an obligation to be happy. Not to be so is a failure to live. It concluded that “sadness is not easily acknowledged in the face of ‘achievable’ happiness. For this reason, sadness may be a powerful source of hidden shame and loneliness for young people.”<sup>40</sup> When considering a vocation, a question that they will ask is: ‘Are these people happy?’ The survey of young American women religious found that this was often a reason given for their choice of a congregation.<sup>41</sup> In France, 99% of young religious see it as ‘a way of happiness’, though most of their families and contemporaries do not share this view.<sup>42</sup>

For the heads of religious orders, joy constantly reoccurs as central to the religious life. Don Ángel Fernández Artime, of the Salesians, puts it at its simplest: “joy speaks...joy is the most beautiful sign of the consecrated life.”<sup>43</sup> Antoine Kerhuel, SJ, representing the Jesuits, said, “I did not choose the religious life because it was easy or difficult. As far as I know, every form of life has both aspects. My criterion for my choice was

<sup>40</sup> Sara Savage, Sylvia Collins-Mayo, et al., *Making Sense of Generation Y: The World View of 15-25 year-olds* (London: Church House Publishing, 2006), p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 100.

<sup>42</sup> Becquart, "Quelques éléments d'analyse sur le Sondage Opinion Way."

<sup>43</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 141.

the joy.”<sup>44</sup> This joy, it must be stressed, is not just an emotion which may wax or wane, but a sharing of the life of God. As such it is deep enough to endure times of desert and darkness.

*The Vows*

The joy of religious life is nourished by the vows that we take. Without a proper rooting in the vows, it is hard to sustain. The first World Congress on Religious Life, held in Rome in November 2004, was attended by the leaders of over 800 religious institutes, theologians, directors of religious publications and young religious. Mary Johnson and her co-authors point out that in the published summary there is almost no reference to the vows. “Chastity (consecrated celibacy) is mentioned simply as one of the convictions for a new praxis, not as a vow; poverty is mentioned only in parentheses; and the vow of obedience is not mentioned at all.”<sup>45</sup> This also struck me at the time, since my lecture to the Congress was devoted to the vows and was not registered in the conclusions. They conclude: “When the personal and social operationalization of the vows is not clearly articulated by religious themselves, a dangerous vacuum is created. If the vows are defined so broadly that most Christians could be said to be living them, the distinctive identity of Catholic religious life is blurred.”<sup>46</sup>

If we do not explicitly value our vows, we devalue our life. The Rule of St. Benedict says that they enable us to run “with expanded heart in the sweetness of love along this way of the Lord’s commandments.”<sup>47</sup> We need a renewed theology of the vows which opens up the joy and freedom of giving away our lives<sup>48</sup> and challenges the assumptions of a consumerist society. Nygren and Ukeritis note the loss of such an evangelical language: “The dominant language of religious life has shifted from theological constructs to social and psychological paradigms. Many religious no longer use sacramental or transcendental frames of reference to describe their experience of God.”<sup>49</sup> Nothing less is able to underpin the gift of one’s life ‘until death’. They remark on the lack of support for permanent commitment: “In responding to questions related to the normativeness of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 107.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 53.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>47</sup> *The Rule of St Benedict*. Stanbrook Abbey, 1937, p.5

<sup>48</sup> Dom Gregory Collins OSB gives some interesting suggestions as to how this might happen in “Giving Life a Theology Transfusion.” *A Future Full of Hope?*, pp. 23-27.

<sup>49</sup> Nygren and Ukeritis, “The Religious Life Futures Project” p. 37.

a lifelong commitment for religious life, all groups (considered by vocation, by tradition, and by age) registered barely moderate agreement.”

I read the Facebook page of a young religious who barely weeks after final profession began to have his doubts, though he still thought that this might be a good way of life. When one loses the long narrative of death and resurrection, it is hard to sustain a commitment ‘until death’, but this is the foundation on which this life is built. The young surely seek to give themselves in an irrevocable commitment, and yet because contemporary culture does not support this, even in marriage, they often find it hard to do so. How can we sustain them? At least by never just resigning ourselves to the collapse of a vocation.

