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Seekers and Dwellers: Plurality and Wholeness in a Time of Secularity

Edited by
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Introduction

Seekers and Dwellers: Plurality and Wholeness in a Time of Secularity

PHILIP J. ROSSI

The disjunction between “seekers” – “who wish to realize in their life new, more personally authentic, ways of being Christian and Catholic – and “dwellers” – “who feel that in the Church all is already clear, well defined and simply to be followed assiduously”¹ – served as the initial focus of discussion when the contributors to this volume first gathered at Marquette University in the fall of 2012. Our conversations soon made evident that, even as this disjunction offered a starting point for addressing the more encompassing question posed by Charles Taylor – “How does the Church speak to (as well as listen to) the world?” – it also provided coordinates for a grid upon which this disjunction intersected with key elements of the other three disjunctions (between authority and experience, between natural law and historicity, and between singular and plural spiritualities) Taylor articulated as interlaced into that more encompassing question.

In consequence, while the disjunction between seekers and dwellers provided the initial frame of reference for the development of these essays, the lines of analysis and argument in the essays then moved along differing, but nonetheless complementary trajectories. One trajectory offered opportunities for a significant engagement with the other disjunctions, while another allowed for probing in greater detail the conceptual and phenomenological contours of the “seekers-dwellers” disjunction in order to test – and in some cases to contest – the comprehensiveness, adequacy, and/or the nature of the contrast it depicts. As a result, while some essays have continued to employ this and the other three disjunctions as a relatively settled conceptual grid, others have treated them as a provisional heuristic frame of reference for a variety of analytic and interpretive strategies for engaging the dynamics of belief and unbelief in the cultures of modernity and its

¹ George F. McLean, “Introduction: Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Christian Philosophical Studies I, eds. Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy), 2012, p. 1.

aftermath. From out of these strategies, these essays now encompass a number of proposals for rendering what started out as “disjunctions” into at least partially “conjunctive” modalities upon the terrain of secularity. The result is the articulation of range of possibilities for a transformative healing of these disjunctions so that what have all too often been perceived as sources of tension and division may be constructively discerned as invitations to engage the world in all its complexity and ambiguity as the locus in which God’s grace is operative all the way down.

Predicaments of Seeking: Fullness, Meaning, and Identity

The two essays in the first section, “Predicaments of Seeking: Fullness, Meaning, and Identity” probe the adequacy of the disjunction that Taylor makes between seekers and dwellers by proposing perspectives on the phenomena of “seeking” that are drawn from two sets of thinkers within the Anglo-American philosophical tradition.

David McPherson, in “Seeking Re-Enchantment,” explores “the predicament of the spiritual seeker today” by providing an account of the goal of that search in terms of the “normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life” that Taylor designates as “fullness.” McPherson articulates the predicament of the seeker in terms of the “disenchantment of the world,” which he takes to involve “a threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning.” Put in terms of Taylor’s account of a moral phenomenology of “strong evaluative experiences,” McPherson articulates the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker as “a condition in which a person seeks after a believable strong evaluative framework – in which he or she can achieve ‘fullness’ – against the threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning.” He engages two non-theistic responses to this predicament that have been articulated by Anglo-American philosophers, the quietist position espoused by John McDowell, and the “non-theistic cosmic teleological views” that have been put forth by Mary Midgley and Thomas Nagel. McPherson argues that neither is adequate in comparison to a theistic response of the personalist kind advocated by Taylor for which a “telos of communion” forms a central component of human fullness. McPherson thus argues that, in contrast both to McDowell’s quietism and Midgley’s and Nagel’s non-theistic cosmic

teleology, “theism provides a purposeful framework by which we can identify our natural tendencies towards interpersonal communion as part of what is ‘noblest and best’ about us and thus to be cultivated as part of a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life.”

In contrast to McPherson, James South, in “Seekers and Dwellers: Some Critical Reflections on Charles Taylor’s Account of Identity” presses Taylor’s distinction between seekers and dwellers in terms of what South sees as its focus upon authenticity as a key element in identity and thus as central to a seeker’s search “for meaning in life.” After distinguishing between two kinds of seekers – those who know “the end point is a return home after years of self-imposed wanderings (those who believe again)” and those who “do not know the end point of the journey (pure seekers),” South locates Taylor’s account within the interplay between Augustine’s inwardness and Montaigne’s perspectivalism within such a human quest for identity. He then engages a number of American thinkers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Stanley Cavell, to articulate, in contrast to what he sees as Taylor’s paradigm of “seeking” as a search for one’s essential identity, an account of seeking as a “never-ending search.” The upshot of South’s discussion is to draw a contrast between “the seeker who is a philosopher, who does not know where she will end up” and the seeker as “someone who does in fact know there is The Way but cannot seem to find it from where she currently is” – a contrast which he sees placing the second kind of seeker (which South takes to be Taylor’s “seeker”) in a fundamental alignment with the dweller in that a space of “habitation” is ultimately the end point for both. For the first kind of seeker, however, the culmination of the quest seems to be not “habitation,” but rather as Cavell describes it, an “abandonment” that “the achievement of the human requires”; it is “not inhabitation and settlement but abandonment, leaving ... [in which] you can treat the others there are as those to whom the inhabitation of the world can now be left..” South’s conclusion thus opens up an important dimension of the question of how the Church can be/become kenotic: it poses the challenge of what would the Church have to become in order for it to be “that to which a philosophical seeker can abandon herself.”

Contexts for Dwelling and Seeking: The Church in the World

The essays in the second section, "Contexts for Dwelling and Seeking: The Church in the World," turn from a focus on the inner dynamics of seeking and dwelling to analyses of the larger social contexts that both provide – and, in important ways, can also take away – intelligibility for the human projects of "seeking" and "dwelling."

In "The Church and the World: A Response to Charles Taylor's View of a Contemporary Disjunction," Ed Block argues that there are larger conditions in the early twenty-first century that militate against *both* seekers and dwellers in their respective efforts to attain fullness. Chief among these conditions, in Block's analysis, are the dynamics of the twenty-first century capitalism that places value on immediate material satisfaction that anesthetizes us into the condition that the Jesuit Superior General Adolfo Nicolás has characterized as the "globalization of superficiality." Block sees this dynamic having a significant impact upon the understanding and exercise of authority, the field in which Taylor has located the second disjunction incapacitating the Church's capacity to address the world. Drawing resources from Hans-George Gadamer and Blessed John Henry Newman Block proposes the reconstruction of a "thick" account of authority in which mutual trust provides the deepest and most reliable motivation. Block further argues that the "unreflective instrumentalization of the self ... which has resulted in what Taylor describes as the "buffered" self, inhibits the ability of the individual seeker or dweller to achieve fullness, wholeness." Block concludes by suggesting that one important direction along which to enact effective resistance to the instrumentalization and anesthetization that the ambient culture has brought to bear upon seeker and dweller alike lies in the recovery and renewal of a range of individual and communal contemplative practices; such a renewal would enable us to be touched by the epiphanic and transformative nature of a lived human experience that has learned to attend to the transcendent call of the good, the true and the beautiful.

Thomas Hughson's essay, "Kenotic Ecclesiology: Context, Orientations, Secularity," suggests that the context in which Taylor has discerned his four disjunction may itself be indicative of a larger disjunction of succumbing to an "us-them" mentality in which efforts

to engage one another across any of the disjunctions become contentious struggles to make “them” conform to “our” way. Hughson sees such evidence for such a disjunction from data that indicate a division between what he terms “social Catholicism” and “conventional Catholicism” that, within the Catholic Church in the United States, affects clergy and laity alike as a difference *within* the respective places in which they stand in the life of the church. Echoing Block, Hughson offers a number of reminders that, even as the Church is rightly faithful to Vatican II’s call to engage the world as the locus in which God’s grace is deeply operative – though often challenging to discern – that engagement must also be rightfully attentive to the eschatological character of the Church’s mission: In a world not yet fully redeemed, the Church is often also called to be “out of phase” with the world. Hughson offers an overview of some of the important debates in Vatican II that re-enforce this crucial theological point and forcefully argues that “the Church has a calling to exemplify social existence transformed by the power of Christ and in light of the gospel, not to be a fawning spaniel in the lap of late capitalism sunk into liberal-democratic nationalism.” Hughson concludes with an astute analysis of how a kenotic ecclesiology needs to be rooted in a theology attentive to the immanent kenotic dynamic of the Triune God in order to create the space needed for the Church’s concrete institutional freedom to be effective in its mission to the world.

Seekers and Dwellers: Re-Reading Experience

The two essays in the third section, “Seekers and Dwellers: Re-reading Experience” offer perspectives on two issues that the authors each argue pose particularly deep and complex challenges to the Catholic Church’s efforts to address the realities of contemporary culture. What links the challenges they each present is a reading of the experiences of seeking and dwelling from perspectives that the authors indicate have yet to be fully engaged in the Church’s reflective encounter with the contemporary world. In one case, the overlooked perspective is one shaped by embedded attitudes and practices experienced as forms of “spiritual violence” that affect what one sees as appropriate possibilities for one’s own seeking and/or of dwelling. In the second case, the other perspective is that of an alternate cosmology, one of non-duality, such as exemplified in Advaita

Vedanta, the metaphysics of Classical Hinduism. In this case, the overlooked perspective is that of a “deeply questioning spiritual realist” who is concerned not so much with a search for an authenticity identity but rather with “discerning the nature of the transcendent world and its significance for us,” and for whom the cosmology perceived as embedded in Catholic doctrine is judged inadequate.

Theresa Tobin’s essay, “Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality: Implications for Seeking and Dwelling Among Some Catholic Women and LGBT Catholics,” thus offers a descriptive and analytic account the phenomenon of “spiritual violence” as a locus in which there are crossings and re-crossings among the fissures between a number of the disjunctions that Taylor has typified. Tobin’s account focuses on “the experience of spiritual violence perpetrated ... by their own faith tradition” against many America Catholic women and LBGT Catholics in order, first, to “examine spiritualities of seeking and dwelling through the experience of spiritual violence” and then “conversely [to] explore the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling.” Her essay thus first explores “how one’s spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence” and then proceeds to consider “how experiences of spiritual violence may impact shifts in an individual’s spiritual orientation from dwelling to seeking.” Though her account does not extensively engage the second and third of Taylor’s disjunctions (respectively, between models of authority and between natural law and experience in matters of morality), it does point in a direction that suggests the continuing efforts to engage this issue will likely bring to light a number of important loci upon which there is deep convergence among the four disjunctions. A further important consequence that Tobin sees issuing from the experience of those who have been subject to spiritual violence is the generation of two important “sub-categories of spiritual orientation” that put together, though in different ways with different emphases, elements of the orientations both of “seeking” and of “dwelling.” She then concludes with a brief reflection of the potential impact upon the dynamics of seeking and dwelling in consequence of Pope Francis’s “call to cultivate a faith that both dwells and seeks, and especially that is capable of holding a healthy tension between dwelling and seeking.”

The second essay in this part, Alan Madry's essay "Seekers, Comparative Spiritual Narratives, and the Authority of the Church," sets forth an issue within which he sees an intersection upon which the first (seekers and dwellers), second (modes of authority), and fourth (diverse spiritualities) disjunctions all converge. Pursuing a line of argument that resonates with James South's reservations about the centrality of an "authenticity identity" for characterizing the quest of the seeker, Madry characterizes the seeker who poses the greatest challenge to Catholic authority as "a deeply questioning spiritual realist." By this he means someone who is not primarily looking for some satisfactory form of "authentic identity" but instead "for ... a more compelling and comprehensive [metaphysical and cosmological] account of the spiritual and practices that arise integrally out of that account and promise something more than a speculative reward after death for their labors." Madry thus offers a comparative account of the metaphysics and cosmology operative in Catholic theology (as he finds it represented in the *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*) in contrast to the cosmology of Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualist metaphysics of Classical Hinduism. The method he employs in this comparison is "that of cumulative case reasoning/inference to the best explanation, the method, with empirical observation and induction, of empirical science, the law, and daily life." Madry acknowledges that there is little new in the criticism he offers of the paradoxical character of Catholic teaching with respect to the doctrines of God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the nature and destiny of the human soul, but the burden of his argument is not to so much to offer a new perspective on Catholic seeking, but rather to indicate why some might look "beyond the Catholic tradition to other accounts of the spiritual that may well go further in satisfying the demands of epistemic rigor ... for discerning the nature of the transcendent world and its significance for us." To that end, he offers an overview of the Advaita cosmology that he sees addressing the paradoxes of the *Catechism's* cosmology; on the basis of what he proposes as metaphysical strengths of Advaita Vedanta, he concludes with the hope that an engagement with its alternate cosmology might be of benefit to seekers on two counts. It would, in the manner of the Catholic mystic Bernadette Roberts, make a "radical transformation of [the believer's] understanding of Jesus and Christ in

the spirit" possible, as well as "providing practices capable of leading the seeker to profound experiences of spiritual awakening."

From Disjunctions to Wholeness

The fourth section, "From Disjunctions to Wholeness," contains essays that, in addition to providing three perspectives – theological, pedagogical, and philosophical – from which to gain an overview of the various disjunctions as they operate within and upon the church and contemporary culture, also trace paths along which dimensions of human wholeness can be discerned in such interplay.

Robert Doran, in "Invisible Missions: The Grace that Heals Disjunctions," suggests that Taylor's four disjunction operate within a larger category in which there is a "disjunction of the church from the very work of God in the contemporary world, a work that I will argue *includes, encourages, and even demands, rather than forbids or laments, a great deal of secularization.*" Doran argues that this larger category provides the horizon for the kind of discernments that are necessary for the healing of disjunctions. This horizon is constituted by "the acknowledgment of the universal presence of divine healing and elevating grace in the world through the invisible missions of Word and Spirit, divine Truth and divine Love, both inside the church and beyond the explicit contours of ecclesial membership." Working from a framework drawn from Bernard Lonergan and Thomas Aquinas, Doran argues for both a doctrinal and a theological continuity in the account his essay provides for understanding the affirmation made by Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes*, § 22) that "the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery." In particular, he emphasizes that there is need for an attentive discernment of grace as it is at work in "the dispensation whereby the evils of the human race are transformed into the greater good of a new community through the loving and non-violent response that returns good for evil." In consequence, Doran characterizes "the church's responsibility in our age" as one that requires it "to discern the presence of such participation in Trinitarian life wherever it may be found, and then to foster it and join hands with it in working for the establishment of God's reign in human affairs." Within this context Doran sees religious and spiritual plurality, the focus of Taylor's fourth disjunction, as a central theological locus for

the processes and practices that will enable the healing of all disjunctions: “The data relevant for Christian theology become all the data on the religious living of men and women at every age, in every religion, and in every culture.”

In “Disjunctions and a Jesuit Imaginary,” Daniel Hendrickson looks at the three experiments and exercises that constitute an important part of the formation of young Jesuits in terms of the role these exercises play as pedagogies for cultivating an alternative *imaginary* to the culturally pervasive “immanent frame. The first of these experiments consists in a “pedagogy of study,” founded in the reflective intellectual dynamics that inform the classical Jesuit program of studies, the *Ratio Studiorum*. Interpreting the dynamics of the *Ratio* in the light of Montaigne’s almost contemporaneous *Essays*, Hendrickson proposes that its techniques of self-examination and the dimensions of personal awareness that they cultivate serve to catalyze “the impulse to constructively engage other people and places” and to do so “with global impact.” He then indicates how a second kind of formative exercise for young Jesuits constitutes “a pedagogy of alterity” that, by focusing on a sense of otherness, “hopes to cultivate in students a pliability of their lives to the new environments – the lives, cultures, customs, and concepts – of other people.” The third pedagogy Hendrickson discuss is one that he terms “a pedagogy of grace,” which serves to “cultivate an orientation to a transcendent other, or at least invites a kind of transcendental orientation.” He then argues that these pedagogies, as “pedagogies of fullness,” can be effective in “disarming two malaises” that Taylor has diagnosed at work in the dynamic of a secular age: an array of relational disjunctions that ultimately entangle us within ourselves, and within the specific disjunctions that entrap the Church. In reference to the specific context of Jesuit and Catholic higher education, he sees the potential for these the pedagogies to open students of a secular age to a network of relationships for solidarity, healing, and wholeness. With regard to the governing Church hierarchy, the pedagogies would encourage a similar openness, particularly with respect to the two of the neuralgic disjunctions Taylor has identified in the current dynamics of the official workings of the church: first, perspectives that focus the meaning of what it means to live as a Roman Catholic principally upon a dynamic of “dwelling,” and second, in reluctance

and unwillingness to recognize spiritual experiences that are not explicitly Christic.

Finally, in “Seekers, Dwellers, and the Contingencies of Grace: Hospitality, Otherness, and the Enactment of Human Wholeness,” Philip Rossi takes the religious plurality at work in what Taylor calls “the nova effect” to serve as a central locus in which to open possibilities for the resolution of the various disjunctions in the dynamics of the cultures of secularity. He suggests that “the recognition, emergent in the aftermath of modernity, that the dynamic of plurality, which is rooted in the very relationality of human agency, is deeply consonant with a Christian account of the abundant operation of God’s grace manifest in the mysteries of Creation, the Incarnation of God’s Word, and the life giving outpouring of their Spirit.” Rossi argues that the dynamic of plurality manifest in the “nova effect” provides new and enlarged possibilities for recognizing and engaging the religious/spiritual “other” that already lies *within* the dynamics of both dwelling and seeking in the radical contingency of the world. On Rossi’s account the nova effect manifests – in ways that resonate with, yet also deeply challenge, the dynamics of the “immanent frame” of meaning constituted by secularity – the contingency and fragility of the otherness with which we all face both ourselves and one another in the workings of history and culture. An important marker of such shared contingency is found in what Taylor calls the “fragilization of belief,” which, for seeker and dweller alike, creates spaces of uncertain or occluded meaning that unsettle the closure that constitutes the buffered identity of modernity’s punctual self. Such fragilization thus brings with it the presence and the power of an “immanent otherness” that provides a sharp and stark reminder that a fundamental human project is finding ways, in the face of all the otherness we communally and individually bring with us, to dwell together in the contingencies of time with one another on the finite and fragile planet entrusted to us. Rossi thus concludes that the envisioning and the enacting of possibilities of welcoming one another – or, as George Steiner puts it, learning to be “guests of each other” and “guests of life on this crowded, polluted planet” – provides a fundamental modality in which we, seekers and dwellers alike, are all invited to be bearers of grace to one another. Such graced welcoming provides a space of possibilities enabling us to act, even as we ourselves are fractured, in ways that help one another in the work of

healing the fractures of the world. In a space of graced hospitality, it becomes possible, whether we consider ourselves seekers or dwellers, to become “guests to one another” by enacting a full welcoming of the other – and full acceptance of our being welcomed as other – in mutual recognition of the shared fragility that marks our human finitude.

Concluding Observations

Charles Taylor has noted that a secular age has made simply believing “naively” difficult if not impossible.² All belief – including those beliefs (*and* the non-beliefs) that matter most for us – has become “contestable,” requiring some manner of reflective articulation and appropriation. All of us, theists and atheists, the “nones” and the indifferent, can and will find ourselves challenged by what he terms the “fragilization” of belief.³ The essays in this volume by no means make a claim to have surveyed the whole terrain of modernity and secularity (including their “post-” forms) upon which belief and unbelief both find themselves fragilized under the cross pressures that bear upon the self-sufficiency of the immanent frame. Their individual and collective ambition has been much more modest; placed within the larger ambit of the project, “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision,” they have rather sought in their analyses to touch upon a number of the particular characteristics that mark the working of secularity within some sectors of the cultural terrain of the United States and of the Catholic Church in the United States in the early twenty-first century. Among the characteristics that one or another of the other essays in the volume address as phenomena on this terrain that are significant for the work of renewing the Church are:

Emphases on instrumentalization and immediacy in all sectors of life that are fostered and exacerbated by the dynamics of a late capitalist economy;

“Us-them” mentalities that have become increasingly manifest in a variety of socio-cultural and political polarizations;

² *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304, 531-532.

Deeply embedded structural biases with respect to race, gender, and economic status and the impact that these biases have on further marginalizing the already powerless;

The attraction that still draws many, however they find themselves placed on the spectrum encompassing “seekers” and “dwellers,” toward various ways of “seeing our lives as a meaningful part of a larger whole”;

The enduring persistence of various forms of aesthetic and contemplative sensibilities, old and new, even in the midst of new forms of static and interference emergent from a culture of informational immediacy and overload.

Many of these are “double-edged” in that the phenomena in which they are manifest offer both challenges and opportunities for the task of “renewing the Church in a secular age.” For instance, the dynamics of instrumentalism and of immediacy marginalize practices of discernment, contemplation, aesthetic creation and appreciation; yet they also make it possible to locate and articulate the very spaces of human meaning they would have us neglect and abandon for the sake of immediacy and instrumental value – and these may very well be precisely the human spaces that the Spirit longs to enable us to fill with an abundance of grace and life. Similarly, the increasing – and increasingly virulent – rhetoric of divisiveness in public discourse further entrenches patterns of injustice, inequality, and exclusion, as well as the persistence of violence at all levels of human culture; at the same time they offer particularly urgent opportunities to find the courage and the creative imagination to put in place practices that enact “the kenotic hospitality of God”⁴ by which, in the words of Pope Francis, we “never construct walls or borders, but [rather] piazzas and field hospitals.”⁵ It is our hope that these essays may be read as efforts to encourage venturing upon the kind of welcoming and healing tasks that Pope Francis commends.

⁴ See Philip J. Rossi, S.J., “Sojourners, Guests, and Strangers: The Church as Enactment of the Hospitality of God,” *Questions liturgiques – Liturgical Questions* 90 (2009), pp. 121-131.

⁵ Pope Francis, Speech to the Gathering of the Italian Church, Florence (November 2015), at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/11/10/pope_francis_a_new_humanism_in_christ_jesus/1185723.

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Part I
Predicaments of Seeking:
Fullness, Meaning, and Identity

1.

Seeking Re-Enchantment

DAVID McPHERSON

In this essay I want to explore the predicament of the “spiritual seeker” today. I use “spiritual” here in a broad sense that is often employed by Charles Taylor: viz., it refers to the realm of meaning that is constituted by strong evaluation. By “strong evaluation” I mean any qualitative distinction of value in terms of good and bad, higher and lower, noble and base, admirable and contemptible, sacred and profane, and so on that is seen as normative for our desires rather than merely contingent upon them. The spiritual seeker is thus someone who is seeking after a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life, which Taylor describes as the condition of “fullness.”

The predicament of the spiritual seeker that I specifically want to explore relates to what Max Weber calls the “disenchantment of the world,” which involves a threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning. We can then understand the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker in terms of the need to overcome this threatened loss of meaning and thereby to achieve a kind of “re-enchantment.” I think coming to terms with the predicament of the spiritual seeker in this broad sense is important for considering how one might become a spiritual seeker in a theistic sense, which can also lead to seeking out specific forms of theistic religious practice.

I will explore the predicament of the spiritual seeker by considering the views of contemporary philosophers who can be seen as highly reflective representatives of the spiritual seeker. In the first section I will fill out in more detail the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker by discussing Taylor’s account of this predicament. In the second section I will consider one non-theistic response to this predicament: viz., the “quietist” position championed by John McDowell. I will argue that this response is inadequate because it in fact attempts to prevent a needed kind of spiritual seeking and it also cannot sustain its own claims. In the third section I will consider much more promising non-theistic responses: viz., the non-theistic cosmic teleological views of Thomas Nagel and Mary Midgley. In the fourth and final section I will discuss what I contend are the main advantages

of a theistic perspective over such non-theistic views. In particular, I will discuss the importance of the “personalistic” aspect of theism and its “telos of communion.” I will also examine the reasons for resistance to this personalistic aspect.

The Predicament

In *Sources of the Self* Taylor writes that it is a distinctive feature of our modern age that people often have anxious doubts about the meaning of life; not only about what the meaning might be, but also about whether there is in fact any meaning at all. In the modern world our strong evaluative frameworks have become problematic in the sense that “no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as *the* framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact.”¹ For many people today there is “something tentative in their adhesion [to a particular strong evaluative framework], and they may see themselves, as, in a sense, seeking. They are on a ‘quest’ [...]”² However, Taylor continues:

To the extent that one sees the finding of a believable framework as the object of a quest, to that extent it becomes intelligible that the search might fail. This might happen through personal inadequacy, but failure might also come from there being no ultimately believable framework. Why speak of this in terms of a loss of meaning? Partly because a framework is that in virtue of which we make sense of our lives spiritually. Not to have a framework is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless. The quest is thus always a quest for sense.³

To live with the threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning, on Taylor’s view, is thus the predicament of the “modern seeker.” In the terms he uses in *A Secular Age*, this means that the modern seeker is one who aspires after the condition of “fullness” against the backdrop of the threat of “exile,” where “we lose a sense of where the place of fullness is, even of what fullness could consist in; we feel

¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 17.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

we've forgotten what it would look like, or cannot believe in it any more. But the misery of absence, of loss, is still there [...]."⁴

According to Taylor, this threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning is the result of the process of disenchantment in the modern West. The key feature of disenchantment here is that it has done away with the pre-modern, enchanted world belief in a meaningful cosmic order (or "ontic logos") where meaning was seen as residing within the cosmos itself and defined in complete independence of our human responses and purposes⁵, as in the idea of the "Great Chain of Being." Moreover, this meaningful cosmos was understood to be part of the obvious, taken-for-granted background to human life as well as something that could be rationally apprehended.⁶ As John McDowell puts it: "In a common mediaeval outlook, what we now see as the subject matter of natural science was conceived as filled with meaning, as if all of nature were a book of lessons for us."⁷

Taylor regards the success of post-Galilean natural science as playing a key role here in the process of disenchantment. Post-Galilean natural science made progress precisely by offering

⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 6; cf. pp. 302-3, 307-20.

⁵ Later, I will refer to this, following Taylor, as a "Platonic" notion of meaning/value. This contrasts with a view of meaning/value as *dependent* on our responses and purposes where it is a requirement of something being meaningful/valuable that it is meaningful/valuable *for human beings*. In other words, the value requires the valuer in that the value is defined as *good for the valuer*. We might call this an "Aristotelian" notion of meaning/value.

⁶ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 16-9, 121-9, 160-1, 186-92; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 25, 59-61, 323-31; Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2011), pp. 291-2. According to Taylor, one way to understand our modern age is by contrast with the different existential predicament of the pre-modern, enchanted world. This pre-modern predicament is "a predicament in which an unchallengeable framework makes imperious demands which we fear being unable to meet. We face the prospect of irretrievable condemnation or exile, of being marked down in obloquy forever, or being sent to damnation irrevocably [...]. The pressure is potentially immense and inescapable, and we may crack under it. The form of the danger here is utterly different from that which threatens the modern seeker, which is something close to the opposite: the world loses altogether its spiritual contour, nothing is worth doing, the fear is of terrifying emptiness, a kind of vertigo" (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 18).

⁷ John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 71.

mechanistic explanations of empirical phenomena instead of the sort of teleological explanations that were central to the “enchanted” idea of a meaningful cosmic order. This made possible a wholly immanent order in nature “whose working could be systematically understood and explained on its own terms, leaving open the question whether this whole order had a deeper significance, and whether, if it did, we should infer a transcendent Creator beyond it.”⁸

The process of disenchantment so understood in many ways constitutes an improvement in our understanding of the world. However, it also brings with it difficult challenges related to how we are to understand our experiences of meaning or value (used equivalently here). On one view of disenchantment, which we can call extreme or total disenchantment, the loss of the pre-modern idea of a meaningful cosmic order entails that all human experiences of meaning or value are to be regarded simply as subjective projections onto a meaningless or value-neutral universe.⁹ The most extreme version of disenchantment in fact combines such projectivism with a mechanistic view of human beings according to which our experiences of meaning or value are explained reductionistically in terms of our genes, or our brain “wiring,” or a stimulus-response mechanism, or something else of the sort.¹⁰

There are many who want to resist such views of total disenchantment – including Taylor – and doing so can be understood in terms of seeking a kind of “re-enchantment of the world.” It is important to note here that seeking re-enchantment does not mean a return to the pre-modern, enchanted world; rather, it primarily means defending a realist, non-projectivist account of meaning or value. As Taylor puts it: “re-enchantment” [...] does not undo the “disenchantment” which occurs in the modern period. It re-establishes the non-arbitrary, non-projective character of certain demands on us, which are firmly anchored in our being-in-the-world.”¹¹ Seeking re-enchantment then above all involves defending the validity of strong evaluation, i.e., qualitative distinctions of value that are seen as normative for our desires rather than merely contingent upon them. Otherwise stated, it means defending, against

⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 15.

⁹ Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections*, pp. 293-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 292-302.

¹¹ Charles Taylor, “Recovering the Sacred,” *Inquiry* 54:2 (2011), p. 117.

the total disenchantment view, the validity of the “enchantment” – i.e., the normative demands or what Taylor calls “strong goods” – that can already be found in our “being-in-the-world.”¹²

Connected with defending the validity of strong evaluation, I think seeking re-enchantment also involves aspiring to a kind of “self-transcendence,” where this means transcending a “lower,” more enclosed mode of selfhood for a “higher” one concerned for strong goods that are normative for our desires. According to Taylor, one of the chief worries regarding disenchantment has been that with the loss of the pre-modern idea of a publicly available cosmic order in which individuals found their place and function there would be a corresponding loss of a sense of a higher, larger purpose for life. Moreover, this is often linked to “a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society.”¹³ Thus, we can say that if the process of disenchantment – especially in its most extreme forms – pushes towards self-enclosure, then re-enchantment must involve a move towards greater self-transcendence in concern for strong goods. But this requires that we are able to defend the validity of these strong goods.

So how can this be done if we reject the pre-modern idea of a meaningful cosmic order, where value is understood in a “Platonic”

¹² It should be noted that the language of “re-enchantment” is potentially misleading insofar as it might suggest that the world *is* completely disenchanted (i.e., devoid of meaning) and so we must create or bring about the meaning or “enchantment.” However, Taylor clearly sees re-enchantment as first of all requiring us to *discover* something that is already there to be discovered: viz., objective meanings/normative demands/strong goods. Hence I said that for Taylor re-enchantment involves defending a realist, non-projectivist account of meaning/value (which strong evaluation presupposes). On Taylor’s view then the world is *not* completely disenchanted and so re-enchantment is a matter of defending the validity of objective meaning/value against the total disenchantment view. This includes overcoming the ways in which objective meaning or value has been neglected due to a scientific, disengaged view of the world. Overcoming this requires exploring an engaged standpoint, which is alluded to here with the use of the Heideggerian phrase “being-in-the-world.”

¹³ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 4. Taylor also connects this with the rise of the dominance of instrumental reason (*ibid.*, pp. 4-8). This arises when we lose the strong sense that there are objective demands upon us. The sole question then becomes how we can most effectively attain the desires we happen to have.

manner, i.e., in complete independence of our human responses and purposes? On Taylor's view what is needed is to argue for the viability of a middle path between projectivism and "Platonism" in regard to the objectivity of strong goods.¹⁴ What Taylor wants to contest in both perspectives is their view that what is objectively real is only what exists in complete independence of our responses and purposes. The key difference between these two perspectives is that Platonism affirms that strong goods can exist in complete independence of our responses and purposes and thus regards them as objectively real, whereas projectivism rejects such a possibility and thus regards such values as mere projections of our subjective attitudes onto the world.

By contrast, Taylor argues that it is only on the basis of our responses to strong goods that we can argue for a realist account of them. This means appealing to an "engaged" standpoint, i.e., to our experiences of the significance of things *for us* as purposeful agents, which arise from our "being-in-the-world" where things are seen as *fit* to be valued in certain ways.¹⁵ This contrasts with the "disengaged" standpoint, which is exemplified in a scientific outlook that seeks to understand the world in "absolute" terms, i.e., without reference to our experiences of the significance of things for us as purposeful agents. Taylor writes:

[Ethics] tries to define the shape of the human moral predicament. But there would not be such a thing unless human beings existed. Once we exist, certain ways of being are higher than others in virtue of the way we are

¹⁴ On this middle path position see Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 7-9, 53-60, 68-9, 256-8, 341-2, 510, 512-3. I should clarify here that in using the term "Platonism" I am not referring specifically to the works of Plato, but rather to a position that resembles Plato's thought. The basic idea of "Platonism" as used here is just the idea of values being understood in complete independence of our human responses and purposes. This is the position that J.L. Mackie and other projectivists such as Simon Blackburn see value realists as endorsing and it can be found in the works of "moral intuitionists" such as G.E. Moore and W.D. Ross.

¹⁵ This is not only an epistemological point about our mode of access to strong goods, but an ontological point about the nature of these goods: they are goods in that they are *good for us*. See Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Introduction & Ch. 2; Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), Ch. 4; Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections*, pp. 293-4; Taylor, "Recovering the Sacred," pp. 115-8.

(the 'Aristotelian' component); certain demands are made on us by other human beings in virtue of the way both we and they are (the 'moral' component). I would want to add: certain demands are made on us by our world in virtue of what we are and how we fit into it (the 'ecological' component). And further, I believe that certain goods arise out of our relation to God (the 'theological' component). Of *all* of these (even the theological component) one would have to say they depart from the Platonic/natural science model. They are all human-dependent goods.¹⁶

When Taylor speaks here of "human-dependent goods" he is advocating what McDowell calls a "no-priority view."¹⁷ Contra Platonism and projectivism, this is the view that neither the object side nor the subject side of our strong evaluative experience can be said to have priority in the determination of values. Rather, as Taylor would put it, strong goods only arise out of our purposeful engagement with the world as human agents whereby certain objects are perceived as being *worthy* of our respect, concern, love, admiration, and the like and thus as constitutive of a normatively higher, nobler, more fulfilling mode of life. This means we cannot understand strong goods if we only consider the subject side or the object side of experience. Both are needed to make sense of our experience as strong evaluators since the dependence runs both ways.

According to Taylor, what is needed then is to articulate an adequate "ontological background picture" (or "moral ontology") that can make sense of and inform our strong evaluative experiences (or "moral phenomenology"). On his view our strong evaluative experiences in fact presuppose or have implicit in them some ontological background picture that can make sense of them.¹⁸ For instance, Taylor discusses in a number of places how the widely

¹⁶ Charles Taylor, "Comments and Reply," *Inquiry* 34 (1991), p. 245. cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 59.

¹⁷ John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 159-62.

¹⁸ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 3-11, 68-75; Taylor, "Ethics and Ontology," *The Journal of Philosophy* 100:6 (2003), pp. 316-20; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 589, 607-9, 692-5; Taylor, *Dilemmas and Connections*, pp. 297-302.

shared strong evaluative judgment that human beings ought to be respected presupposes some ontological account that makes sense of this “respect worthiness” by explaining what it consists in. This will often involve specifying an account of our human potential for a higher mode of life, due to our being created in the image of God, or our being Kantian rational agents, or something else of the sort.¹⁹ For Taylor, then, this sort of appeal to a background ontology is needed for discovering a believable strong evaluative framework.

In his discussion of ontological background pictures at the beginning of *Sources* Taylor notes that in the modern world the articulation and defense of one’s background ontology for his or her strong evaluative experiences can be “very difficult and controversial.”²⁰ This is due in part to the pluralistic nature of modern society in which any attempt to articulate and defend a given background ontology can be contested, even where there is agreement on particular strong evaluative judgments, such as that human life should be respected or that we should cultivate certain virtues. Moreover, for many people the background ontology behind their strong evaluative responses remains largely implicit and underexplored. This leaves open the possibility that there could be “a lack of fit between what people as it were officially and consciously believe [...] on the one hand, and what they need to make sense of some of their moral reactions, on the other.”²¹ Taylor believes that this is in fact the case for those who adopt a reductive naturalist stance towards their moral reactions, e.g., when they offer a sociobiological explanation of their moral responses of respect for human life. But it could also be the case in less reductive approaches as well. I will suggest that it is the case with any view that sees human life against the backdrop of a purposeless universe. When there is such a lack of fit between our strong evaluative responses and our ontological background picture this requires that we either revise our responses to fit our ontology (or lack thereof) or else revise our ontology to fit our strong evaluative responses.²²

On Taylor’s view it is part of the modern predicament that many people’s strong evaluative beliefs have a “tentative, searching,

¹⁹ See Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 5-6, 25; Taylor, “Ethics and Ontology,” p. 317.

²⁰ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 9.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 609.

uncertain nature.” Although many people may not be attracted to reductive naturalist explanations for their strong evaluative responses since they believe such responses do “show them to be committed to some adequate basis,” nevertheless, they are “perplexed and uncertain when it comes to saying what this basis is.”²³ Taylor further maintains that many people would not feel ready to make a final choice between theistic and secular ontologies as the grounds for their strong evaluative responses. In light of the fact that most of us, as he puts it, “are still in the process of groping for answers here,” the task of articulation thus goes beyond merely “formulating what people already implicitly but unproblematically acknowledge,” or “showing what people really rely on in the teeth of their ideological denials.” What is needed is to show that “one or another ontology is in fact the only adequate basis for our moral responses, whether we recognize this or not.”²⁴

We can summarize Taylor’s account of the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker then as a condition in which a person seeks after a believable strong evaluative framework – in which he or she can achieve “fullness” – against the threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning. Moreover, we have seen that Taylor regards the finding of a believable strong evaluative framework as requiring that one articulate and defend an adequate background ontology that can make sense of and inform our strong evaluative experiences. Before considering some different attempts to articulate and defend an adequate background ontology for strong evaluation, I want to consider an approach that seeks to avoid this requirement: viz., the “quietist” approach championed by John McDowell. I will seek to show that the requirement of an adequate background ontology cannot in fact be avoided.

Non-Theistic Re-Enchantment #1: Quietism

The basic idea of McDowell’s quietist position is that we should remain content with the strong evaluative experiences that arise for us within a particular shared form of life and not seek to provide any deeper ontological grounding or justification for them. McDowell

²³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 10.

²⁴ Ibid.

acknowledges that some may experience a sense of “vertigo” from the realization that their ethical (i.e., strong evaluative) beliefs are completely contingent upon their being brought up in a particular shared form of life.²⁵ However, he thinks that this vertigo can be overcome and a realist, non-projectivist view of ethics can in fact be defended from within a particular form of life. Drawing on the metaphor of Neurath’s ship, which has to be rebuilt while at sea, McDowell writes:

[One] can reflect only from the midst of the way of thinking one is reflecting about. So if one entertains the thought that bringing one’s current ethical outlook to bear on a situation alerts one to demands that are real, one need not be envisaging any sort of validation other than a Neurathian one. The thought is that this application of one’s ethical outlook would stand up to the outlook’s own reflective self-scrutiny.²⁶

What is needed in order to recognize such ethical demands – “which are there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them” – is to acquire the conceptual capacities that can open our eyes to “the very existence of this tract of the space of reasons.”²⁷ The rational demands of ethics, McDowell says, “are not alien to the contingencies of our life as human beings. [...] [Ordinary] upbringing can shape the actions and thoughts of human beings in a way that brings these demands into view.”²⁸ The resulting habits of action and thought are what he calls “second nature.”²⁹ Against scientific naturalism, which attempts to understand everything in “absolute” terms (i.e., independent of our experience of the meaning of things for us), McDowell defends a more sophisticated version of naturalism, viz., a “naturalism of second nature,” which can account for the space of reasons – i.e., the domain of meaning – in terms of the development of our human potentialities as rational, linguistic animals within a particular form of life. He writes: “We tend to be forgetful of the very

²⁵ John McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 60-3, 206-11.

²⁶ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 81; cf. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 36-44, 187-97.