### *Community*

Difficult as it is to generalise about the ‘fragmented generation’, a desire for community, local and global, is almost universal. The British survey of Generation Y, our millennials, to which I referred above, shows that they are both highly individualistic, often alone in the bubble of their iPad, isolated from those around them, yet longing for a community of friends, both in flesh and blood and in cyber communities of the like-minded. The survey of young American women religious revealed the desire for community, whether they were members of institutes that were more traditional or less so. “The youngest entrants to both LCWR and CMSWR are the most likely to value living and interacting with other members. Millennial respondents in both conferences were more likely than any other age cohort to say that living together, sharing meals together, and socialising together with other members of their institutes were very important.”<sup>50</sup> LCWR members tend to want smaller communities, with four to seven members. CMSWR vocations usually desire to live in bigger communities, of eight or more. The French survey gave similar results.

Bruno Cadoré, OP, Master of the Dominican Order, believes that what is crucial is the quality of the conversation that we have between us: “St Dominic’s idea was that the word of each person should have the same importance. This is essential in the life of the chapter, which means to say that the Order is democratic but not in the sense of there being majorities and minorities.”<sup>51</sup> Everything depends on our ability to talk and listen to each intelligently and truthfully. Charles Taylor, the Canadian philoso-

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<sup>50</sup> Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, pp. 114f.

<sup>51</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*, p. 77.

pher, wrote of the ethics of authenticity.<sup>52</sup> The millennials more than any previous generation expect authentic, truthful communication. If they are unable to say what they think, or if we do not, then they are unlikely to stay.

Because of the individualism of contemporary culture, community is both longed for and hard. It is the joy and penance of religious life. For those brought up in small families, community life is both difficult and attractive. In a religious community one has to live with people whom one has not chosen, and give time to heal wounds. Life on the web needs no such patience. A tap on the keyboard and someone is removed from the list of friends. Fernando Millán Romeral, of the Carmelites, complained that the moment that people find themselves in difficulty, they leave the order, as happens in so many marriages today.<sup>53</sup>

Most religious, like married people, will encounter times of crisis, when our vows will seem to make no sense or we are discouraged by our failure to live them well. Such crises will either destroy our religious lives or deepen them. A healthy religious community helps its brothers and sisters to live such times fruitfully, so that we draw nearer to the Lord and to each other. The Eucharist is the remembrance of a crisis in which all that Jesus had laboured to build appeared to come to pieces, as his community betrayed him, denied him or fled. A community will endure and flourish if it is unafraid to accompany its members in hope as they live through and beyond such moments. Otherwise religious life will just be a place to pause in the endless search of somewhere to belong.

### *The Life of Prayer*

According to the 2009 survey of young women entering religious life in the United States, all candidates, whatever their theological leanings, stressed the desire for a profound life of prayer: "In general, the younger the respondent, the more positively she evaluated her religious institute in offering opportunities for spiritual growth, in faithfulness to prayer, and in the quality of its communal prayer experiences."<sup>54</sup> An institute will only attract and retain vocations if it clearly places prayer, shared and individual, at the centre of its life.

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<sup>52</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>53</sup> Benotti, *Viaggio nella vita Religiosa: interviste e incontri*.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 104.

Karl Rahner SJ famously claimed that “the Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.”<sup>55</sup>

We now inhabit that future, and the young who are drawn to religious life appear to confirm his intuition. A life centred on Christ, an intense experience of his presence and grace, is ardently sought by most considering our life. The fastest growing form of Christianity today is Pentecostalism, which gives its participants an intense, shared experience. Many millennials are drawn to forms of devotion that may appear incompatible to older generations, both benediction and charismatic praise, both the silent and the loud.

Religious congregations have different traditions of prayers, from the private recitation of the breviary by the Jesuits to the lengthy singing of the full office of the Cistercians. No single way is inherently better. But no community is likely to attract vocations unless prayer is seen to be at the centre of the common life. This will challenge the tendency to activism of earlier generations, for whom a genuine selfless devotion to the needs of other people often undercut the time given to common prayer. But unless communities give time for prayer together, I doubt if the young will come and stay.

For example, the motto of my Order is *contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere*, ‘to contemplate and to share the fruits of contemplation with others’. The pressures of pastoral service often mean that there is precious little *contemplata* to share! A challenge that we and many others face is to revive a contemplative life which is the fount of all that we do.

Vocations to the contemplative life have remained relatively strong, though it is hard to obtain statistics. For example in England and Wales, in the eighties, active sisters were receiving roughly three times as many vocations as enclosed nuns. During the nineties, they were at parity, despite the fact that there were vastly more active sisters than nuns. There has been a slight revival of vocations to the active sisters, and so in 2014 they received 27 new vocations as opposed to 18 for monasteries of nuns. Still, given the relatively small number of enclosed nuns, this means that proportionally, their recruitment is stronger. A similar pattern can be observed elsewhere in the West.

In our frenetic society, consumed by activity, endlessly texting and emailing, the silence and song of the monastery is an oasis where harassed people can rest and find themselves again. And so from the Christ in the Desert in New Mexico to Bose, founded by Enzo Bianchi in the shadows

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<sup>55</sup> Karl Rahner, SJ, *Theological Investigations XX* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 149.

of the Italian Alps, monasteries remain vital centres of Christian life. Beautiful liturgy and silence summon us still.

An interesting new development is the establishment of monasteries in the centre of cities. In the thirteenth century, the friars implanted themselves in the new towns. In the twentieth century, the monks and nuns have come to the cities. For example the monastic fraternities of Jerusalem, founded by Brother Pierre-Marie Delfieux in 1975, established a community of monks and nuns in the centre of Paris at the church of Saint-Gervais-Saint-Protais. Their beautiful singing of the office attracts large numbers. It is a contemplative oasis in the tumult of a busy city. Brother Théophane says that their 'liturges citadins' (liturgies for city dwellers) expresses the yearning for the peace of the heavenly Jerusalem, 'the city where, according to the Book of the Apocalypse, all of humanity is gathered and reconciled in communion with God'. At a time when the Enlightenment belief in progress has collapsed and the future is hard to discern, here the harassed and hounded find signs of our ultimate hope. Fraternities have been founded in many cities of France, and in Belgium, Germany, Canada, Italy and Poland. This looks set to be an enduring aspect of religious life in the future.

The hunger of our contemporaries for silence and prayer overflows into other communities which are beyond the remit of this chapter, the so-called 'new monasticism'. This vague term covers a whole range of loose gatherings of lay people of various denominations who offer mutual support and prayer, the Community of St. Anselm, where people make a temporary commitment to religious life, the Moot Community, the 24/7 movement and the Boiler Rooms described by Andy Freeman and Peter Greig in *Punk Monk*.<sup>56</sup> The monastic life in one form or another continues to appeal. Alasdair MacIntyre said that the West needs a new St. Benedict.<sup>57</sup> Maybe we do not yet have him, but his rule continues to inspire.

### The Wider Community

A characteristic of the new generation is the search for a wider community of friends. Christopher Jamison OSB argues that they have grown distrustful of the longer narratives of modernity with the fall of the Berlin Wall and 9/11. This generation

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<sup>56</sup> Andy Freeman and Peter Greig, *Punk Monk: The New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), p. 263.

has created a narrative that is neither big nor small, a ‘midi narrative’ as the researchers call it. This narrative is focused around the friendship group, a group that may also include some family members (siblings for example). In itself, a group of friends is clearly part of every generation’s experience. It is the surrounding narrative that makes the current youth version of it both distinctive and potentially destructive. Or rather, it’s the absence of any wider narrative that is the problem. The small group of close friends and immediate family now bears the whole weight of a young person’s meaning; no other groups have any continuing role.<sup>58</sup>

*Friends*, the American sitcom, lets us oldies peak into such a community. This attraction to the circle of friends is reflected in development of wider circles around the community of those who have taken vows. This takes an older, more traditional form, lay associates, and also a new form, the new ecclesial movements.

### *Lay Associates*

There has been a vast expansion of lay associates of many religious institutes. Most ancient orders have had lay associates for centuries. Fraternities of lay Dominicans date back to the thirteenth century. With the decline of vocations, some institutes look to lay associates to carry on their charism and mission, and even accept them as members of their communities, sometimes with the right to take part in communal decision making.

Lay associates can vastly enrich these communities. They embody a hope that even if the congregation disappears, the baton is handed over. In Holland, for example, I met Dominican friars who thought that these lay associates are the future and that classic religious life had reached its end. They were in for a surprise!

Nygren and Ukeritis sound a note of warning. The clear identity of the vowed religious life should not be undermined: “Religious congregations must examine the impact of what has been an uncritical introduction of associational and affiliational forms of membership. This will entail a focus on the meaning of membership and in many cases the re-establishment of boundaries.”<sup>59</sup> If lay associates become virtually undistinguishable from the vowed members of a community, the clear identity of the

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<sup>58</sup> Fr. Christopher Jamison O.S.B. (ed.). *The Disciples’ Call* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 232.