²⁷ McDowell, *Mind and World*, p. 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

idea of second nature. I am suggesting that if we can recapture that idea we can keep nature as it were *partially enchanted*, but without lapsing into pre-scientific superstition or a rampant platonism.³⁰

Now, Taylor certainly agrees with McDowell regarding the importance of our upbringing and participation within a shared form of life for acquiring the ability to move within the space of reasons, i.e., the domain of meaning.³¹ However, he believes much more is needed if we are to adequately re-enchant the world, i.e., defend the validity of the “enchantment” or strong goods that can be found in our being-in-the-world. As we have discussed, what he thinks is needed is the articulation of an adequate background ontology that can make sense of and inform our strong evaluative experiences. This whole issue of background ontology goes largely unaddressed in McDowell’s work. It seems to me that the issue gets lost in his Neurathian critique of attempts to justify an ethical outlook from a standpoint outside of that outlook.³² Taylor is certainly in agreement with McDowell that justification for an ethical outlook must be internal to that outlook, i.e.,

³⁰ Ibid., p. 85; my emphasis; cf. pp. 84-95, 125-6; McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, Essay 9. It should be noted that McDowell distinguishes between two kinds of “platonism”: “rampant platonism” (what Taylor refers to as “Platonism”) and “naturalized platonism”; see McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 77-8, 84-5, 87-8, 91-2, 95, 115-6, 123-6. He writes: “In rampant platonism, the rational structure within which meaning comes into view is independent of anything merely human, so that the capacity of our minds to resonate to it looks occult or magical. Naturalized platonism is platonistic in that the structure of the space of reasons has a sort of autonomy; it is not derivative from, or reflective of, truths about human beings that are capturable independently of having that structure in view. But this platonism is not rampant: the structure of the space of reasons is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a human being’s eyes to them” (ibid., p. 92). On the previous page he says: “The idea [of naturalized platonism] is that the dictates of reason are there anyway, whether or not one’s eyes are opened to them; that is what happens in a proper upbringing.” McDowell accepts naturalized platonism, while rejecting rampant platonism (the same is true of Taylor, as seen above).

³¹ See Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*, Chs. 2, 4, 9-10; Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 32-40; Taylor, *Philosophical Arguments*, Ch. 6. For Taylor the development of our linguistic capacity is particularly important.

³² See McDowell, *Mind and World*, pp. 79-84; McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert A. Heinaman (Boulder, CO: Westview Press); McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 12-22, 35-44, Essay 9.

based on our strong evaluative experiences as purposive beings engaged with the world. But he thinks that from *within* an ethical outlook we must appeal to an ontological background picture that can make sense of and inform our strong evaluative experiences and which is in fact implicit in or presupposed by those experiences.

McDowell does not entirely avoid the issue of background ontology insofar as he challenges the more reductive or scientific ontologies with his account of the role of second nature in human life. However, while he sees the capacity to recognize ethical demands as arising out of our upbringing and participation within a particular shared form of life, he does not seek to articulate what makes sense of the demands themselves. Indeed, McDowell often speaks as though it is simply a matter of developing a “sensitivity” to certain situations in which one can just see, e.g., that courageous acts are required in certain fearful situations, kind acts are required in situations where someone is in need, and so forth.³³ But why courage and kindness should be seen as virtues – i.e., as part of a normatively higher mode of life – and why other human beings are worthy of our concern is left unexplained. Although McDowell affirms the importance of the strong evaluative category of “the noble,” the question arises whether his sophisticated naturalism can really make sense of the way in which strong goods are normative for our desires and seen as being of “incomparably higher worth” than things we just happen to desire.³⁴ As I will suggest later, this seems to make most sense if we can accept the view that there is some “built in” moral or spiritual purpose for human life and indeed for the cosmos as a whole (or, if we do not accept this theistic rendering, there is a cosmic purpose that is “just there”), which I believe McDowell’s brand of naturalism is committed to rejecting.

McDowell speaks of the need for reflective self-scrutiny of our ethical outlook, but it is not clear what this involves beyond seeking a kind of internal coherence (viz., in avoiding contradictions). It seems that the most he wants to say is that if our ethical outlook “hangs together” in a “coherent scheme of life” then “that is surely some

³³ See McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture IV; McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, Essays 1, 3, 9.

³⁴ See Taylor, “Ethics and Ontology,” p. 316; McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” pp. 209, 215, 218; McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 9-10, 36, 42, 92-3, 169.

reason to suppose that the perceptions [of the ethical outlook] are veridical.”³⁵ But this judgment of the veridicality of our ethical outlook is quite underdetermined without an articulation of a background ontology that can make sense of it. Indeed, we might wonder why for McDowell articulating such a background ontology is not part of what is required to achieve internal coherence. This underdetermination in fact seems to be a necessary feature of his quietist position. However, we still need to address questions such as: What is it about *the world* that can make sense of a realist moral phenomenology? What exactly does our second nature open our eyes *to*? If the world is really without an inherent moral teleology, then does it actually make sense to think that there are normative demands that are “there in any case, whether or not we are responsive to them”? In short, it does seem that what we need is an account of the background ontology that can make sense of and inform our strong evaluative experiences of dignity, nobility, admirability, sacredness, and so on.

If this is right then a position that is truly quietist with respect to such ontological background pictures would often seem to require a willed inarticulacy about them. In other words, if we accept Taylor’s account of the predicament of the modern seeker, then this means actually preventing a needed kind of spiritual seeking, i.e., the seeking after a believable strong evaluative framework in which one can achieve fullness. Moreover, such a position leaves an ethical outlook unstable insofar as challenges can arise with respect to what ultimately makes sense of it and this could invite a projectivist explanation. Indeed, since we become aware of ethical demands through our upbringing in a particular form of life, one might regard our experience of these demands – apart from any deeper explanation – as mere cultural prejudice.

It is important to note that many who have sought to remain content with the value experiences that arise for them within a particular form of life – i.e., they have not sought to provide these value experiences with any deeper grounding or justification – have also not sought to defend a realist account of value. We might think here of Bernard Williams’s affirmation of the “radical contingency” of

³⁵ McDowell, “Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle’s Ethics,” p. 214; cf. McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, pp. 21-2.

ethics, where one's ethical beliefs are seen as completely dependent on the contingencies of our personal, cultural, and evolutionary history. According to Williams: "This sense of contingency can seem to be in tension with something that our ethical ideas themselves demand, a recognition of their authority."³⁶ We might also think of the similar affirmation of radical contingency in Richard Rorty's "liberal ironist" position, which he contrasts with the stances of "the metaphysician" and "the theologian." The basic difference between the liberal ironist and the metaphysician or theologian is that the former is able to recognize the ultimate contingency of his or her most deeply held beliefs – or "final vocabularies" – whereas the latter seeks to ground such beliefs in some view about the nature of reality.³⁷ According to Rorty, one of the liberal ironist's most deeply held beliefs is that "cruelty is the worst thing we do." However, he says: "For liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question 'Why not be cruel?' – no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible."³⁸ Whereas the metaphysician or theologian might want to answer this question by giving an account of the dignity inherent in human nature in light of a higher purpose for human life, the liberal ironist sees the stance against cruelty simply as part of his or her final vocabulary, which is arrived at through a contingent historical process that has heightened feelings of human solidarity. If someone does not happen to share this solidarity or has conflicted desires, then all that can be done to move him or her to have this solidarity or to overcome the conflicted desires is to try to make it seem more "attractive."

Now, if we accept a position like that of Williams and Rorty, then this means accepting a much more disenchanting view of life than McDowell would like to maintain. However, I do not think that McDowell can avoid such a view without articulating a background ontology that can make sense of and inform the strong evaluative experiences that arise from within a given form of life. If one's background ontology ultimately is one that affirms cosmic

³⁶ Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 21; cf. John Cottingham, "The Good Life and the 'Radical Contingency' of the Ethical," *Reading Bernard Williams*, ed. Daniel Callcut (London: Routledge, 2008).

³⁷ See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 73-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

purposelessness – as seems to be the case for McDowell as well as for Williams and Rorty – then it is hard to avoid having this undermine our strong evaluative experiences. As Thomas Nagel argues in his article on “The Absurd,” it is natural for human beings to take the “transcendental [i.e., self-transcending] step” of considering how our first-personal experiences of meaning or value fit within an overall view of things. Against those who want to fend off the sense that life is ultimately absurd – because our subjective experiences of meaning find no objective support³⁹ – by seeking to remain content with their experiences of meaning, Nagel writes:

Given that the transcendental step is natural to us humans, can we avoid absurdity by refusing to take that step and remaining entirely within our sublunar lives? Well, we cannot refuse consciously, for to do that we would have to be aware of the viewpoint we were refusing to adopt. The only way to avoid the relevant self-consciousness would be either never to attain it or to forget it – neither of which can be achieved by the will.⁴⁰

The willed inarticulacy of the quietist position thus does not seem sustainable. Indeed, we might regard this as being indicative of our nature as *meaning-seeking animals*; i.e., we are the kind of beings who can become concerned – and indeed often are concerned – with ultimate questions about the meaning and purpose of our lives.⁴¹

Non-Theistic Re-Enchantment #2: Cosmic Teleology

³⁹ To be more precise, Nagel sees the sense of the absurd as arising from the conflict between the *seriousness* with which we naturally regard our subjective experiences of meaning and the lack of objective support for them. Somewhat similarly, Camus says that human beings have a “longing for happiness and for reason” and “[the] absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. Justin O’Brien [New York: Vintage Books, 1991], p. 28).

⁴⁰ Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 21; see Cottingham, “The Good Life and the ‘Radical Contingency of the Ethical,’” pp. 35-6.

⁴¹ I borrow the term “meaning-seeking animals” from Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), Ch. 1.

I think a more promising non-theistic response to the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker is in fact found in Nagel's more recent work. In his earlier work Nagel seemed to accept the conclusion that life is indeed absurd. However, he is apparently not satisfied with this conclusion and much of his recent work has sought to overcome it. In a recent essay entitled "Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament" Nagel argues for the need to develop "an alternative to the consolations of religion."⁴² More specifically, he wants secular philosophy to recover something of the "religious temperament," which he understands in terms of the yearning for cosmic reconciliation or harmony, i.e., the desire "to live not merely the life of the creature one is, but in some sense to participate through it in the life of the universe as a whole."⁴³ Nagel seems to express his own view when he writes: "Having, amazingly, burst into existence, one is a representative of existence – of the whole of it – not just because one is part of it but because it is present to one's consciousness. In each of us, the universe has come to consciousness and therefore our existence is not merely our own."⁴⁴

Nagel has gone on to develop this view more fully in his most recent book, *Mind and Cosmos*, where he writes:

The world is an astonishing place [...]. That it has produced you, and me, and the rest of us is the most astonishing thing about it. If contemporary research in molecular biology leaves open the possibility of legitimate doubts about a fully mechanistic account of the origin and evolution of life, dependent only on the laws of chemistry and physics, this can combine with the failure of psychophysical reductionism to suggest that principles of a different kind are also at work in the history of nature, principles of the growth of order that are in their logical form teleological rather than mechanistic.⁴⁵

⁴² Thomas Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religion Temperament: Essays 2002-2008* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 7.

Nagel is particularly impressed with the way in which the universe is an intelligible order and has given rise to beings that are capable of understanding it. This allows then for a cosmic teleological perspective in which human beings have an important place, viz., where “[each] of our lives is a part of the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking and becoming aware of itself.”⁴⁶ This gradual waking up of the universe begins with the emergence of life and consciousness, and then further develops with the emergence of rational, linguistic forms of consciousness: “The great cognitive shift is an expansion of consciousness from the perspectival form contained in the lives of particular creatures to an objective, world-encompassing form that exists both individually and intersubjectively. It was originally a biological evolutionary process, and in our species it has become a collective cultural process as well.”⁴⁷ Nagel further maintains: “to explain not merely the possibility but the actuality of rational beings, the world must have properties that make their appearance not a complete accident: in some way the likelihood must have been latent in the nature of things.”⁴⁸ Nagel wants to avoid appealing to a theistic explanation of these phenomena and so he appeals instead to an “Aristotelian idea of teleology without intention.” He writes: “I am not confident that this Aristotelian idea of teleology without intention makes sense, but I do not at the moment see why it does not.”⁴⁹

There are of course a number of well-known scientists who reject this notion and endorse a view of cosmic purposelessness and thus of the ultimate meaninglessness of human life.⁵⁰ However, Nagel’s view does find support in a growing body of scientific and philosophical literature that argues that the universe is in some sense “biophilic” and “noophilic,” i.e., there is a “tendency” – and indeed some have

⁴⁶ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 85; cf. Nagel, *The Last Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 127-33; Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament*, pp. 16-7.

⁴⁷ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵⁰ See Jacques Monod, *Chance & Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971); Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

said an “inevitability” – for the universe to give rise first of all to life and then to conscious intelligence.⁵¹ In other words, on this view the development of something like human life appears, at the very least, to be a strong possibility “built in” to the nature of the universe from the beginning, or it is “just there” if we accept Nagel’s Aristotelian idea of “teleology without intention.” As Freeman Dyson puts it: “I do not feel like an alien in this universe. The more I examine this universe and study the details of its architecture, the more evidence I find that the universe must in some sense have known that we were coming.”⁵² This allows then for a teleological understanding of human life and the cosmos.

Now, if the non-theistic cosmic teleology that is endorsed by Nagel can be made compelling then I think it could enable re-enchantment. In other words, I think it could provide an ontological background picture that supports strong evaluative realism. It especially seems to support a sense of the “incomparably higher” with regard to our human capacity to come to understand the nature of the universe and to take up the perspective of the whole (both in social and cosmic terms). This is because of our important role in the telos of the universe in “gradually waking and becoming aware of itself.”

Human life can thus be seen as inherently meaningful when our human concerns are embedded in a purposeful cosmos. On this point Mary Midgley writes:

To find the universe meaningful is [...] simply to find a continuity between its patterns and those of our own lives – enough continuity to confirm that our presence here makes sense. *The point is not that the world belongs to us but that we belong to it.* We do not have to think that it was designed for our benefit, nor that we can understand it

⁵¹ See Freeman Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), Ch. 23; Martin Rees, *Our Cosmic Habit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Simon Conway Morris, *Life’s Solution: Inevitable Humans in a Lonely Universe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Paul Davies, *The Goldilocks Enigma: Why Is the Universe Just Right for Life?* (New York: Mariner Books, 2006); Neil A. Manson (ed.), *God and Design: The Teleological Argument and Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Mary Midgley, “Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning,” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 68 (2011), pp. 193-201; Midgley, “Why the Idea of Purpose Won’t Go Away,” *Philosophy* 86:4 (2011), pp. 545-61; John Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life* (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 47-9.

⁵² Dyson, *Disturbing the Universe*, p. 250.

completely. We only need to see it as ordered in a way that makes our presence here intelligible. And since we actually are a part of it, this is not a silly project. It explains why we are naturally disposed to respond to this world with the mixture of caution, trust and reverence that have proved appropriate for our ancestors over many aeons of hard experience.⁵³

Midgley develops a line of thought that is in many ways similar to that of Nagel in seeing a teleological rather than a merely mechanistic process at work in the emergence of life and consciousness and she appeals to the scientific literature mentioned above as support.⁵⁴ Moreover, like Nagel, Midgley is concerned to recover something of a non-theistic “religious temperament” according to which we see ourselves as connected to a larger whole. However, whereas Nagel emphasizes the role we play in “the lengthy process of the universe gradually waking and becoming aware of itself,” Midgley is most concerned to advance a deep ecological perspective according to which the natural world is seen as the fit object of traditionally religious attitudes such as reverence, awe, wonder, and gratitude. In a number of her works she has written in support of James Lovelock’s “Gaia theory,” which sees the earth as “a self-maintaining whole, a vast, complex living system” of which we are a part and “at home.”⁵⁵ Although it is acknowledged that the earth is not alive in the way that

⁵³ Midgley, “Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning,” p. 196.

⁵⁴ Midgley, “Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning,” pp. 195-201; Midgley, “Why the Idea of Purpose Won’t Go Away,” pp. 559-61. Midgley in fact also cites Nagel on this issue (Midgley, “Why the Idea of Purpose Won’t Go Away,” p. 560). In a passage very reminiscent of Nagel’s work, Midgley writes: “for some time [naïve materialism] has been running into great difficulties over the ‘problem of consciousness’ and also over this unrealistic attitude to purpose. The concept of matter turns out to be quite as puzzling as the concept of mind; indeed perhaps more so. [...] Perhaps there are not two radically different kinds of stuff, mind and matter, but just one great world which has both mental and physical attributes. [...] [It] would not be surprising if a single tendency, or *conatus*, runs through the whole, so that our kind of conscious purposiveness is only one part of it” (Midgley, “Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning,” p. 195).

⁵⁵ Mary Midgley, “Concluding Reflections: Dover Beach Revisited,” *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Science*, ed. Philip Clayton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 965, 967; cf. Midgley, *The Essential Mary Midgley*, ed. David Midgley (New York: Routledge, 2005), Pt. V.

individual organisms are alive and so the notion of the earth as a “living whole” is metaphorical, nevertheless, Midgley thinks the metaphor is apt because the earth as a whole is sick and in need of care and it is precisely living things that can be ill or well.⁵⁶ This way of viewing the earth is intended then to show it as a fit object of reverence, awe, wonder, and gratitude. Hence, the term “Gaia” is used, which is the name for the Greek earth-goddess.

I think Nagel and Midgley both offer interesting and promising non-theistic paths for the spiritual seeker by providing a way of seeing our lives as a meaningful part of a larger whole. Both defend a cosmic teleological perspective, though it is quite different from the pre-modern, enchanted world idea of a meaningful cosmic order, as in the idea of the “Great Chain of Being.” Nagel and Midgley acknowledge the speculative nature of discussions about cosmic teleology and both also acknowledge different possible ways of understanding this teleology, including theistic ways.⁵⁷ However, neither takes the theistic path. I want to turn now to consider what this path has to offer.

Theistic Re-Enchantment

To begin with, it should be noted that one thing that theism offers is a possible explanation for the appearance of teleology in the universe. Recall that Nagel says: “I am not confident that this Aristotelian idea of teleology without intention makes sense, but I do not at the moment see why it does not.” There are indeed many who would question whether cosmic teleology makes sense apart from theism; e.g., Alasdair MacIntyre writes: “the only type of teleologically ordered universe in which we have good reason to believe is a theistic universe.”⁵⁸ The idea here seems to be that to believe that the universe as a whole is expressive of a purpose requires a purposive being (viz., God) that created it. Or at least, one might argue that it is best

⁵⁶ Midgley, “Concluding Reflections,” pp. 966-7; cf. *The Essential Mary Midgley*, pp. 359-60.

⁵⁷ See Nagel, *The Last Word*, pp. 129-33; Nagel, *Secular Philosophy and the Religious Temperament*, pp. 16-7; Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, pp. 7-12, 84-95; Midgley, “Darwinism, Purpose and Meaning,” pp. 197-201; Midgley, “Why the Idea of Purpose Won’t Go Away,” pp. 559-61.

⁵⁸ Alasdair MacIntyre, *The MacIntyre Reader*, ed. Kelvin Knight (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), p. 152.

explained in theistic terms.⁵⁹ However, Nagel confesses to “an ungrounded assumption” in not regarding theism as a real option. He writes: “I lack the *sensus divinitatis* that enables – indeed compels – so many people to see in the world the expression of divine purpose [...]”⁶⁰ He also thinks a non-theistic teleological view – if viable – would allow for “a more unifying explanation than the design hypothesis” because it does not appeal to anything beyond nature.⁶¹

We might question whether Nagel over-emphasizes the role of a *sensus divinitatis* in coming to see the world as an expression of divine purpose and also whether a non-theistic view really can provide a more unifying explanation than a theistic one given that the non-theistic view appeals to a notion of purpose without intention.⁶² However, it is not my goal here to argue for the superiority of a particular explanation; rather, I want to consider the difference theism can make in the life of the spiritual seeker. I only raise the explanatory issue because many people do have the sense that God would be needed for a teleological view of the world, and it is some such teleological view that I think is important for informing a conception of a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life, i.e., a view of fullness.

I want to argue here that it is particularly the “personalistic” aspect of theism that constitutes its chief advantage over non-theistic views for those who are seeking re-enchantment. William James expresses this personalistic aspect well when he writes: “The more perfect and more eternal aspect of the universe is represented in our religions as having personal form. The universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*, if we are religious [i.e., theists]; and any relation that may be

⁵⁹ See Manson (ed.), *God and Design*.

⁶⁰ Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos*, p. 12. Elsewhere Nagel also confesses to a “fear of religion,” which I will discuss below.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² There are also metaphysical considerations regarding the relationship between necessary and contingent being – as in Aquinas’s “third way” – which call into question whether a non-theistic view can provide a more unifying explanation than a theistic view. However, it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss this issue. For more on the debate over whether theism or atheism provides a more unifying explanation see Alasdair MacIntyre, “On Being a Theistic Philosopher in a Secularized Culture,” *Proceedings of the ACPA* 84 (2011), pp. 23-8.

possible from person to person might be possible here.”⁶³ In other words, theism is personalistic in that it holds that the ultimate nature of reality is personal rather than impersonal due to having been created by a person (God) and – at least on the view of theism that I want to put forward – for the central purpose of love, which is most fully realized in communion between persons (both human and divine).⁶⁴ The theist will thus interpret the evolutionary process in terms of the “telos of communion”: i.e., in virtue of God’s providential creation there is a directionality in evolution whereby life arises and then conscious intelligence, which leads to the emergence of beings who are capable of interpersonal love/communion and have a natural tendency towards it.⁶⁵ Moreover, to be capable of interpersonal communion and to have this as our ultimate end can be taken as a way of understanding what it means to be created in the “image of God” (since “God is love”). Taylor in fact develops such a view in his work and he says that on this view the “fullness of human life [is] something that happens between people rather than within each one.”⁶⁶

We can see then that theism provides a background ontology that can inform a particular conception of a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life: viz., one that is centered on interpersonal love/communion (this mode of life will of course include other important elements as well, such as the virtuous development of our various human capacities, which can also further contribute to the richness of communion). Even though our evolutionary inheritance has endowed us with conflicting natural tendencies towards both interpersonal communion and towards various forms of self-enclosure (e.g., domination, hatred, violence, etc.), nevertheless, theism provides a purposeful framework by which we can identify our natural tendencies towards interpersonal communion as part of what is “noblest and best” about us and thus to

⁶³ William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover, 1956), pp. 27-8.

⁶⁴ None of this denies the value of non-persons. Indeed, theism, as I understand it, entails the view that the created world is intrinsically good. Moreover, there is a kind of communion possible between persons and non-persons, but it is not the fullness of interpersonal communion.

⁶⁵ The phrase “telos of communion” is from Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 764.

⁶⁶ Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?*, ed. James L. Heft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 113; cf. pp. 35, 114; Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 278-9, 282, 668, 701-3, 764.

be cultivated as part of a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life.⁶⁷ In short, the theist maintains that love is indeed “Creation’s final law,” even though nature may be – at least to some extent – “red in tooth and claw.”⁶⁸

It should be noted that the process of disenchantment is often associated with the move away from theism towards a more “impersonal order,” starting with deism and then transitioning ultimately into a reductive materialism that is indifferent to human concerns.⁶⁹ This is behind what I have called the total disenchantment view. As we have seen with McDowell, Nagel, and Midgley, there are many who want to resist reductive materialism and thereby seek a kind of re-enchantment. However, another way of conceiving of re-enchantment is not only to resist reductive materialism (and the associated projectivist view of value), but also to reject the whole move towards an impersonal order. In other words, this means seeing the universe as a “personal order” that was created by a person (God) for the central purpose of interpersonal communion.

However, there are many people who are resistant to this sort of personal order and instead want to affirm an impersonal order, even if not to the extent of reductive materialism. Indeed, both Nagel and Midgley give expression to such a resistance. For instance, Nagel writes about the “fear of [theistic] religion,” which he thinks is behind much of the problematic scientism and reductionism in modern intellectual life. Nagel wants to encourage his fellow non-religious colleagues to resist the influence of this fear on their intellectual life. However, he acknowledges that he is also subject to this fear of religion, which he says is distinct from the fear of the baleful effects of religious institutions. It is a “fear of religion itself.” He writes: “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn’t just that I don’t believe in God and, naturally, hope

⁶⁷ See Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, pp. 71-2; cf. Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 668.

⁶⁸ See Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, Ch. 2. In his poem *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, Alfred Tennyson writes: “Who trusted God was love indeed [/] And love Creation’s final law – [/] Tho’ Nature, red in tooth and claw [/] With ravine, shriek’d against his creed –”; quoted (*ibid.*, p. 40) in the context of a response to the problem of evil.

⁶⁹ See Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Chs. 6-7.

that I'm right in my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."⁷⁰ Nagel refers to this as the "cosmic authority problem." It is not entirely clear what all is behind this fear of religion, but an important part of it seems to be related to the thought that there is an all-powerful, all-knowing Being who can hold us accountable for everything we think and do, even the most shameful things that we might keep hidden from others.⁷¹ While I think such a reaction is quite understandable, it does not necessitate that one should reject theism altogether, especially if a better view of the matter is possible. For instance, the thought that God knows what we do and think and can hold us accountable might form an important part of our sense of moral "conscience," at least according to the etymological meaning of the term as "knowing-with." But in order for this not to be oppressive I believe it needs to be accompanied by a view of God as a kind of loving and merciful parent rather than a vindictive and wrathful judge.

As for Midgley, she states that the "personal aspect" of theism is the aspect that "modern thought has found it hardest to assimilate."⁷² For instance, we can see this manifested in those who want to call themselves "spiritual" in virtue of a concern for the state of their inner life and a friendliness "to the idea of an immanent God or life force, though they can no longer bring the idea of a fully personal deity into focus."⁷³ As we have seen, Midgley and Nagel both accept something like the idea of an impersonal "life force" in their non-theistic cosmic teleological views. Midgley thinks that there is difficulty particularly with combining the "personal aspect" of God with the belief that God is "universal and immanent – not a fully human god like Homer's Olympian deities, but a creative power underlying the structures of the cosmos."⁷⁴ However, she does not fill out exactly why there is a

⁷⁰ Nagel, *The Last Word*, p. 130.

⁷¹ I am inferring this from Nagel's mention of the "cosmic authority problem." Roger Scruton argues (somewhat provocatively) that one of the underlying motives for contemporary atheist culture (especially in its militant forms) is "the desire to escape from the eye of judgment [whether human or divine]" (Roger Scruton, *The Face of God: The Gifford Lectures 2010* [New York: Continuum, 2012], p. 2).

⁷² Midgley, "Concluding Reflections," p. 971.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 972.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 971.

problem here. No doubt divine creation and divine action more generally are in some sense mysterious, but it is not clear that there is anything inherently contradictory in the personalistic view of God.⁷⁵

Midgley also mentions several other reasons for why modern people have difficulty with the personal aspect of theism. First, the view of God as an absolute ruler who is interested in punishment strikes many people as objectionable. Second, many also find objectionable the parochial view of God in the Bible, particularly in the Hebrew Bible or “Old Testament,” where God sanctions tribal warfare and other atrocities. Third, the transcendent nature of God can contribute to a denigration of our this-worldly existence, which again many find objectionable. Finally, a personalistic view of God is seen as being too anthropocentric (i.e., God is conceived of in our own image and as concerned especially with us), which sits uneasily with the picture of the world offered to us by modern science: viz., a world vast in time and space in which human beings are not at the center.⁷⁶ In regard to the first three points, I think they are somewhat “straw man” in character since very few, if any, thoughtful theists today would subscribe to these objectionable views. These views can be overcome simply through a better theology. In regard to the final point about anthropocentrism, a few things need to be mentioned.

First, while it is true that modern science has in many ways made human life seem less significant, there still appears to be a kind of anthropocentrism present in the biophilic and noophilic views discussed above, which Nagel recognizes more than Midgley.⁷⁷ In short, on such views there is a directionality to the universe in giving rise to life and then to conscious intelligence and this process has eventually given rise to human beings, who are – as far as we know – the most impressive manifestation of such conscious intelligence. For the theist, what is most important about this intelligence is that it makes possible interpersonal communion.

⁷⁵ This is a big issue that goes beyond the scope of this essay, but see Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chs. 3-4.

⁷⁶ Midgley, “Concluding Reflections,” pp. 972-3.

⁷⁷ Again, it should be emphasized that recognizing this sort of anthropocentrism does not mean one cannot see value in the non-human world. There is a tendency in Midgley’s work to see any form of anthropocentrism as leading to a denigration of the non-human world.

Second, there is only a very limited way in which the theist conceives of God as being (analogically) like us: viz., like us, God is a *person*, i.e., a rational, self-conscious being capable of communion. Moreover, the reason why God is understood as a person is not just because we want God to be like us. Rather, divine personhood is a way of making sense of a purposeful view of the world and it is also seen as a kind of perfection in that being capable of interpersonal communion is better than not being capable of it.⁷⁸ It is indeed noteworthy that Midgley herself feels the need to appeal to a quasi-personalistic deity – albeit metaphorically – with her “Gaia” theory, which, as we saw, attempts to capture a sense of the natural world as being the fitting object of traditionally religious attitudes such as reverence, awe, wonder, and gratitude.

Although there are some common resistances to the personalistic aspect of theism – which I have suggested can be overcome – it is important to see that there are also a number of specific ways in which a spiritual seeker might find him or her self naturally drawn to the personalism of theism – where “the universe is no longer a mere *It* to us, but a *Thou*” – and thus to theistic re-enchantment. I want to conclude by outlining four important cases of this.

First, there is the profound feeling of gratitude for existence, which we have seen that Midgley seeks to cultivate. This feeling typically involves seeing life as a gift or a blessing. However, the notion of life as a gift or a blessing seems to make most sense when there is *someone* (viz., God) who is the giver of the gift or the bestower of the blessing. Thus, we see that theism provides a natural home for the feeling of gratitude for existence.⁷⁹ Such a feeling is arguably natural for human beings – unless things have gone terribly wrong – and it can be an important impetus to spiritual seeking. Since theism provides a natural home for this feeling of gratitude for existence, we can see why

⁷⁸ In other words, if we consider what would constitute the highest object of love, it seems that adding personhood, which includes the capacity to return love, would increase an object’s worthiness of being loved over that which is impersonal and thus unable to return love. Hence, as we have seen, on Taylor view fullness is “something that happens between people rather than within each one.”

⁷⁹ See Cottingham, *Why Believe?* (New York: Continuum, 2009), pp. 161-3. Apart from theism one can only speak of life as a gift or a blessing metaphorically as a way of trying to capture the sense of the value of life.

a spiritual seeker might be drawn towards theism. Consider, e.g., the following statements by the character Dmitri in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*: "I'm tormented by God. Tormented only by that. What if he does not exist? [...] So then, if he does not exist, man is chief of the earth, of the universe. Splendid! Only how is he going to be virtuous without God? A good question! I keep thinking about it. Because whom will he love then – man, I mean? *To whom will he be thankful, to whom will he sing the hymn?*"⁸⁰

This passage also points to a human need to be orientated towards an ultimate object of love, devotion, reverence, and even worship, which is explored throughout Dostoevsky's writings.⁸¹ Such a need seems to be expressed not only in the life of the devout theist, but also in the lives of non-theists who seek a "God-substitute," whether in the form of a "religion of humanity" (*à la* Comte, Feuerbach, Marx, etc.), or Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, or a deep ecological perspective such as Midgley's. But the question is whether such "God-substitutes" are as adequate objects of love, devotion, reverence, and worship as a personalistic God. The theist argues that God – if God exists – is worthy of our fullest love, devotion, reverence, and worship in virtue of God's perfect goodness, love, wisdom, and so on.⁸² According to

⁸⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Everyman's Library, 1990), p. 592; my emphasis.

⁸¹ In *The Adolescent* the "holy peasant" Makar remarks: "[To] live without God is nothing but torment. And it turns out that what gives light is the very thing we curse, and we do not know it ourselves. [...] It is impossible for a man to exist without bowing down; such a man could not bear himself, and no man could. If he rejects God, he will bow down to an idol – a wooden one, or a golden one, or a mental one. They are all idolaters, not godless, that is how they ought to be called" (Dostoevsky, *The Adolescent*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky [New York: Everyman's Library, 2003], p. 373). Likewise, at the end of *Demons* Stepan proclaims: "The whole law of human existence consists in nothing other than a man's always being able to bow before the immeasurably great. If people are deprived of the immeasurably great, they will not live and will die in despair. The immeasurable and infinite is as necessary for man as the small planet he inhabits [...]. [Long] live the Great Thought! The eternal, immeasurable Thought! For every man, whoever he is, it is necessary to bow before that which is the Great Thought" (Dostoevsky, *Demons*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky [New York: Everyman's Library, 1994], p. 664).

⁸² I draw here on my article "To What Extent Must We Go Beyond Neo-Aristotelian Ethical Naturalism?," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86:4 (2012), p. 650. It should be noted that this sort of argument is implicit in

Alasdair MacIntyre: “finite beings who possess the power of understanding, if they know God exists, know that he is the most adequate object of their love, and that the deepest desire of every such being, whether they acknowledge it or not, is to be at one with God.”⁸³ If this claim is accepted then it constitutes a second specific way that the spiritual seeker can be drawn to theism.

A third way pertains to the deep human need, especially in the face of great suffering and evil, to believe or at least hope that ultimate reality is concerned with our fate and is on the side of the good and that tragedy does not have the final word. One of the most powerful expressions of what theism has to offer here is found in a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr.:

When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice. Let us realize that William Cullen Bryant is right: “Truth crushed to earth will rise again.” Let us go out realizing that the Bible is right: “Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” This is hope for the future, and with this faith we will be able to sing to some not too distant tomorrow with

projectivist views of God, which see the idea of God as a projection of our longings or highest ideals. However, John Cottingham notes: “talk of God as a projection does not in the end advance the debate between theists and atheists very much, since it cannot settle the question of whether the impulse to project our longings outward to an external source does or does not have an objective counterpart” (Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, pp. 10-1). It does seem to suggest something very important about us as human beings that we project our longings in this way: viz., we are in some sense *homo religiosus*.

⁸³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), pp. 5-6. One might also claim that God is best able to meet the human desire for the fullest kind of self-transcending interpersonal communion since on a theistic perspective one’s love for the beauty and goodness of the world also extends beyond the world to its ultimate creative source in God.

a cosmic past tense, “We have overcome, we have overcome, deep in my heart, I did believe we would overcome.”⁸⁴

Such a belief or hope in a theistic moral order, William James writes, “not only incites our more strenuous moments, but it also takes our joyous, careless, trustful moments, and it justifies them.”⁸⁵ We see clearly, e.g., how it inspired Martin Luther King, Jr.’s strenuous, self-transcending work of love and justice as well as provided existential consolation. Moreover, it provides support for the common human practice of petitionary prayer (consider, e.g., the “Our Father” in this light).⁸⁶ In short, given the deep human need to believe or hope that ultimate reality is on the side of the good and concerned with our fate, we can see how a spiritual seeker can be drawn to a theistic form of re-enchantment.

Finally, if it is true that we have a natural draw towards the fullness of communion, then theism seems to provide its best home. This is not only because it offers a personalistic conception of God who is

⁸⁴ Martin Luther King, Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), p. 252.

⁸⁵ William James, *Pragmatism* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1981 [1907]), p. 51; cf. 49-51. Similarly, John Cottingham writes about the “buoyancy of the good” in a theistic worldview: “what the religious [i.e., theistic] dimension adds is a framework within which [human] nature is revealed as more than just a set of characteristics that a certain species happens intermittently to possess, but instead as pointing to the condition that a Being of the utmost benevolence and care that we can conceive of desires us to achieve. Focusing on this dimension, moreover, encourages us with the hope that the pursuit of virtue, difficult and demanding though it often is, contributes however minutely to the establishment of a moral order that the cosmos was created to realise. To act in the light of such an attitude is to act in the faith that our struggles mean something beyond the local expression of a contingently evolving genetic lottery; that despite the cruelty and misery in the world, the struggle for goodness will always enjoy a certain kind of buoyancy” (Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, pp. 72-3).

⁸⁶ The topic of prayer is explored in an interesting way in Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road*. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey about the novel, McCarthy remarked: “sometimes it is good to pray. I do not think you have to have a clear idea of who or what God is in order to pray. You could even be quite doubtful about the whole business” (<http://www.oprah.com/oprahbookclub/Cormac-McCarthy-on-Writing>).

regarded as the most worthy object of love, but also because theism sees God as having created the world for the purpose of communion, which is most fully realized between persons (both human and divine). Thus, theistic religion – properly understood – is never merely individual, but rather, it must take a communal form and this is manifested most clearly in particular theistic religious communities where the members seek to grow deeper in communion with one another, with God, and with others beyond their particular community. Moreover, such theistic religious communities will also involve practices of thanksgiving, worship, prayer, love, and justice. Granted the value of interpersonal communion, thanksgiving, worship, prayer, and the work of love and justice, we can see why a spiritual seeker might then seek out a particular communal form of theistic religious practice.

None of this is intended to show the truth of theism, but only its significance for the spiritual seeker if believed to be true or at least if hoped to be true. There is still much spiritual seeking that will likely need to take place in order to come to have faith, but one thing that may help – apart from philosophical, theological, and other forms of intellectual enquiry – is to actually participate in a particular community of theistic religious practice whereby one seeks growth in communion with God and other persons. As Taylor puts it: “It is no longer usual to sense the universe immediately and unproblematically as purposefully ordered, although reflection, meditation, spiritual development may lead one to see it this way.”⁸⁷ This may be a life-long process, but it is at least one promising path to re-enchantment.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 325. For more on the importance of religious practice for faith see Cottingham, *On the Meaning of Life*, pp. 79-104; Cottingham, *The Spiritual Dimension: Religion, Philosophy, and Human Value* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Chs. 1, 7, & 8; Cottingham, *Why Believe?*, Chs. 1, 5, & 7.

⁸⁸ I would like to thank William Wainwright for his very helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay. I would also like to acknowledge that in my discussions of McDowell and Nagel I have drawn some on David McPherson, “Cosmic Outlooks and Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics,” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 55:2 (2015), pp. 197-215. The discussion here is significantly expanded (McDowell and Nagel are a minor focus in the “Cosmic Outlooks” article, where the main focus is on examining a disagreement between Rosalind Hursthouse and Bernard Williams with regard to the viability of a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethic perspective).

Seekers and Dwellers: Some Critical Reflections on Charles Taylor's Account of Identity

JAMES B. SOUTH

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor writes that, "There is a question about ourselves – which we roughly gesture at with the term "identity" – which cannot be sufficiently answered with any general doctrine of human nature." He follows this claim with the lapidary sentence: "The search for identity can be seen as the search for what I essentially am."¹ Despite its apparent clarity, this sentence is deeply complex and problematic. The words "search" and "essentially" sit there on the page and the sentence poses more questions than it answers. How is the search for our identity to be conducted? What can it mean to claim that there is something I am essentially that is additional to my nature as a human being? What picture of human identity stands behind Taylor's assertion here? In Part two of this chapter, I will try answering these questions from Taylor's point of view, but also call into question his way of answering them. My larger concern in highlighting these questions is the way they interweave with Taylor's use of the distinction between "seekers" and "dwellers" as it relates both to the search for what Taylor labels "authenticity" and their relation to the institutional church. But, as part VI of the chapter will make clear, I have significant concerns about the notion of authenticity as Taylor (and others) conceive it, and that will have significant implications for how I characterize the distinction between seekers and dwellers. Hence in part VII, I will try to address the issue of seekers and dwellers as it connects to a search for meaning in life, while trying to do so without using the characterization of authenticity with all the metaphysical baggage it carries when Taylor talks about "what essentially I am." For now, I begin with a basic account of Taylor's distinction between seekers and dwellers before moving in parts II-V to an account of Taylor's narrative of modern

¹ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 184.

gains. Along the way, I will be questioning some of the assumptions of his account.

Part I

In Taylor's contribution to *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, the very title of his chapter is striking: "The Church Speaks – to Whom?" The bulk of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of the apparently contrasting notions of "seekers" and "dwellers" on the one hand and on the other those "who believe still" and those who "believe again." And, in his typically penetrating way, he finds the crux of the issue to lie in what I want to describe as the way people "hear" the claims of the Church in contrast to the "voice" in which the Church speaks. A particularly striking example he uses in this connection is the voice of the Church heard when it speaks of homosexuals as "intrinsically disordered," when we all know homosexuals whose lives are finely ordered. There is, then, he points out a disconnect between the voice of the Church and the conditions under which we receive it today.²

Of course, Taylor does not think there is any way to go back to a time when we could hear things differently, nor does he seem at all nostalgic for such a time. He is clear that the moral sources that have become available to us in modernity represent "an epistemic gain" and the reason for this is that these moral sources "represent real and important human potentialities."³ These new moral sources are precisely the causes of the differences between the ways people hear the voice of the Church. What Taylor largely leaves unanswered in this essay, though, is an obvious way forward from this lack of attunement between what "we" hear and what "they" say. This is another method of being "out of touch" with our identity. He mentions Taizé communities as a way of connecting with seekers and clearly views this as a path to "believe again," but his more substantive suggestion, which given the purpose of his essay is understandably only briefly discussed, is to have us recall past voices

² Charles Taylor, "The Church Speaks – to Whom?" in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, ed. Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research and Values in Philosophy, 2012), pp. 1-14.

³ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 313.

– the voices of those saints who have tried to describe, or point at, the “enigmas of existence” as opposed to the “surface appearances” that are articulated in the authoritative voice of the Church.⁴ It is here that Taylor and Augustine seem closer together than his usual narrative might indicate. As I show below in Part III, Taylor tends to “backslide” into a more robustly Augustinian view of identity than he realizes. Also, in this brief essay he notes he has provided examples of how this listening to past voices might work in Chapter 20 of *A Secular Age*. I shall return to that more extensive discussion below, but again his examples point towards a lingering attachment to Augustine's notion of inwardness. In the next part of the chapter, though, I want to return to the questions raised by Taylor's notion of the search for identity. How is the search for our identity to be conducted? What can it mean to claim that there is something I am essentially that is additional to my nature as a human being? What picture of human identity stands behind Taylor's assertion here?

Part II

One way to begin answering these questions is to recall that Taylor sees this search for identity – as he conceives it – as first becoming especially prominent in the thought of Augustine, whom he views as having intensified the notion of inwardness as part of the notion of a search for the self. The long version of this argument is given in *Sources of the Self*, but there is a succinct summary in *The Ethics of Authenticity*. There he stresses that Augustine's view is one “... where being in touch with some source – God, say, or the Idea of the Good – was considered essential to full being.” The initial inward turn, which in Augustine is a matter of finding “... the road to God as passing through our own self-reflexive awareness of ourselves” develops over time to the view that “the source we have to connect with is deep in us. This is part of the massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths.”⁵

It is crucial to emphasize that Taylor sees the development of the notion of authenticity as an epistemic gain. He narrates a story about

⁴ Taylor, “The Church Speaks – to Whom?,” p. 19.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 26-27.

the advance of human inwardness, perhaps most originally present in Augustine's thought. In this evolution of the processes of inwardness, the evolving concomitant moral ideal (and epistemic gain) is one of "being true to oneself," and Taylor, following Lionel Trilling, names this moral ideal "authenticity."⁶ In *A Secular Age*, Taylor describes this culture of authenticity in the following way:

I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority.⁷

I take it that "realizing our humanity" here must be equivalent to the search for identity as the search for what I essentially am.

Since Taylor begins his narrative with Augustine's inward turn, it is important to think through what that turn means in Augustine. The paradigm figure for this search throughout Augustine's narrative in the *Confessions* is given in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Peter Brown has brought out this aspect of Augustine's thought well: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32) has a special resonance for Augustine. More than any other biblical story, it serves as a consciously chosen mirror for self-understanding."⁸ It is especially noteworthy, and Brown emphasizes the point, that when Augustine recounts his encounter with the books of the Platonists, he echoes the parable "by saying that it helped him come, or return, to himself."⁹ Of course Augustine is careful to point out that this return was due to God's help, and it is this tension between returning unaided and only because of some prior movement in him of God's work that makes

⁶ Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, p. 15.

⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 475.

⁸ Peter Brown, "Introduction," in Augustine, *Confessions*, second edition, trans. F.J. Sheed and ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), p. xii.

⁹ Brown, "Introduction," p. xiii.

Augustine's story a mystery. It took the conjoined jolt of reading the books of the Platonists *and* God's action within him to lead Augustine into his inmost recesses. So, as a story about the importance of inwardness, it is crucial that we keep in mind that for Augustine God's assistance is a necessary condition for this inward turn. That interconnectedness of the parable and Augustine's return due to God's help explains why Brown can write: "Yet for Augustine, the story is as universally applicable as it is personally significant. Like all of Sacred Scripture, it is a type or figure in light of which the enigmas of our own existence is revealed."¹⁰ So, the search inward to find a source of our identity is one that leads us to our own enigmas of existence, a phrase, strikingly used, as we saw in Part I, by Taylor himself, but that journey inward, or return home, is instigated by God.

But if it is the meaning of our existence that is questioned by this parable, Northrop Frye has emphasized a larger point about the parable used by Augustine to lead us to a consideration of the enigmas of our existence, namely, that it "sums up, in epitome, the whole Christian story of the exile and return of man to his home."¹¹ This raises the stakes of the search considerably since it makes us question why one did not know that one was home in the first place and demands that we think what the sources of exile might be. Since the Christian story is in keeping with God's providential plan, both for each fortunate individual and for the world as a whole, one must confront not only the enigmas of the mystery of personal existence, but also the enigmas of the world's direction. At the same time we can ask of the parable the question why we would leave home at all. The prodigal son's brother did not. That, too, must be part of God's providential design and part of the enigma of the brother's existence. So, there's a part of both the personal enigmas of existence and the Christian story that needs to make room for staying at home. This is a real problem, though, since it shows a radical discontinuity between the possibility of searching within and the necessity of the Church's forward direction as a pilgrim church aiming in a providential direction.

As a result of Taylor's use of this narrative concerning inwardness and self-reflection, I want to take him as intimating that our search for

¹⁰ Brown, "Introduction," xiii.

¹¹ Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), p. 134.

our identity often begins by denying it, by leaving behind a given identity that is “out of touch.” In the prodigal son story, there is a return to oneself *through* those experiences of deprivation and destitution; experiences graphically represented in Augustine’s own multiple uses of the story. But from Augustine’s story of exile and return, we know that the return is ultimately a happy one – it ends well, just as it does for the prodigal son and, in Frye’s account, the world as a whole. The Christian story, for all its challenges and pitfalls, is one in which in the end, all will be well. As Northrop Frye wryly explains: “The story of the salvation and redemption of mankind is a comedy because it comes out right and ends happily for all those whose opinion on the matter counts.”¹²

Here I become uneasy, because Frye certainly has it right. Most of us are not prodigal sons in the sense in which the Christian story and its use in Augustine would suggest – or if we are, we cannot be certain of our status. Augustine’s turn toward inwardness is teleological; even though he might not have been aware when he began reading the books of the Platonists that it was God acting within him and directing his life providentially, we as readers discover it was so designed. We have to take his story on faith. But my worry in Augustine’s portrayal of the background of providential assistance makes problematic the idea that our existence is an enigma. In one sense it might be, if we allow that God’s work within us is beyond our reckoning, but then it is only epistemically an enigma; it is not an enigma *simpliciter* because God knows what is essential to our identity and that leaves open the conceptual space for denying any genuinely open search for the enigmas of our existence that is not ultimately directed by God. That makes it seem as if Taylor is smuggling God into his story of authenticity and searching instead of showing that any genuinely meaningful life requires us to accept God’s presence. The coincidence of the same phrase appearing in both Brown’s discussion of Augustine and in Taylor’s invocation of the voices of past saints is in retrospect, unsurprising. If the voices of the saints articulate our enigmas and point to an inward depth, it is still likely that those voices will also use the teleological notion of providence

¹² Northrop Frye, “The Stage is All the World,” in ed. Troni Y. Grande and Garry Sherbert, *Northrop Frye’s Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance*, Collected Works of Northrop Frye, Vol. 28 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 448-49.

and the argument Taylor makes threatens to become vacuously circular. I will return to this worry in discussing Taylor's account of "past voices" in Part VI.

Part III

I want now to contrast two different kinds of searches and the kinds of seekers that they exemplify: one where we know the end point is a return home after years of self-imposed wanderings (those who believe again) and the other where we do not know the end point of the journey (pure seekers). Both seekers start from the same place – a confusion about where and who they are.

The first kind of search is exemplified in the *Divine Comedy*. The opening words:

Stopped mid-motion in the middle
Of what we call our life, I looked up and saw no sky
Only a dense cage of leaf, tree, and twig. I was lost.

This translation by Mary Jo Bang¹³ is not exactly literal, but it captures an important element of Dante's orientation, and one that fits well the contrast Taylor draws between human nature and identity. On the one hand there is the generic "what we call our life" (*nostra vita*) and on the other hand there is the intensely personal search in the words "I looked up" (*mi ritrovai* in Italian, literally "I found myself"). Coupled with this dialectic of general and particular, we find a metaphor that reveals a sense of entrapment, "a dense cage" (literally "a dark wood") coupled with a sense of despair: "I was lost" (the Italian is literally "the straight way was lost"). I shall return to this sense of entrapment soon. I want to suggest that this sense of loss and confusion that Dante experiences is one that, however arduous, is an inward search that leads him to a cosmic vision of order.

The second kind of search is one where we do not know the end point of the journey. Taylor talks about this in terms of "self-exploration," and it emerges in his discussion of a modern turn in Augustinian inwardness. It is striking, I think, that the passage with which I began this Chapter, which contrasted human nature and

¹³ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno: A New Translation*, illustrated by Henrik Drescher, trans. Mary Jo Bang (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2013), p. 15.

identity, is found in his chapter on Montaigne in *Sources of the Self*. The gap Montaigne opens up between human nature and identity is central to his thought, yet in Taylor's account, he is loath to come to terms with the more radical implications of Montaigne's view. For Taylor, Montaigne's self-exploration is a matter of "exploring what we are in order to establish ... identity, because the assumption behind modern self-exploration is that we do not already know who we are."¹⁴ This way of phrasing the matter raises significant questions and suggests that there is an identity that we merely have to discover through a process of exploration of the self, a self we essentially are. The account of providence may be gone from this modern turn, but the teleology is not. Nonetheless, there are elements in Montaigne's thought that belie Taylor's interpretation and I want to point to those in order to further develop the notion of a seeker who chooses not to "believe again" as readily as Dante's seeker does.

As Richard Flathman has noted, there is a "radical perspectivalism" in Montaigne's thought that "coexists with rather than contradicts or takes back Montaigne's repeated insistence on the ways in which our judgments and our dispositions are shaped and directed by custom, convention, and the opinions of those around us."¹⁵ I quote Flathman's judgment here for two reasons. First, it will prove important when we arrive at a discussion of Taylor's notion of authenticity. Second, it shows the Augustinian notion of inwardness at one of its pivotal points of change. Montaigne stands at a kind of hinge point in the development of the notion of inwardness. The perspectivalism is exemplified in Montaigne's essay, discussed by Flathman, "Of Heraclitus and Democritus" where, in speaking of the soul, Montaigne writes: "And she [the soul] treats a matter not according to itself, but according to herself." The priority Montaigne accords to the interests of the soul here is conspicuous. He continues: "Things in themselves may have their own weights and measures and qualities; but once inside, within us, she allots them their qualities as she sees fit."¹⁶ There is a real echo here of Augustine's repeated

¹⁴ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 178.

¹⁵ Richard Flathman, "Perfectionism without Perfection: Cavell, Montaigne, and the Conditions of Morals and Politics," in *The Claim to Community: Essays on Stanley Cavell and Political Philosophy*, ed. Andrew Norris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 114.

¹⁶ Flathman, "Perfection without Perfectionism," p. 114.

metaphysical claim, based on Wisdom 11:21, that everything has its "measure, number, and weight,"¹⁷ but unlike Augustine's robust metaphysical use of this passage in his account of the people and things in the world, here these qualities are radically relativized. One more quote from this essay will exemplify the aspect of Montaigne's thought that differentiates him decisively from Augustine and from Taylor's account of Montaigne as self-explorer:

Death is frightful to Cicero, desirable to Cato, a matter of indifference to Socrates. Health, conscience, authority, knowledge, riches, beauty, and their opposites – all are stripped on entry and receive from the soul new clothing, and the coloring that she chooses – brown, green, bright, dark, bitter, sweet, deep, superficial – and which each individual soul chooses; for they have not agreed together on their styles, rules, and forms; each one is queen of her realm. Wherefore, let us no longer make the external qualities of things our excuse; it is up to us to reckon them as we will.¹⁸

These passages from Montaigne indicate that there is more to self-exploration than Taylor thinks. There is, in fact, room for self-creation – "it is up to us to reckon them as we will," not to discover something essential about ourselves.

In what I have pointed at earlier in this chapter, I expect the reader to see how I want to complicate Taylor's picture. In one sense, it seems the paradigm seeker for Taylor would be the Prodigal Son who, following Augustine and Dante, returns home, believing again. At the same time, the paradigm dweller would be the brother of the prodigal son, the one who did not seek and who believes still. But what the passage from Montaigne suggests is something more radical about seeking. I want to claim that Montaigne is attracted to the idea that there might not be an end to the search, that there might not be someone I essentially am. That means that the prodigal son might not

¹⁷ Augustine, *Literal Commentary on Genesis IV, 3.7*, in *The Essential Augustine*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (New York: New American Library, 1964), pp. 103-105.

¹⁸ Flathman, "Perfection without Perfectionism," p. 114. Note that Flathman quotes only part of this passage. The complete passage I have used is from Montaigne, *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 220.

be able to return home, because he was never at home in the first place. At the same time, the brother becomes much more interesting as a figure. On the one hand, he could be as much of a seeker as the prodigal. After all, if there is no self he essentially is, his creation of himself could take place at home rather than through the travails of a journey. On the other hand he might be mired in some sort of self-imposed story about his identity as the dutiful son of his father, in which he falsely thinks that is who he essentially is.

As a result of Taylor's glossing over these sorts of complications in his discussion of Montaigne, then, we are tempted to miss an important aspect of seeking and dwelling. Seeking takes on the dimension of a never-ending search, not the dimension of the discovery of who one essentially is. While I do not want to overly simplify Taylor's thought here, I think in his discussion of Montaigne he falls victim to a parallel problem to the one I identified in his account of Augustine. Just as Augustine presupposes that his search for himself is guided by God's providential design, hence arrogating his role in the search, here Taylor's assumption that Montaigne is looking to discover who he is essentially pushes us to imagine that there is a preset essential or true self waiting to be discovered. The space for our thinking that Flathman identifies in Montaigne provides us with a new perspective, one that radically shifts the parameters of seeking and dwelling. I now turn to an exploration of those parameters, before returning to discussing Taylor's notion of authenticity.

Part IV

I want to continue exploring the phenomenology of seeking, and I will do so using an example that comes close to echoing Dante in the panic of being lost, but which describes the finding of oneself in a radically different way, building on the perspective of Montaigne. Emerson, at the beginning of his essay "Experience," provides us with the following image:

Where do we find ourselves? In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe that it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight.

But the Genius which, according to the old belief, stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us the lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup too strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday.¹⁹

The relevance of this quote for my purposes is readily apparent. It points to a more extreme state of disorientation and panic than Dante's vision of himself trapped in the woods. For, as we know, Dante, though he too had to drink of the waters of Lethe in order to forget the journey through Hell he endured, also had reliable guides, first Virgil and then Beatrice. But Emerson has us waking up in complete disorientation and without a guide – even our Genius has been weakened since the lethe was poured too strong, so it does not help us out of our lost state or recover from our journey through Hell enabling, with Beatrice's assistance, our return home. Nor is Emerson's image comparable to the Parable of the Prodigal Son, since there is no evidence of God's working within us to help us find our way. Instead, the picture Emerson provides is one in which we have lost every sense of direction. No matter how bright the sun, we find ourselves in a darkness that prevents us from knowing the extremes, which might as well amount to thinking there is no end, no home. Here, a pertinent association is with Thoreau's *Walden*. Stanley Cavell has noted that rather than being an account of Thoreau's dwelling at Walden Pond, "Walden was always gone, from the beginnings of the words of *Walden*."²⁰ This complicated assertion points to the fact that any attempt to establish a dwelling, to be a dweller, perhaps leads us astray. I shall return to this point in Part VII.

For his part, Emerson continues:

Sleep lingers all our lifetime about our eyes, as night hovers all day in the boughs of the fir-tree. All things swim and glitter. Our life is not so much threatened as our perception. Ghostlike we glide through nature, and should not know our place again. Did our birth fall in some fit of indigence and frugality in nature, that she was so sparing of her fire and so liberal of her earth, that it

¹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Experience," in *Nature and Selected Essays*, ed. Larzer Ziff (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 285-86.

²⁰ Stanley Cavell, *The Senses of Walden* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), p. 117.

appears to us that we lack the affirmative principle, and though we have health and reason, yet we have no superfluity of spirit for new creation? We have enough to live and bring the year about, but not an ounce to impart or to invest. Ah that our Genius were a little more of a genius!²¹

Here I want to linger over the notion of perception, for while we may live a ghostlike existence, perhaps evoking in us images of the spirits Dante encounters in his journey, the more important point is that we cannot see our way about. Dante could look up and, though he could not see the sky, he could see the obscuring woods around him and have, providentially, Virgil arrive to help him emerge from his sylvan cage. Emerson, by contrast, states flatly that the guides we might have, Genius and perception, are no help at all.

There is a resonance with Montaigne's perspectivalism here for sure, but with an added loss. Now we have lost even the power to reckon the external qualities of things. Indeed, inwardness seems to have failed us, and as ghostlike creatures unable to see in the daylight, we have no way either to discover ourselves or create ourselves. So, what remains for us to do on Emerson's account? He writes about inwardness and self-reflexiveness as follows: "It is very unhappy, but too late to be helped, the discovery we have made, that we exist. That discovery is called the Fall of Man. Ever afterwards, we suspect our instruments."²² So, there is no path back to innocence – call it finding who we essentially are – through inwardness and our ability to believe or believe again is suspect. Significantly, he adds a bit later:

The life of truth is cold, and so far mournful; but it is not the slave of tears, contritions, and perturbations. It does not attempt another's work, nor adopt another's facts. It is a main lesson of wisdom to know your own from another's. I have learned that I cannot dispose of other people's facts; but I possess such a key to my own, as persuades me against all their denials, that they also have a key to theirs.²³

²¹ Emerson, "Experience," p. 286.

²² Emerson, "Experience," p. 304.

²³ Emerson, "Experience," p. 308.

Two things stand out in this passage. The life of truth is one's own and does not trespass on another's. This might be thought to be a concession to a view of inwardness that discovers who one essentially is, but I am not so sure. The image of "a key to my own facts" needs to be analyzed carefully. After all, the fact is that Emerson calls the life of truth "cold." That makes me think that the noonday sun not only fails to illuminate a way for us, it also does not warm us. If this is finding out who one essentially is, it appears to be a kind of *via negativa*. For Emerson in "Experience," finding ourselves is not a matter of discovering a unique ground that each of us essentially is; rather it is a matter of coming to terms with an endless series of losses. As Stanley Cavell has put it, "Finding ourselves on a certain step we may feel the loss of foundation to be traumatic, to mean the ground of the world falling away, the bottom of things dropping out, ourselves foundered, sunk on a stair."²⁴ This thought connects to Cavell's regular way of reading Emerson as equating mourning with morning, and discovering that each new morning is a rebirth.²⁵

Emerson ends his essay strikingly: "and the true romance which the world exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power."²⁶

Here I want to call attention to the word 'romance.' A crucial feature of Emerson's thought is well brought out by Stanley Cavell. I want to come at it from two perspectives. From one perspective, Cavell makes it clear that there is no such thing as a true (or false) self; hence he is disputing the notion, central to Taylor's work, of there being something that I essentially am. Cavell writes: "Such an idea [of a true self] seems rather imposed from outside oneself, as from another who has a use for oneself on condition that one is beyond desire, beyond change"²⁷ Cavell here is reminding us of that dimension of our modern notion of inwardness that is too often betrayed. As Flathman wrote of Montaigne above, "custom, convention, and the opinions of those around us" are ever present.

²⁴ Stanley Cavell, "Finding as Founding: Taking Steps in Emerson's 'Experience,'" in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, ed. David Justin Hodge (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2003), p. 134.

²⁵ Cavell, "Finding as Founding," pp. 115-116.

²⁶ Emerson, "Experience," p. 311.

²⁷ Stanley Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. xxxiv.

Surely they play a role in shaping our notion not only of the way the search inward should proceed, but also in fostering a complacency about the search itself. Cavell is well known for picking up these themes in Emerson and Thoreau and I return to them below.

Right now, though, I want to note that from another perspective, rejecting the idea of a true self means recognizing that our self is always divided, “that no state of the self achieves its full expression, that the fate of finitude is to want, that human desire projects an idea of an unending beyond.”²⁸ It is this divided self and unending goal that powers our romantic attachments to the world and others. This is most forcefully enunciated in Cavell’s registering of a “passionate utterance,” which he describes as “an invitation to improvisation in the disorders of desire.”²⁹ In talking about the disorders of desire, Cavell is making the picture of our identity especially complex. Emerson in “Experience” had separated out the world from our selves when he stressed the transformation of genius into practical power is why the world exists. That the “why” here cannot be understood teleologically is clear enough. It might be thought that we might want to restrict ourselves to a modest sense of teleology in relation to identity and a “true self.” Of course, there might be all sorts of smaller epiphanies along life’s journey, which can be full of surprises and in which distortions and mystifications can be lifted from our ways of conceiving our identities.³⁰ In fact, though, I think that all that remains in an Emersonian/Cavelleian picture is whether or not there is a true self we are to become. But the important point to stress is there is never an end to that journey – true selfhood might be an ideal, but it is unachievable. The “why”, then, paints a very different picture of our place in the world and our relation to it than Augustine and Dante provide of us as pilgrims, and hence not at home in the world. If we

²⁸ Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 311.

²⁹ Stanley Cavell, *Philosophy the Day after Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 185.

³⁰ For one intriguing discussion of the way we can hide ourselves, see Edgar A. Levenson, “The Purloined Self,” *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, 15 (1987), pp. 481-490. But, of course, while we do this through what he calls processes of “experience mystified by anxiety,” I see these as clarifications of anxiety, not a route to reveal a full-fledged “authentic” self.

are not at home in the world, it is our failure, not part of who we essentially are.

I have worked through, albeit briefly, some thoughts from Augustine, Dante, Montaigne, and Emerson to show a range of possible responses to our being lost and finding ourselves. The Prodigal Son returns home and Dante, with Beatrice's help, glimpses his true home. Montaigne finds within himself the ability to reckon the external qualities of things, that is, the ability to think for himself and for himself alone, and it is not too much a stretch to say he creates his identity there. Emerson works his way beyond Montaigne. He, too, creates an identity, but it is an identity that is always doubled. In addition, the world of facts he finds himself in is cold, and he does not know the way forward – does he go up the stairs or down the stairs? At the end he concludes that the only way forward is one that recognizes that there is no self I essentially am, but rather a continuous journey, though a journey without a guide. Indeed, one way of noticing just what is important in Emerson would be to note that point he is making is that guides are not to be trusted. Instead, we are moving in the disorders of desire, to use Cavell's phrase, picking up a way of interpreting the true romance of the world by acting in it.

I now want to return to the notion of conformity as diagnosed by Emerson and Thoreau. I do so to connect these topics to Taylor's ethic of authenticity and its relation to the activities and attitudes of seekers and dwellers. While I do not have the space to present passages in detail, I instead rely on Cavell's interpretation of the notion of conformity. I want to say that the notion of authenticity is compromised by its lack of political import. Here is Cavell:

You may or may not take an explicit side in some particular conflict, but unless you find some way to show that this society is not yours, it is; your being compromised by its actions expresses the necessity of your being implicated in them. That you nevertheless avoid express participation or express disavowal is what creates that ghost-state of conformity Emerson articulates endlessly, as our being inane, timid, ashamed, skulkers, leaners, apologetic, noncommittal, a gag, a masquerade, pinched in a corner, cowed, cowards fleeing before a revolution. These are among the contraries at once to thinking *and* to acting aversively; which is to say, by

Emerson's definition of self-reliance (namely as the aversion of conformity), contraries of self-reliance, in word or in deed.³¹

Given this devastating list of ways in which we compromise the creation of (a divided) self, avoid becoming self-reliant, Taylor's notion of authenticity begins to fall apart. We may all, in Taylor's words, conceive of ourselves as having to connect with a source deep within us, but the ways we fail to do so are manifold in the very process of thinking we *are* doing so. Hence, I want to say that both seekers and dwellers risk living in conformity and that one reason for this is a misconceived notion of the self as one with which we can connect. In the next part, I explore more directly one component of what I take to be missing in Taylor's account of seekers and dwellers.

Part V

I now wish to point to a potential problem with the claim that past expressions of the "enigmas of existence" can counter the voice of the authoritative Church today. As I showed above, the first problem is that Taylor has failed to distance himself from Augustine to the extent that he thinks he does. As a result, his method for countering the voice in which the Church speaks strikes me as a little too easy an answer. Despite his historical narrative and the crucial epistemic gains and moral resources that the notion of authenticity is intended to provide, Taylor's Augustinian allegiances inflect his account with a "timeless" dimension to the reception of those enigmas of existence. I do not think such timelessness is plausible, or is even what Taylor himself wants to think. In fact, Taylor himself is careful to distance himself from the "timeless" conception of the enigmas of our existence when he mentions the concurrent rise of consumer capitalism along with the notion of authenticity, as though it were causally connected with our currently available descriptions of seekers and dwellers.³²

He makes this point most strongly in *Sources of the Self*. There, as Ruth Abbey has aptly noted, "[Taylor] acknowledges in principle the

³¹ Cavell, "What is the Emersonian Event?" in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, p. 190.

³² Taylor, "The Church Speaks – to Whom?" p. 18 and *A Secular Age*, pp. 474-475.

role that changing material and institutional factors, such as those in the economic, administrative, legal, military, technological and political realms play in shaping identity"³³ But my point is that Taylor has only done this "in principle." He remains tempted to try to go back to earlier voices, but without accounting for the current situations of the hearers of those past voices. So, any attempt at retrieval of past descriptions of the conditions of our existence runs up against the fact that there have been momentous changes in the conditions of the possibility of hearing those descriptions. The duality of Montaigne's thought, in which he both supports a kind of adherence to convention but also develops a notion of self-creation, shows how even in the sixteenth century, the things Montaigne was capable of hearing might extend well beyond the scope of the voices of the Church. More generally, as Quentin Skinner has made clear, we need to recognize that in "learning more about the causal story" [of our present view of what is good], the effect is "to loosen the hold of our inherited values upon our emotional allegiances." Skinner goes on to write: "Haunted by a sense of lost possibilities, historians are almost invariably Laodicean in their attachment to the values of the present time."³⁴

I want now to extend Skinner's point in a slightly different direction. Cavell has noted that from Thoreau's perspective in the nineteenth century, "*Our* nostalgia is as dull as our confidence and anticipation."³⁵ This sentence can be read in the context of the denunciations of conformity present in both Emerson and Thoreau, but how much more must that be the case today? Skinner's formulation of his objection, "loosening the hold of our inherited values upon our emotional allegiances," does not apply only to historians in the way that Skinner intimates. In fact, it has been argued that this is a more general condition of human life as it is currently lived, especially in Western industrial societies, the societies that also concern Taylor in his narrative and in his conceptions of seekers and

³³ Ruth Abbey, *Charles Taylor* (Philosophy Now Series) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 74.

³⁴ Quentin Skinner, "Modernity and Disenchantment: Some Historical Reflections," in *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, ed. James Tully with the assistance of Daniel M. Weinstock (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 45.

³⁵ Cavell, *The Senses of Walden*, p. 117.

dwellers. J. M. Bernstein, for example, has talked about this condition in terms of “affective skepticism.” In his compelling interpretation of Adorno, Bernstein points to an analysis of twentieth century society that sees it as the result of an “ethical failure.”³⁶ This contrasts with Taylor’s apparently more ameliorative picture of our current ethical position as an epistemic gain. The modern turn identified by Taylor, though, does call into question the comedic aspect of the prodigal son story, as the notion of self-creation becomes more prominent than self-discovery, and the horrors of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries make it hard to imagine that most people really do view their lives as comedies. Who would want to do so? While we may retain a nostalgic attachment to the idea of an inward “getting in touch,” it is unclear from Taylor’s description of the search for identity that the goal could return to its former prominence in our historical situation. How could we return given what we have witnessed. Who wants to go back to that home? Or, put differently, what kind of a person would want to do that? Is that what dwellers are doing?

Bernstein’s account of our modern situation relies heavily on the conditions of the modern subject as diagnosed by Max Weber. Taylor, too, discusses Weber, so juxtaposing Bernstein’s account with Taylor’s is an effective way to explicate my concern with Taylor’s more optimistic view of our epistemic gains and moral resources. Taylor’s use of Weber tends to focus on the latter’s account of the rise of an attitude to human life and work that can be viewed as affirmation of ordinary life. As Taylor puts it, this is characterized as “A spiritual outlook which stressed the necessity of continuous disciplined work, work which should be of benefit to people and hence ought to be efficacious, and which encouraged sobriety and restraint in the enjoyment of its fruits”³⁷ But another Weberian thesis of crucial importance is downplayed by Taylor, namely, Weber’s thesis of the “iron cage” of rationality. In *A Secular Age*, Taylor makes use of this image in discussing the ways that we moderns organize time as a “precious resource, not to be ‘wasted.’” The result, for Taylor, is that the time we live in is a “uniform, univocal, secular time” that “occludes all higher times, makes them hard to conceive.” This sense of time traps us in a kind of routine that is best characterized as

³⁶ J. M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 4.

³⁷ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 226.

"banal."³⁸ This is certainly an important aspect of Weber's "iron cage" metaphor and it certainly fits with Taylor's emphasis on the need for us to rediscover the "enigmas of existence" that can be vertical and not horizontal. But it fails to do full justice to the metaphor's many dimensions. In bringing out an additional aspect of the metaphor, I want to help clarify the ways in which Bernstein's use of the term and his diagnosis of our modern predicament is significantly different than Taylor's. To say that twentieth century society is an ethical failure is to say more than that the sense of time has been flattened; it brings into question the epistemic gains in the moral concerns that Taylor sees as a sign of progress.

For Bernstein, it is not just that time has been flattened out. Instead, he wants to argue that "Modern, secular reason is self-undermining."³⁹ So, rather than seeing the secular age as an epistemic gain, albeit with the downside of flattening out spiritual experience, Bernstein links together two aspects of contemporary secular experience in a way that shows that the process that Taylor describes as an epistemic gain has in fact led to a condition of nihilism. The first aspect Bernstein identifies is "the increasing rational incoherence of modern moral values and ideals." This incoherence leads us to see the "practical inadequacy for the purpose of regulating – orienting and giving meaning to – everyday life."⁴⁰ Bernstein focuses on the following summary passage from Nietzsche's *Will to Power*:

But among the forces cultivated by morality was *truthfulness*: this eventually turned against morality, discovered its teleology, its partial perspective – and now the recognition of this inveterate mendaciousness that one despairs of shedding becomes a stimulant. Now we discover in ourselves needs implanted by centuries of moral interpretation – needs that now appear to us as needs for untruth; on the other hand, the value for which we endure life seems to hinge on these needs. This antagonism – *not* to esteem what we know, and not to be *allowed* to esteem the lies we should like to tell ourselves – results in a process of dissolution.⁴¹

³⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 59 and p. 719.

³⁹ Bernstein, *Adorno*, p. 5.

⁴⁰ Bernstein, *Adorno*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Bernstein, *Adorno*, p. 5.

There is a lot to unpack here, but the basic idea is clear enough. Secular reason has given us scientific truths, but because these truths are merely scientific, they are not effective at engaging us on an emotional level. At the same time, what would engage us affectively is not available to us because the moral resources we have at our disposal are not worthy of being valued. There is a clear echo here of Skinner's Laodicean attitude, but now extended to stress the divide between our highest value, scientific rationality, and the moral stories that we used to use to make sense of our experience. The resulting experience is what Bernstein names "affective skepticism:"

Affective skepticism specifies a situation in which agents can find no good reason, no motive, for pursuing a particular form of practice (intellectual or practical) that can be separated, at least in principle, from the question of the internal coherence of the practice.⁴²

That is, the moral resources available to us are inadequate to externally motivate us – to take us outside of Taylor's flattened time.

To be fair, Taylor himself recognizes the tensions I am invoking in his essay, "A Catholic Modernity?" There, in a trenchant discussion of secular humanism, neo-Nietzscheans, and those who acknowledge transcendence, he compares our current condition with the choices that confronted Matteo Ricci, the famous Jesuit explorer of China. Taylor writes:

He [Ricci] wanted to distinguish between those things in the new culture that came from the natural knowledge we all have of God and thus should be affirmed and extended, on one hand, and those practices that were distortions and would have to be changed, on the other. Similarly, we are challenged to a difficult discernment, trying to see what in modern culture reflects its furthering of the gospel, and what its refusal of the transcendent.⁴³

Here I think Taylor is asking the crucial question and challenging us in the right way. I remain unconvinced, though, that we have the

⁴² Bernstein, *Adorno*, p. 6.

⁴³ Charles Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?" in *Dilemmas and Connections: Selected Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 186.

ability to make this discernment in any kind of deeply reasonable way, though we might be able to count gains and losses from an external perspective. So, at the end of the day, we need to recognize that for Taylor this is going to become a matter of faith based exploration. As he states in this same essay, "This cannot be a matter of guarantee, only of faith. ... Now, it makes a whole lot of difference whether you think this kind of love is a possibility for us humans."⁴⁴

This returns us to the issue of the Church's voice and our ability to hear it, adding an additional level of complexity.

Part VI

To see why I think that Taylor's invocation of faith might be sufficient, for those who can hear it, and yet not sufficient as a *philosophical* response to the inheritance of modernity, it is necessary to confront two key aspects of Taylor's account. One is the stress he places on the moral good and epistemic gain present in the notion of authenticity. The other is the availability to us of the voices of the past, which spoke eloquently and differently about our existence in time. I have already invoked Emerson as a caution against the idea of authenticity as a self-discovery, showing how he advanced Montaigne's initial attempt to construct a notion of self-creation. I suspect it is clear that my sympathies more nearly align with those of Montaigne and Emerson, and the reason for that is my inability to accept Taylor's notion of authenticity as finding essentially who we are.

As my use of Skinner is designed to illuminate, the historical dimensions of where we find ourselves make finding ourselves extraordinarily problematic. Abbey's litany of what shapes our identity – the economic, administrative, legal, military, technological and political realms – opens up a vast project. How could anyone ever know enough to find their identity with such an array of formative influences? More importantly, it calls into question the "essentially" in our identity. What could be essential given the contingent circumstances of so much that shapes our identity?

Psychoanalysis, perhaps more than any other twentieth century project, has noticed this problem, and the dilemma we face has been

⁴⁴ Taylor, "A Catholic Modernity?," p, 186.

pressed by Adam Phillips, who writes: "... first, ideally, we are made to feel special, then we are expected to enjoy a world in which we are not."⁴⁵ He is speaking, of course, about childhood and adulthood, but the thought has a more extensive scope in that we realize the separation of the concerns of the world from our wishes, a point made strongly by Emerson at the end of "Experience." Elsewhere, he writes that authenticity is one of an array of examples of "a phantom-limb effect – an absence acknowledged through an apparent presence ..." and then asks, "... what can you be for if you are against authenticity?"⁴⁶ In this context, he considers Wendy Lesser's memoir of living in Berlin. Lesser makes a case for a certain ironic distance in our understanding of our self and contrasts that with the desire to do away with an ironic life "... so that something more – More what? More childlike? More authentic? More credulous? – something fresher and newer, at any rate, can be ushered in."⁴⁷

Phillips goes on to liken irony to a "distance regulator," which we are trying to escape. But, after all, what is wrong with a distance regulator? What allows us to see that as an attractive option? I think in what I have said above – from Emerson, Adorno, and Skinner – that an answer to that question is becoming clear. We can be for a distance regulator because any other scenario puts us at risk of being credulous, whether about the self, our modern circumstances, or the contingencies that shape our identity. In short, we do not want to be taken in. For this reason, Phillips takes the quest for authenticity to be regressive.⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he strikingly writes that, "Through understanding to the limits of understanding – this is Freud's new version of an old project. Freud's work is best read as a long elegy for the intelligibility of our lives."⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Adam Phillips, *Missing Out: In Praise of the Unlived Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2012), p. xv.

⁴⁶ Adam Phillips, "The Authenticity Issue," in his *On Balance* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2010), p. 108 and p. 115.

⁴⁷ Phillips, "The Authenticity Issue," p. 43. While it would complicate the argument, it might be helpful to think of authenticity as a concept that is defined best by what it is not. But again, that just means we can never get at a clear conception of authenticity. For more on this way of thinking about authenticity, see, Eric Dussere, *America is Elsewhere: The Noir Tradition in the Age of Consumer Culture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 4-11.

⁴⁸ Phillips, "The Authenticity Issue," p. 116.

⁴⁹ Phillips, *Missing Out*, p. 63.

But now, what about the enigmas of our existence? In Chapter 20 of *A Secular Age*, Taylor writes of those “who broke out of the immanent frame,” what earlier I was describing at the flattened time that Taylor sees in Weber’s description of modernity.⁵⁰ Central to his discussion of these exemplars are those who experienced some kind of conversion. Taylor’s narrative of the variety of conversions is rich and nuanced. I will take as my example for discussion, from the several given by Taylor, the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, whom Taylor views as having “... paced out an itinerary which is in more than one sense ground-breaking.” As Taylor summarizes his discussion, he recognizes that Hopkins “starts from a modern predicament, and also ends up in previously uncharted terrain.”⁵¹ Hopkins is resistant to what Taylor describes as a “religion of impersonal order,” that is, one that sets up a code or set of rules, a correlative set of disciplines that cause us to internalize these rules, and a network of organizations that are rationally structured in such a way that we carry out what the code demands.⁵² For Taylor, what is most remarkable about Hopkins is his dual conviction of the role of communion – not an obedience to rules, but a participation in God’s love – and the “deep connection between this telos of communion and a recognition of the particular in all its specificity.”⁵³ So, in this sense we can see that Hopkins begins from two points. On the one hand he is alarmed by the kind of challenge an Emersonian notion of self-creation presents to his image of the relation between God and humans, and on the other hand he perceives a set of social organizations that enclose us in something akin to Weber’s iron cage.

This description of Hopkins’s accomplishment is sketchy, but sufficient for my purposes here. While recognizing the virtues of Hopkins’s achievement, I want to raise a worry. In a similar context, Cavell has written of Eliot’s great poem *Ash Wednesday*. There, Cavell recognizes that Eliot begins correctly with a recognition of “the profitlessness of labor, the absoluteness of time,” what he describes as the “decisive experience of the truth of Ecclesiastes.”⁵⁴ But then Cavell

⁵⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 728.

⁵¹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 764.

⁵² Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 742.

⁵³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 742.

⁵⁴ Stanley Cavell, “Ending the Waiting Game,” in *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York: Charles Scribners and Sons, 1969), p. 162.

enters a cautionary note. Eliot progresses through the poem to speak of the “joy of surrender; the direction is up.” And he continues: “But can it [the direction up] really be *taken*, or does Eliot’s assurance relay only on knowing his religion like a book?”⁵⁵ That is, is Eliot, and by extension Hopkins, really able to lay bare the enigmas of existence, or are they telling us what they already believe, what has been written down for them to believe? This question is much too large for this chapter to answer, but it is worth raising in the context of Taylor’s reliance on contemporary exemplars of conversion as voices that can counter the voice of the Church that so many seekers find alienating. And, raising this question now, in tandem with what I have written earlier, will lead to my merely preliminary phenomenology of seekers and dwellers.

Part VII

If we are bereft of authenticity, if our reliance on exemplars can be questioned, and if we need to recognize all the external forces that shape our identity, how can we ever make sense of the distinction between seekers and dwellers? Are not they both looking for something impossible to find? The seeker, in search of some experience that will bring her relief from the overpowering, stifling orderliness of contemporary society might well say that she is on an authentic search. But the concern raised above about the notion of authenticity and the Emersonian additions to Montaigne’s sense of self-creation cause me to pause in envisioning seekers in that way. In his essay, “Thinking of Emerson,” Cavell writes, parenthetically to a discussion of how we are to deal with life’s discontinuities, or as I would like to call them, all the barriers that stand in the way of a nostalgic sense of authenticity:

In Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, knowing how to go on, as well as knowing when to stop, is exactly the measure of our knowing, or learning, in certain of its main regions or modes, for example, in the knowledge we have of our words. Onward thinking [an Emerson phrase from his essay “History”], on the way, knowing how to go on [a Wittgenstein phrase from *Philosophical*

⁵⁵ Cavell, “Ending the Waiting Game,” p. 162.