<sup>59</sup> Nygren and Ukeritis, “The Religious Life Futures Project,” p. 41.



latter is undermined, and it is just this clarity which the new generation cherishes.

I witnessed this in the case of a religious community in Belgium. The community had fully incorporated lay people into its life and governance at a time when religious life seemed doomed. When vocations to the order revived, it was with difficulty and pain that a community of friars was again established. In America, the Association of Contemplative Sisters decided to admit laywomen contemplatives, to support their life of prayer. Now the majority of members are lay people and however admirable and helpful the Association remains, it has “lost much of its ability to serve as a forum for contemplative communities to collaborate and to speak and act in the Church.”<sup>60</sup>

Every order has its own tradition and way of life, but in my experience, lay Dominicans flourish best when they have their own identity and way of life, their own structures of government and formation. This protects them from being seen merely as second class members of the order, an outer circle with a diluted identity. It also protects the clear identity of the brethren and sisters as vowed religious with a distinctive way of life.

### *The New Ecclesial Movements*

Perhaps the most remarkable development in the Church’s landscape since the Council has been the burgeoning of the new ecclesial movements, especially in France, Italy and Spain. The variety and vigour of these movements is astonishing. *Comunione e Liberazione* gathers half a million people at their annual assembly.<sup>61</sup> There are the Focolari, the Beatitudes, the Chemin Neuf, the Neocatechumenate movement, present in more than 120 countries and running 78 seminaries, the Legionnaires of Christ, and many more. They are not institutes of consecrated life since they include both professed religious and lay people, but their flourishing, and sometimes failure, says something about the context in which the religious life of the future will emerge.

Pope John Paul II had a profound appreciation of these movements. Indeed some religious had the impression that with the decline of religious life in the West, the Vatican believed that they represented the future. He said in his message to the World Congress of these movements in May 1998, that “they represent one of the most significant fruits of that spring-time in the Church which was foretold by the Second Vatican Council.” Why are they succeeding so wonderfully and also sometimes experienc-

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson, et al, *New Generation of Catholic Sisters*, p. 58.

<sup>61</sup> Jameson, *The Disciples’ Call*, 149.

ing crisis? Joanna Gilbert of the Wellspring Community writes: "A striking feature of the new ecclesial movements is the renewed sense of the Church as one organic communion: one Body of Christ in which all the parts, gifted by the Spirit, play a significant role....The shared charism enables fruitful collaboration with the laity, often through support of lay formation and mission work together, but with clear boundaries respecting the difference of vocations."<sup>62</sup>

They embody the Council's vision of the Christian vocation shared by all the baptised. Here is a form of religious community which is open to all sorts of people, and offers an experience of the Church which is larger than the local parish or diocese, which may not be flourishing. These new movements have sometimes filled the vacuum left by the decline of traditional religious life.

Many of them are also experiencing crisis. The very thing that makes them attractive, the shared community of lay and religious, may also be hazardous. Jamison quotes an interview with members of a Beatitude Community in Denver in 2002: "With their radical living arrangements, their monk-like daily routine, their simple habits and beautifully ethereal liturgies, community members are attracting a small but loyal following....'We are a family living like monks', said Christine Meert, a small woman in her mid-40s with a big smile and short tousled hair."<sup>63</sup> This beautiful inclusiveness can become ambiguous when religious and laity are unsure of their different identities and the nature of their relationships. This has led the Holy See to intervene in a number of cases where boundaries have collapsed.

These new ecclesial movements are not in competition with religious life. They are new vital communities which have much to teach vowed religious, both by how they flourish and why sometimes they experience crisis. Sister Nathalie Becquart believes that they invite religious to "serve the Christian vocation and so all of the different vocations. Religious life ought therefore to promote and develop ever more an ecclesiology of communion which shows how to give thanks for and carry each of the different vocations."<sup>64</sup> To live is to be called. The vowed life makes evident in an especially naked way the human vocation to respond to the call of God summoning each of to share the divine life.

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<sup>62</sup> Simmonds (ed.), *A Future Full of Hope?*, p. 101.

<sup>63</sup> Jameson, *The Disciples' Call*, p. 150.

<sup>64</sup> Becquart, "L'aventure autrement, un chemin de miséricorde: Religieux(ses) apostoliques."