Investigations §155] are of course inflections or images of the religious idea of The Way, inflections which specifically deny that there is a place at which our ways end. Were philosophy to concede such a place, one knowable in advance of its setting out, philosophy would cede its own autonomy.⁵⁶

Based on this passage, we can describe the seeker in two ways.

In one case, we have the seeker who is a philosopher, who does not know where she will end up; a condition we saw above Cavell describes as living life as an improvisation within the disorders of desire. Of course, the disorders of desire could be religious as well as secular, but for this type of seeker its region is not one where philosophy gives up its rights. Here the image might be of someone who is carrying on a dialogue with God and/or the Church, but does not know how it will end; or is exploring, in whatever groping fashion, for some understanding of the (ever evolving) enigmas of her existence. There is no known outcome here, only the search.

In the other case, the seeker is someone who does in fact know there is The Way but cannot seem to find it from where she currently is. Then she might need a guide, as Dante needed Vergil and Beatrice, and Augustine needed God's promptings. In this case, the seeker might use philosophy, but is not in the end a philosopher. In the former case, the seeker is not searching for her authentic self, but hoping to create a provisional one that will allow her some contact and evolving understanding of her enigmas of existence. In the latter case, to use the image Cavell used in discussing Eliot, the seeker is someone who knows what the book says but is having trouble seeing the way the book applies to her life, how she hears the voice of the Church. Chapter 20 of *A Secular Age* describes some of the ways that seekers of the latter type can cease to hear the voice of the Church or understand the words of the Book. I think this is an accurate description of the way that Taylor writes about most of his exemplars of conversion, including Hopkins. It also coheres with his mentioning the functional role of Taizé communities. But, and this is the crucial point, this kind of seeker knows what she is looking for and is failing

⁵⁶ Stanley Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, p. 18.

to find it. She is trying to discover herself (again), and believes there is a self there to be discovered. The causes of that failure can be as different as the various contingencies forcing conformity on her, with the resulting feeling of being worked on by forces outside her that keep her out of attunement, or it can reside in her lack of attunement with the voice of the Church due to her own idiosyncrasies.

With these images in front of us, though, it becomes more difficult to see how the seeker of The Way is significantly different from the dweller, beyond the fact that the dweller has never lost contact with The Way (or has found it again). Still I want to keep open the conceptual space such that we can perceive a significant difference between any kind of seeker and a dweller.

Cavell shows what he takes to be the decisive difference between Emerson's picture of philosophical seeking and Heidegger's notion of dwelling. He quotes Heidegger: "The *thanc* [thought] means man's inmost mind, the heart, the heart's core, that innermost essence of man which reaches outward most fully and to the outermost limits." The affinity between this thought and Taylor's notion of authenticity is sufficiently clear. After this quote from Heidegger, Cavell continues:

The substantive disagreement with Heidegger, shared by Emerson and Thoreau, is that the achievement of the human requires not inhabitation and settlement but abandonment, leaving. ... For the significance of leaving lies in its discovery that you have settled something, that you have felt enthusiastically what there is to abandon yourself to, that you can treat the others there are as those to whom the inhabitation of the world can now be left.⁵⁷

This is not an easy passage to clarify, nor will I try to discover all its meanings. What is salient, though, for the purposes of thinking about dwellers and seekers is that seeking, in the philosophical sense, is a matter of leaving something behind. Aron Vinegar has accurately captured at least a minimum of what this passage is trying to convey: "... the word "abandonment" in Cavell's lexicon, ... [has] connotations of enthusiasm, ecstasy, leaving, relief, quitting, going onward, release, shunning, allowing, delivering, trusting, suffering,

⁵⁷ This and the previous quote from Heidegger are from Cavell, "Thinking of Emerson," in *Emerson's Transcendental Etudes*, p. 19. The quote from Heidegger is from his *What is Called Thinking* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1976), p. 144.

and binding."⁵⁸ What is important to note is that all these connotations are responses to some experience, an experience that has the shape of Emerson's disorientation in not knowing where he is. It is then up to us, in the improvisation of the disorders of desire, to discover not ourselves, but something out there to which we can abandon ourselves. Self-knowledge, recognizing the enigmas of our existence, becomes a response to that experience. Those who dwell cannot have that experience, because they have inhabited and settled. In the case of those dwelling in the Church, or those seekers of attunement with the voice of the Church, the self-knowledge is something to be discovered. The philosophical seeker, though, abandons and in abandoning, in discovering what captures her interest, learns about herself – perhaps continually – though not who she essentially is.

I conclude, finally, with two questions and a tentative answer. Can the philosophical seeker abandon herself to the Church? If so, what would that mean the Church would have to become? I think the answer to the first question is yes, and the answer to the second is that we do not have a clue, other than to say it would speak in a very different voice, one that was as improvisational as the seeker's. Can the Church be improvisational and remain a Church? Answering this question, I can do no better than evoke Cavell's poignant phrase at the end of his essay "Ending the Waiting Game:" "We hang between."⁵⁹ That is, we cede philosophy to religion or else we recognize that the Church must change in ways that allow seekers to seek (with no *telos* in sight) and dwellers to become seekers. This strikes me as the most urgent task of those who provide the voice of the Church today.

⁵⁸ Aron Vinegar, *I Am a Monument: On Learning from Las Vegas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), p. 20.

⁵⁹ Cavell, "Ending the Waiting Game," p. 162.

Part II
Contexts for Dwelling and Seeking:
The Church in the World

The Church and the World: A Response to Charles Taylor's View of a Contemporary Disjunction

ED BLOCK

In one sense it is not just the Catholic Church that is, in Charles Taylor's words "out of phase with the world it wants to speak to." Yes, the Catholic Church is "out of phase," but Taylor's own work suggests that the (Western) world itself is "out of joint" along many of the same lines that Taylor lists as problems of the Church reaching people today. Taylor's work (particularly *Sources of the Self*, [1989]) identifies the disaffected – if not marginalized – in numerous places. To repair the disjunction, Taylor says we can and should make common cause with the world itself, particularly those most disaffected and marginalized, pointing out ways that we *all* can come to ... greater fullness.

Echoing *Sources of the Self* (19), Taylor identifies, in *A Secular Age*, "a profound dissatisfaction with a life encased entirely in the immanent order." The sense is that this life is empty, "flat, devoid of higher purpose" (506). Here and later he focuses on the relation of health and spirituality, and authenticity as an ethic.

His goal is stated rather early in *A Secular Age*: "What I want to do is focus attention on the different kinds of lived experience involved in understanding your life in one way or the other, on what it is like to live as a believer or an unbeliever" (4-5). A bit later he refers to "alternative ways of living our moral/spiritual life in the broadest sense" (5). Here Taylor's focus on the moral/spiritual life highlights, even dramatizes the difference from the populace at large. How often and how many believers, even, think about their lives in moral or spiritual terms? How many ponder the "morality" or spiritual benefit – or detriment – of buying a particular item, going to a particular movie, joining this or that health club?

Realizing that a search or quest for "fullness" may seem, to some, a luxury reserved only for the affluent, I would argue that some sense of what Taylor points to in the experience of Bede Griffiths (*SA*, 5) is,

in fact, the existential goal of thinking people today. That is, they¹ seek some form of fullness, so long as they are not otherwise oppressed, victimized, or numbed by the conditions (largely secular) – not to mention enticements and distractions – created by the twenty-first century form of late capitalist life into experiencing the “confusion, exile, and emptiness” that Taylor describes in *A Secular Age* (SA, 6-7), and earlier, in *Sources of the Self*. In his writings (*Laudato si, Evangelii gaudium* his homily on a visit to Lampedusa, particularly), Pope Francis also calls attention to many of these same ailments.²

Using Taylor’s paradigmatic examples of what “fullness” and its opposite appear to be (SA, 5-7), I would like to examine three of the four disjunctions that Taylor lists, titling these three parts: “What Do Seekers Seek?,” “Authority as Acknowledgment,” and “In Respectful Exchange.” I shall conclude with a brief reflection on “the punctual self,” a final look at “Seekers and Dwellers,” and a qualified answer to the problems raised by the disjunctions, based on my own personal investment in what Taylor calls “the experience of the aesthetic” (chapter sixteen of *A Secular Age*). In this way I hope to specify and analyze some of the conditions of twenty-first century life that militate *against* both seekers *and* dwellers, not only within the Church, but in society at large. Perhaps awareness of these conditions will help form or define a common ground on which not only religious and spiritual, but even the (exclusively) secular may find and build a consensus within which to reflect on and, ideally, combat the challenges to fullness.

The Second Vatican Council’s “Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” is prescient in pointing out many of the factors that lead to the disjunctions Taylor identifies, and which I am arguing involve the conditions of late capitalism in the West (particularly the United States). The following are taken from Thomas Merton’s

¹ I speak from, and to, an American audience, primarily.

² “*Laudato si ... On Care for Our Common Home*,” Papal Encyclical of 24 May, 2014, #113, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html; *Evangelii gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World (24 November 2013), https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html; Visit to Lampedusa, Homily of Holy Father Francis, 8 July 2013, https://w2.vatican.va/content/Francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa).

"Christian Humanism," a reflection on the "Constitution," first published in *Love and Living* (New York: FSG, 1979). A first quotation from the "Constitution" sets the tone:

Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on one another. For the beginning, the subject and the goal of all social institutions is and must be the human person, which for its part and by its very nature stands completely in need of social life (nn. 24-25).

Merton notes that "Our modern world cannot attain to peace, and to a fully equitable social order, merely by the application of laws which act upon man, so to speak, from outside himself" (154-55). In fact, the Council is prophetic in cautioning:

Reasons for anxiety, however, are not lacking. Many people, especially in economically advanced areas, seem, as it were, to be ruled by economics, so that almost their entire personal and social life is permeated with a certain economic way of thinking ... At the very time when the development of economic life could mitigate social inequalities ... it is often made to embitter them; or, in some places, it even results in a decline of the social status of the underprivileged and in contempt for the poor Extravagance and wretchedness exist side by side. While a few enjoy very great power of choice, the majority are deprived of almost all possibility of acting on their own initiative and responsibility, and often subsist in living and working conditions unworthy of the human person (n. 63).

The Council also gives the lie to economic theory that posits "the invisible hand" (of the market), capable of advancing economic "fullness" for a nation or a people:

Growth is not to be left solely to a kind of mechanical course of the economic activity of individuals, nor to the authority of the government. For this reason, doctrines which obstruct the necessary reforms under the guise of a false liberty, and those which subordinate the basic rights of individual persons and groups to the collective

organization of production, must be shown to be erroneous (n. 65).

With these words, the Council, in the mid-1960s, was already warning of many of the problems we see today, and which account for Taylor's concerns.

What Do Seekers Seek?

Seekers ask questions, but elements of the culture, aspects of the secular world view, inhibit, prevent and make negligible or seemingly irrelevant certain kinds of key questions, or – worse – replace them with, at best, partial, or distracting and draining questions like: What kind of car should I buy to be happy, or to be a good citizen of this planet? Should I be a vegetarian? A Vegan? A goddess worshipper?

What is it in the secular culture that makes people disinclined to ask “the big questions”? Part of it is the overwhelming bias toward the worth of the individual and the value given “ordinary life” (cf. *Sources*, 13-16 and chapter 13). Am I at peace? Is (my) life worthwhile? Am I fulfilled? Today, the answers to the last two are frequently finessed into materialist form. For example, “Is my life worthwhile, professionally?” “Am I fulfilled sexually?” Taking a cue from the subtitle of Taylor's *Sources* – “The Making of the Modern Identity,” do we need to go back to something like a set of Maslovian “values” from which to begin to reconstruct a healthy relationship to the self, *before* we try to “climb” to spiritual heights?

It is even tempting to critique Taylor's description of “fullness” as “utopian.” Yes, it can be argued, there are people who have such experiences as Bede Griffiths, for whom a sense of fullness (moral, spiritual) orients them, or at least serves as a guide, goal, intimation of what life could or should be. But for most people, there just is not time for – or enough interest in – reflecting on such a “state.”³ They are too busy making a living, trying to get ahead, trying to deal with conflicts,

³ While somewhat narrow, or at least selective, I offer my experience as a teacher as an example. Teaching English in a university environment for thirty-five years, I would say that the vast majority of students had little thought about “fullness” – even defined as 19 to 21 year olds might define it. Most had little imagination beyond the next weekend, or – at most – the end of the course, or the end of their college careers.

misfortunes, failures, heartache, losses, to even *think* about fullness. They may find it in clubs, parish organizations, etc. But, in their free time they stare into the TV set to see the images of others' fulfillment: "Real Wives of Orange County," the million-dollar houses of "Love It or List It," and the extravagant and expensive foibles of the Kardashians. Or, now, they stare into the screens of their smart phones, to find distraction, relief from boredom, and a (possibly false) sense of being alive.

In time, the struggle for existence and the opium of popular entertainment so anaesthetize many people that they become like the currently faddish zombies. Here, however, they are animated by the stereotypical desires reflected back to them from the gigantic screens in their homes.

Even Taylor's description of "the middle condition" of the secularist (SA, 7) may also be far too benign – if not naïve. The striver here has *all* the weight of secular materialist culture to persuade him or her that attainment of "fullness" *here and now* is possible, with enough money, objects (and a more beautiful man, or woman). The experience of otherness – monstrosity, ennui, etc. (SA, 6), is often blamed on or sought to be overcome by drugs, drink, psychotherapy, or other exercises. Or it is projected onto, or vicariously exorcised, again, by manipulated media images and fantasies.

Authority as Acknowledgment

These conditions also exacerbate the state of affairs making for the second disjunction Taylor identifies: the issue of authority – again, both within and outside of the church. What Taylor says – in summary – in "Religion Today" (SA, 535) concerning the "spiritual but not religious" also applies to the second disjunction: the problem with how the Catholic Church exercises "authority." To address – if not reverse – the almost wholesale rejection of authority⁴ that characterized the 60s, the Church will need to exercise authority by example rather than merely by precept, proscription, etc. It has, instead, for the most part, re-stated old claims and formulae. The fear of relativism and the conviction that secularism will never

⁴ A problem which all realize has infected members of society from as early as grade school on up, issuing in the state of many young people today.

compromise has led to polarization. Pointing to a theme I shall address later, we might ask: does the instrumentalization of the self that Taylor identified in *Sources* make individuals more, or less likely to accept forms of “authority” that, themselves, make fullness difficult or impossible?

The issue of authority: the “model of authority” in the Church has its parallels in the secular world, and many of them involve “a concentration of power and authority at the centre.” Much corporate authority is “top down”; political power is increasingly oligarchic. Especially in the United States, economic power is plutocratic and therefore concentrated in the few – the richest 1% or 0.1%. The assumption of these entities – managerial, philosophical, and economic – make it difficult to think outside the particular box. An example: for decades economic “authority” has been based on the *laissez faire* capitalist thinkers and policy-makers who subscribe to the thought of Strauss, Hayek, and – God forbid, Ayn Rand.⁵ Today a classical economist like John Maynard Keynes is at most paid lip-service, and more contemporary thinkers like Paul Krugman, and Joseph Stiglitz are loud but marginal voices.⁶ Economic power, wielded by the rich, follows the conservative line.⁷ Opponents are marginalized and/or ignored. But the “authority” of the hardline capitalist thinkers is not questioned in part because of prevailing biases conditioned by what Taylor might blame on an “economic imaginary.”

The questioning of authority that we have seen since at least the 1960s has been descried by conservatives and blamed on the loss of values. But, from a Taylorian perspective, the phenomenon can be both more complex and more disturbing. Genuine authority is not

⁵ Former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan – notoriously – claimed Rand as a friend and guide.

⁶ *Why* that is cannot be attributed to sound arguments or even a political majority. In fact, conservative economic policy derives from those who have money supporting policies that benefit *them*. The 99% are not, generally, conservative economically. The authority that the rich wield “seems” “natural,” “inevitable,” or even “logical.”

⁷ Edward D. Kleinbard’s “Invisible Man: Losing Sight of the Real Adam Smith” *Commonweal* (December 4, 2015), pp. 31-35, shows how much contemporary, particularly conservative economists have misunderstood the moral framework for Smith’s economic thought and corrects misunderstandings of the supposed “invisible hand” at work in markets.

achieved by force. When it requires force to impose authority, authority has already been eroded. Ask police officers on the street. When a teenager refuses to obey an officer's order, it is frequently because of a larger context in which authority does not figure as a value.

What I might term "thin" authority is that imposed by law, ordinance, etc., but it is only effective within a complex texture of other social, cultural, and individual constraints. Michel Foucault has traced much of this texture in *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish, 1977)*.⁸ What I will call "thick" authority, on the other hand, is that developed through sustained contact and a network of supporting beliefs and practices. A beloved teacher⁹ exercises thick authority. Students seek to do what the teacher wants in part because of what they share. Now one difficulty today, as I see it, is that the Church hierarchy seldom exercises "thick authority."¹⁰ And, without regular contact with exemplary priests, nuns, and bishops – and the example of gifted lay leaders – the authority of the Church is eroded.

In Respectful Exchange

To show how far we (in the United States, at least) have strayed from a robust conception of authority, I would offer this brief excursus. The phenomenological and hermeneutical philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer discusses what I would call thick authority in *Truth and Method*. There he shows that the Enlightenment critique of authority went too far, dismissing the possibility of "true prejudices" and true authority. He locates genuine authority in a dialectical relation between reason and tradition. "If the prestige of authority takes the place of one's own judgment, then authority is in fact a source of prejudices. But this does not exclude the possibility that it [authority] can also be a source of truth, and this is what the enlightenment failed to see when it denigrated all authority" (*Truth and Method* 247).

⁸ See *Sources*, 159.

⁹ Especially, for instance, in a boarding school, where the students and teachers share more of their lives together.

¹⁰ To be fair, the Church, as organization, has little control over this development. Since the death of the Apostles, those who led and guided "the people of God" – including St. Paul – have had to rely on more distant – and hence "thinner" – forms of authority.

Gadamer addresses “the essence of authority”:

It is true that it is primarily persons that have authority; but the authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge – knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence, i.e. it has priority over one’s own.

In another insight that applies today, Gadamer says:

... authority cannot actually be bestowed, but is acquired and must be acquired, if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on recognition and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, accepts that others have better understanding. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to a command. Indeed, authority has nothing to do with obedience, but rather with knowledge (248).

For Gadamer, the key is recognition and acknowledgment which implies reason and judgment.

Gadamer’s discussion of authority vs. reason in the Enlightenment also casts light on what he would call the “prejudice” in favor of the supposedly unbiased nature of reason. Much of what Taylor seeks to explain in his discussion of “immanentist” views of the world is the presumed superiority of a supposedly exclusive reliance on (scientific) reason.

Another view of authority comes from the Venerable John Henry Cardinal Newman, where we find, in his fifth Oxford Sermon, “Personal Influence, The Means of Propagating the Truth,” the question: “whether the influence of Truth in the world at large does not arise from *the personal influence*, direct and indirect, of those who are commissioned to teach it” (79-80). Here, like the beloved teacher, it is the “force of character” (and message) that inspire followers to action and carrying on the teacher’s message.¹¹ This is Newman’s

¹¹ It could be argued that Newman, in fact, patterns his discussion of Christ’s influence on his own experience as a fellow and tutor of Oriel College, Oxford. Many of his insights about learning and understanding in *Idea of a University* derive from this same background.

analysis of "thick" authority – couched, as must be admitted, in a primarily theological and religious context.

For Newman, truth "has been upheld in the world not as a system, not by books, not by argument, nor by temporal power, but by the personal influence of such men ... who are at once the teachers and the pattern of it ..." (91-92). Though he speaks primarily of moral truth and personal excellence, what he describes resembles what Gadamer describes when he says, "the authority of persons is based ultimately, not on the subjection and abdication of reason, but on recognition and knowledge – knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight." Newman describes such "recognition" in a negative way: "And men feel, moreover, that the object of their contemplation is beyond their reach ... and grounded on a foundation which they cannot explain. And nothing is more effectual ... than the sight of a superior altogether independent of themselves" (93).

Referring to "the consistency of virtue," Newman contrasts "the changes of human affairs" to "something on which it [the mind] can rely, for peace and rest; and what can then be found immutable and sure." For Newman, in this specifically religious context, these are God's word and promises, illustrated and conveyed to the inquirer in the person of his faithful servants ... "Every day shows us how much depends on firmness for obtaining influence in practical matters; and what are all kinds of firmness, as exhibited in the world, but likenesses and offshoots of that true stability of heart which is stayed in the grace and in the contemplation of Almighty God?" (93-94).

Anticipating Gadamer's own discussion of philosophical hermeneutics, Newman says,

While the Scriptures are thrown upon the world, as if the common property of any who choose to appropriate them, he is, in fact, the legitimate interpreter of them, and none other; the Inspired Word being but a dead letter (ordinarily considered), except as transmitted from one mind to another. While he is unknown to the world, yet, within the range of those who see him, he will become the object of feelings different in kind from those which mere intellectual excellence excites (94-95).

Again, this sounds like the thick authority of the beloved teacher.¹²

In a final example that confirms my point about thick and thin authority, Newman notes that “we could scarcely in any situation be direct instruments of good *to any besides* those who personally know us, whoever must form a small circle” [emphasis mine] (98). And, in a contrast that could be applied to, particularly, political “leaders” today, he observes that “[t]he men commonly held in popular estimation are greatest at a distance; they become small as they are approached ...” (95). The common property of Gadamer’s and Newman’s thought on authority is the issue of acknowledgment and recognition granted, because it is underwritten by acquired – lived – knowledge (what Newman in his essay on “Unreal Words” – and also in his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* – refers to as lived truth).

Seekers and Dwellers

The conditions that we examined above can prevent the different seekers, with their “plural forms of spirituality,” from achieving respectful – let alone fruitful – exchange. This is, as Taylor notes, in part because the pluralism of religions also “fragilizes” them (SA, 531). But pluralism is also affected by many of the conditions that, as noted earlier, militate against the efforts of seekers and dwellers alike to find satisfying lives – in terms of Taylor’s “religious faith in a strong sense” (SA, 510).¹³ These are conditions that encourage superficiality, or excessive self-sufficiency.¹⁴ Though the writings of John Paul II and Benedict XVI address a number of problems (capitalism, the lack of

¹² The hypercritical, deconstructive stance that encouraged students to challenge teachers is part of what Taylor identifies as the Enlightenment gone wrong. Both Newman and scientist Michael Polanyi have made clear that – at the beginning – it is necessary for the student to trust the teacher (acknowledge authority) before questioning or challenging.

¹³ The whole quote: “The strong sense I define ... by a double criterion: the belief in transcendent reality, on one hand, and the connected aspiration to a transformation which goes beyond ordinary human flourishing on the other.” Similar positions have been espoused by Simone Weil and, probably following her, the late British philosopher and novelist, Iris Murdoch, in her defense of “self-transcendence” in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970).

¹⁴ Here, a trouble arises, since – at least in the United States – “self-sufficiency,” under the name of “freedom,” “self-reliance,” or other, similar – ideologically charged – ideas are embraced and extolled as core values of American life.

personalism, "the culture of death," "relativism," and political extremism of various kinds), it should be clear that all these attempts have required explication and application by experts, and in the process the message – and the authority – have been diluted, distorted, or ignored. They have, at most, what I have called "thin authority."

If it wants to speak effectively, once again, to seekers, dwellers, and unbelievers of the world in the twenty-first century, the Catholic Church needs to be more acutely aware of and even more sensitive to the – often peculiarly debilitating – ailments of both seekers and dwellers, wounded and discouraged by the conditions created by twenty-first century late-capitalism (with its relegation of everything to the secular and/or the economic). These conditions drain vitality, joy, and purpose from their lives, vitality, joy, and purpose being qualities of fullness.¹⁵

It is my contention – not a particularly original one – that unreflective instrumentalization of the self such as Taylor analyzes in *Sources*, which has resulted in what Taylor describes as the "buffered" self (*SA*, 37-42), inhibits the ability of the individual seeker or dweller to achieve fullness, wholeness.¹⁶

Excursus on the "Punctual Self"

As Taylor argues in *Sources*, "instrumentality" has been going on for almost 400 years. In chapter nine of *Sources*, Taylor analyzes the origins of what, in *A Secular Age*, he comes to call the "buffered self."¹⁷ Following upon a discussion of Descartes's "disengaged subject" (159),¹⁸ he describes

¹⁵ Another "condition" that affects "seeking" and "dwelling." Not all forms of "seeking" are equally benign. Among the "choices" or "options" that are on offer are the following – admittedly perhaps exaggerated examples: "Satanism," exclusive "goddess worship," and "hoarding," a phenomenon graphically illustrated in a statement attributed to (the young) Bill Gates: "The one who dies with the most toys wins."

¹⁶ One might add: it can also keep the believer from being receptive to the myriad forms of grace as well as the benefits of the proliferating forms of spirituality discovered in the "Age of Authenticity."

¹⁷ While there are certainly distinctions, the phenomena described by these two terms are most certainly related.

¹⁸ This discussion is founded on the acknowledgement of Cartesian dualism.

... the growing ideal of a human agent who is able to remake himself by methodical and disciplined action. What this calls for is the ability to take an instrumental stance to one's given properties, desires, inclinations, tendencies, habits of thought and feeling, so that they can be *worked on*, doing away with some and strengthening others until one meets the desired specifications. (159-60).

Without dwelling on the implications of such an "instrumental stance" (which I shall discuss in a moment), he goes on to reflect upon the familiarity, pervasiveness, and subsequent development of this type of human agent:

The subject of disengagement and rational control has become a familiar modern figure. One might almost say it has become one way of construing ourselves, which we find it hard to shake off. It is one aspect of our inescapable sense of inwardness. As it develops to its full form through Locke and the Enlightenment thinkers he influenced, it becomes what I want to call the 'punctual' self. (160).

It is the deficiencies of this "punctual self," or the "buffered self," that a number of spiritual writers today increasingly seek to counter or heal. Perhaps most notably, Thomas Merton's writings seek to have us call to mind – and to body – an earlier, more "enchanted" form of the self, urging a greater sense of silence and emptiness; an apophatic approach to inwardness as a counterbalance to the frenzy of the "disenchanted world" inhabited by the "buffered self."

It is the effect of such an "instrumental" stance upon our ability to cultivate "inwardness," as well as how such an attitude affects our view of the world, that I want to stress. To see oneself always and exclusively as someone or something to "be worked upon" has made for the "disenchantment" that Taylor analyzes in *A Secular Age*. And because we can "work upon" ourselves, we can also "work upon" our world, manipulating – and dominating – it for our purposes. Except

perhaps in extraordinary moments, there is lost the sense of self and world as "gift."¹⁹

Now instrumentalization of the self takes almost as many forms as the cultural matrix provides. "Enlightenment naturalists" (*Sources*, 342f.) treat the self as a biological organism. Invoking scientific causality, they transform the human being into a specimen, a project, or even a "product"²⁰ to which scientific findings provide answers and upon which "results" can be produced, reducing personal agency, autonomy, and independence. Note the irony in the United States today, with its emphasis on autonomy, liberty, and self-reliance, while so many of the conditions militate against it.

Economic instrumentalization treats the self as consumer, finding simplistic answers in solutions that merely increase the consumer's buying choice and purchasing power. Ethnic and gender instrumentalization "objectifies" the self in narrow, exclusionary ways that reduce the person to a part of a collective, enabling factions and interest groups to manipulate them more easily. Political instrumentalization reduces the self to a set of ideological positions. These, of course, play into both economic and/or gender-ethnic instrumentalization, as suggested above.

An Answer?

The experience of fullness described by Bede Griffiths (*SA*, 5-6) calls for interiority and receptivity. But instrumentalization makes such interiority and receptivity – a particular kind of openness – difficult, if not impossible. Are people involved in the "rat race" happy? Are the billionaires "satisfied"? The frenetic pace at which they seek to increase their wealth, or spend it, suggests an almost impersonal drive.²¹ Clearly, the 99% are struggling to make ends meet, raise their children, and to find some happiness or satisfaction in *some* parts of their lives.

¹⁹ Anticipating where I shall go in my conclusion, I would, here, merely point to "the aesthetic" as a regular, recognized – though increasingly dismissed or minimized – "stance" that can restore the sense of gift.

²⁰ Cf. the "self-help" movement.

²¹ Fifty-eight years ago Hannah Arendt published *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), in which she sees production and consumption as becoming something akin to a biological force.

Individual interiority, furthermore, can only thrive in, and be nurtured by communal – particularly ritual and festive, but also more specifically familial, social, and even national – exteriorizations (cf. *SA*, 570s) that have not been almost totally co-opted by the media, the forces of commercialization, etc.²²

Anticipating ideas he would explore in *A Secular Age*, Taylor (in *A Catholic Modernity?*²³) elaborates on his understanding of human nature and the “together-goods” that he says are crucial to human “fullness.”²⁴

... it is as though the highest fulfillment in human life happens in the lives of individuals. By this I do not mean that people are blind to the need for collaboration and participation by others but, rather that they think that the fulfillment itself happens in my mind, my feelings, my life. You may be instrumentally essential, and that is important, but the fulfillment is mine ...

Taylor then points out:

What gets blocked out are what we might call essentially together-goods, where it is crucial to their being the goods they are that they be lived and enjoyed together, all the way from dance to conversation, to love, to friendship, to common self-rule, to the preaching of the Word. (One of the really illuminating turns in contemporary philosophy is Gadamer’s reconstruction of our understanding of a conversation as a common action, more like a game or a dance than a series of causally linked monological actions).

²² A perhaps overused example might be the celebration of Christmas. How hard it is to avoid, supplant, counter the commercial exploitation of the holiday. One must be almost absolutely counter-cultural in order to make this feast serve the genuinely communal needs of individuals, families, congregations. Just do a thought experiment and see how much easier it might be to create new communal forms in connection with Easter.

²³ *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture* edited and with an introduction by James L. Heft, S.M. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁴ In this section of *A Catholic Modernity?* he refers to “human fulfillment,” but it is clear from context that he is talking about the same thing he refers to as “fullness” in *A Secular Age*.

And, in a passage that clearly anticipates the issue that concerns him in *A Secular Age*, Taylor concludes:

To break with this assumption is to see the fullness of human life as something that happens between people rather than within each one. So human nature is something that in principle – and not just *de facto* – cannot be conceived as existing in a single individual. This is the lesson Augustine seems to be drawing from the creation story, if I follow Jean Bethke Elshtain: out of one many; so that humans “be bound together not only by likeness of nature but also by feeling of kinship” (112-113).

The project in *A Secular Age* does not give Taylor the opportunity to dwell on “together-goods”, but it is important for us to have this goal – a sense of the good (such as he had also outlined in *Sources* chapters 1-3) in view.

A Caution

Of course, even “habits of inwardness” and intimate exchange (*SA*, 540-41) can have both positive and negative aspects, depending on what other pressures or “conditions” – already discussed – apply. A software engineer, for instance, may have to work deep in his head (a form of interiority) in order to come up with solutions to problems, and his exchanges with co-workers may be conducted exclusively in those terms, while, at the same time, the software engineer might also be starving inside for “intimate exchange.”²⁵ There is a vast literature on the dehumanizing conditions of contemporary work (see, for example, works by Barbara Ehrenreich). There are also whole “networks” of other associations and exchanges that we are losing – though some classes, ethnicities, etc. have often struggled to nurture them.

Another example of supposed “intimate exchange”: for those who rely excessively on the use of social media as a way of supposedly “connecting” with people, the quality of the interactions, reduced to

²⁵ Perhaps the kind that might have been shared by, say, union members – at work or away from work – in decades past.

144 characters,²⁶ or defined by the limits of texting, can undermine relationships in the same way that a debilitating disease will, over time, sap an organism of health and viability, even if it does not kill it outright.²⁷ The decline of conversation and communal forms of entertainment is another sign of impoverishment.²⁸

Seekers and Dwellers: A Final Perspective

Among the most insightful sections in *A Secular Age* is chapter fourteen, "Religion Today." It is here that Taylor outlines two aspects of religion today and distinguishes: "seekers and dwellers."²⁹ Defined by their contrastive values/views on authority and self-sufficiency, these two form one focus of the disjunctions Taylor discusses. It is my view that these two are equally subject to, and undermined by the secular forces that Taylor analyzes.

It is true, I think, that "dwellers" suffer from some of the same threats posed by late capitalism and the secular culture it encourages. Many "dwellers" feel secure because they accept authority and differentiate themselves from "outsiders."³⁰ But when their values are threatened, the dwellers' response is often retrenchment, reactionary throwbacks; in short, an attempt to take refuge in nostalgia and doctrinaire positions.³¹ We find "dwellers" reaffirming God, family, and nation, but in sometimes distorted or exaggerative forms (nostalgic ritual, narrowly defined family values, xenophobia),

²⁶ This is not the place for a long defense of language, but numerous critics have pointed to the impoverishment of language by science, technology, and today's electronic means of communication.

²⁷ Facebook and Twitter are the comic apotheosis of Taylor's "ordinary life." It all means nothing, feverishly.

²⁸ Anticipating my conclusion, I would point to things like the very popular "Poetry Out Loud" project sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts as an example of efforts that nurture the aesthetic sense *in* communal forms.

²⁹ Terms derived from Robert Wuthnow and his book, *After Heaven* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

³⁰ See SA on "expanded solidarity" (609).

³¹ Much of the reactionary wing of the Catholic Church fits here (with the unreflective – let alone largely unexplained – re-introduction of the Latin Mass being a signal example). Pro-life Catholics who feel threatened also manifest some of these tendencies, making dialogue between pro-life and pro-choice Catholics difficult, if not impossible. See Peter Steinfels, "Beyond the Stalemate" *Commonweal* 140.11 (Jun 14, 2013), pp. 12-18.

meanwhile espousing attitudes and positions (libertarian, NRA, etc.) that actually contradict their core values. These positions play into the manipulation by political and/or economic forces that seek to benefit by exacerbating the polarity between supposed "conservative" and "liberal."³²

What I want to stress is that dwellers and seekers (*SA* 533) *both* suffer at the hands of twenty-first century "aggressive secularism."³³ For seekers, their quest [for "strong faith"] is devalued, belittled, marginalized or becomes diluted to a fad or a fashion (cf. the self-help and "pop spirituality" movements). For dwellers, the attacks from the secular (and the "New Atheists"³⁴) encourage attitudes, and more than merely attitudes, of retrenchment and/or nostalgia.

General Conclusion

By way of introducing my conclusion, I would like to make clear my perspective on the "disjunctions" Charles Taylor has identified. (It is a perspective anticipated in a few of my footnotes.) I come to the issue from one of the "areas" that Taylor identifies in chapter sixteen ("Cross Pressures") of *A Secular Age*; the experience of the aesthetic, a "lived experience" that, as he notes, is difficult to explain, or justify, by exclusively "immanent" argument. But it is an aspect of one's worldview that helps make for fullness, wholeness. The late Swiss theologian and humanist, Hans Urs von Balthasar, has even argued that the experience of beauty (the aesthetic) is the primary way to understand the transcendent.³⁵

I write as a literary scholar who, for almost two decades, has found the reaffirmation of my cradle-Catholicism's privileging of the transcendent in literature "fulfilling" in Taylor's sense. Nurtured by Newman, George Steiner, von Balthasar, and a number of Catholic

³² There are even questions about whether the supposedly "grass roots" "Tea Party" was not formed – and is certainly now supported – by representatives of the plutocratic class, like Karl Rove, the Koch brothers, and their ilk.

³³ Adolfo Nicolas, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus, identifies this in his 2010 address in Mexico City, "Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today," http://www.sjweb.info/document/s/ansj/100423_Mexico%20City_Higher%20Education%20Today_ENG.pdf, p. 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ See his *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*; also *Love Alone* and numerous other works.

writers (most notably the novelist Jon Hassler and poets Denise Levertov and Czeslaw Milosz), I can corroborate from “lived experience” the epiphanic and transformative nature³⁶ of the insights and revelations derived from my interaction with the various works I have studied, taught, and written about. Steiner speaks of the experience of otherness that literature makes possible, arguing that the experience is “underwritten” by the presumption of transcendence.

I have also witnessed or experienced the degrees of impoverishment worked by various, supposedly immanentist approaches to literary experience and response (notably Freudian, Lacanian, deconstructive, post-structuralist generally). On the other hand, I have found corroborating experiences of fullness and wholeness³⁷ in ritual, conversation, and the – often difficult – struggle to harmonize form and content (SA, 609) in my teaching, research, family, and social life. All this against the constant “cross-pressures” of the increasingly secular (and corporatized) world, both at the university where I taught, and in the wider world.

So how do we try to reach a world that is hurting, often in ways it cannot articulate? Yes, we can offer the standard Christian “bromides” about “this vale of tears.” But modern spiritual writers – starting, perhaps, with Thomas Merton – are onto something different. And it often includes silence, attentiveness, the kind of interiority necessary to nurture the kinds of “fullness” and “wholeness” that Taylor’s work examines. Taylor’s identifying some of the disjunctions that put the Church out of phase and prevent it from engaging productively, and in a nuanced way, with the modern world is a crucial step for laypeople, professional theological, and hierarchal representatives to take toward addressing the problem. It is my humble addition to say that the Church – its various members seen, perhaps, in terms of seekers and dwellers – has more in common with (Western) society at large; where “cross-pressures” between immanent and transcendent continue to undermine, weaken, marginalize, privatize – or “domesticate” – the role of God, religion, and genuine ritual in people’s lives.

³⁶ In *Real Presences* Steiner speaks of transcendence “underwriting” meaning.

³⁷ I might suggest that these are like the “antecedent probabilities” Newman points to in various places as what led him to belief.

Kenotic Ecclesiology: Context, Orientations, Secularity

THOMAS HUGHSON, S.J.

Four communicative disjunctions are ways in which, “the Catholic Church today is ... out of phase with the world it wants to speak to.”¹ Unless and until the influence of Pope Francis permeates the Church at all levels and in all contexts his charismatic leadership cannot be said to have changed this condition altogether. He surely has set a direction away from the clerical culture among bishops that abetted sweeping clergy abuse of minors under a rug of silent re-assignments. Even the Church now represented in the deeds and words of Francis cannot by-pass coming to grips with the disjunctions and with abuse. So George McLean’s theological response to the disjunctions and crisis of abuse remains a valid, long-term project. He advises nothing less than, “... rethinking the entire nature of the Church and its public presence in quite different, indeed kenotic, terms.”² That is a tall theological order.³ What does a theological project of that scope involve?

Outlining some directions along which to think about a kenotic theology of the Church draws on more than theological reflection and research. Interpreting the Word of God and the life of the Church depends not only on Scripture and tradition but also on non-theological knowledge of contexts. So sections I and II discuss

¹ Charles Taylor, emailed memo, “Plan for a Meeting: The Church and the World,” 12/28/10.

² George F. McLean, “Introduction: Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” in Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean, editors, *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change Series I. Culture and Values, Volume 1 (Washington, D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), pp. 1-14 at 3.

³ In response to José Casanova’s work on public religion I suggested a kenotic ecclesiology in “Missional Churches in Secular Societies: Theology Consults Sociology,” *Ecclesiology* 7 (2011), pp. 173-194.

contextual matters. Section I consults sociology on U.S. Catholicism and proposes an additional disjunction. Section II discusses what it means to speak about the Church being “out of phase.” Is it always a negative condition for the Church to be out of phase? Were not Israel’s prophets often out of phase with Israel’s kings, was not Jesus out of phase in his public ministry, and was not early Christianity out of phase with the Roman Empire? In what way is being out of phase an objectionable feature of postconciliar Catholicism? Sections III and IV then begin to reflect on kenosis in the Church.

I. Context: A Fifth Disjunction?

Are there more than four disjunctions in the Church’s contemporary context? I understand Taylor’s four disjunctions as logically antithetical ideal types. Ideal types are synthetic constructs that accent selected common features in many concrete phenomena. Ideal types help generate testable hypotheses. Max Weber’s famous argument for affinity between an ideal-typical Calvinist, Protestant ethic and an ideal-typical spirit of capitalism plausibly framed diffuse historical, empirical phenomena.⁴ Weber’s ideal-typical correlation was open to detailed historical investigations confirming, falsifying, or modifying the Protestant ethic/spirit of capitalism connection.⁵ But a limit in antithetical ideal types is to leave no logical space for in-between positions of greater and lesser proximity to one or the other opposed ideal type. They are logical contradictories that involve either/or judgments of identification. May it not be better to conceive Taylor’s ideal types as logical contraries instead of contradictories? Then, between two opposed positions in each disjunction there lies a spectrum of intermediate points with varying degrees of proximity to or distance from each of the poles. This both/and allows for elasticity and tension in-between.