## Conclusion

At first glance, religious life appears to be in terminal decline in the West. Undoubtedly many congregations will disappear, and courageous communities recognise the moment when it would be irresponsible to accept new recruits. This does not mean that they have failed. Perhaps they have fulfilled the role for which they were founded and now is the time for other forms of religious life to arise. But there are a surprising number of young people who continue to be interested in religious life. Can we attract their interest and gain their commitment? What form will their religious life take in the future?

Periodically new forms of religious life unexpectedly burst into life, such as the friars in the thirteenth century and so many apostolic congregations in the age of the Industrial Revolution. I have not so far spotted any radically innovatory forms of religious life emerging today. Maybe they are already present and have yet to sprout high enough to be visible. The establishment of monasteries in city centres may be a sign of the future. Also some religious are living their vows in the new context of the ecclesial movements, sometimes with difficulty but also with success.

We can, however, speak of what attracts candidates of the millennial generation to religious life today. They are both formed by contemporary culture and react against it, as has been the case with every generation since the beginning of religious life. They seek a clear identity as religious, with fidelity to the Church's teaching and a radical following of Christ, with prayer at the centre of the common life. But the fluid sense of identity which characterises the contemporary world, its shifting allegiances, with communities speedily formed on the web and as quickly left behind, makes perseverance in our identity of religious, and an enduring commitment to the life, even more difficult than in the past. A renewed theology of the vows is needed so that religious life can be humanly and spiritually lived as joyful and free.<sup>65</sup> We need to offer new generations, as well as discover for ourselves, a strong identity which is more profound than any offered by such outwards signs as the habit, as good as that might be. This is an identity as disciples, always attentive to the summons of the Lord, an identity that is not undermined by the crises that every human being endures, but deepened and clarified as we hear the one who continues to call us every morning: "Oh that today you would listen to my voice" (Psalm 94).

Soon the post-millennials will be knocking at our doors, considering their vocations. What religious life will they seek? It is too early to tell.

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<sup>65</sup> See Collins, "Giving Religious Life a Theology Transfusion," pp. 23-37.

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# **The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy**

## **Purpose**

Today there is urgent need to attend to the nature and dignity of the person, to the quality of human life, to the purpose and goal of the physical transformation of our environment, and to the relation of all this to the development of social and political life. This, in turn, requires philosophic clarification of the base upon which freedom is exercised, that is, of the values which provide stability and guidance to one's decisions.

Such studies must be able to reach deeply into one's culture and that of other parts of the world as mutually reinforcing and enriching in order to uncover the roots of the dignity of persons and of their societies. They must be able to identify the conceptual forms in terms of which modern industrial and technological developments are structured and how these impact upon human self-understanding. Above all, they must be able to bring these elements together in the creative understanding essential for setting our goals and determining our modes of interaction. In the present complex global circumstances this is a condition for growing together with trust and justice, honest dedication and mutual concern.

The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy (RVP) unites scholars who share these concerns and are interested in the application thereto of existing capabilities in the field of philosophy and other disciplines. Its work is to identify areas in which study is needed, the intellectual resources which can be brought to bear thereupon, and the means for publication and interchange of the work from the various regions of the world. In bringing these together its goal is scientific discovery and publication which contributes to the present promotion of humankind.

In sum, our times present both the need and the opportunity for deeper and ever more progressive understanding of the person and of the foundations of social life. The development of such understanding is the goal of the RVP.

## **Projects**

A set of related research efforts is currently in process:

1. Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change: Philosophical Foundations for Social Life. Focused, mutually coordinated research teams in university centers prepare volumes as part of an integrated philosophic search for self-understanding differentiated by culture and civilization. These evolve more adequate understandings of the person in society and look to the cultural heritage of each for the resources to respond to the challenges of its own specific contemporary transformation.

2. Seminars on Culture and Contemporary Issues. This series of 10 week cross-cultural and interdisciplinary seminars is coordinated by the RVP in Washington.

3. Joint-Colloquia with Institutes of Philosophy of the National Academies of Science, university philosophy departments, and societies. Underway since 1976 in Eastern Europe and, since 1987, in China, these concern the person in contemporary society.

4. Foundations of Moral Education and Character Development. A study in values and education which unites philosophers, psychologists, social scientists and scholars in education in the elaboration of ways of enriching the moral content of education and character development. This work has been underway since 1980.

The personnel for these projects consists of established scholars willing to contribute their time and research as part of their professional commitment to life in contemporary society. For resources to implement this work the Council, as 501 C3 a non-profit organization incorporated in the District of Columbia, looks to various private foundations, public programs and enterprises.

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