⁴ In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1, *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) Jürgen Habermas expounds Max Weber’s analysis as the instantiation of an account of modernity as the rationalization (disenchantment) of both society and structures of consciousness.

⁵ Max Weber, trans. E. Schils and H. Finch, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (New York: The Free Press, 1949), pp. 89-95.

On an anecdotal basis probably most of us know people whose religious situations in fact lie between the opposed poles of each disjunction. In-between may be the normal situation. The life of a person and a society is complicated. Crosscurrents as well as irresolvable differences run through every society and person. Philip Rossi helpfully points to immanent otherness in postmodern identities.⁶ Solid selves exclude too much. Hybridity of many sorts is the postmodern normal for cultures and selves. May it not be that many people practically operate with an affinity for both poles in each disjunction? They are dwellers who are seekers, or vice versa; ecclesiastical decision-makers who also consult widely in concert with plural centers of decision-making; natural law thinkers who also appreciate new ideas about sexuality; Christocentric dialogue partners who learn from believers in other spiritual and religious traditions.

Furthermore, in their current formulation even such contrary poles seem to be structured as 'us vs. them'. One pole represents 'us' and our contemporaries in a secular age while officialdom is 'them'. The Church hierarchy is 'them', while laity and lower clergy are 'us'. 'They' are the dwellers, 'we' the seekers. 'They' have jurisdictional authority; 'we' struggle with conscience. 'They' hold to an abstract natural law morality on sexuality; 'we' have an historically conscious perspective. 'They' stress nothing but the Christocentric completeness of the Christian tradition. 'We' are open to enrichment by other spiritual traditions. The result is that even when re-conceived as logical contraries between which lies a spectrum of possible positions each ideal-typical disjunction presents a spectrum that is vertical with an 'over' and an 'under'.

Each disjunction locates the problem in the 'them', the 'over', the hierarchy, officialdom. Reform of the hierarchy then becomes the paramount objective. They need kenosis. There's no denying that. But a kenotic ecclesiology that focuses on the hierarchy alone defaults on McLean's principle of re-thinking the whole nature of the Church. A hierarchical preoccupation obscures, for example, another fault line that runs through the whole Church in a secular age. Vertical contrasts

⁶ Philip J. Rossi, S.J., "Seekers, Dwellers, and the Plural Contingencies of Grace: Hospitality, Otherness, and the Enactment of Human Wholeness," in this volume.

between seekers/dwellers, etc. may pre-empt attention and deflect exchange about a 'pervasive' rather than 'vertical' disjunction.

An example of a pervasive disjunction surfaces in data assembled in the sociology of U.S. Catholicism.⁷ A disjunction between social and conventional Catholics occurs throughout the length and breadth of the Church, involving episcopacy, clergy, and laity alike. The point of division does not lie between those whose position in Church structure is one of hierarchical office and all others. This fifth disjunction pertains to how people on all levels of Church authority in a regional Church understand social justice. As a background statement from a theological perspective, both charity and justice in tandem, not one or the other, are integral to Catholicism. They are distinct yet in principle are co-present, interrelated commitments. The conjunction of charity and justice is normative in Catholic social teaching. A disjunction occurs insofar as the majority of U.S. Catholics wants social charity without social justice. The social-scientific data show 98 percent of all US Catholics putting a conviction about helping the poor in the topmost group of attributes in what it means to them to be Catholic. That represents unanimity on assisting the poor. However, 53 percent of U.S. Catholics do not associate helping the poor with social justice activities. In other words, the majority of Catholic laity wants assistance to the poor mainly in modes other than social justice.

⁷ The data comes from William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, Mary I. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007) and William V. D'Antonio, Michele Dillon, Mary I. Gautier, "Catholics in America: Persistence and Change," special insert in the *National Catholic Reporter*, October 28-November 10, 2011, pp. 1-28a. The authors are not responsible for my interpretation of their data. Chapter Two in my *Connecting Jesus to Social Justice: Classical Christology and Public Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013) argues for the interpretation summed up here. The sociological data, regrettably, do not break out according to categories of Church office. Consequently for empirical facts on the social charity/social justice issue in the episcopacy and clergy I have to rely on media reports about public actions and statements by bishops, on official documents from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and on anecdotal observations of homilies, attitudes, statements by, and actions of clergy. Anecdotally, clergy seem more aligned than bishops with social Catholicism.

Sociological data do not spell out what people thought those other modes of assistance are. A plausible generic designation for generous assistance to the poor apart from obligations in justice would be social charity or social compassion, whether enacted by the government, individuals, churches, or other voluntary associations.⁸ Generous charity or compassion carries on the traditional practice of almsgiving, albeit in indirect, organized modes. Social charity does not presuppose social analysis. Contrarily, Catholic social teaching on contributive and distributive social justice presupposes analysis of systemic problems. Analysis leads to advocacy for public policies to bring about structural changes toward a more just social and economic order.

Social justice and almsgiving whether individual or social, are compatible, indeed indissociable in principle. But in the U.S. less than half of Catholics identify social justice activities as very or highly important to their Catholic identity although 98 percent rank assisting the poor as very or highly important to their Catholic identity. 98 percent esteem and presumably in fact want social charity for the poor, vulnerable, and marginalized. But only a 47 percent minority links social charity and social justice in their Catholic identity. 53 percent of Catholics do not maintain a prominent place for social justice in their Catholic self-understanding. I will classify the 53 percent majority as conventional Catholics and the 47 percent minority as social Catholics.⁹ That divide can be interpreted as a disjunction between social and conventional Catholicism.

'Social Catholicism' or 'social Catholics' have been historical theology's terms of art for a way of being Catholic that began in European responses to miseries and inequities due to the impact of

⁸ See David Wagner, *A Critical Look at American Charity: What's Love Got to Do with It?* (New York: The New Press, 2000) for a critique of this kind of charity. Wagner propounds an either/or outlook on charity and justice in favor of justice. Still, I agree with Mary Elsbernd, O.S.F. and Reimund Bieringer, *When Love Is Not Enough: A Theo-Ethic of Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002) on an essential role for justice along with love or charity.

⁹ It would be interesting to compare this interpretation of U.S. Catholics with Catholicism in France as explained by Danièle Hervieu-Léger, "Mapping the Contemporary Forms of Catholic Religiosity: (Some Suggestions to Make Things More Confused)," in Charles Taylor, José Casanova, and George F. McLean, editors, *Church and People*, pp. 25-38.

the Industrial Revolution.¹⁰ The social doctrine of the Church is the most visible official sign of continuity in social concern from the end of the 19th century until the present day.¹¹ Social Catholicism involves active commitment to the dignity of the person, the common good, and a just social order in a given society and internationally. Social Catholics have found Catholic social teaching fortifying, clarifying, and guiding their own intuitions on economic and political activities fostering changes toward more just social structures. However, they are not the majority in the US Church.

Sociologist Jerome P. Baggett concluded from 300 in-depth interviews with Catholic parishioners in the San Francisco area to a lack in fluency in the language of Catholic social teaching. As a result there is what Baggett calls “civic underachieving.”¹² Likewise sociologist Mary Jo Bane discovered what she called “the Catholic puzzle.” The puzzle is “a strong set of official teachings on social justice and faithful citizenship alongside Catholic participation in civic life that is no higher than that of other denominations, and in a number of areas, lower.”¹³ Conventional Catholicism, it seems from Baggett and Bane, typifies parish life more than does social Catholicism. To be sure social Catholicism is strong in many parishes and individuals including those in diocesan offices of social outreach. But conventional Catholicism so far holds the numerical high ground.

The disjunction between social and conventional Catholicism is pervasive not vertical. Social Catholicism has an historical record of hierarchical, lay, and clerical adherents all on the same page.¹⁴

¹⁰ See Paul Misner, *Social Catholicism in Europe: From the Onset of Industrialization to the First World War* (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1991) and Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2nd printing 2000).

¹¹ For a synthesis see the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, English transl. *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 2005).

¹² Jerome P. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 175.

¹³ Mary Jo Bane, “The Catholic Puzzle: Parishes and Civic Life,” in Mary Jo Bane, Brent Coffin, and Richard Higgins, editors, *Taking Faith Seriously* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), pp. 63-93 at 64.

¹⁴ Social Catholicism has a pre-modern tradition behind it. See Judith A. Merkle, S.N.D. de N., *From the Heart of the Church: The Catholic Social Tradition* (Collegetown, MN: Michael Glazier Book, Liturgical Press, 2004) and Johan Leemans, Brian J.

Similarly, conventional Catholics can be found among laity, clergy, and bishops. Many official public documents on social topics from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops tilt toward social Catholicism. At the same time in dioceses and at the national level episcopal, lay, and clerical public preoccupation with abortion and gay marriage have eclipsed the rest of social teaching. As a result, in the public sphere of a pluralistic society it is conventional not social Catholicism that has become the visible image of U.S. Catholicism. Doubtless, Pope Francis's emphatic option for the poor has put a new moment before conventional Catholicism. Not only Catholics see that the pope is making social Catholicism normative for the Church.¹⁵ But the extent to which papal influence will stir conventional bishops, clergy, laity to become social Catholics remains to be seen. Resistance to or dismissal of *Laudato Si* by some Catholics among those denying climate change has been emerging in the U.S.

In light of a pervasive disjunction between social and conventional Catholics it would be a mistake to imagine from the outset that the principal zone of problems in Church/modern world relations lies in maladroit exercise of pastoral authority. The pervasive disjunction described above signals another dimension in the Church being out of phase. There is in the U.S. at least a need for kenosis and reform in the lower clergy and laity not only in the episcopacy. Too many conventional Catholics are in phase with laissez-faire capitalism à la Ayn Rand, with learned helplessness that enervates civic activism, and with Catholic voices whose public focus on abortion and gay marriage has marginalized Catholic concern for poverty, racism, the ecological crisis, and creeping plutocracy. That kind of 'being in phase' with prominent cultural currents would fail to express the breadth and depth of social concern inherent in Catholicism.

II. Theological Perspectives: 'Being out of Phase'

Section I explored non-theological knowledge of a problematic element in a national context. International in its framework Section II

Matz, and Johan Verstraeten, editors, *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First-Century Christian Social Thought* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

¹⁵ See brief remarks online by journalist Naomi Klein in *The New Yorker* 11 July 2015, <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/31226-a-radical-vatican>.

seeks to clarify what 'being out of phase' means in light of at least five theologies of the Church/modern world relationship. They can be understood as the theological context. The first of these theologies, now at best a rearguard action in Catholicism, governed the pre-conciliar commissions and preparatory documents. Pre-conciliar Neo-Scholasticism saw the Catholic Church as faithful to its tradition and doctrines by having raised a post-Tridentine wall around the Church in protest against and to protect its members from modernity, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and 19th century exaltation of human reason. Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) epitomized a principled being out of phase with a prodigal West to which the Church addressed a salutary summons to humble repentance and return. Deliberated opposition to modernity guided initial drafts of conciliar documents that curial commissions handed out at the inception of Vatican II. In the curial perspective being out of phase with a misguided modern world was being true to God, Christ, gospel, and Church tradition, particularly in light of Vatican I's emphasis on divine and ecclesial authority.

That outlook, however, did not survive conciliar deliberations by the world's bishops at Vatican II. Nowhere was the Church/modern world change, and a second concept grounded in a renewed continental Thomism, more explicit and nowhere did it carry more normative weight than in debates on Schema XVII (1963) that eventually became the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* approved by the bishops on December 7, 1965, the second last day of the council.¹⁶ The *Pastoral Constitution* advanced into a new Church/modern world relation keyed by conciliar *periti* such as Dominicans Marie-Dominique Chenu, Yves Congar, and Edward Schillebeeckx, along with Karl Rahner, S.J. as well as by French and Belgian bishops.¹⁷

The conciliar text committed the Church to dialogue with the modern world, albeit a dialogue in which the Church is never oblivious to ambiguities and misguided tendencies. The whole set of

¹⁶ For a brief overview see Norman Tanner, *The Church and the World: Gaudium et Spes, Inter Mirifica* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005). For detailed historiography see Giuseppe Alberigo, editor, *History of Vatican II*, 5 volumes, Joseph Komonchak, editor, English version (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995-2006).

¹⁷ See Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2012).

Vatican II texts but especially the *Pastoral Constitution* and the method of dialogue brought the Church into phase with the modern world to which it wished to convey the gospel message.¹⁸ Though Aquinas was far from a leading influence on Vatican II, a renewed, world-affirming, Thomist perspective entered into the *Pastoral Constitution*. Modern Catholic social teaching developed a Church/modern world relation both positive because of the imprint of Thomism and dialectical in confronting problematic conditions since the Industrial Revolution. Pope Leo XIII's *Aeterni patris* had installed Neo-Thomism as the predominant Catholic school of philosophical and theological thought after Vatican I. Leo also published *Rerum novarum* (1891) that initiated the modern tradition of social teaching on human dignity and the common good.

In a renewed Thomist perspective 'being out of phase' could mean approximately what an earlier Neo-Scholasticism promoted and that Bernard Lonergan described as the pre-conciliar Church being a day late and a dollar short on major issues of modern thought (e.g. religious liberty, science, evolution, historicism, historical-critical exegesis, etc.). Or it could mean something approximating Taylor's analysis of the postconciliar situation. Taylor's identifying of positive elements in modernity and rejection of a subtraction idea of secularization are harmonious with Catholic social teaching, renewed Thomism, and postconciliar reception of the *Pastoral Constitution*. All in all, Taylor's criticism of being out of phase and seeking an alternative route reclaims and develops the conciliar concept of a dialogical Church/modern world relation.

But there are three postconciliar rivals. A pronounced neo-Augustinian outlook, Radical Orthodoxy, and a family of socio-critical theologies all proceed with deeper suspicions of modernity. The neo-Augustinians and socio-critical theologies are not satisfied with postconciliar appropriation of the *Pastoral Constitution*, and criticize as

¹⁸ For a corporate continuation of the conciliar approach in a postmodern context see "Decree 4: Our Mission and Culture" from the 34th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, in John W. Padberg, S.J., editor, *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees of the 31st to 35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), section nn. 103-108, "Our Mission and Critical Postmodern Culture," pp. 542-544.

naïve much dialogue with the modern world.¹⁹ To all three, Taylor's speaking about the Church 'being out of phase' with the modern world would sound like something positive.

Although during the council they approved the *Pastoral Constitution's* breaking away from pre-conciliar Neo-Scholasticism, still Henri de Lubac, S.J., Louis Bouyer, Jean Danielou, S.J., and Joseph Ratzinger had misgivings about what seemed to them a too enthusiastic embrace of modernity.²⁰ They saw in the *Pastoral Constitution* and postconciliar initiatives arising from it an uncomplicated optimism absorbed from the *Zeitgeist* of the 1960's. This troubled them greatly. They re-evaluated Vatican II's commitment to a dialogical model of Church/modern world relations in which the Church opened itself to modernity.²¹ Their criticisms made a significant impact at the 1985 Synod of Bishops and can be heard echoing through chancery halls to the present. The view is more or less what Taylor criticizes as a subtraction idea of secularization.

Among neo-Augustinians papal office made Benedict XVI the most influential exponent.²² They staked out the position of a prophetic minority whose revised idea of dialogue with the modern world involves defending the holiness of the Church against criticisms, upholding the primacy of transcendence in all zones of Catholic life against a perceived compromise with worldliness, and pointing out limits and flaws in modernity. The neo-Augustinians have shifted,

¹⁹ On the neo-Augustinian perspective see Joseph Komonchak, "Augustine, Aquinas or the Gospel *sine glossa*?" in Austen Ivereigh, editor, *Unfinished Journey: The Church 40 Years after Vatican II: Essays for John Wilkes* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 102-118.

²⁰ Introducing Jean-Luc Marion's, trans. Thomas A. Carlson, *God Without Being: Hors-Texte* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) David Tracy remarks on a neo-Augustinian option as one of the two major trajectories in contemporary theology. In *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. 50-52 Robert M. Doran observes that the main conflict in contemporary theological method has roots in medieval Augustinians' opposition to Aquinas.

²¹ See Faggioli, "The Battle Over '*Gaudium et spes*' Then and Now: Dialogue with the Modern World After Vatican II," a paper delivered the Vatican II Conference at Georgetown University, October 11-12, 2012, <https://georgetown.app.box.com/s/8sfzqvpejzznukwqalui>.

²² Massimo Faggioli, *Vatican II: The Battle for Meaning*, 75-83. And yet Benedict placed his neo-Augustinian teachings in continuity with those of his predecessor, John Paul II. John Paul II stood with renewed Thomists in social teachings but was closer to neo-Augustinians on modern Western culture(s).

that is, from conciliar dialogue with a discerning eye to an outright postconciliar dialectic in Church/modern world relations. Their theological critiques counteract, in their view, a too eager partnering with an untrustworthy Western modernity. In this perspective what Taylor calls being out of phase signifies authentic Christianity guided by a critical intelligence with affinity for some but by no means all postmodern thought.

Socio-critical theologies—political, liberation, feminist, Black, ecological, and public theologies—all presuppose that the social mission of the Church in both praxis and principle has affirmed transformation that promotes the common temporal good of all civic neighbors. The affirmation has been a matter of practice in the social services of Catholic Charities in the U.S., and internationally by the Catholic Relief Services. Their benefits are available to all in pluralist societies, not just to Catholics or Christians. Public theology articulates that aspect of social mission and conceives its task as service to all in a society. States Scottish theologian Duncan Forrester, there is a “theology which seeks the welfare of the city before it protects the interests of the Church ...”²³ Even more, explains South African John W. De Gruchy, “[p]ublic theology as Christian witness does not seek to preference Christianity but to witness to values that we believe are important for the common good.”²⁴

Judgments in political, liberation, Radical Orthodox, Black, womanist, Latino/a and public theologies vary on the location, depth, and extent of structural sin. Surely a renewed Thomist outlook and Taylor’s analysis do not preclude engaging in explicit criticism of specific features and dynamics of modernity. The Church and Christians are or should be out of phase with much of what socio-critical theologies have criticized in the world to which the Church wishes to speak.²⁵ The objectionable features need to be changed.

²³ Duncan Forrester, “The Scope of Public Theology,” in Elaine Graham and Esther Reed editors, *The Future of Christian Social Ethics: Essays on the Work of Ronald H. Preston 1913-2001*, Special Issue, *Studies in Christian Ethic* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 5-19 at 6.

²⁴ John W. DeGruchy, “Public Theology as Public Witness: Exploring the Genre,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 1 (2007), pp. 26-41 at 30.

²⁵ For a dialogical rather than polemical approach to the opposition between Catholic theologies representing public theology and the Hauerwasian, neo-Augustinian perspective see Kristin Heyer, *Prophetic and Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006).

The socio-critical family of theologies puts the modern world on trial, but not according to Neo-Scholastic canons and not uniformly from exclusively neo-Augustinian premises. Liberation theology for its part began with a reaction against the *Pastoral Constitution's* dialogue with modernity for having passed too quickly over modern imperialism, colonialism, slavery, oppression of women, and Western (Christian?) exploitation of the Majority World. In public theology my Church/modern world theology mostly accords with that of the renewed Thomists and Taylor. I do want to emphasize that Taylor's 'being out of phase' allows for socio-critical theology and specifically for a nonconforming, public, prophetic Church/modern world relation in any context.

The condition of possibility for a prophetic, public Church/world relation is that secularization has not necessarily produced privatized religion. The possibility of public, prophetic religion has remained open if not everywhere enacted.²⁶ The genre of public theology cautiously, conditionally, and critically endorses liberal democracy and late capitalism rather than abhors them root and branch. In dealing with the public sphere public theologians have drawn upon the socio-critical analyses of Jürgen Habermas and the constructive acuity of Charles Taylor.²⁷ A public-theological perspective incorporates much socio-critical analysis yet equally affirms a nuanced appreciation of values in modernity such as liberal democracy if not manipulated by plutocratic influence on mass media, majority rule that does not oppress minorities, capitalism if

²⁶ See José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) and "Public Religions Revisited," Hent de Vries, editor, *Religion: Beyond a Concept* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 101-119.

²⁷ See analyses of plutocratic pressures on democratic processes, a manipulative influence of mass media in the public sphere, and a decreased, tenuous public sphere in Jürgen Habermas, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 1989) and Jürgen Habermas, trans. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, editors, "'The Political': The Rational Meaning of a Questionable Inheritance of Political Theology," in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 15-33. See Charles Taylor's more positive analysis of the public sphere in *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 185-196.

subordinate to and regulated by the common good, and human rights when understood to include not only legal and civil but also social, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Socio-critical theologies point out that the Church originated in the Incarnation and public ministry of Jesus whose option for the poor was seriously out of phase with the powerful in the world to which he wanted to speak. His incisive, sometimes sarcastic, often critical engagements with complex Jewish, Hellenistic, and Roman people and meanings frequently were not irenic, though not pointlessly belligerent either. He contested a number of Israel's customs, beliefs, and practices, chastised religious leaders, and condemned the behavior of Gentile kings. He set forth the kingdom of God in contrast to any other kind of kingdom, such as the Roman Empire or the Zealots' ideal of a forcefully restored kingdom of Israel.²⁸ Jesus' message and deeds threatened religious and political authorities so they schemed to have him eliminated by state violence.

Phases connote temporal succession. Jesus introduced a new phase in God's redemptive history with humanity and creation. Jesus the Christ manifested and led the coming of God's new and final reign. The Christ did not adjust his mission, ministry, and teaching to dominant interpretations of divine power, which Israel, Egypt, and Rome alike associated with supreme human civil/sacral power and authority. Christ started in the grass roots and gave a place to the least and last. The Church participates in God's new, upsetting and interrupting presence in Jesus and bears witness to the final age heralded by the Incarnation, ministry, and paschal mystery of Jesus completed by Pentecost.

Consequently the pilgrim Church of Vatican II bears an 'already' realized message about the end of history that has 'not yet' come to fulfillment. The 'already' of the Resurrection precedes every subsequent historical period. So while absorbing, learning from, contributing to, and developing in a multitude of cultural contexts it would be a mistake of profound proportions for the Church to try to derive its fundamental self-understanding and agenda primarily from those contexts, even where the gospel has permeated those contexts to some extent. The (divine) origin, constitution, and mission of the

²⁸ See among others, Richard A. Horsely, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Church, to be sure, involved cultural and historical contexts, languages, peoples, and movements. But contexts were not ultimate and determinative sources any more than the Hebrew and Greek languages were the ultimate source of the divinely inspired Scriptures. Sometimes being out of phase with some specific element in a context, and more rarely with the context itself, means being in phase with the nature and mission of the Church.²⁹

Until the Constantinian Holy Roman Empire the Church was out of phase with the power, authority, mores, imperial decisions, policies, and most rulers of the Roman Empire. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas and authors of many entries in the *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* argue that Christians are in principle and so should conduct themselves in fact as resident aliens in the modern or postmodern world.³⁰ The Church has a calling to exemplify social existence transformed by the power of Christ and in light of the gospel, not to be a fawning spaniel in the lap of late capitalism sunk into liberal-democratic nationalism. The school of thought known as Radical Orthodoxy invokes both Augustine and Aquinas in negating all things modern and secular on behalf of what some see as a new socialist Christendom. Christianity and theology, in this view, provide the antidote to the modern myth of violence underlying social sciences and secularization that has falsely promoted itself as a corrective to religious conflicts and thereby marginalized Christianity.³¹ In this

²⁹ For the Church challenging its contexts see Paul M. Collins and Michael A. Fahey, editors, *Receiving 'The Nature and Mission of the Church': Ecclesial Reality and Ecumenical Horizons for the Twenty-First Century* (London: T & T Clark, 2008) Appendix, "The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement," Faith and Order Paper 198, pp. 110-145 at 141-143, nn. 112-118.

³⁰ Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001; originally Trinity University Press, 1975), with William Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989) among many and more recent publications. See Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh, editors, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Malden, MA, 2004). See the entry, "Stanley Hauerwas" by R. R. Reno in *The Blackwell Companion*, 302-316. Also, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, editors, *The Hauerwas Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

³¹ See, to begin with, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1990).

perspective being out of phase is a definitive hallmark of the Church faithful to its calling.

A socio-critical Church/modern world relation does not stem, however, from a subtraction idea of secularization and the secular. That idea seems to be the most limiting feature of neo-Augustinian thought and of Radical Orthodoxy. Neither neo-Augustinian nor Radical Orthodoxy's Church/modern world relations have space within which to let a Church/modern world dialectic become dialogical. A secularized world is presumed to lack any positive relation with God, gospel, faith, and Church. This outlook and language have seeped down into pastoral teaching in dioceses and parishes where, despite the explicit teaching of the *Pastoral Constitution* on a positive secularity, "secular" has come to mean antipathy to all things religious, transcendent, and Catholic. But regrettably, renewed Thomism, and by association Taylor's Church/modern world outlook, as well as most Catholic theology seem to have little interest in relating in some positive, dialogical way to Radical Orthodoxy.

For the Church to be in phase with the best elements in Western socio-cultural contexts furnishes a stronger platform from which to promote transformation of socially unjust structures. A kenotic Church in phase with its context, then, does not mean servile adjustment to any and every tendency. A kenotic Church need not abandon counteractive public witness and may well commit itself to non-violent modes of promoting social change. A more kenotic actualization of the Church will liberate the Church to be able to proceed more consistently according to an option for the poor. A kenotic ecclesiology puts the Church out of phase with contextual distortions. An authentic being in phase with the best impulses in a cultural context opens humanistic grounds for a prophetic, messianic being out of phase.

Then what kind of being out of phase do Taylor's disjunctions manifest? Taylor's idea of being out of phase does not register dissatisfaction with the prophetic, dialectical being out of phase typical of social Catholicism. Rather and primarily, what Taylor calls being out of phase points to pastoral authorities ignorant of the modern moral order, the contemporary social imaginary, and the ethic of authenticity. All three inhabit and are inhabited by those to whom the Church wishes to speak. In the U.S. there is precious little evidence

that chanceries consider it important to keep abreast of developments in Catholic sociology and philosophy. The direction in Taylor's analysis lies toward an authentic being in phase for the sake of, it seems to me, a messianic, kenotic being out of phase. On that premise sections III and IV outline some systematic-theological principles for a kenotic theology of the Church. The Conclusion proposes a tentative agenda for kenotic Catholicism in the United States.

III. Kenotic Ecclesiology: Six Orientations

McLean is surely correct to say that a kenotic Church will be more capable of "credible proclamation of the Gospel for these new and global times."³² Pope Francis leads the way. But the international Church, not to mention the Vatican, is large and complex. Some circles in both may prove refractory. Insofar as Francis's example and teaching take hold to that extent actualization of kenosis increases. Nonetheless incremental, scattered changes of that sort in lived religion do not obviate developing a kenotic ecclesiology. Change involves communication of perspectives and value judgments. Kenotic ecclesiology can play a maieutic role by articulating and expounding themes that serve to articulate kenosis in the Church's self-understanding. A search for kenotic ecclesiology will do well to incorporate six orientations.

Toward Listening

The first is that theologians need to listen to philosophers, social scientists, and others who reflect on or study both Catholicism and cultural contexts. This is simply educated common sense in academic conditions where centripetal forces of specialization drive the disciplines farther and farther apart. Commitment to interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration can overtake resignation to disciplinary silos. Someone once remarked that actual problems do not come in discipline-sized chunks. Learning and dialogue across borders are necessary. The basis for dialogue on the part of theology is recognition

³² George F. McLean, "Suffering lays out path to new life for church," *National Catholic Reporter*, June 22, 2012.

that by itself theology does not have the whole picture.³³ By its own reckoning and in light of faith theology's particular part may be the vanishing point in the center of the painting without which the painting is not a unified whole. Theology's position vis-à-vis other disciplines has been in flux. Is it possible still to speak of theology as 'queen of the sciences'? A queen perhaps because of divine things in the subject matter, but a sister certainly in view of limits in human experience, speech, and thought that seek some understanding of the content of faith. (And a sister with something to say in Catholic universities.³⁴)

Toward Historical Precedent

The second orientation is historical consciousness of the theological situation in regard to a kenotic theology of the Church. Kenotic theology has been primarily a theology of the person of Christ. Russian Orthodox theologian Sergii Bulgakov also conceived the Holy Spirit as kenotic.³⁵ Usually kenosis has not been applied to the Church. There is one exception and it did not turn out well. Its ill effects linger like smog on the theological landscape. In the 1960's a number of theologians enthusiastic about the secular reconceived the meaning and purpose of Christianity's churches in terms of kenosis. Avery Dulles summed up this current of thought in the phrase, "secular-dialogical."³⁶ In this view God acts primarily through grace influential within the world. The churches perform the auxiliary interpretation service of articulating the primary and non-ecclesial action of God. The churches themselves do not continue the presence and mission of Christ. According to this 1960's view divine presence and influence lie

³³ An eighth specialty, communications, completes theology in Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979; originally Herder and Herder, 1972). Among tasks in communications is dialogue between theology and non-theological disciplines on a cultural context.

³⁴ See Adriaan Theodor Peperzak, *Philosophy between Faith and Theology: Addresses to Catholic Intellectuals* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

³⁵ Sergii Bulgakov (1871-1944) spoke about a kenosis of the Spirit in *The Comforter*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), passim pp. 189-227.

³⁶ Avery Dulles, expanded edition, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1987), p. 92.

first and most significantly in the secular realm. The Church depends on and derives from the divine reality immanent in the secular. The Church exists as an hermeneutical servant that points to and interprets God's prior, independent, and redemptively most important presence in the secular.

Gibson Winter, for example, proposed a servant Church without structures for evangelizing and conducting worship. Dulles described Winter's proposal as, "the apostolate of the servant Church should be ... discerning reflection on God's promise and presence in the midst of our own history."³⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg's theology of revelation as universal history had no need for anything other than knowledge and assessment of historical facts to see God's purposes. Dulles admired the effort to break churches out of preoccupation with their own institutional structures and to seek an advancing of the Kingdom of God not limited to members of the churches. He nonetheless criticized one idea of servant applied to the Church. A servant works under the command of another. If the Church serves the world it means that the servant Church takes its cues, agenda, and purpose from the masterful world. In the most radical perspective the Church would empty itself of its own traditional nature, purpose, and institutional structures in order to offer a *diakonia* in which the Church has little original to say and ends up being expendable.

The defining mistake of secular-dialogical theology in the 1960's and 70's was not positive appreciation of the secular and of history. Nor was it recognizing that God is active outside the churches and that the churches have a duty to discern the signs of the times. Nor was it in arguing that Israel's increasing realization of divine transcendence and opposition to idolatry was a proto-secularization of physical nature. Nor was it that secularization owes something to Christian faith in the Incarnation as divine embrace of the human in all its aspects not only the formally sacred and religious. Secular-dialogical oversight lay in too simple an idea of the secular and of how the secular and the Church related. This early version of a kenotic theology of the Church proceeded from an uncritical idea of

³⁷ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 95. Dulles discussed Gibson Winter's *The New Creation as Metropolis* (New York: Macmillan, 1963). Dulles also listed Harvey Cox and J.A. T. Robinson among Protestant and Robert Adolfs, Eugene Bianchi, and Richard P. McBrien among Catholic theologians. McBrien does not fit easily into the model.

Church/modern world dialogue. The dialogue lacked a dialectical moment of the sort evident in Catholic social teaching, the *Pastoral Constitution*, and most forcefully in socio-critical theologies.

Any contemporary kenotic theology of the Church has to learn from and distance itself from mistakes in 1960's and 70's elevation of the 'world' over the Church in Church/modern world relations. That misguided project operated from a dialogical Church/modern world relationship in which the Church did all the listening and none of the proclaiming of the gospel. Too, there was little sign of an ability to shift dialogue into a critical judgment or two and then back to dialogue. Secular-dialogical theology plunged the institutional and missionary structures of the churches into conceptual crisis. Theological reaction was swift and moved directly to re-claiming the theology of a prophetic church willing to challenge its contexts.

The realization was that, "the church can be missionary only if its being-in-the-world is, at the same time a being-different from the-world"³⁸ Vatican II's *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church* shared an earlier Protestant emphasis on *missio Dei*. Church mission and with it a Church/modern world relation originate in the divine, Trinitarian missions of Word and Spirit. Contemporary Orthodox, Protestant and Catholic theologies of the Church largely agree that Trinitarian communion and Trinitarian mission constitute the Church. The formal ecumenical consensus on 'high', Trinitarian ecclesiology starts from the inner divine life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not from problems in the human dimensions of the Church. Such a perspective sees the Church not as a hermeneutical handmaiden to the secular world but as the Trinity's social mode of salvific mission.

Consequently embarking on a second round of a kenotic theology of the Church has to contend with being out of synch with contemporary theologies of the Church that still are in reaction against the first round. For example, the most significant contemporary statement of ecumenical consensus on the nature and mission of the

³⁸ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 386. See also Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), pp. 289-295.

church ignores kenosis.³⁹ Why? Most likely renewal in Trinitarian theology presupposes a critique of the secular-dialogical model of Church/modern world relations and so dismisses a kenotic idea of the Church. A recent synopsis of Catholic ecclesiology likewise does not mention kenosis.⁴⁰ Accordingly the contemporary theological situation demands that new reflection in kenotic ecclesiology take account of and be seen to be congruent with gains from Trinitarian ecclesiology of communion.

In brief, a discredited series of 1960's attempts at secularizing the nature and mission of the churches forms a background to any re-thinking of the Church's whole nature in light of kenosis. There has to be a clear difference between ecclesial self-emptying and ecclesial self-extinguishing. Since the Church is a Trinitarian communion with a missionary nature the first question for theological reflection is not, how can the Church become kenotic? Rather the Church already is kenotic because of an origin and participation in the kenotic *missio Dei*. This prototypical divine kenosis launches, constitutes, and continues in the Church. Consequently the question becomes, how can the Church actualize its kenotic constitution in modern/post-modern contexts?

Towards Distinguishing Kenotic Constitution from Actualization

A third orientation for a kenotic theology of the Church arises from the distinction between the kenotic constitution and the historical realization of the Church. The constitution of the Church is kenotic because it comes into existence as concrete, social participation in Trinitarian communion. The missions of Word and Spirit are, as will be noted, kenotic, and draw the Church and her members into that dynamic. But actualizing the constitution, the identity, of the Church takes place in and through graced, struggling, fallible, disordered yet hopeful human beings in various contexts that mingle excellences with distortions. Renewal and reform toward a more kenotic Church

³⁹ Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Paper 214, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012).

⁴⁰ Michael Fahey, S.J., "Church," in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin, editors, second edition, *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), pp. 315-373 at 360/1.

pertain not to the Trinitarian constitution but to its actualization by persons in history.

More basically, what is kenosis? The *locus classicus* is Philippians 2:7.⁴¹ Paul describes Jesus as one who did not cling to the form of God. This can be understood to mean the superior, immortal fullness and otherness of divine being including divine glory, creativity, omnipresence and omniscience. In a gracious, free act, humble in an inconceivable extreme, Jesus in Israel was both heavenly and pre-existing no less than being mortal, and so vulnerable as to be subjected to crucifixion. Jesus emptied himself, in a sense took on nothingness, emptiness. Jesus manifested the omnipotent God's voluntary powerlessness.⁴² This kenosis is an act of love not an extinguishing of the one taking on mortal human nature. The Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) clarified this in asserting that in the Incarnation neither divine nor human nature was changed.⁴³

⁴¹ Exegetes have debated vigorously over Philippians 2. What does Christ's having emptied himself (*kenosen*) mean in its original pre-Johannine, pre-dogmatic context? Larry Hurtado's reading affirms that in pre-existence passages, "Jesus' origins and meaning lie in God, above and before creation and human history, making his appearance an event of transcendent significance," *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003), p. 126.

⁴² Wawclaw Hryniewicz relates Catholic participation in ecumenism to kenosis in "Ecumenism and Kenotic Dimensions of Ecclesiology," *The Challenge of Our Hope: Christian Faith in Dialogue Cultural Heritage and Contemporary Change* series, vol. 32 (Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2007), chapter 11, pp. 135-147. In "Does Kenosis Rest on a Mistake? Three Kenotic Models in Patristic Exegesis," Sarah Coakley, in C. Stephen Evans, editor, *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 246-264, emphasizes that Gregory of Nyssa, "insists that the *kenosis* of the Incarnation is the sign of supreme divine power, not of the loss of it," p. 264.

⁴³ This is not to ignore major differences between Paul's text and context and those of the patristic period, above all Nicaea (325 CE) and Chalcedon (451 CE) but to assume that John 1:1-14 became more important than Philippians 2 which was assimilated into pre-dogmatic "proto-orthodox devotion," Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, chapter 10. See Sarah Coakley, "Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of 'Vulnerability' in Christian Feminist Writing," in *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender: Challenges in Contemporary Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 3-39; originally in Daphne Hampson, editor, *Swallowing A Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 82-111. Coakley points out that Cyril of Alexandria developed a Logos

Some Eastern Orthodox and Protestant theology sees Christians' *theosis* (divinization) and life of faith as a kenosis in which a disciple of Jesus lets go of self-will, plans, egoistic desire, and a purely autonomous life in order to surrender to the life, will, and providence of God. The disciple undergoes kenosis, a self-emptying that allows divine influence to transform, elevate, and guide the human person. In transformative *theosis* a believer is conformed to the mind and heart of Christ, participating more and more in God. *Theosis* can be said to be a process of 'becoming God' by human sharing in divine life as long as divine otherness and creaturely dependence do not disappear. *Theosis* bears out one meaning in 2 Peter 4: "... you may come to share in the divine nature" *Theosis* involves human kenosis.

At the same time, an unnoticed paradox attends ascription of kenosis to human beings other than Jesus.⁴⁴ Kenotic theologies seem to overlook that paradox. Jesus relinquished manifestation of the incomparably greater mode of divine life. Disciples of Jesus, on the other hand, surrender sinful pride, distorted self-love, and a resistant incapacity in human nature for saving union with God. They abandon only absences of being, inferior actual conditions, and unlike Jesus enter into something superior. On a more positive reading of the human condition disciples surrender limits inherent in being a finite creature. A human, all humans, cease clinging to something creaturely in receiving something uncreated.

The paradox is that sinful human beings drawn into redemption by Jesus' cross, death and resurrection start indeed on a path of self-emptying. But not in the radical mode of Jesus. He let go of divine life in all its fullness to take on limited human life, so he could serve and redeem humanity. We let go of whatever blocks redemption but in no case let go of something superior to redemption by Jesus' kenosis.

Speaking about kenosis on the part of human beings actualizing the Church has to be mindful of that paradox in order not to weaken divine/human incommensurability. Wanting to reassure ourselves that Christ is like us and we are like Christ in every conceivable

Christology in reference to Philippians 2. Still, that was a Logos (Johannine) Christology.

⁴⁴ For controversy on kenosis in relation to Christians' self-surrender see Coakley, "Kenosis and Subversion," and Stephen Pardue, "Kenosis and its Discontents: Towards an Augustinian Account of Divine Humility," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65, 3 (2012), pp. 271-288.

human respect except sin does not excuse ignoring divine/human otherness. The paradox is that kenosis is a universal Christian vocation yet also on the grounds of Philippians 2 an impossibility. Moreover ascetical admonition to kenosis can be dangerous for those, including Christian women, suffering oppressed identities. For them an ideal of kenotic self-sacrifice may become a passage to self-extinguishing and the foregoing of liberation through self-assertion, dialogue, and self-transcending mutuality.⁴⁵

Is, then, kenotic *imitatio Christi* by the Church and believers impossible? In a secondary sense, it is possible. In word and deed the public ministry of Jesus disclosed the human meaning of the kenotic Incarnation that remains the exemplary measure of all future ecclesial *imitatio Christi*. This is a profound truth in liberation theology's turn to Jesus' public ministry as the principle by which to gauge and reform Church/modern world relations. Jesus acted with and taught an option for the poor.⁴⁶ Jesus' orientation toward the least, the most vulnerable, and the marginalized belongs to Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's constituting the Church as kenotic. The most intense moment in Jesus' kenosis comes in the suffering and death that, John's Gospel points out, together with the resurrection manifest the glory of God in an extremity of divine love and its blessed result. Jesus is the servant of humanity who exercises sovereignty through the influence of the Holy Spirit within human freedom not through external constraints.

⁴⁵ On mutuality as integral to kenosis see chapter 5 in Jane E. Linehan, "The Kenosis of God and Reverence for the Particular: A Conversation with Jürgen Moltmann" (unpublished dissertation, Marquette University: Proquest, UMI Dissertations Publishing 1998, 99127729).

⁴⁶ Leading exegete John Meier remarks, the Jesus of history is "the Jesus we can 'recover' and examine by using the scientific tools of modern historical research," and for that reason is "a modern abstraction and construct," less than the totality of what Jesus felt, thought, said, and did, and other than the Jesus of faith-knowledge who is the object of theology, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Volume One: The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 25. Exegetical debates swirl around societal aspects in Jesus' public ministry. Some claim he was all about social reform. To the contrary holds Meier, "the historical Jesus subverts not just some ideologies but all ideologies, including liberation theology ... [and] ultimately eludes all our neat theological programs," p. 199. Is not an 'option for the poor' too a modern concept used to open the meaning of New Testament texts?

The option for the poor by the Church and individual members participates in Jesus' kenosis in his public ministry.

The fullest measure of ecclesial and individual kenosis takes place in witness to Jesus that suffers his fate of suffering and death. Historically, for the Church in El Salvador the option for the poor by the Jesuits at the University of Central America in San Salvador imitated Jesus in his public ministry in an option for the poor and came to the mode of complete witness. Martyrdom is *imitatio Christi* that depends on and participates in Jesus' kenosis but does not have its own original human meaning. Martyrdom enters into Jesus' kenotic death, and in Johannine perspective, also manifests the glory of God, hidden though the person's resurrection is. And facing martyrdom, John's Gospel assures the Church, involves the Holy Spirit in being Paraclete, Advocate for those undergoing false accusation and condemnation just as had Jesus. Not only the mission of the incarnate Word but that of the Holy Spirit is kenotic.

According to Thomas Aquinas the missions of Son and Spirit consist in the two Trinitarian processions to which a temporal effect is added. The temporal effect added to the procession of the Son from the Father is the assuming of an individual human nature by the Son. The temporal effect added to the procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son is more difficult to pin down. The Spirit's manner of presence in creation and salvation has qualities of both hiddenness and transparency. The Spirit, for example, inspires the prophets and authors of the Scriptures but does not have, as it were, a speaking role like that of Isaiah, Jesus, and the apostles. The Incarnation is the kenosis of the Word, but the kenosis of the Spirit is immanent in the world in a dynamic, diffuse, elusive, and yet divinely effective way. The visible mission of the Spirit from Pentecost onward elicits a hearing of the gospel that leads to belief in Christ, to a following of Christ that includes the option for the poor. The Spirit acts as Paraclete in those witnessing to Christ with an option for the poor under duress. One thinks of the courage of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador.

In adverting above to the kenotic Church, I distinguished the kenotic, Trinitarian constitution from the continuous historical actualization of the Church through successive eras and in plural cultural contexts. To stress again a salient point, the dimension and scope of Church renewal pertain to historical actualization of an already given kenotic dimension. Any change in the Church toward

renewal or reform can be only a process of new historical actualizing of what the Church already has been given to be. At the same time it has to be recalled that much in reform and renewal depends on graced, free, human receptivity with more and less creativity. Historical contingency comes with any context and also enters into any renewal and reform.

Historically contingent elements change. Changes are fraught with stress and should not be underestimated. For example, before Gutenberg and the Reformation direct access to Scripture was limited to those adept in Hebrew, Greek, and/or Latin. Printing presses, new translations from the original languages and the Latin Vulgate into vernacular languages made possible multitudinous copies of the one Bible. All who were literate wherever they lived and to an ever-increasing extent whichever language they spoke potentially were gaining access to the written Word of God. That shift in actualization in access to Scripture was essential to the Reformation and a momentous change in historical actualization of how something in the Church's constitution, the New Testament, figured in the life of the Church.

Again, Jesus' calling of the apostles and momentum toward apostolic succession are an ingredient in the constitution of the Church. But it is a matter of contingent actualization whether a bishop like originally Middle Eastern Irenaeus of Lyon (130-202 CE) was seated on a special chair in a Frankish diocese modeled on the Roman Empire's administrative district or like Anglo-Saxon Boniface (ca. 645-754 CE) was a peripatetic monk-bishop who evangelized Frisians and Teutons. Actualization flows from divine grace but only in and through people's creativity, adaptation, spiritual insights, or contrarily has to make do with poverty of imagination that renders actualization dull and dreary.

Toward the Whole New Testament

A fourth methodological orientation, perhaps *pace* McLean, is that New Testament sources for a humbler, more earthy idea of the Church cannot be located only or even primarily in Pauline and deutero-Pauline writings. The whole New Testament, including the Gospel of

John, contributes to the theology of a Church marked by kenosis.⁴⁷ Concentrating on the concrete, earthly aspect of the Church McLean advises that focus on Philippians 2 will rid the Church of harmful triumphalism due to over-determination of ecclesiology by the Prologue to John's Gospel. McLean blames assimilation of John's Gospel for a too exalted a picture of the Church floating above its own humanity. To the extent that McLean commends Paul, that is all to the good. However, there are problems with preferring Paul. Before his dramatic encounter on the way to Damascus, Paul had no experience of Jesus in Galilee or Judaea, no human knowledge of Jesus' public ministry anywhere. His knowledge of Jesus and the gospel comes primarily and authoritatively from the risen Jesus, not from Paul's witnessing the public ministry, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Paul's own, unique, direct access to Jesus, amplified by immersion in Christian community, was exclusively 'high' and heavenly rather than gained from a 'low' source that started from Jesus' Jewish followers' ordinary human experience of him.

That is to say, for one thing Paul's body of Christ ecclesiology did not contain the idea of the Church as People of God. For another Philippians 2 cannot be isolated from the Pauline idea of the Church as the body of which Christ is the head. Mystical Body ecclesiology tends toward maximum identification of the historically active and visible Church with Christ. Christ is sinless. The Church is Christ's body. So too the Church is sinless. But the members at least are not. Moreover McLean objects to an image of the Church as the spotless (sinless) bride of Christ, almost as if that image were implied only in John 3:29, Revelation 19:7, 21:2, 9–10, and 22:17. A more familiar, more explicit likening of the Church to the bride of Christ, however, is deutero-Pauline Ephesians 5: 24–25. Recourse to Paul, then, is not the whole solution to an overly high ecclesiology.

Towards Mission

A fifth methodological orientation collects and focuses a Trinitarian theme already begun. The Church derives from and shares in the eternal creativity of the Word/Son and Holy Spirit Who together

⁴⁷ See George F. McLean, "Introduction: Disjunctions in the 21st Century," pp. 3-5.

remain immanent wellsprings in the Church. As an outcome of Trinitarian missions in which God gives away as it were divinity, not clinging to eternal life, the constitutive givenness of the Church already is kenotic. Consequently the question for Church/modern world renewal becomes, how can the constitutive kenotic givenness be re-imagined and re-actualized? I will not try to be exhaustive but only to underline a few major kenotic aspects of the givenness or the constituting of the Church by Christ and the Spirit.⁴⁸

For one thing the Church shares in the kenotic aspect of the divine missions. Contemporary ecclesiology has recognized this in an ecumenical consensus on the missionary nature of the Church. The Church exists from and is constituted by divine kenosis in the Incarnation and the sending of the Spirit that together institute communion between humans and the Trinity and on that basis among humans. Communion is past, present, and future. As some have said with only slight exaggeration, the Church does not have a mission; mission has a Church. The missionary nature of the Church comes to dramatic kenosis in giving away without return what is most valuable, the good news of Christ, the life energies of missionaries, and Christian fellowship.⁴⁹ The missionary nature of the Church, moreover, means that all the baptized enter into the mission of the Church to continue and fulfill the mission of Christ. Continuing kenosis, divine and human, belongs to the missionary nature of the Church.

Consequently the historical actualization of Christianity as divinely constituted exceeds any and all cultural, linguistic, social, etc. instantiations. The Church is not and cannot be exhausted or fully realized in any one era, culture, language, or society. No era, culture, or people can claim to fully represent Christ, gospel, and Church. To think it could was an erroneous tendency in the euphoria of

⁴⁸ See a brief blog by Ben Myers on a kenotic motif in the pastoral theology of former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, "Rowan Williams and Kenotic Ecclesiology," *Faith and Theology*, 2 September 2008, <http://www.faith-theology.com/2008/09/rowan-williams-and-kenotic-ecclesiology.html>.

⁴⁹ On the history of mission see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), Stephen B. Bevans, SVD and Roger P. Schroeder, SVD, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

Constantine's legitimizing of Christianity in the Roman Empire. Augustine to the contrary taught that the Church could not be identified with the (Christian) Roman Empire. The Church is always more than its concrete actualization in any era or culture. In that sense the Church is always in process, continually becoming, and cannot be solidly identified with any culture, society, or period as if permanently normative. The Church has an inherent capacity for discovery and realization of new and unforeseen possibilities released in gifts and potentials in different cultures. Ecclesial self-surrender of elements in its own status quo when the gospel of Christ and the Spirit invite new cultures into Trinitarian communion is a type of kenosis. It has to cease uncalled-for clinging to even very valuable customs, habits of thought, auxiliary structures, and revered modes of operation. The transition from Vatican I to Vatican II still underway indicates how challenging that surrender is.

Too, the Church has more givenness in its identity than does any social formation derived from human ingenuity (voluntary associations) or human nature (family, state). The Church does not exist and act purely according to its own discretion as if it were a human project with an enduring purpose established by human agreement. The Church is at the disposition of the Trinity because the initial and on-going missions of Word and Spirit constitute the Church. In the nature of the case the scope of Church reform encompasses multiple, contingent, historical actualizations of a givenness in constant immediacy to the Trinity, and exposed to the corrosion of sin. But the divine institution and substance cannot be reformable.

Ecclesia semper reformanda does not mean the Trinity is always beginning over again, as if the New Testament origins of the Church were negligible not normative. It is helpful to recall that the Protestant Reformation was a demanding summons that the Church become what it already is in its normative origins.⁵⁰ True, opposed ideas of what the Church is eventually divided Luther's reform from the Church and vice versa. But those divided into Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists et al. sought nothing other than for the Church to be what it is given to be from God, and so to live, to actualize what Christ and the Spirit had given and were giving. The Reformation was

⁵⁰ See John De Gruchy, "Re-forming Congregations in a Time of Global Change: Toward a Kenotic Ecclesiology," in *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 2006, pp. 51-67, digital journal: <http://journals.ptsem.edu/id/PSB2006271/dmd008>.

not about seeking to alter what God had given but about identifying the means of knowing what that is, and then reclaiming it. The Reformation was all about regaining the divine constitution of the Church in order to actualize it faithfully.

IV. From Context to Matrix: Secularization as an Ecclesial Good

Sections I and II have addressed the context of the Church. Section III laid out some orientations for kenotic ecclesiology. At this point an interruptive revisiting of context is appropriate. 'Context' denotes a larger text adjacent to a given passage and by extension refers to an environment or situation surrounding a particular historical reality. Generally speaking a context is conceived as other than the text or historical reality. That is how Sections I and II understood context. Yet that standard concept has a deficiency that leaves it inadequate. For what apparently is external may at the same time and in some way be internal to the text or historical reality. That is why for certain purposes Lonergan's concept of 'cultural matrix' is preferable to 'cultural context'. 'Matrix', from *mater*, mother, connotes something not only environmental or circumstantial but also generative and for that reason internally linked to something distinct from it that is related by origin. Matrix allows conceiving also a reciprocal internal relationship between what otherwise are text and context, historical reality and context thought of as an accompanying and explanatory environment. That is, appeal to 'context' in the humanities and theology emphasizes distinctness of text and context not also an internal co-presence signified by 'matrix'. The concept of matrix has an ecclesiological application.

It would be inadequate to think of the Church and world or Church in a context, as if the Church were something pre-formed and completed in heaven, as it were, and subsequently dropped into a series of diverse earthly circumstances that in no way entered into the Church's constitution, self-understanding, and actualization. To the contrary, however, the Church exists and acts in cultural contexts that always already have a presence inside an historical series and a panorama of simultaneous actualizations of the Church. So the Church has always existed in a cultural matrix with some manner, hopefully redeemed, of presence in the Church. This is to approach historicity by another route. The historical events of Christianity's

origin belong to the constitution and initial actualization of the Church. They are not simply the historical context in which Christianity originated.

Apart from the central event of Jesus's suffering, death and resurrection there were other incorporations of context into the Church's structure and self-understanding. In Acts 6: 1-6, for example, the apostles faced a very human, earthly issue. Some widows among followers of Jesus complained that they were not receiving an equitable dole of bread from the common stores of food. The apostles solved the problem by instituting a new Church office, deacons. The apostles appointed seven men as deacons who were to handle the administration and serving of food. The distribution of bread and the widows' complaint was a 'circumstance' that entered into not only the actualization but into the very constitutional structure of the Church in the apostolic period. In light of this apostolic initiative Benedict XVI taught the inherent, constitutive not adventitious role of social charity in the early Church and ever since.⁵¹

Kenotic ecclesiology starts with the kenotic constitution of the Church and seeks to imagine new actualizations of that givenness in modern/postmodern matrices. Secularity is a pervasive aspect of those matrices. However understood, secularization belongs to both Church and world, not to the world alone as if only an external context. Secularity is a feature of the cultural matrix around and in the contemporary Church. On the side of the 'world', its secularity can be defined by movement (emancipation?) away from a former proximity and subordination to the faith of the Church in the historical actualization that was Christendom. In modernity historical processes of secularization have affected and to some extent have entered into the Church's self-understanding, life, and pastoral practice, its actualization. In a subtraction model the Church has been a passive victim that lost many things: real estate; social authority and a monopoly on legitimating truth and value; political power; and members. In a more positive perspective did not the Church gain from secularization something internal to itself, as distinguished from accepting an external circumstance about which it could do nothing?

⁵¹ Benedict XVI, *Deus caritas est* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice, 2009), w2.vatican.va/.../hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html, n. 21 on Acts 6: 1-6.

An answer in favor of a positive contribution from secularization to the Church's historical actualization can appeal to the writings of John Courtney Murray, S.J. (1904–1967). His work, not least his influence as a *peritus* within the commission that prepared the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* at Vatican II, pointed to the institutional distinction of Church from state as something significant for the spiritual flourishing of the Church. Murray argued that pre-modern and early modern Church policies on its exercise of power in the temporal order blended the Church's possession and exercise of powers in spiritual and temporal realms in a way typical of Constantinian Christendom. Mainly the See of Rome but also local bishops were alleged to share Christ's comprehensive authority. Pope Innocent III propounded the full measure by declaring the Pope to possess the plenitude of all power temporal and spiritual granted by Christ to Peter. All royal and civil authority derived by delegation from papal authority. Against that background Murray argued past Robert Bellarmine's underwriting of papal exercise of temporal power in emergencies only. Murray's thesis that the Church, Pope, and bishops did not possess temporal power in the first place was a rude shock to curial theology that associated a curtailing of Church authority in civil matters with the French Revolution's anti-ecclesial separation of church from state.

But the French Revolution was not the meaningful event from which Murray proceeded. He looked to the founding and constitution of the United States. The First Amendment to the U.S. constitution states, "Congress shall make or pass no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Murray explained that this functional separation of church and state as institutions relieved the Church of the burden of thinking and acting with temporal power over civil authority. Appealing to the classic Letter to Emperor Anastasius by Pope Gelasius I in 494 Murray reclaimed Gelasian dualism. Gelasius had declared, "Two there are, august Emperor, by which the world is chiefly ruled" The two kinds of authority, imperial authority at all levels and episcopal and papal authority, do not coincide. Of the two, ecclesial authority had primacy because its origin was Christ and its goal is eternal life. But Murray pointed to the long history of struggles between popes and rulers as a learning process for the Church. A series of trials and errors has led to clarifying the nature and exercise of the Church's spiritual

primacy. Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* registered that new clarity.

The Church was true to its nature, here conceived as its constitution, when it sought to exercise authority toward what pertains to eternal life in the pilgrim condition only by spiritual and not by political or coercive means. Consequently, the policy and practice of legal establishment were not due to the constitution of the Church but to contingency in actualization. Vatican II abandoned the previously prevailing idea that Church doctrine required legal establishment under the coercive authority of the state, where feasible. The alternative was an idea, polity, and experience of non-establishment that Murray brought to Vatican II from the United States. Vatican II broke the putative bond between Catholic doctrine and establishment.

I think one conclusion from Murray's overall argument and Vatican II's *Declaration on Religious Liberty* can be stated in terms of secularization as a good for and within the Church. Assertions of civil authority's independence from Church authority led to the Church's eventual affirmation of the spiritual nature of the Church's authority. Letting go of claims to power in temporal matters purified the Church and enabled deeper appropriation of its own internal and external mission. The Church by divine institution indeed had the highest kind of authority from Christ. But that, on the principle of *imitatio Christi*, did not include possession or exercise of civil authority. Secularization as historical process incited in the Church clarity on the spiritual nature of its mission, its sacramental power, and on the spiritual nature of its teaching and governing authority. In modernity secularization exerted a successful, incremental, practical and theoretical influence removing civil from ecclesiastical authority. Vatican II grasped and approved that independence of civil authority in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty* and the *Pastoral Constitution*. Vatican II likewise understood and taught the spiritual quality of the Church's exercise of authority in those two documents. The ecclesiology in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and the *Decree on Mission* likewise supported purifying the Church's understanding and exercise of power in temporal matters. It was to be a spiritual exercise of authority such as takes place in the sacraments, preaching, and teaching. In that larger ecclesiological framework the very secularization that ended Christendom also prompted a new depth in

the Church's self-understanding and way of actualizing its constitution.

Conciliar relinquishing of a claim on establishment could be understood as a type of kenosis, a letting-go of a too-wide exercise of authority in social existence. And this kenosis came through secularization of civil authority at governmental and personal levels. In accepting some of the results of secularization the Church did not surrender its Trinitarian constitution but let go of a contingent, customary Constantinian mode of actualization. The Church's kenosis due to processes of secularization seems to be an element in the wider meaning of secularization as letting creation be known and appreciated for its intrinsic existence and attributes. Neo-Augustinian resentment against modernity involves unremitting criticism of secularization. It will be interesting to see how Pope Francis interprets secularity. Will he continue the neo-Augustinian skepticism toward secularity of Benedict XVI and some theologians Catholic and Protestant, or will he recover the more balanced, positive yet discriminating view in the *Pastoral Constitution* and in John Paul II's social encyclicals? The beginning of an answer can be inferred from Francis's knowledge of chemistry and respect for the natural sciences, the realm of secularity *par excellence*, in his *Laudato Si* on climate change.

V. Conclusion: A Kenotic Agenda in a Pluralist Democracy

In conclusion I'd like to set forth a tentative agenda for a more kenotic actualizing of the Church in the U.S. context with attention to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). The USCCB actualization of kenosis in the public sphere and political life needs development. Confusion comes from USCCB lobbying activities at federal and state levels on behalf of specifically Catholic convictions and goals at the same time that it espouses and advocates the common good. Sociologist and social ethicist John A. Coleman S.J. commented that, "[it] may be fairly hard, simultaneously, to be seen or to operate as a religious (albeit legitimate) interest group and also, at the very same time, as an interlocutor for the public or common

good.”⁵² Interest group lobbying in fact and in perception benefits private interests not the public common good.

Kenosis actualizes an orientation to service and the common good. Clarity in the USCCB’s and individual Catholics’ entry into the public sphere would benefit from the approach to social mission taken by public theology. It seems to me that a few items for a more kenotic USCCB public-theological agenda are these:

1) The USCCB could produce a brief public document teaching the universal right/duty correlation on religious liberty in the *Declaration on Religious Liberty*. The First Amendment right of Catholics and the USCCB to exercise religious liberty involves the corresponding civic and religious duty to fully respect the right to freedom of religion and conscience of all citizens, indeed of all human beings especially those minority religions in the U.S. whose right to freedom may be most at risk, such as Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. Why would not the USCCB ally on this concern for freedom with Baptists likewise vigilant about religious liberty in law and practice for religious minorities and all citizens?

2) The USCCB could issue a brief document on the importance of free, public education for the nation as a whole, with an offer of dialogue between Catholic and public school leaders for the sake of an overlapping objective, a literate, educated youth and citizenry with sound value-judgments pertaining to the common good in a pluralist democracy.

3) The USCCB and lay experts could re-institute the dialogical process and broad consultation that led to *Economic Justice For All* in light of cultural, social, and economic conditions that have emerged after the 1990’s in legislative and executive dismantling of the New Deal. Ecumenical and interreligious consultation on those more recent conditions would be a valuable next step toward renewing application of principles enunciated in the 1986 document.

⁵² John A. Coleman, S.J., “North American Culture’s Receptivity to Catholic Social Teaching,” in Daniel McDonald S.J. *Catholic Social Teaching in Global Perspective* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), pp. 195-218 at 208. Charles E. Curran made a similar point in, “The Reception of Catholic Social and Economic Teaching in the United States,” in Kenneth Himes, OFM, editor, *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), pp. 469-93 at 484.

4) The USCCB could re-conceive and re-structure the concrete manner of the Church's entry into the public sphere. The episcopacy could relinquish sponsorship of lobbying that seeks to influence the legislative and executive branches of government at federal and state levels. Instead the USCCB could shift the episcopal and pastoral priority from a focus on formation of public policies to assisting dioceses and parishes in gaining familiarity with the breadth of Catholic social teaching. An informed Catholic laity then would be capable and empowered to take up tasks in regard to public policies.

But how might that assistance take place in the grass-roots? Sociologists Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell provide a decisive reason for not conceiving a parish forum for Catholic social teaching primarily in terms of a classroom or lecture-hall for adult education.⁵³ They found that only one thing moved church-going people from social concern learned from Scripture, homilies, and churches' teachings into active involvement in civic praxis. Altruistic values are not motives. It was only active participation in a social network that led people from values, ideals, ideas, and principles into active engagement. Social networks involve close friends, or small parish groups, talking about religion with family and friends. Among parishioners civil and political activity flow from their participation in religiously linked social networks alert to social issues.

Consequently, dioceses and parishes are best advised to encourage and foster development of social networks connected to Catholic social teaching and focused on matters under discussion in the public sphere. Social networks would seem to be the specific kind of local forum best suited to enable more conventional Catholics to become social Catholics.

In the perspective of this chapter and the ecclesiology of Vatican II, it follows that the theologically and sociologically most appropriate influence of the Church in the public sphere and political life comes from the laity. They, claiming their Catholic vision and value-judgments are capable of acting in their independent capacity as citizens, not from episcopal sponsorship of lobbying or other direct episcopal influence on government officials. That role of the laity was the position also of Murray in consonance with the ecclesiology of

⁵³ Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, with the assistance of Shaylyn Romney Garrett, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), pp. 471-479.

Vatican II. Lobbying and seeking episcopal direct influence on public policy and government officials by-pass the agency of laity, who after all also are the Church, believers who are citizens. Kenosis by the bishops would create space for kenosis by social Catholics divested of the primacy of self-interest to enter public life in exercise of their citizenship. The simplest kenotic change is to embrace the option for the poor, in line with Pope Francis. The simplicity is its accessibility without grandiose scenes of utopian outcomes. The option begins in a movement from asking how does this public policy or practice affect me, and those close to or like me, to asking how does it affect the most vulnerable, the poor, the marginalized. That is how the option for the poor takes root. A Church that asks that question sets itself on a kenotic path in the public life of a pluralist democracy.

Part III
Seekers and Dwellers:
Re-reading Experience

Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality: Implications for Seeking and Dwelling among Some Catholic Women and LGBT Catholics¹

THERESA W. TOBIN

1. Introduction

In his opening essay of *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Charles Taylor attributes widespread mistrust of institutional Catholicism among spiritual seekers to their perception that the Church has no place for seeking.² Seekers pursue questions, invite dialogue, and negotiate their spiritual identities over time as they search, in all manner of places, for an experience of spiritual reality. The official Church seems to push “already worked-out answers,” to have little capacity to listen, and to offer a faith bound by absolute rules and universal laws leaving little room for discussion or negotiation.³ Spiritual seekers perceive that the Church has nothing to offer them, that is has, as it were, come down on the side of dwellers who look to religious authorities for timeless truths, absolute moral rules, and firmly delineated sacred space. Taylor explains that seekers

¹ The inclusion of the determiner “some” in the title is meant to indicate that not all Catholic women or gay or lesbian Catholics experience spiritual violence within the Roman Catholic tradition. Moreover, the movements this essay tracks focus primarily on people in the United States and Western Europe, which is the audience to whom Taylor primarily addresses his work on secularization.

² Charles Taylor, “The Church Speaks – to Whom?” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, eds. Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), pp. 17-25.

³ Taylor cited in George McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century” in *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, eds. Charles Taylor, Jose Casanova, and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2012), p. 5.

presented with a faith on these terms “all too easily give up on it and search elsewhere.”⁴

While this is surely part of the explanation, in this essay I suggest that another major source of mistrust of the Church, especially among many American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics, is the spiritual violence they have experienced through their participation in the ritual life of the Church. Spiritual violence does not name the use of physical force to inflict material harm in the name of God or for religious purposes as, for example, in a religiously motivated war. Rather, in spiritual violence sacred symbols, texts, and religious teachings themselves become weapons that harm a person in her spiritual formation and in her relationship with God. In recent decades, both Catholic women and LGBT Catholics have used the term ‘spiritual violence’ to name a range of such harms.

Taylor explicitly references Church teachings on women’s ordination and homosexuality as examples of the Church pushing “pat and ready-made answers,” foreclosing prospects for discussion, and thereby failing to engage seekers.⁵ What I want to emphasize is that for many the problem is not merely dissatisfaction with authoritarian and paternalistic modes of presentation, but rather with experiences of being spiritually harmed as a result of spiritual formation within a religious community that aligns these teachings with the will of God and implements them in liturgical and ritual life. Victims of spiritual violence are charging that an institution, which should be (and claims to be) shepherding people into loving relationship with the divine, is often instead erecting significant barriers to this relationship. For these people the issue is not just that the Church seems out of touch or irrelevant, but that the Church has been a conduit for spiritual violation. Their mistrust of the institution stems from an experience of a church that has inflicted devastating spiritual injury on people trying to seek or dwell within its bounds.

In light of these considerations, this paper has two broad aims: First, I foreground spiritual violence as a pervasive form of church-based violence that has gone unrecognized in the larger church as violence and needs to be examined as a serious obstacle to the moral and spiritual authority of the church. Secondly, I examine spiritualities of

⁴ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” p. 19.

⁵ Ibid.

seeking and dwelling through the experience of spiritual violence and, conversely, I explore the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling. I examine how one's spiritual orientation as a dweller or seeker may impact her response to spiritual violence. For example seekers may be more inclined toward anger and dissent, whereas dwellers may be more prone to internalize the harm or compartmentalize tensions in an effort to dwell securely within the fold. I also suggest that the experience of spiritual violence may be one influence responsible for a shift in spiritual orientation among many American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics from dwelling to seeking. I suggest that survivors of spiritual violence often end up cultivating a hybrid spirituality as either a dweller/seeker or seeker/dweller, and that their experiences thus serve as an important resource for a church interested in bridging the disjunction between seekers and dwellers.

The structure of the paper is as follows: In §2, drawing from several sources, I clarify my understanding of the terms 'seeking' and 'dwelling' in order to lay a groundwork for my analysis. In §3, I present a basic account of spiritual violence as victims are using this term, and in §4 I draw from victims' experiences to illustrate some of the spiritual consequences of victimization by this mode of violence. In §5 I examine how one's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence, and how experiences of spiritual violence may impact shifts in an individual's spiritual orientation from dwelling to seeking. I conclude with some brief remarks about prospects for hope and healing under the new leadership of Pope Francis.

2. Seeking and Dwelling

Robert Wuthnow uses the terms 'dwelling' and 'seeking' to describe two distinct spiritual orientations, and to trace a measurable shift in the American public in the second half of the 20th century from the former to the latter.⁶ Seekers and dwellers represent ideal spiritual types, perhaps a bit like personality types, which are characterized by certain features or markers. And like personality types, many people

⁶ Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

who may partake primarily in one orientation very often exhibit features associated with both.⁷ Seeking and dwelling, then, are rough characterizations rather than precise concepts, but they are nonetheless useful categories for demarcating two palpably distinct ways of orienting one's life to the transcendent.

As Wuthnow describes it, dwelling is a spirituality of habitation. For dwellers, "God occupies a definite place in the universe and creates a sacred space in which humans too can dwell; to inhabit sacred space is to know its territory and to feel secure."⁸ Seeking, by contrast is a spirituality of negotiation, whereby "individuals search for sacred moments that reinforce their conviction that the divine exists, but these moments are fleeting; rather than knowing the territory, people explore new spiritual vistas, and they may have to negotiate among complex and confusing meanings of spirituality."⁹ For seekers spirituality is metaphorically a journey one chooses to embark on; for dwellers spirituality is metaphorically a place one inhabits. We can clarify further these spiritual types by contrasting them along five dimensions of spiritual life.

Relationship to a Faith Tradition and Congregation

The general characterization offered above, if not qualified, is a bit misleading for it gives the impression that seekers are never closely affiliated with a religious community or tradition, and this is not necessarily the case. For one thing, it would rule out the possibility of seeker clergy, people who are clearly tied very closely to a particular faith tradition in so far as they vocationally have devoted their lives to the community, but who may nonetheless gravitate toward a

⁷ Moreover, Wuthnow and Taylor both note that the Christian tradition has emphasized elements of both orientations, as best seen in the lives of the saints many of whom were deeply anchored to the tradition, in the manner of spiritual dwellers, but also questioning and challenging the bounds of that tradition and their own spiritual experience within it, in the manner of seekers. Taylor references Teresa of Avila and St. Francis de Sales ("The Church Speaks," p. 18); Wuthnow references the rule of St Benedict with its call to both stability and conversion (*After Heaven*, p. 5).

⁸ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, pp. 3-4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

spirituality of seeking.¹⁰ Dwellers are, by definition, tied to a particular faith tradition and engage in regular and consistent participation in the liturgical life of a congregation within that tradition – they are churched. But what distinguishes the dweller’s close tie to the faith tradition is how her view of the sacred binds her to that tradition. Dwellers maintain that God is encountered in Church-designated sacred places, and that divine truths are revealed exclusively through the teachings of the Church, and so they are tied to the Church in a rather fixed way, viewing the Church as the exclusive conduit for communion with the divine, the sole path to salvation. They are anchored, as it were, with a very short chain.

Seekers, on the other hand, have a more complex relationship with faith communities. Some seekers, those who Drew Christiansen calls “the spirituals,” may or may not be affiliated with a faith tradition or congregation.¹¹ There is a sense of spiritual homelessness that attends this way of seeking but this should not be interpreted necessarily to mean that one does not belong, although it can mean this for some. What better distinguishes the spirituals is not their membership status but conditions for membership. As Christiansen notes, for the spirituals, the standard for belonging “is not the religious authority of any church as a repository of revelation,” as it is for dwellers, “but rather the satisfaction of their own often inarticulate searching.”¹² Whereas dwellers belong on the basis of perceived spiritual and moral authority of the community and its leaders, the spirituals belongs on the basis of how well a community satisfies the needs and desires of their spiritual search – their relationship with a faith tradition is instrumental.

However, not all seekers view their relationship to a particular religious tradition as instrumental. Not all seekers have a free-floating spiritual identity that can land just anywhere. Some seekers experience themselves, like dwellers, as anchored to a particular faith

¹⁰ It would also fail to account for encounters, such as the one described in this *America* article by James J. DiGiacomo between a seeker clergy and dweller parishioner, in which a key difference between a seeker and a dweller arises from a difference in the way each understands *how* we should search for the truth at <http://americamagazine.org/issue/533/article/little-gray-cells>.

¹¹ Drew Christiansen, “Engaging the Spirituals: The Secular Challenge to the New Evangelism” in *America*, March 26, 2012, pp. 17-19.

¹² Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, p. 18.

tradition and understand their spiritual identity to be deeply bound up with that tradition. Yet they are not tied to the tradition in the same way as dwellers are tied. The difference turns on their different view of the sacred as fluid rather than fixed, their belief that God may manifest in any number of places and experiences, and that divine wisdom may be revealed in any number of religious or spiritual traditions. These seekers are anchored to the faith, but with a very long chain that enables them happily to drift with curiosity and openness beyond the boundaries of their professed faith, to seek divine encounter in nature, or in the holy sites or texts of other traditions. One thinks here of figures such as Thomas Merton who, as a Trappist monk and Catholic priest, was on the one hand clearly anchored within Catholicism, but on the other hand was unambiguously a seeker, encountering the divine especially within nature and within the wisdom of the Zen Buddhist tradition. A distinctive feature of seekers in this camp is the fluidity of their spiritual identity. They have a spiritual identity that is, in one sense, clearly rooted in a particular spiritual home, but they seek out wisdom and spiritual experience outside the boundaries of their religious home and allow those encounters to influence their understanding of the faith on offer in that home, as for example, the way Merton's Buddhism shaped his Catholic spirituality.

We might summarize the three possibilities here metaphorically: Dwellers are anchored to a faith tradition with a very short chain; some seekers are anchored, but with a long chain; other seekers, the spirituals, are not anchored at all, and of this group those who "belong" to a faith community are tied loosely to it with something akin to a slip knot, ready to easily move on when the community no longer serves their spiritual needs.

Relationship to the Sacred and Experience of the Divine

Accordingly, the orientations of dwelling and seeking differ in their relationship to the sacred and the divine. Dwellers take the sacred to be fixed and emphasize clear and fairly rigid boundaries distinguishing the sacred from the profane and protecting sacred space from its surroundings. Dwellers emphasize buildings, such as churches, and places within buildings, such as altars and sacristies, as sites to encounter the divine. Dwellers might access the sacred in

Eucharistic adoration, for example, but not, typically, in the mundane activities of ordinary life. For seekers, by contrast, the sacred “is fluid, portable, and spirituality must be pursued with a sense of God’s people being dispersed.”¹³ Seekers draw fewer or no boundaries demarcating the sacred from the profane. For seekers, rather “than being in a place that is by definition spiritual, the sacred is found momentarily” in almost any experience – even in activities like mowing the lawn or viewing a full moon.¹⁴

Spiritual Formation and Faith

Dwellers and seekers have distinctly different understandings of the process of spiritual formation and correspondingly different understandings of faith. For seekers, spiritual formation is a matter of an individual choosing her path, struggling to define herself in relation to the transcendent and to develop an authentic spiritual self. For dwellers on the other hand, the path has already been charted and spiritual formation involves conformity to rituals and rules in order to habituate oneself into a spiritual tradition already established and handed down. Whereas dwellers experience faith as an inherited given, seekers experience faith as something one strives for; it is not taken for granted, but is an option one has to choose.¹⁵

Relationship to Religious Leaders and Institutions

Seekers and dwellers also relate differently to religious authorities and institution. Christiansen offers an apt description of the spirituals (one class of seekers) on this score:

¹³ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 5. These differences can also be seen in how seekers and dwellers relate to liturgy. Seekers typically don more casual attire, which “blurs the lines between liturgy and everyday life” whereas dwellers are more likely to dress up as an act of distinguishing liturgy from the everyday. And dwellers are likely to prefer a liturgy that is “highly uniform” and texts and music that emphasize heaven as a place where God is located and where believers are headed, whereas seekers are likely to resonate with liturgies that are highly variable and texts and music that deal more with momentary experiences of the divine in everyday life (*After Heaven*, p. 9).

¹⁵ McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” p. 5.

What they reject is conformity in a rules-bound institution ... They resist reinforcement of ritual distinctions between the ordinary faithful and the ordained. They want to explore the world of faith and plumb the depths of the spirit in the company of like-minded people. They welcome the company of the officially religious who can help them but balk at rigid orthodoxies, imagined or prescribed in the name of tradition.¹⁶

Seekers who are more firmly anchored in a faith tradition may value its rules and traditions more deeply than the spirituals. Nonetheless, they are likely to emphasize the spirit of the law over the letter of the law, so to speak, and to value flexibility and adaptability over time rather than rigid constancy. Dwellers, by contrast, seek “the constant guidance available in a Church tradition and the desire to have this articulated as amply as possible” by religious authorities who are perceived as having spiritual and moral authority over and above the laity.¹⁷ For dwellers, the church is at its best “not when it is questioning, adapting, changing, but when it stands firm on its age-old answers”.¹⁸ Dwellers appeal to the moral and spiritual authority or religious leaders for answers, and “see the long tradition of the Church and the certainties of its teaching, as the road to salvation.”¹⁹

“Believing Still” vs. “Believing Again”

Taylor suggests another way of drawing distinctions between dwellers and seekers as between those who “believe still” and those who “believe again” respectively. One feature of the secular age, which is also the backdrop for this distinction, is allegiance to what Taylor calls the immanent frame. Those who “believe still” are those who have never bought entirely into the immanent frame, which understands the world and human experience to be completely explainable in terms of the causal laws of empirical science. For those who “believe still”, religious faith has never been threatened by the

¹⁶ Christiansen, “Engaging the Spirituals,” p. 18.

¹⁷ McLean, “Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” p. 5.

¹⁸ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” p. 20.

¹⁹ Ibid.

immanent frame. Taylor likens these to the spiritual dwellers. Those who “believe again” are those who have questioned or confronted the real possibility that religious faith is not an appropriate or viable stance in the modern world, but who nonetheless come to believe that there is something more in human experience than can be explained by the immanent frame, and so come to choose the stance of religious faith in a kind of conversion experience. Taylor likens these to the spiritual seekers.²⁰

Spiritual Orientation of Institutions

Finally, religious institutions can also express a spiritual orientation that emphasizes either seeking or dwelling. Institutions which emphasize dwelling are “tightly bounded and hierarchical, prescribing behavior through a formalized set of rules; individuals [are] expected to conform to those rules, indeed, to internalize them.”²¹ By contrast, institutions which emphasize seeking involve “looser connections,” encourage diversity and diffuse power arrangements, and maintain that “practical activity takes precedence over organizational positions. Rather than rules, symbolic messages prevail.”²²

3. Spiritual Violence

Taylor posits that mistrust of the Church among spiritual seekers is rooted in their experience of a church that not only favors dwelling but that is hostile to seeking. He references Church teachings about women’s ordination and homosexuality as two contemporary examples of the authoritarian, dogmatic attitude and tone the Church has taken, which has undermined its credibility with seekers. However grass-roots movements among American Catholic women and LGBT Catholics suggest that their mistrust of the Church is also rooted in their experience of spiritual violence perpetrated by the Church through these teachings. Taylor emphasizes epistemic and spiritual foreclosure in the way the Church presents its teachings as the problem; these movements emphasize the spiritual violence of the

²⁰ Taylor, “The Church Speaks,” pp. 21-23.

²¹ Wuthnow, *After Heaven*, pp. 8-9.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

teachings themselves and the double-violation of then being silenced or censured by Church leaders for questioning religious teachings that one experiences as spiritually abusive.

In the first decade of the 21st century, both Catholic women and LGBT Catholics used the term ‘spiritual violence’ to name a distinct form of violence that uses sacred objects, texts, teachings, or rituals to violate a person in her spiritual self and harm her relationship with God. Spiritual violence is violence in the sense of violation of persons and so has resonance with psychological violence to the extent that it can be inflicted without the use of physical force.²³ Yet spiritual violence is distinctively spiritual in terms of both its means, which are the symbols, texts or rituals that mediate a person’s relationship with God, and in terms of what it harms, namely, a person’s spiritual self – her sense of and posture toward the transcendent. The kind of spiritual violence members of these groups have identified manifests structurally. They are not charging that a particular Church leader or group has intentionally engaged in targeted acts of spiritual abuse, though some have. Rather, their claim is that the religious institution of Roman Catholicism is a spiritually violent place for women and LGBT persons because norms that violate the spiritual personhood of members of these groups partially constitute the institution, its traditions and rituals, and the understanding of God it promotes.²⁴

In 2001, the LGTB Catholic group Dignity USA, teamed up with the interfaith group Soulforce, to launch a “Stop Spiritual Violence

²³ Elsewhere I propose that violating harms are agent-caused harms that express an attitude of disrespect toward or degradation of the other and are capable of inflicting deep and enduring damage to the self. Theresa W. Tobin, “Spiritual Violence” *under review*.

²⁴ Moreover, not all spiritually harmful institutional norms are violations. We have to distinguish between aspects of the institution that are violent and aspects of the institution that themselves may not be violating but that support violence. Sexist or misogynist interpretations of scripture are violent on my account because they are agent caused, express spiritually demeaning attitudes toward women, and are capable of extensively damaging the spiritual identities of women who pursue formation in this community. Theological teachings that valorize suffering as a way to draw closer to God may not be violating, even if it turns out they are otherwise psychologically or spiritually harmful, because they do not satisfy the disrespect condition of a violation. However, in conjunction with other aspects of the institution, these teachings may function to enable or support violence.

Campaign.” This campaign called on the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to end the use of sacred texts and religious teachings to advance false and degrading views about homosexual persons and relationships. In a press release about the campaign, the Rev. Mel White from Soulforce highlighted official Church teachings with which the group takes issue, which include those teachings that call “same-sex unions ‘a deplorable distortion’ and adoption by gay parents ‘a grave danger’”, as well as teachings that “describe homosexual orientation as ‘objectively disordered’ and homosexual acts as ‘intrinsically evil.’ ... Vatican statements have reaffirmed the Church’s views that homosexuals should not be allowed to adopt, teach, coach, be married, ordained, or serve in the military.”²⁵

The Executive Director of Dignity USA, Marianne Duddy, charged that Church teaching about homosexuality amount to a kind of holy war against sexual minorities which has left “suicide, wasted lives, ruined relationships, broken families, discrimination and physical violence” in its wake.²⁶ The campaign draws special attention, however, to the distinctively *spiritual* harm LGBT Catholics endure when their faith and their relationship with God is damaged as a result of what Rembert Truluck calls the “pollution of spiritual resources.” As Truluck puts it:

When policemen become criminals, what happens to law enforcement? When firemen become pyro-maniacs, what becomes of fire protection? When preachers and religious leaders become spiritual abusers and deceivers, what happens to faith, hope and love? The pollution of spiritual resources by homophobia and radical distortions of the truth about the Bible and God has cut off millions of people from the spiritual encouragement and help that they need and deserve.²⁷

The “pollution of spiritual resources by homophobia and radical distortions of the truth about the Bible and God” which has cut off millions of people from loving communion with the divine is the

²⁵ <http://www.archives.soulforce.org/2000/12/05/vatican-waging-holy-war-against-sexual-minorities/>.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Rembert Truluck, “Spiritual Violence” online at: <http://www.whosoever.org/v5i6/violence.html>.

phenomenon of spiritual violence. The sacred texts, symbols and worship practices through which a person comes to experience and know God are the very same means through which she is actively degraded and debased. When this happens, a person is at great risk of experiencing her degradation and debasement as delivered or sanctioned by God. Dignity USA and Soulforce are charging that spiritual formation through the Church places LGBT Catholics at risk of experiencing God as an abuser rather than as a loving presence, and encourages a relationship with God rooted in inappropriate shame and self-loathing, rather than humility, love, and gratitude.

Some Catholic women have leveled a similar charge that the Church perpetrates spiritual violence against women. In 2010, the Vatican released a document condemning the attempt to ordain women into the Roman Catholic priesthood as a crime, and as grave as the sexual abuse committed by Catholic clergy against children.²⁸ Church leaders were careful to distinguish these two crimes as different in kind: attempting to ordain women is a crime against the sacraments, whereas pedophilia is a serious moral offense. Yet the document designates both as *delictio graviora* – the most egregious sins in the Church – linking the two in perception even if not in fact, and giving the impression that within their respective domains the two are equally grave. Media outlets focused on this as a public relations debacle for the Church, but many Catholic women experienced profound spiritual and emotional pain upon hearing this report and some have called it a manifestation of spiritual violence against women. In a *National Catholic Reporter* editorial Jaime Manson writes this:

For women across the globe ... this is a statement of profound spiritual violence against half of the human race already routinely victimized on the basis of their God-given anatomy [T]he church's statements only reinforce the idea that female bodies are not of equal value in the eyes of God, that they do not hold the same potential to be a sacred vessel of the life of God in our world Women, and those who attempt to ordain them, were classified as committing crimes against the

²⁸ <http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2010/07/modifications-made-in-normae-de.html>.

sacraments. Such crimes are metaphysically serious in that they constitute any action that desecrates the Eucharist. Not only can God not work through the body of a woman, now, it seems, women's bodies actually defile the Eucharist [F]or those women struggling to worship or work in the Catholic Church, these latest norms demonstrate unequivocally a painful truth: the church can be, and often is, a very toxic place for women.²⁹

Manson's charge is that Church officials build in to sacramental life the idea that women's bodies would defile or desecrate the Eucharist. Catholic women's pursuit of connection with the divine through the ritual life of their faith tradition is mediated by the message that their God-given material nature is defective, a sacramental pollutant, and that God Himself set things up this way. Individuals vary in their ability to resist or work around these influences, but Manson is charging that the church as an institution is spiritually violent to the extent that it erects spiritual obstacles to loving communion with God for women, and places women who pursue spiritual formation within its bounds at considerable risk of spiritual injury.

4. The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence

In this section, I draw from both scholarly sources and victim testimony to examine more closely the spiritual injury that can result from the kinds of spiritual violation just described. I highlight elements of victim testimony that are suggestive of the person's spiritual orientation as either a seeker or dweller. These details serve as groundwork for exploring how a person's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may impact her experience of spiritual violence, and conversely how experience of this kind of spiritual violation may impact a person's spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller, both of which I take up in the next section.

²⁹ Jaime L. Manson, "New norms are much more than a PR disaster," in *National Catholic Reporter* online at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/new-norms-are-much-more-pr-disaster>.

The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence against Gay Catholic Men

Dignity USA advocates for the spiritual wellbeing of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Catholics. Here I discuss the experiences of a well-known political blogger who is also a gay Catholic man and who has written quite publically about his own struggle to reconcile his gay identity with his Catholic faith identity.³⁰ In his 1994 essay, "Alone Again, Naturally" published in the *New Republic*, Andrew Sullivan presents a measured and quite moving account of his struggle to live authentically as both gay and Catholic, and chronicles the journey which eventually convinced him that the Church's position on homosexuality is deeply flawed and that it is, to use the language of this paper, spiritually violent.³¹

Sullivan recounts that although no one discussed it openly, but only in derogatory, veiled language, he learned early on from broader cultural influences, from his family, and from his Church that homosexuality was an abomination. At 15 years old, as he "filed up to the Communion rail to face mild-mannered Fr. Simmons for the umpteenth time" he asked God to help him with "that."³² "That" was his as of yet unnamed but known homosexual orientation. Despite "knowing" at this early age that his sexuality was something to be ashamed of and something to hide, it was also something he took first to God.³³ For Sullivan the challenge was not "how to make what [he] *did* conform with what the Church taught [him] ... but how to make who [he] was conform with what the Church taught [him]."³⁴ This

³⁰ Lesbians, bisexual and transgendered persons likely experience spiritual violence differently from gay men given the complex interactions between gender identity and sexual identity within a larger context which valorizes maleness and masculinity but demonizes homosexual or bisexual orientation. Gay men may, for example, may experience relative privilege in so far as they function as men, whereas lesbians may suffer the double disadvantage of spiritual repression on the basis of both gender and sexuality. I do not intend the remarks in this section to be easily generalizations to all LGBT persons, although I imagine there are at least some similarities in the kinds of spiritual violation members of these groups experience.

³¹ Andrew Sullivan, "Alone Again, Naturally," *The New Republic*, vol. 211, issue 22, 1994, pp. 47-55.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

distinction is important because it indicates that the struggle is not merely to modify behavior but to become a certain sort of self.

In his battle to make who he is comport with Church teaching about who he ought to be, Sullivan engaged in serious and prayerful study of the church's teachings on homosexuality.³⁵ Despite a deeper intellectual understanding of the Church's position, however, over time his attempts faithfully to live out these teachings led Sullivan to conclude that the Church was ultimately leading people into "two simultaneous and opposite directions: a deeper respect for homosexuals, and a sterner rejection of almost anything they might do," – the familiar, "Love the sinner, hate the sin" line.³⁶

As an adolescent and young adult, Sullivan tried to tackle the "love the sinner, hate the sin" paradox by suppressing and denying his sexual identity, a move which had devastating consequences both for his psyche and for his faith. He found ways to "expunge love from life"; he developed "intense intellectual friendships" ... but kept them "restrained in a carapace of artificiality to prevent passion from breaking out"; he "adhered to a hopelessly pessimistic view of the world" in order to explain his "refusal to take part in life's pleasures, and to rationalize the dark and deep depressions that periodically overwhelmed [him]."³⁷ The impact on his faith was equally stark. He describes his faith and his sexuality as entering a dialectic in which "faith propelled me away from emotional and sexual longing, and the deprivation that this created required me to resort even more dogmatically to my faith."³⁸ The struggle to suppress his sexual identity sparked "an intense religiosity that could provide me with the spiritual resources I needed to fortify my barren emotional life."³⁹ His faith took on a "caricatured shape, aloof and dogmatic, ritualistic and awesome. As time passed, a theological austerity became the essential complement to an emotional emptiness."⁴⁰

Based on these experiences, Sullivan eventually concluded that,

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52. Sullivan references in particular the 1975 "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" and the 1986 Pastoral Letter, "On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons."

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

... the Church's teachings created a dynamic that in practice led ... to pathology; by requiring the first lie in a human life, which would lead to an entire battery of others, they contorted human beings into caricatures of solitary eccentricity, frustrated bitterness, incapacitating anxiety – and helped perpetuate all the human wickedness and cruelty and insensitivity that such lives inevitably carry in their wake. These doctrines could not in practice do what they wanted to do: they could not both affirm human dignity and deny human love.⁴¹

In Sullivan's experience, Church teaching on homosexuality encouraged a habitual renunciation of his most basic capacity to love, which led to the perversion of his spiritual and moral character and to disordered relationships both with other people and ultimately with God. The experiences Sullivan describes are what Rembert Truluck is referring to when he speaks of the "pollution of spiritual resources" which cuts a person off from loving communion with God. Sullivan did not come to reject official Church teachings about homosexuality

⁴¹ Ibid., 54. Sullivan targets specifically the comparison the Church draws between alcoholism and same-sex desire as analogously objective disorders. Both homosexuals and alcoholics are counseled to stunt the development and expression of their disordered conditions by renouncing homosexual acts and alcoholic acts, respectively. Yet the former has to do with one's fundamental capacity to love; the latter does not, and this difference makes all the difference. It is worth quoting Sullivan (p. 54) at length on this point:

"If alcoholism is overcome by a renunciation of alcoholic acts, then recovery [still] allows the human being to realize his or her full potential, a part of which ... is the supreme act of self-giving in a life of matrimonial love. But if homosexuality is overcome by a renunciation of homosexual emotional and sexual union, the opposite is achieved: the human being is liberated into sacrifice and pain, barred from the matrimonial love that the Church holds to be intrinsic, for most people, to the state of human flourishing ... In other words, the gay or lesbian person is deemed disordered at a far deeper level than the alcoholic: at the very level of the human capacity to love and be loved by another human being, in a union based on fidelity and self-giving. Their renunciation of such love is not guided toward some ulterior or greater goal – as the celibacy of the religious orders is designed to intensify their devotion to God. Rather, the loveless homosexual destiny is precisely toward nothing, a negation of human fulfillment."

Here Sullivan points out that renunciation of homosexual emotional and sexual union is ultimately renunciation of a central aspect of a one's capacity to love.

because he found them intellectually confused (although he does marshal an argument to this end) but because his attempts to live out these teachings led to moral and spiritual pathology and ultimately to alienation from God and from other people.

The Spiritual Impact of Spiritual Violence against Catholic Women

Although official church teaching has long excluded women from the sacrament of Holy Orders, only in the last 40 years have a growing number of theologians examined the impact of this exclusion on Catholic women's spiritual experience.⁴² In an early (1983) article on the topic, Sandra Schneiders discusses, in particular, women's experience of sacral unworthiness and spiritual inferiority.⁴³ Sacral unworthiness is the sense that simply in virtue of being female one is unworthy to participate or assist in sacramental life. Since women's exclusion from ministry is justified as God's will, God's own design, which Church officials could not alter even if they wanted to,⁴⁴ women's relationship with God easily may be shaped by the belief that their spiritual inferiority and sacral unworthiness is also God's will.

⁴² See for example, Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Beacon Press, 1983); Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Violence against Women*, ed. with M. Shawn Copeland. *Concilium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), *The Non-ordination of Women and the Politics of Power*, ed. with Hermann Häring (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1999), and *In the Power of Wisdom: Feminist Spiritualities of Struggle*, ed. with M. Pilar Aquino (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000); and Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, N.Y.: Crossroads Press, 1992).

⁴³ Sandra M. Schneiders, "The Effects of Women's Experience on Their Spirituality," *Spirituality Today*, vol. 35, no. 2, 1983, pp. 100-116.

⁴⁴ The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sets this out clearly, quoting the decree *Inter insigniores*:

Only a baptized man (*vir*) receives sacred ordination. The Lord Jesus chose men (*viri*) to form the college of the twelve apostles, and the apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry. The college of bishops, with whom the priests are united in the priesthood, makes the college of the twelve an ever-present and ever-active reality until Christ's return. The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord Himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible. (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P4X.HTM#2O. No. 1578 & 1579.)

The wound of sacral unworthiness is deepened by another characteristic feature of Catholic ritual life, namely, the presentation of God in almost exclusively male terms – what Schneiders calls the “divinization of maleness” – despite the lack of scriptural support for this practice. Scripture provides numerous images of God, many of which are feminine and some of which are female personifications,⁴⁵ but staunch resistance by Church leaders to proposals for more inclusive liturgical language, or even just the bristling of ordinary lay people when one refers to God as “she” indicates how effectively the official Catholic imagination has been shaped by a male God, and the hard work one has to do to liberate oneself from these imaginative limits.⁴⁶ This divinization of maleness coupled with an exclusively male priesthood encourages the spiritual imagination to equate God with male, and conversely to equate male with God, with potentially devastating spiritual consequences for women. As Schneiders explains:

Perhaps the most profoundly destructive is the deep sense of exclusion from the divine that women imbibe ... God, to women, is man “writ large.” Men are God “writ small.” God and man belong to the same order of things and from that order women are excluded ... A second negative effect on women’s spirituality ... is that women (and men as well) have most often experienced God the way they have experienced men. They admire, depend upon, and defer to God. But they can also be dominated, used, undervalued, and basically despised by God. They are ever guilty, a nuisance, and can justify themselves only by unrelenting service, continual performance, and lowly self-effacement.⁴⁷

Women who pursue spiritual formation in such an environment are at risk of “imbibing” a sense of their own divinely ordained inferiority as a central aspect of their spiritual self, which informs how they relate to both God and other people. They are at risk of experiencing God as either authoring or reinforcing broader cultural

⁴⁵ E.g. Is. 66:13; Is. 49:15; Psalm 131:2.

⁴⁶ See Elizabeth A Johnson, *She Who Is*, especially chapter 1.

⁴⁷ “The Effects of Women’s Experience,” p. 101.

messages of female inferiority, and they are in turn at risk of experiencing themselves as undervalued or even despised by God.⁴⁸

It is into this long history of conceptual devaluation of women around which sacramental life has been built that Jaime Manson's editorial charging the Vatican with spiritual violence against women fits. Women's exclusion from Holy Orders along with whatever spiritual injuries that exclusion may inflict is not new. Manson's concern is that this most recent Vatican declaration packs a new spiritual punch and with even more brutal spiritual force. The new message does not merely re-emphasize exclusion; it emphasizes the stronger position that women's bodies are sacramental pollutants and would desecrate the Eucharist. This message strengthens the divinization of maleness and sense of sacral unworthiness that places women at risk of experiencing God as hostile or abusive.

Michelle Casey's⁴⁹ experience reveals the profound spiritual injury to women that can result from spiritual formation within a religious institution that encourages a sense of sacral unworthiness and spiritual inferiority in women. Casey's descriptions of her early spiritual life are descriptions of a dweller. She was a rigidly rule-following cradle Catholic who pitied her non-Catholic associates who she believed were hell bound. Faith was a matter of conforming to Church rules and teachings, which instructed her especially in how to be a "good girl" in God's eyes. Being a good girl had a lot to do with sexual purity. Casey's faith was based on fear of God's punishment should she step out of line, and on the sense that as a girl she was especially prone to sexual sin. Since she could not change the fact that she was a girl, she says she spent the bulk of her life trying to justify herself to God by putting herself down, belittling and judging herself as a way of making restitution with God.

In 2002, when the clergy sexual abuse crisis broke publicly, Casey experienced an enormous sense of betrayal that she likened to a major

⁴⁸ For a good recent summary of this conceptual history see, Margaret Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York, N.Y.: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

⁴⁹ The name Michelle Casey is a pseudonym for the women who shared with me the experiences recounted here and who gave me permission to share these experiences without using her name. All paraphrasing of her experiences and direct quotes attributed to Casey reference unpublished interview transcripts from December 6th, 2013, Milwaukee, WI.

infidelity, as if she discovered that her husband had been unfaithful for the entire 50 years of their marriage. Casey was not a direct victim of sexual abuse, but she had spent her whole life fearfully obeying priests and trying to live out the teachings of the Church and all along Church leaders were violating those teachings in the grossest way while condemning lay Catholics and women in particular as hell bound for the smallest transgressions. Her trust was so completely shattered that she left the Church and began what she described as a quest of spiritual seeking.

A few years into this spiritual quest Casey attended a non-religious women's retreat. On the first evening, facilitators led participants in an introductory exercise in which they asked participants to "kneel down and pray before your god." The idea was to get people pre-reflectively in touch with what "gods" anchor their pursuit of meaning and purpose. The image that came immediately into Casey's mind, and that she could not shake no matter how hard she tried to imagine something else, was an image of the Roman collar. Casey was stunned by the exercise because she realized that the "god" she had worshipped for over sixty years was "the priest." The spiritual violation Casey endured led to a form of idolatry in which she worshiped not God, but priests who had shepherded her into a "faith" based on fear, anxiety, and a deep sense of shame about being a woman. Casey described the exercise as both freeing because it revealed a crucial truth about her life, and devastating as she faced a terrible realization that her spiritual capacities had been recruited over the course of a life-time to support her own degradation and to lead her away from loving relationship with God.

Spiritual Violence, Seeking, and Dwelling

Thus far I have tried to foreground spiritual violence as an overlooked mode of violence perpetrated against women and LGBT persons by the institutional Church. The experiences members of these groups are naming as spiritual violence are not new, but the more public naming of these experiences as a form of Church-based violence is new. I have suggested that experience of spiritual violence is a significant source of mistrust of the Church among members of these groups. But victims' experiences of this mode of violence have not been uniform and the lenses of seeking and dwelling may shed

some light on these divergent responses. In this section, I examine the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling and, conversely, the disjunction between seekers and dwellers through the lens of spiritual violence. Specifically, I explore how one's spiritual orientation as either a dweller or seeker may influence one's experience of and responses to structural spiritual violence, as well as how the experience of spiritual violence may influence one's spiritual orientation and specifically how it may be an important source of the rise in the number of seekers among American Catholics. I use the term 'explore' quite literally here. This section is exploratory and suggestive. I am not intending to tell a causal story about influences or to present empirically verified correlations – this is not an account of how these phenomena in fact influence each other, but an exploration of how they may do so. Nonetheless, these reflections offer important considerations for a Church interested in bridging a perceived disjunction between seekers and dwellers and for discerning how it might relate spiritually to both.

*Impact of One's Spiritual Orientation on One's Experience of
Spiritual Violence*

Dwellers: It may be more difficult for dwellers to perceive structural spiritual violence than it is for seekers to perceive it, because a dweller's threshold for conscious experience of violation is likely much higher than a seeker's threshold. This is in part because a dweller's spiritual identity is so wholly constituted by, and in a fairly rigid and fixed way, the norms, rules, and ritual practices of the institution. To perceive violation built into these norms is a serious threat to the spiritual self who is so deeply constituted by them. There is, as it were, a great incentive of self-protection not to see the flaws in the structure, since it is just a short step then to see the flaws in the self that has been so thoroughly constituted by the structure.

The dweller's orientation, then, may shape her experience of structural spiritual violence in at least one of two ways: internalization or compartmentalization. Dwellers may be more likely than seekers to internalize the harm of spiritual violation because their spiritual orientation does not permit questioning and does not emphasize the search for spiritual authenticity, but instead emphasizes conformity to and habituation into the ritual life of the community. Michelle Casey's

early experiences of formation seem to exemplify this. Dwellers who internalize the harm may deny charges of structural violence and typically come to endorse and defend the violating norms. Moreover, if one internalizes the harm, she may not consciously experience spiritual violation but may nonetheless suffer from some of its effects as these are borne out in her spiritual personality. The young Andrew Sullivan who attempted to live out Church teachings about homosexuality might be an example of this response. Initially he did not overtly experience violation, but he suffered nonetheless from latent spiritual angst, a spiritual self-marked by dishonesty, anxiety, and bitterness and a deep sense of self-loathing, which he later came to realize were the consequences of attempting to live within a spiritually violent structure – one that could not both affirm human dignity while denying his capacity to love. Other dwellers respond to structural spiritual violence by compartmentalizing spiritual experience, attempting to maintain faithful commitment to the Church and its teachings and simply ignoring or shelving those aspects that pose a potential threat to one's spiritual self. The likely makes for a fragmented spiritual self who may experience residual or latent spiritual angst often just below the surface, but nonetheless people in this camp manage to dwell, albeit not entirely at ease by compartmentalizing.

One might object at this point that my analysis forecloses the possibility that someone might escape violation from structural spiritual violence altogether, and through very thoroughgoing conformity to the rules and traditions of the Church cultivate a loving communion with the divine and a healthy spiritual self. Indeed, some dwellers will deny that the structure is violent and resent the charge that their denial is a sign that they have internalized the harm and so are operating with a kind of false consciousness. Individual resilience to structurally inflicted violence varies, and some people for a variety of reasons may escape conscious experience of violation.⁵⁰ In the case

⁵⁰ In a four-part series of organized discussions entitled "More Than a Monologue. Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church" (sponsored by Fordham University, Yale Divinity School, Union Theological Seminary and Fairfield University) an array of perspectives on these issues were shared, including responses from gay and lesbian Catholics who do not experience Church teaching on homosexuality as violating. For access to panel presentations: <http://digital.lib>

of structural violence, however, one cannot look exclusively at individual conscious experience; one has to look at how the structure functions to produce a set of options for the believer, none of which is entirely free from violation. That is, a structure is violent if that structure leaves open no non-violating options for people, even if individuals do not always consciously experience the harm and even if some manage to work around it.⁵¹ An individual's awareness of the violence of a structure she may participate in, and her experience of violation as a result of participation in that structure will depend on a number of other features of her situation. Moreover, one's awareness of these things is rarely "all or nothing," for a structure or institution that is undeniably *partially* constituted by norms that violate persons may not be wholly constituted by such norms.

I also want to acknowledge a possibility that emerges when one considers structural spiritual violence from a strictly theological perspective which maintains that an all-loving and all-powerful divine being is capable of circumventing humanly installed institutions, and that the mystery of God's grace may reach victims despite the violating conditions of their religious home. That is, from this perspective, one's experience of and relationship with God is never entirely up to her, or entirely reducible to her participation within a human institution, and so a person may manage to experience loving communion with God despite an institution that erects barriers to such communion.

Seekers: Seekers may more readily perceive structural spiritual violence because their spiritual identities are less rigidly constituted by the norms of the institution, but their experience of and response to it will vary depending on the kind of seeker one is. "The spirituals," those who have a free-floating spirituality but who may nonetheless find resources within the Church for the journey, may well notice the violent structures of the Church but are likely not to experience violation of the spiritual self because their spiritual identities are not

www.fordham.edu/cdm/search/searchterm/more%20than%20a%20monologue/or%20der/nosort.

⁵¹ Factors including family influences, local parish life and experiences, resources from other parts of the faith tradition, and an individual's own psychological resilience can mitigate the potentially damaging impact of a spiritually violent environment, just as there are sources of resilience which may protect a person from the damaging impact of psychologically abusive parenting.

constituted through the Church. Awareness of the violent structures may cast a suspect pall over the Church as a viable resource for the journey, and may lead this group of seekers to seek elsewhere – to perceive the church as outdated, out of touch, but they are not likely to experience violation of the spiritual self because their spiritual self has not been constituted through these structures. By contrast, those seekers whose spiritual identities are partially constituted through formation in the Church, but whose spiritual selves are more porous, malleable, and fluid than the spiritualities of dwellers, are likely to perceive the violation and to experience anger, and so to dissent from certain aspects of Church teaching and to engage in radical questioning of the faith and negotiation of their relationship to it.

*Impact of Experience of Spiritual Violence on One's
Spiritual Orientation*

Just as a person's initial spiritual orientation may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence, so too the experience of spiritual violence may influence a shift in one's spiritual orientation in any number of ways. I want to look especially, though not exclusively, at how this experience may be one source of shift from dwelling to seeking. I focus here only on people who gravitate toward dwelling and to those seekers who are anchored to the Church, but nonetheless gravitate toward a seeking spirituality.⁵²

Seekers: Spiritual violence may lead seekers into loss of Catholic faith, but not a loss of religious faith, or loss of religious faith but not a loss of spirituality. Because their spiritual identities are less thoroughly and rigidly constituted through institutional norms and practices, and because the boundaries of their spiritual selves are more porous and fluid, people who have been seekers all along may be better positioned to maintain a sense of religious faith, or at least a sense of connection to the transcendent in the aftermath of spiritual

⁵² I am not discussing the spirituals, since in my view they are likely not to be spiritually violated. A person's ability to be spiritually violated by participation in a religious institution turns on the extent to which his or her spiritual identity is constituted through participation in that institution, and the spirituals, by definition, do not have spiritual identities constituted through a religious institution.

violation. Their connection to the Church is not instrumental, but is integral to their faith and spiritual identity, which is why they experience some level of violation. Yet their seeking orientation may protect them from a total crisis of faith, because it is easier for them to separate God from the places and practices through which we encounter God. Thus seekers who have experienced spiritual violence in the Church, may lose their Catholic faith but retain a sense of religious faith and seek communion with God through participation in another religious homes. Or, they may lose religious faith becoming suspicious of institutionalized religious communities generally speaking, perhaps because of a sense that they are prone to corruption, but nonetheless retain a sense of the spiritual and a desire to connect with God, though be only loosely affiliated with a congregation, if at all (perhaps they become a “spiritual”). The seeking orientation may be more likely to protect a person’s spiritual capacities from thoroughgoing spiritual corruption as a result of structural spiritual violation because it does not identify God so closely with institutionally designated places and doctrines.

Dwellers: I’d like to suggest that dwellers who have conscious experience of spiritual violation are likely to respond in one of two ways: either (1) they experience a spiritual crisis that generates a total break from religious faith, a rejection of their former spiritual self, or (2) they become seekers, having to reconstitute their spiritual identities, negotiating a new one either within the faith tradition of origin or within an alternative religious home. That is, because the spiritual self is so thoroughly and densely constituted through the norms and rituals of the Church, the conscious recognition of structural spiritual violation can bring with it a crisis of the spiritual self: one is likely either to abandon religiosity and faith altogether, or to become a seeker.

Although initially it might be more difficult for dwellers to perceive spiritual violence, if and when the conscious experience of violation comes, it may be all the more severe. Dwellers might be likened to a piece of wood that may bend gradually under the pressures of the violating structure until one day some manifestation of the violation is too much to bear and the wood – the spiritual self – breaks. Because the threshold for their conscious experience of violation is higher, because it takes more to shake them, so to speak, the spiritual consequences once they are shaken may be more severe.

This seems to be what happened to Casey in 2002, when she learned of the child sexual abuse scandal in the Church. Casey has a total crisis of faith that led her initially to leave the Church and to reject God. Because the dweller makes such a tight association between the divine a specific set of institutional norms and practices, dwellers may be at greater risk of conflating the divine with the symbols, places, and practices that mediate experience of the divine, which is precisely what happened to Casey who came to conflate God with the Church and in particular with priests. If dwellers then come to experience these spiritual mediators as abusive or poisoned, they may be at greater risk of experiencing the divine itself as abusive and thus may be at a higher risk than seekers of experiencing a total crisis of faith. They may be more inclined to abandon religious faith altogether rather than to retain a sense of connection with God beyond the norms and rituals of the Church and seek healthy spirituality elsewhere, or navigate a healthier path within the tradition of origin.

For those dwellers who do not have a complete spiritual crisis, their conscious experience of spiritual violation may mean that it is no longer possible for them to dwell safely and securely in the spiritual home of origin and so they have to negotiate their spirituality. And yet the pull of dwelling keeps them tied, even anchored, to the inherited faith they love and experience as a deep part of their identity that they are unable and unwilling fully to relinquish. For people in this camp, the stance of faith generally speaking has not been threatened, but their stance in relation to their particular spiritual home and the faith on offer in that home have been called into question. The source of spiritual seeking in this group seems to spring from the experience of growing up in a spiritually abusive religious home, but a home that nonetheless also delivered some crucial spiritual goods and relationships that are not easily or willingly abandoned. This is not unlike a person who grows up in an abusive family situation, but whose experience was complicated by the fact that the family relationships were not damaging all the way through, and by the fact that even the abusive ones may have delivered important goods and values. In such cases a person develops an uncertain relationship to that home once she reaches spiritual adulthood and is confronted with questions about whether to stay, if she stays how much time to spend there or with which members of the spiritual family to associate, and how to stay and be safe in this

spiritual home. That is, she has to negotiate a new spiritual identity within this home because the inherited path of identity formation results in a damaged spiritual self, and so a spirituality of negotiation – a spirituality of seeking – emerges.

I think this may be where Michelle Casey has landed and it is worth quoting her here because her words illustrate the sense of spiritual homelessness one can experience and the shift from dwelling to seeking one may undergo. Casey describes her relationship to the Church since her 2002 break with it as follows:

I needed to stay away ... in order to feel that those rules no longer hold me. Then I'd come back to [the] Church thinking that I had a whole new outlook and prepared to reengage, but when I do all of the old comes right back flooding me, and I have to go away again, and this time, stay away longer ... the oppression, the rigidity of the mass take me right back to thinking nothing has really changed. But what I also know is that something has to change in me; this is a two-way thing – there is something in me that has to change before church will be different for me. What do I need to do to embrace this Church differently?⁵³

Having been a dweller, it took a long time and a major betrayal to generate her crisis of faith, which initially led Casey to leave the church and even temporarily to suspend her commitment to religiosity, though she never seems to have lost a sense of the transcendent. She went seeking for the transcendent in other traditions and in her own explorations of self-discovery. She has now in some sense returned to the Church, but arguably as a seeker.

Even those women and gay Catholics who are dwellers and who claim not to have conscious experience of spiritual violence and who remain steadfastly dwellers are nonetheless more likely to be propelled to some extent into a spirituality of negotiation – and thus to experience elements of spiritual seeking – in a way that men and heterosexual persons are not so propelled, precisely because their very existence in the Church as women and as gays invite the question of how to reconcile or *negotiate* those identities with one's spiritual

⁵³ Unpublished interview transcripts, December 6, 2013, Milwaukee, WI.

identity. The Church's teachings on homosexuality forces the question "How can I be both gay and Catholic?" which is a question not raised for heterosexuals – there is no disjunction between heterosexual identity and Catholic identity. Similarly, the Church's views about and treatment of women raises the question, "How can I affirm my own dignity as a woman and be Catholic?" which is a question not raised for men because the dignity of men is clearly valued and endorsed.

Two Sub-Categories of Spiritual Orientation

This discussion generates two sub-categories of spiritual orientation for victims of spiritual violence:

Dweller/seekers may, like Andrew Sullivan, still encounter God in the sacred places and holy rituals designated by the official Church. This may be easier for gay men to do because as men there is nothing in Catholic liturgical experience that overtly violates their personhood in the way that several liturgical and ritual norms may violate the spiritual personhood of women. Dweller/seekers reorient themselves toward religious authorities and toward the institution, no longer viewing either as a repository for revealed truth but rather as fallible resources for the journey. But they do not necessarily aim to create radically new institutional structures or rituals. They may continue to emphasize encountering God within traditional ritual practice and familiar, clearly delineated sacred space, but can no longer relate to religious authorities as epistemically privileged repositories of divinely revealed truth, for example, and so treat them instead as resources. That is, these dweller/seekers still dwell in the sacred spaces and rituals designated by the tradition, but engage in individual, personal negotiation of an authentic spiritual self that can be integrated with those aspects of the self that the faith tradition denigrates. Their spiritual identity is still, in some sense, traditionally Catholic or marked by participation within the bounds the institutional Church – they change the self but not the structure. Sullivan, for example, appears to remain very clearly anchored in many ways to a traditional understanding of Catholic faith, still regularly attending mass and reciting the same communion litany before receiving the Holy Eucharist that he recited as a 15 year-old. His seeking appears to take place at an individual level as he

negotiates how fully to integrate spiritual and sexual aspects of the self while still participating to greater or lesser extent in much of the ritual life of the official Church.

Seeker/dwellers by contrast may, like Jaime Manson and many of the members of Dignity USA and the Women's Ordination Conference (WOC), no longer be able to encounter God in officially designated Church spaces, or through officially designated sacraments because spiritually violating attitudes toward women are built into the central meanings of these. For these people, participation in the ritual life of the community may be experienced as participation in one's own spiritual abuse. Their spiritual identities are still partially and deeply constituted by the faith in some sense and they experience other aspects of the tradition as beautiful and affirming – the church is not spiritually violent all the way down, so to speak. People in this group are no longer able to encounter God in officially designated spaces or to build relationship with God through the officially sanctioned rituals, yet the pull of dwelling may nonetheless keep a person tied, even in some sense anchored to the inherited faith and might yield a sense of responsibility to that faith. They often feel as if they cannot and will not leave and abandon the gift of the faith to a human institution that threatens to corrupt that faith. I'd like to suggest that in addition to whatever individual spiritual negotiation they may undertake, seeker/dwellers are also more likely than dweller/seekers to seek radical institutional change by creating new spiritual communities and new rituals, or by giving new spiritually non-violating meanings to old familiar rituals.⁵⁴ That is, whereas dweller/seekers are more likely to emphasize individual spiritual change, seeker/dwellers are more likely to create new structures or to be open to the creation of new structures, but ones that are still in some sense expressive of a distinctively Catholic spirituality. Members of Dignity USA clearly

⁵⁴ For example, Catholic ritual is always part of Dignity USA's national conferences, including opportunities for participants to attend Holy Mass, These "masses" are in many respects radically revised and reimagined versions of liturgy so as to be maximally inclusive, for example, and so are denounced by the official Church as sacrilegious. But the fact that these ritual opportunities are viewed as an important part of this community's gatherings suggests the pull of dwelling that many members of this organization feel. For more on this perspective see, Michele Dillon, *Catholic Identity: Balancing Reason, Faith and Power* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), see especially chapter five, "Gay and Lesbian Catholics: 'Owning the Identity Differently,'" pp. 115-163.

understand themselves to be part of the Church, and yet also seek new institutional norms and structures. Members of the WOC, and especially Roman Catholic Women Priests, also understand themselves to be part of the Roman tradition and yet seek radical (at the roots) structural change, which includes full inclusion of women into the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Conclusion: The Leadership of Pope Francis and Prospects for Healing and Hope

I'd like to conclude with some brief remarks about prospects for hope and healing from structural spiritual violence under the new leadership of Pope Francis. Specifically, I'd like to suggest that the two sub-categories just described of dweller/seeker and seeker/dweller reflect the spirit of Pope Francis's leadership, which might be characterized as a call to cultivate a faith that both dwells and seeks, and especially that is capable of holding a healthy tension between dwelling and seeking.⁵⁵ To the extent survivors of spiritual violence also come to cultivate this kind of hybrid spiritual life, they may serve as important resources for a Church interested in bridging the disjunction between seekers and dwellers.

The disjunction between a dweller-friendly Church and an increasingly seeker-oriented population within the West is not due to a mere emphasis on dwelling over seeking within the Church, but rather a distorted kind of dwelling emphasized by a Church that has, by and large, cut itself off from seeking. There is a connection between the kind of spiritual violence described in this paper and a degenerate spirituality of dwelling that can result when dwelling is cut off from seeking. Structural spiritual violence manifests not only in the Church teachings about women and LGBT persons referenced in this paper, but also in the attitudes among Church leadership toward victims

⁵⁵ In an oft-cited remark from 2013, that Pope Francis made about gay priests during an interview on a papal airplane. He said, "If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?" Although Francis did not stray from official church teaching about homosexuality, he struck "a more compassionate tone than that of his predecessors" including his immediate predecessor Pope Benedict who in 2005, wrote that men with "'deep-seated homosexual tendencies' should not become priests" (*New York Times*, July 29, 2013).

which encourage silencing and hasty censure rather than dialogue and attempts to heal and reconcile. In my view, these attitudes are, at least partially, the result not just of a lopsided but also a depraved form of dwelling characterized by a hostility toward seeking that can emerge when dwelling is severed from seeking. Although no religious institution is entirely immune from becoming spiritually violent, an institution that emphasizes and values seeking is less likely to become so because seeking can function as an important check on those aspects of dwelling that may yield an ossified faith bolstered by arrogant certitude. If this is right, then prospects for healing from structural spiritual violence require a correction in the spiritual orientation of the institution of the Church. I think Pope Francis clearly recognizes this and is pursuing such a corrective.

In his 2014 Christmas address to the Curia, Pope Francis lists fifteen sicknesses or ailments infecting the Curia that need to be healed if the Church is to restore its credibility and relevance.⁵⁶ The list includes:

- The disease of rivalry and vainglory which impedes humility (#7)
 - “Spiritual Alzheimer’s disease... in those who have lost the memory of their encounter with the Lord” and “who build walls and routines around themselves, and thus become more and more the slaves of idols carved by their own hands” (#6)
 - “The disease of excessive planning and of functionalism” which “attempts to contain and direct the freedom of the Holy Spirit ... We contract this disease because ‘it is always more easy and comfortable to settle in our own sedentary and unchanging ways’” (#4)
 - The disease “of mental and spiritual ‘petrification’” found “in those who have a heart of stone ... who lose ‘the sentiments of Jesus’ (cf. Phil 2:5-11), because as time goes on their hearts grow hard and become incapable of loving unconditionally the Father and our neighbour (cf. Mt 22:34-35)” (#3)
 - The disease of thinking “we are ‘immortal’, ‘immune’ or downright ‘indispensable,’” and so of failing to be self-critical (#1).

⁵⁶ “Presentation of the Christmas Greetings to the Roman Curia” address of his Holiness Pope Francis. Clementine Hall, December 22, 2014. Online at https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2014/december/documents/papa-francesco_20141222_curia-romana.html.

The arrogance, certitude, stone-heartedness, self-referential attitude, and rote functionalism described in this list are arguably ailments that result from a prolonged spirituality of dwelling that has been disconnected from the gifts of seeking. To dwell without seeking is to risk cutting oneself off from the mystery of God, from the surprising places where and people through whom God can be revealed, and from a sense of that the kingdom of God is both “already and not-yet.”⁵⁷ It is also to risk a rigid, haughty assuredness that becomes an obstacle to intimate human encounter and unconditional love, which Jesus clearly modeled as God’s love.

To seek without dwelling is also risky, though, and may generate a different kind of spiritual “sickness.” Seeking cut off from dwelling risks collapsing into an exaggerated individualism, which may yield an isolated spiritual self that easily becomes apathetic or disillusioned. It is to risk abandoning the rituals and relationships through which we encounter the divine and that sustain our faith. It also risks deserting our responsibility to a community to whom we are accountable both for our own spiritual failures and when we believe others, including Church leaders, have strayed from the Gospel message. This may be part of the reason why seeker/dwellers like members of WOC and Dignity USA do not understand themselves as having left the Church, but instead as in some sense anchored to the Church. They seek radical change of its most fundamental structures and have created new communities of faith to spearhead and support this journey, rather than going it alone.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John C. Haughey, S.J., “The Mission from Below” in *Where is Knowing Going? The Horizons of the Knowing Subject* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), pp. 1-14.

⁵⁸ This is speculative, but it may be the case that healthy spiritual development and sustenance requires participation in a community with some shared sense of the transcendent and some shared sense of how to relate to the transcendent. I think this is evident even among people who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious but who nonetheless seek other people with common spiritual sentiments with whom to share the journey. If one has no spiritual community, or if one’s relationship with a spiritual community is purely instrumental one may fall into a kind of spiritual isolation that leads to a loss of a sense of the sacred and of being connected to a transcendent being or reality – a kind of apathy or spiritual numbness. Even secular accounts of virtues such as reverence or piety, typically associated with spiritual or religious ways of being, emphasize these traits as

Arguably, Pope Francis is challenging the Church as a whole – lay faithful and Church leadership – to cultivate and nurture a spirituality that both seeks and dwells and that is capable of encountering God in the healthy tension between these orientations. In his recent address to the US Congress, for example, he lifts up the lives of two American Catholics as spiritual exemplars: Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton. Day might be characterized as a dweller/seeker. She became extremely devout, went to daily mass, and promoted religious orthodoxy and yet retained a humility that fostered the kind of human encounter and intimacy that enables us to perceive peoples' realities and experiences, which can change us and help us see anew the face of God. Merton might be characterized as a seeker/dweller. As a priest and deeply prayerful man, he was clearly anchored to the Church, and yet he is also one of the clearest examples of a seeker who looked for and experienced God in other spiritual traditions, especially Buddhism, and in experiences in nature.

Pope Francis has not called for reconsideration of the substantive content of Church doctrine about homosexuality or women's ordination, and he may have some blind spots especially in regard to the role of women in Church leadership.⁵⁹ Early in his papacy he was asked about the possibility of ordaining women to which he replied, "'The church has spoken and says no ... That door is closed,'" and then he referenced Pope John Paul's II 1994 document, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which declares that "the church has no authority to ordain women, and this view must be held by all as a definitive belief."⁶⁰ Members of WOC continue to ask the Pope to engage in dialogue about this issue, arguing that his failure even to discuss it risks undermining the credibility of his powerful message against elitism in all its forms.⁶¹

important *social* virtues. See for example, Paul Woodruff, *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ See for example, Paul Valley, "A weakness for women," chapter 16 in *Pope Francis: The Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism* second edition (Bloomsbury: London, 2013).

⁶⁰ Robert McClory, "Pope Francis and women's ordination" in *The National Catholic Reporter*, The Francis Chronicles, September 16, 2013, p. 1.

⁶¹ For a summary of the most recent address see Thomas C. Fox, "Theresa Kane's message to Pope Francis: eradicate scandal of gender inequality" in *National Catholic Reporter*, September 19, 2015. Theresa Kane first made a public plea for gender equality within the Church in a 1979 address to Pope John Paul II. See,

Still, Pope Francis has, generally speaking, assumed a radically new spiritual and moral posture and tone, which has galvanized many Catholics, especially younger generations who have felt alienated from the Church, to a renewed commitment to the faith. And as John Allen suggests, at “a certain point tone becomes substance if it is seen as revitalizing the prospects of the Church.”⁶² A change in tone that revitalizes a culture of seeking within the institution of the Church, and that aims to bridge the disjunction between seekers and dwellers by making dialogue a habit and humility a paramount institutional virtue, may indeed be a substantive change the full implications of which we have yet to discover. Survivors of spiritual violence who value both seeking and dwelling and who have learned to hold a healthy tension between these orientations may be especially well positioned to lead the way.

“Listen ... to Hear the Call of Women” online: *The Washington Post*, October 8, 1979, see <http://www.washington-post.com/archive/politics/1979/10/08/listen-to-hear-the-call-of-women/a6a4b00b-f44b-48c7-8771-33e91f248798/>. Moreover, in an editorial after the Pope’s visit, Maureen Dowd suggested that rationale for Church teaching on women’s ordination sends a message that women are divinely ordained as in some sense lesser beings, which lends credibility to those who would justify poor physical, psychological, economic, and political treatment of women on grounds that women are lesser beings. She references Paul Valley’s biography of the pope, *Pope Francis: Struggle for the Soul of Catholicism*, which calls women the Pope’s greatest area of weakness, an area that Francis is well aware of but appears baffled about how to resolve “within the orthodox framework of Catholicism.” See Maureen Dowd, “Francis the Perfect 19th Century Pope” in *The New York Times*. September 26, 2015.

⁶² John Allen, quoted in Rachel Donadio, “On Gay Priests, Pope Francis Asks: ‘Who am I to Judge?’” in *The New York Times*. July 29, 2013.

Seekers, Comparative Spiritual Narratives, and the Authority of the Church

ALAN MADRY

Seekers, Autonomy and Authority

Among the challenges that Charles Taylor identifies for the Catholic Church¹ in engaging the contemporary world are, firstly, a growing number of spiritual seekers. Seekers, most broadly, are those who are not wholly satisfied with their inherited beliefs or institutions but who nonetheless believe that the world contains a spiritual dimension, some realm beyond the material that has a bearing on their lives and is therefore worth pursuing. They seek a more cogent cosmology or a more congenial spiritual community or an authoritative guide. A second challenge that Taylor identifies for the modern church is the vastly greater accessibility of other religious traditions outside of not only the Church but outside of the more familiar, traditional western faiths of Christianity and Judaism.

The two circumstances quite obviously potentially overlap for many: someone searching for a satisfying and meaningful spiritual path – a belief system and set of spiritual practices or a spiritual organization, might naturally proceed in that search by looking to the options presented by other developed traditions of thought and practice. The search might begin with the most accessible traditions: the protestant denominations, Judaism and then extend perhaps to the distant cousins of Hinduism, Buddhism or Taoism in all of their variety. Taylor himself does not draw the two challenges together because he seems to want to distinguish under the rubric of “seeking” persons who are motivated primarily by a rejection of external, universal directions and a search for “authenticity,” by which he means some individually fashioned, custom-made version of spirituality. Taylor suggests that seekers, so understood, are marked by a feeling that the Church’s answers to questions are too pat, too quick and do not themselves reflect a spirit of searching and the

¹ Taylor, 2012.

complexity and challenge of the questions. Taylor further suggests that seekers do not see the need for the disciplines prescribed by the Church.²

Taylor's characterization of seekers seems to be neither accurate, surely not universally accurate or even accurate for the vast majority of seekers, nor especially useful in fully appreciating the value of the challenge that seekers pose for the Church. Surely there are people who fit Taylor's description of a seeker but I suspect that their number may be exaggerated by philosophers too much and perhaps not altogether accurately influenced by a Kantian emphasis on authenticity as a central aspect of ethics or who assume that the current emphasis, particularly in the US, on political individualism naturally carries over to the spiritual realm.³

It is also true that spiritually inclined people may well approach the spiritual path from different inclinations and aptitudes. Some among us are more comfortable with charitable work, others with intellectual inquiry, others yet with solitary prayer or devotional service. A historian might explore the early history of the Church, searching for the true Jesus as a spiritual practice while a philosopher might find a similar spiritual satisfaction in addressing timeless questions about the nature of the transcendent. The Catholic Church, to its credit, makes room and provides opportunities for all of these inclinations. But Taylor's characterization of the seeker appears to go beyond merely pursuing the sacred according to one's own unique aptitudes and interest. He seems to be suggesting that we might seek

² Ibid.

³ The attitude that Taylor describes would appear to arise most naturally in a tradition, like the Catholic tradition, that lays some emphasis on salvation by acts. In that case, to the extent that one accepts a Kantian account of ethics as built on an experience of the dignity of reason, an insistence on each person having some say would seem natural on its face. One has to doubt, however, whether Kant would agree. Kantian self-legislation does not, after all, endorse whatever an individual agent legislates; self-legislation consists rather in accepting the universal dictates of pure, abstract reason.

As I will discuss later, other traditions do not conceive of the achievement of the human telos as a reward for good conduct; they conceive of the telos as the achievement of knowledge, in particular knowledge from immediate experience of the true nature of existence. In those traditions, the idea of spiritual realism and the search for a true account of the transcendental world is more prominent and the search for tailor-made spirituality does not so naturally arise.

to fashion our beliefs about the very nature of the transcendent and the purposes of spiritual practices to satisfy some idiosyncratic inclination.

The idea of seeking a personalized spirituality, however, seems odd on its face. Most seekers likely are realists about the spiritual; they believe that there is a transcendent realm with a particular character that exists regardless of how we might think about it or what we want from it. The spiritual search is a search for an understanding of that realm, its nature, how it interacts with the phenomenal world of our experience. It is a search, too, and maybe above all, for insight into our own full human nature in that larger context and in particular whether there is a telos woven into our natures and if there is, what it is and how to achieve it.⁴

Seekers may well begin their searching with moral beliefs that are at odds with those of the Church but those commitments more likely figure into the search not as something akin to a personal taste like a color of car or cut of clothing, but as a commitment to the moral legitimacy or metaphysical soundness of their beliefs. It then enters into the search as a criterion for the truth of a spiritual cosmology. If someone is convinced that being gay and entering into a loving relationship with someone of the same sex, contra the Church's teaching, is not morally sinful, but is consistent with a deeply spiritual life, then he or she may well look for a tradition that accepts those beliefs as evidence that that tradition has a greater grasp of spiritual truth.⁵

In that light, a committed Catholic who criticizes the Church for a monarchical or paternalistic attitude and demands that the laity have a greater voice in forming Church teaching, may not be seeking

⁴ The image of the seeker and being on a spiritual search carries mythic attractiveness. Even committed Catholics for whom a meaningful spiritual life outside of the Church is inconceivable might still happily embrace the characterization for any of a number of reasons. To be a seeker may be contrasted with complacency or the idea that spirituality does not demand much. Whereas dwelling in the Church may demand a great deal including overcoming doubts or a sense of distance or abandonment (e.g., Mother Theresa), or the constant effort to lose selfishness, to care for others, to be compassionate, to see God or the hand of God in all things.

⁵ Theresa Tobin's essay in this volume, "Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality," explores some ways in which such tension has an impact upon "seeking" and "dwelling."

primarily greater respect for his or her ethical autonomy; rather she may already have come to the conclusion that the Magisterium is prone to error and could benefit from the larger experience of lay Catholics more familiar with the wider range, greater complexity and demands of life. To put the matter more emphatically, these Catholics are not rejecting “external,” universal direction or the disciplines of the Church, what they are rejecting is the Magisterium’s claim to privileged authority.

Skepticism about the authority of the Magisterium on moral matters, naturally enough, can easily lead to skepticism about more than the authority of the Church on moral matters; it may also be the spur to a deeper critical reflection on fundamental metaphysical articles of the faith. If the Magisterium is wrong on the importance of birth control in a world threatened by global warming, if it is self-destructing because of its insistent exclusion of women and married people from the clergy, maybe it is wrong about other, more fundamental matters of fact as well.

And then there are other seekers whose skepticism begins with the oddness and at least *prima facie* incoherence of so much of the Catholic cosmology.

Margaret Atwood in her novel *The Robber Bride* captures the perplexity of a thoughtful young Catholic confronted by some of the so-called mysteries that abound in the Catholic catechism:

God could see everything that you did and also thought and most of these things annoyed him. He seemed to be angry much of the time, like Sister Conception.

But God was also Jesus, who got nailed to the cross. Who nailed him? Roman soldiers, who wore armour....

It was not really the Roman soldiers’ fault because they were just doing their job. Really it was the fault of the Jews. One of the prayers in chapel was a prayer for the conversion of the Jews, which meant they could switch over to being Catholic and then get forgiven. In the meantime God was still mad at them and they would have to keep on being punished. That is what sister Conception said.

Things were more complicated than that, thought Roz, because Jesus had arranged for himself to be crucified on purpose. It was a sacrifice, and a sacrifice was when you

gave your life to save other people. Roz was not sure why getting yourself crucified was such a favour to everyone but apparently it was. So if Jesus did it on purpose, why was it the fault of the Jews? Were not they helping him out? A question of Roz's that went unanswered by Sister Conception, though Sister Cecilia, who was prettier and on the whole nicer to Roz, took a crack at it: a bad deed remained bad, she said, even if the result was good. There were lots of bad deeds that turned out to have good results, because God was a mystery, which meant he switched things around, but humans were not in control of that, they were only in control of their own hearts. It was what was in your heart that counted.⁶

Nor is it the case that seekers are looking to escape discipline. From my own experience of years of traveling with seekers in the company of various Eastern teachers, the seekers with whom I am familiar are willing to devote hours daily to practices of meditation or chanting. They engage in selfless charitable work, adopt strict diets, etc., that demand far more than Catholicism. What does Catholicism demand of the ordinary Catholic, after all? Moral conduct? Surely, but Catholicism, indeed religion, is not unique in that regard. We all strive to be compassionate, kind, honest, and to treat others with dignity and integrity. Catholicism does seem to be preoccupied with sexual strictures that are special, but also seem weakly grounded and lacking in integration with a deep insight into human psychology or telos. Contrary to other religions, Protestant and Eastern, Catholicism is particular lax when it comes to insisting on the study of scripture. No, seekers are not necessarily seeking to avoid discipline. More often, a true seeker is looking for more – a more compelling and comprehensive account of the spiritual and practices that arise integrally out of that account and promise something more than a speculative reward after death for their labors.

In that regard, a more accurate understanding of the seeker is also potentially of far greater use for a Church serious about a thorough soul searching. The seeker who both questions the fundamental tenets of her inherited religion and is open to wisdom from elsewhere poses

⁶ Atwood, 1993, pp. 322-323.

the deepest challenge and greatest opportunity for the Church to reconsider its history and beliefs against the broadest background and the most rigorous standards of reason. The more critical seeker is the far more interesting seeker because she is the more intellectually mature. She is able to step back without fear of being “wicked and impious” and objectively evaluate the reasonableness of her deepest religious commitments. Particularly recognizing that there are in the world vastly different cosmologies, religious and non-religious, she can treat each as a competing theory about the nature of what exists and how it operates and hold those theories to rigorous standards of rational belief. If anything, the demand to hold cosmological beliefs to rigorous standards is even more compelling given how much is at stake.

For such a seeker, a deeply questioning spiritual realist, it is only natural to consider other traditions. Religion by definition is concerned with the transcendental, i.e., with possible dimensions of existence beyond the phenomenal world of our ordinary waking consciousness, a world known to us through uncommon revelations or mystical experiences. And different religious traditions provide vastly different accounts of the transcendent dimension, the human telos and how to achieve that telos. For one convinced that there is or at least may be more to existence than the material, that there may be a transcendent dimension, skepticism about the authority of one tradition can quite naturally lead to a consideration of alternative cosmologies. Thus the two challenges that we began with coalesce.⁷

How we understand the nature of seekers and the challenge that they present is of substantial practical importance. If we limit our conception of seeking to embrace nothing more than the search for personal moral autonomy or a story tailor-made to the seekers’ likes and dislikes, we will overlook altogether the more significant and

⁷ Of course, there are people who leave the Church out of skepticism and do not consider the possibility that other traditions may have something valuable to offer. This could be either because they are unfamiliar with other traditions that may seem, *prima facie*, too exotic or too alien. At the same time they may already be convinced that what is essential for the spiritual life is simply living a moral life, one sufficiently guided by moral virtue and cultural wisdom. These people are not seekers, though, and it is seekers that I want to focus on here. To the extent that the church adjusts to engage seekers, those same adjustments may well provide the circumstances to reengage skeptics who have given up on religion altogether.

important challenge to the Church's fundamental teaching posed by the more skeptical seeker. Taylor, for instance, seems to suggest that the Church might better address the concerns of seekers by at least acknowledging the complexity of issues and not simply offering what he refers to as "pat" and "quick" answers. The Church might also openly acknowledge the lack of certainty and challenges faced by some saints and mystics who nonetheless never abandoned the Church. He doubts whether the Church as now oriented, with all authority concentrated in the Vatican, can begin to address these constituencies.

George McLean, in his introduction to the collection that includes Taylor's reflections on seekers, appears to go even further. He would have the Church stop presenting itself as perfect, imperial and unchanging and instead adopt an attitude consistent with a kenotic understanding of Jesus, as one who, voluntarily accepting a human birth, gives up his heavenly majesty.⁸ Tomas Halik, writing in the same volume would seem to agree: the church, he says, needs to replace the paradigm of paradise and the temple with the exodus and discipleship, exchanging the attitude of the dweller, content with the church as is, for the attitude of the seekers.⁹ These suggestions may address the concerns of dwellers in the Church, those committed to the Church but who have grown skeptical of the Magisterium's claim to inerrancy on matters of morality but for the more deeply skeptical, they may be counterproductive. The deeply skeptical want knowledge, they want guidance from someone authoritative. If the Church does nothing more than say, "this is what we believe, but we're not sure" a skeptic still has reason to look elsewhere.

In the remainder of this essay, I want to make more concrete and vivid the grounds for skepticism and the reasons why a skeptic may be drawn to another tradition outside of the western traditions altogether. In Section II I review the Catholic cosmology as articulated by the Magisterium of the Church in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the official account of the articles of the faith, highlighting those aspects, fundamental aspects, that are at best thin and at worse apparently ad hoc or paradoxical if not outright incoherent. The elements here are familiar; the discussion adds little if anything to

⁸ McLean, 2012, p. 1.

⁹ Halik, 2012, p. 187.

questions that have been posed for centuries and I do not explore at length the ingenious solutions that have been offered by theologians and philosophers attempting to make sense of the *prima facie* gaps and problems with the basic tenets. The reason is that despite their efforts, indeed as those efforts themselves underscore, the basic tenets of the faith are riddled with paradox and lacking in deep explanatory power. The constant invocation of “divine mystery” and the insistence on the unintelligibility of the spiritual further underscores the incompleteness and paradoxical nature the Catholic narrative.

Section III considers the same general cosmological questions from the perspective of Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualist metaphysics of Classical Hinduism and how Advaita avoids each of the problems presented by the Catholic cosmology. Not only does Advaita avoid the *prima facie* problems of the basic Catholic cosmology, it also provides explanations that are more comprehensive and richer in detail, thus more truly explanations rather than simple bare claims. Its methods are similar to those of science: careful observation and reason, supplemented of course by higher states of consciousness, themselves systematically explained, developable and testable. In addition, the theory of Advaita has the potential to provide productive lines of inquiry into theoretical issues that have so far eluded materialistic science – the hard problem of consciousness, the mind-body problem and the nature of mystical experience.

The method of this paper is that of cumulative case reasoning/inference to the best explanation, the method, with empirical observation and induction, of empirical science, the law, and daily life. Were the Catholic account the only explanation reasonably available to explain our persistent yearning for and experience of the sacred, its incompleteness and paradoxes might be more readily accepted. But its account is far from the only account available and to the extent that other spiritual traditions provide more complete and cogent narratives one’s that avoid the faults of the Catholic story, they bear on the rationality of embracing the Catholic narrative, including, in particular, the authority of the Catholic Church as a reliable guide to the spiritual and the spiritual life. Because so much potentially is at stake when we deliberate about cosmologies, we should subject the alternatives to the most rigorous scrutiny. This does not rule out any belief at the start, particularly not theistic faith, provided that the theory that includes the idea of faith

satisfies better than its rivals the demands of coherence, explanatory power, predictive power and ontological parsimony.

I conclude with suggestions on the value of comparative inquiry for enriching our understanding of perennial issues in theistic philosophy. My purpose in this paper is to offer some insight into why some Catholics or those evaluating Catholic Church as a possible guide might become skeptical of its reliability and seek answers elsewhere.

The Authority of the Church and Catholic Cosmology

This section considers the reasons why a thoughtful seeker, someone with at least a provisional belief that there is more to the world than material existence, might find the Catholic cosmology disillusioning and the authority of the Church as a source of spiritual knowledge and guidance consequently diminished. Though the Church claims extraordinary authority by virtue of its claim to being the one, true Catholic Church, the vicar of Christ through the unbroken line of apostolic succession from Peter, the Church's authority, as of the authority of anyone claiming knowledge in any area, rests ultimately on the quality of the narrative it offers. For the claim to privileged authority itself is embedded in the narrative and rises or falls with the cogency of the narrative as a whole. One cannot claim authority and then offer explanations that are self-contradictory, oddly emotionally or intellectually immature, or are inconsistent with the evidence, including evidence of the Church's own past glaring errors.

The Nature of God

To begin with, there is a God; a singular, personal, eternally existing, first cause, maker of heaven and earth, bearer of all perfections. Among the perfections are omniscience, omnipotence and goodness. God is all-loving, merciful and compassionate though God's mercy is tempered by justice. This description of God is, notoriously, *prima facie* perplexing. It presents any number of logical challenges that appear to multiply with attempts to provide solutions. Fundamentally, there is the conflict between God's omniscience and human free will. God's omniscience presumably includes knowledge

of the future, of what has not yet come to pass. And complete knowledge of the future would appear to include knowledge of future, voluntary human actions and their consequences. But such knowledge, as Aquinas and other great thinkers in the Catholic tradition recognized, appears to be odds with the existence of free will in humans. Free will entails a lack of causal determinism and thus an openness and lack of predictability in human affairs. But if God knows what we are going to do, then it must be that what we are about has already been determined for us by prior events, indeed prior events going all the way back to the nature of God's original creative act.¹⁰

Yet free will is crucial to the Catholic cosmology for at least two reasons. In the first instance, free will is essential for moral responsibility and moral responsibility is central to the Catholic version of the human end. It would make little sense to reward the virtuous with eternal life in heaven or condemn the wicked to eternal suffering on the basis of their choices if those choices were not wholly and freely their own. Yet God's foreknowledge suggests precisely that. Second, Catholicism teaches that God seeks a loving relationship with his creatures. But a true loving relationship demands that love be given freely and not determined by contingent facts bearing absolutely on a person's choice to love God in return or to reject God's love. Again, God's foreknowledge suggests otherwise. But to surrender God's knowledge of future contingent events to preserve human free will seems to entail admitting an imperfection.

The combination of God's supposed omnipotence and perfect mercy combined with the obvious reality of human suffering of course leads us to one of the most intractable of all problems, the problem of evil. The *Catechism* teaches that God's purpose in creating the world was, "to show [His glory] forth and communicate it;" "he wanted to make his creatures share in his being, wisdom, and goodness."¹¹ The image is compelling: a God of infinite goodness desires to multiply his goodness by bringing into existence beings to share in the joy of that love and goodness. Yet everywhere we look, there is suffering and great evil and all too little evidence of love and goodness.

The problem of evil stated in its simplest form involves logical incompatibility. If God is indeed all merciful and all powerful, He

¹⁰ For a contrary view of the significance of this paradox see generally Burrell 1993.

¹¹ *Catechism* 1995, paragraph 293, quoting St. Bonaventure, In II Sent. I, 2, 2, 1.

would not permit innocent people to suffer, yet suffering is not only present but ubiquitous and effects altogether innocent children and adults as often and to the same extent as the wicked who might be thought at least to deserve punishment for their wickedness. Consequently, God either lacks perfect mercy or the power to protect innocent creatures from pain. I know of no compelling argument that conclusively avoids this paradox.

But the problem of evil goes deeper than the logical paradox suggests. For God does not simply stand aloof and watch as mankind, indeed all creatures big and small toil and suffer; the world's suffering is the product of God's own choices; not just one choice but many choices on many occasions. In the first instance, even before creation, if God is omniscient, God knew that the world as he intended to create it was one in which suffering was going to occur, yet God nonetheless set his creation on a path that led to a morass of great suffering. When an agent knows that his or her actions are bound to produce a particular result and yet goes ahead with implementing a set of plans, it is reasonable to regard the agent as fully accepting that those consequences should occur.

The *Catechism* places the responsibility for suffering on the Fall, the alleged free choice of our human progenitors, the very intended beneficiaries of creation, the first among God's creatures with an immortal soul. The *Catechism* says of the account of the fall in Genesis that it:

... affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place at the beginning of the history of man. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by *the original fault freely committed by our first parents*.¹²

But the allocation of blame exclusively to our human progenitors is surely too facile; God must bear more than a little responsibility for both the fall itself as well as for his own response. We are told that everything that God created was good. Presumably for rational, self-consciousness humans that means virtuous, inclined to choices and actions, indeed taking pleasure in choices and actions and circumstances in harmony with the natural world and one another.

¹² *Ibid.*, paragraph 390, emphasis added.

Yet our original virtuous forbearers chose a course of conduct that resulted in enormous deprivation and suffering for themselves and all of their progeny. How is that possible? All answers to lead back to God. Perhaps God did not create Adam and Eve inclined to virtue, taking pleasure in the contemplation and promotion of goodness. Perhaps God failed to apprise Adam and Eve fully of the consequences of disobedience. How, after all, could anyone, much less a virtuous person, inclined to goodness, be so easily duped to disobey the all perfect God, a God with whom they had regular encounters. God could not possibly have revealed himself and what was at stake to these good people. He must have left them in a state of, if not flawed virtue, at least horrible ignorance. No one aware of what was at stake – the loss of an intimate closeness to the infinite glory of God Himself, expulsion from paradise, the beginnings of suffering and misery, strife among their children, the corruption of mankind forever, the world that we find ourselves in today – no one apprised of those consequences could have made such a grave and horrible choice.

The account in Genesis itself suggests that Adam and Eve could not have appreciated the consequences of disobedience. According to Genesis that first act of disobedience by our progenitors itself brought knowledge of good and evil. That suggests that the mythical, metaphorical Adam and Eve did not know evil before the act and therefore could not possibly have guessed at the tragedy that they were to bring about. According to Genesis, God informed Adam and Eve no more than that “the day you eat of it, you must die.”¹³ Such a terse caveat can mean little to beings who know nothing of death – in the physical body, metaphorically or otherwise. And not just the imposition of pain and death, but of even greater significance, the loss of an open and intimate relationship with God has to be the greatest punishment of all. Had God revealed himself to Adam and Eve, to let them understand fully what they would be losing, it is hard to conceive how they could possibly have thrown away such beatific grace.

Needless to say, leaving our progenitors in ignorance of the consequences of their conduct is not consistent with perfect paternal love and compassion, it is not, as the *Catechism* instructs, sharing his “wisdom and goodness.” Indeed, it is one of the most important

¹³ Genesis, 2.17.

responsibilities of parenthood to nurture virtue, a love of goodness and moral knowledge in our children, a sense of what is at stake and the importance of right thinking, choices and actions. We demand at least that much of one another despite being fallible human beings. We should be able to expect at least that much from a perfectly loving and omniscient God. The lack of full-disclosure, to borrow a contemporary and well accepted doctrine of simple fairness, undermines any sense that our progenitors' original act of disobedience was "freely committed."

Even if it might be reasonable to lay some blame for the fall on the choice of our progenitors, it is surely inaccurate to say that their actions alone brought about its consequences. Adam and Eve may have disobeyed God's command but it was God who determined that with only one exception, every single human being from that moment on would be born with the corrupting taint of someone else's sin. The *Catechism* explains:

All men are implicated in Adam's sin, as St. Paul affirms: "By one man's disobedience many [that is all men] were made sinners": sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned¹⁴

But St. Paul is patently wrong in this regard: all men did not sin. Only the first humans, the first ensouled of God's creatures, disobeyed God. "All men" did not even exist at that moment much less join in the choices and decisions of their forbearers.

Furthermore, the *Catechism* here wildly misallocates responsibility for the introduction of original sin. The immediate occasion for the imposition of that curse may have been choices by the original humans, though even here, as I argued a moment ago, their blame is suspect and God is surely implicated. Nonetheless it was God who reacted to that first disobedience so dramatically and tragically and determined that every innocent child descended of Adam and Eve would bear the taint of their ancestors' sin. Not only did the all merciful God not forgive the very first act of disobedience, one committed, as Genesis suggests, without an appreciation for the evil that it would bring, but that same God decided that every human born

¹⁴ *Catechism*, 1995, paragraph 402.

thereafter, innocent of any wrongdoing, would begin life burdened by the corruption of original sin. So who introduced original sin into the world? None other than God Himself.

And to be burdened by the corrupting influence of original sin is also to be even less able than Adam and Eve to choose wisely. This original sin imposed by God on his beloved children inclines us toward evil and away from Him:

Following Saint Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection to Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted¹⁵

Indeed, the *Catechism* declares, "[a]fter that first sin, the world is virtually inundated by sin."¹⁶ From one perspective, to return to an earlier theme, so much for free will. A free will should at least be neutral between good and evil but following the fall, we are one and all born inclined to evil, at least such is the theory of original sin.¹⁷ From another perspective, God's own choice to burden mankind with an inclination that makes it even more difficult to living virtuously does not speak well for God's mercy and justice.

The observed reality, though, is even worse because it introduces an element of enormous arbitrariness. Peter van Inwagen usefully analogizes the condition of fallen humanity to that of a ruined city:

Imagine a great city – New York, say – that has been lifted several yards into the air by the hand of some vast giant and then simply let fall. The city is now a ruin. The mass of buildings stand at crazy angles, Others have been destroyed or lie on their sides. Some few still stand straight. The suitability of the buildings for human

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 403. See also *ibid.*, 1707.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 401.

¹⁷ Personally, if this is what free will amounts to, and it is difficult to see how else to understand free will within this larger narrative, I would gladly forego free will in preference to natural virtue: a natural understanding and delight in the beneficence of living a life in harmony with natural law and natural goodness. I suspect that I am not alone in this and that that shared intuition is the crux of this critique.

habitation varies. ... How these remnants of functions are distributed among the various buildings is simply a matter of chance.¹⁸

The buildings in Professor van Inwagen's analogy are, of course, us. And the distribution of the remnants of functions represent the enormous disparities in the initial conditions into which we are born. Some of us are born with the inherent potential for great intelligence, creativity, sociability and wisdom; the kinds of traits that can make it easier, indeed natural, to lead a life of virtue and selfless love. Others among us, however, are afflicted with personalities, parents, families, cultures and subcultures that pose enormously greater obstacles to achieving virtuous character. The burdens of being born into the poorest sections of any American city, to parents suffering addiction to drugs, neglectful and violent, inclines children to more of the same; as does being born to wealthy but shallow, materialistic, and self-centered parents. Being born to parents who disdain religion, or having crushing early experiences with abusive or predatory clergy, can easily disincite one to any interest whatsoever in religion.

Yet, under the Catholic narrative, God gives each of us, regardless of his or her origins just the one single life, a life that may last no more than a day or stretch to a hundred years, conditioned by our physiological inheritances, parental care or lack of care and wider culture to earn a place in heaven blessed with the beatific presence of God for all eternity or be condemned to everlasting torment with no hope ever of a chance to redeem ourselves and to earn God's love and a place in his sublime presence. It is difficult to imagine conduct less just and less merciful than to burden everyone with an inclination to sin, though in fact burden some far more than others, and then give them all just one short life to earn their eternal (*i.e., forever; without end*) rewards and punishment; either bliss for all eternity in the presence of God himself, or eternal damnation not only suffering every horror of physical pain but knowing that there is no possible chance of redemption and joining God in his heaven. One can easily understand why a thoughtful philosopher like Thomas Nagel could conclude: "It isn't just that I don't believe in God and, naturally, hope that I'm right

¹⁸ van Inwagen, 1995, pp. 221-223.

in my belief. It's that I hope that there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."¹⁹

To be sure, Catholic teaching provides that in recompense for the harshness of His punishment, God did send His only begotten son, Jesus, to redeem mankind from sin. Indeed, the otherwise baffling crucifixion of Jesus only makes sense, to the extent that it does make sense, within Catholic teaching in light of the fall and God's reaction to the fall by the imposition of original sin:

The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the "reverse side" of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men, that all need salvation, and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. The Church, which has the mind of Christ, knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.²⁰

The *Catechism* goes even further still, though, and declares that the crucifixion not only redeemed mankind from sin, it "gave us blessings better than those the demon's envy had taken away."²¹ Quoting St. Thomas Aquinas quoting St. Paul, the *Catechism* explains, "'Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more': and the Exultet sings, 'O happy fault ... which gained for us so great a Redeemer!'"²²

Putting aside the point we've already made, that God and no demon imposed original sin on mankind, this explanation, rather than reconciling original sin to God's perfect mercy itself introduces even more paradoxes. In the first instance, this rationalization of original sin appears to suggest our current situation, post the redemption, is better than the situation that God created initially for mankind, the paradise of Eden and God's regular presence and intimacy with his creatures. One would think that an all-loving God would have placed

¹⁹ Nagel, 1997, p. 130.

²⁰ *Catechism*, 1995, par. 389.

²¹ *Ibid.*, par. 412. Again, the *Catechism* confuses cause and effect. Whether some demon was involved in the mythic fall is another issue, but even were there some demon tempting the first ensouled humans, it was God who determined the consequences, not the first humans, nor the demon. God and God alone decided that the consequence for the original disobedience was to condemn all of mankind to be born bearing the corrupting influence of sin.

²² *Ibid.*

His cherished mankind in the best possible situation from the very beginning, if for no other reason than to provide a situation least likely to lead to a fall. Not having done that, and given that God in his omniscience must have foreseen the fall, the entire narrative begins to look as if it was God's plan that our human progenitors fail, that He react by burdening all subsequent generations with the taint and influence of sin, send his son to redeem the world and then bless mankind with the greatest blessings. The *Catechism* adopts precisely this story:

Creation is the foundation of "all God's saving plans," the "beginning of the history of salvation" that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth": from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ.²³

Not only does this seem like odd behavior for a God devoted to the well-being of his people, it also implies that our human progenitors responsible for the fall were acting under the influence of some divine compulsion to play their roles in God's plan to finally bestow even greater grace. This returns us to Margaret Atwood's perplexity: if Adam and Eve, and the Romans and the Jews, were all simply playing out their parts in some great drama anticipated, and intended by God to bring about an even greater paradise than the original Eden, how can those people be punished, many with eternal condemnation, for simply playing their parts enroute to this great boon for all of mankind?

Second, though the *Catechism* declares that the human condition after the fall and redemption is filled with even greater grace, it does not endeavor to explain what that greater grace is apart from the fact that the world now has a redeemer and, perhaps, his Church. But had there been no fall, we would not need a redeemer. The introduction of a redeemer alone, therefore, cannot be the greater grace for it implies nothing more than the removal of the original sin imposed by God that created the need for a savior. Furthermore, as I will return to later,

²³ *Ibid.*, par. 280. Again, quoting from St. Paul, this time from the Epistle to the Romans 8:18-23.

the mere appearance of Jesus did not even bring to an end original sin. Even after the sacrifice of Jesus, original sin remained and the sacrament baptism was required to remove that taint though, even then, oddly without removing the effects of original sin.²⁴

Moreover, certainly, the world is no less inundated by sin now than it was in Eden before the introduction of sin. The assertion that we are better off today with a redeemer than were Adam and Eve in paradise sounds ludicrous and indeed, as Galen Strawson has written, “It may be added that genuine belief in such a God, however rare, is profoundly immoral: it shows contempt for the reality of human suffering, or indeed any intense suffering.”²⁵

If the greater grace is the institution of the Church itself, that is a grace only insofar as the Church remained the true church of Jesus, preserving and promulgating his teachings. That, though, is one central point at issue here. We will return to the claimed authority of the Church later. It is enough to note here that the history of the Church has been at best a mixed blessing. Just ask the victims of the Church’s own extremism, rigidity and corruption; to name only a few – the victims of the proto-orthodox enroute to establishing their beliefs as dogmatic orthodoxy, the victims of the crusades, of the Inquisitions and, most recently of predatory pedophiliac priests and their callous

²⁴ *Catechism*, 1995, par. 405: “Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle.”

²⁵ Strawson, 2012. I doubt that this is altogether so. More likely, the acceptance of suffering is part and parcel of interpreting the suffering of Jesus as a great and redeeming moment, and that gladly accepting suffering ourselves, perhaps as a test of faith, is also redemptive. I recall years ago at a conference on accommodating disabled students a Jesuit colleague suggesting that the disabled were especially blessed because they were able to participate in Christ’s suffering in a way denied to the able bodied. The Catholic preoccupation with suffering, as well as of sin and the need for redemption, is in dramatic contrast to all eastern religions, as we will discuss later in regards to Advaita Vedanta. Buddhism may begin with the recognition of the reality of suffering but it seeks above all to free people from that weight, by among other things, recognizing that the source of suffering is the pursuit of happiness in a constantly changing phenomenal world. Hinduism is similar but the emphasis is on the achievement of a state of enlightened knowledge in which everything in the phenomenal world, including one’s own sense of oneself as a distinct being, is seen immediately as the Self experiencing it Self.

bishops more concerned about the reputation of the Church than protecting innocent young minds, lives, and their spiritual progress.

Finally, God's choice to address His own earlier imposition of original sin by sending His son to be horribly and gruesomely crucified is not only cruel and callous, it also bizarrely evinces an embrace of human sacrifice as an appropriate way of appeasing God to purify sin.²⁶ The story of Abraham and Isaac to which we will return later demonstrates the same embrace of human sacrifice, though for an even stranger reason, simply to demonstrate one's obedience to God. We rightly recoil at the idea of human sacrifice as a deplorable practice in backward societies yet we find the God of both the Old as well as the New Testament Himself not only condoning human sacrifice but embracing it, demanding it of His subjects and arranging for it and using it Himself within His own divine plan. Interestingly, the Old Testament in Leviticus emphatically condemns human sacrifice to the false god Moloch:

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites: Anyone, whether an Israelite or an alien residing in Israel, who gives any of his offspring to Moloch shall be put to death. Let his fellow citizens stone him. I myself will turn against such a man and cut him off from the body of his people; for in giving his offspring to Moloch, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name."²⁷

Apparently human sacrifice is only sinful when the sacrifice is to other than the god who caught the attention of Abraham and Moses.

The Catholic cosmology with its gloomy and morose emphasis on sin, especially the strange and strained notion of original sin, the essential need for redemption from sin, particularly through the crucifixion of Jesus, and the awarding of eternal rewards and punishments based on a single life poses insuperable dilemmas. And it is no answer, indeed it only makes matters worse, simply to claim, as Alvin Plantinga most recently did, "Suppose God does have a good reason for permitting sin and evil, pain and suffering: why think we

²⁶ For a more thorough discussion of the doctrine of original sin as well as alternative and perhaps better interpretations of the connection between the crucifixion and original sin see Taylor, 2007, pp. 648-660.

²⁷ Leviticus, 20:1-5.

would be the first to know what it is?"²⁸ Nietzsche cogently answered that question decades ago:

An omniscient and omnipotent God who does not even take care that his intentions shall be understood by his creatures, could he be a God of goodness? A God who for thousands of years, has permitted innumerable doubts and scruples to continue unchecked as if they were of no importance in the salvation of mankind, and who, nonetheless, announces the most dreadful consequences for anyone who mistakes his truth? Would he not be a cruel god if, being himself in possession of the truth, he could calmly contemplate mankind, in a state of miserable torment, worrying its mind as to what was truth?²⁹

Nor is it an adequate answer to claim that we are incapable of understanding the nature of divine goodness, that the human mind, experience, and language are too removed from the greatness of God to ever capture the truth of God's nature. If that is so, then we have no business saying of God that He is perfectly good, for we have no idea then what we are talking about. The unintelligibility of God's goodness is especially perplexing if we are to take God's goodness, selfless love and mercy as perfect models that we should strive to emulate, more especially if such striving constitutes even a part our path to eternal salvation.³⁰ As Thomas Nagel recently observed in an exchange in the *New York Review of Books* on the force of the problem of evil:

Even if the theist supposes that the problem has a solution that we humans are unable to grasp, that would mean that God, who created us with the capacity to discover the

²⁸ Plantinga, 2011, p. 59.

²⁹ Nietzsche, 1911.

³⁰ Nor is it much of a response to claim, as some do, that our notions of sin and the redeeming power of God's grace find support in our own experience of *akrasia* and the power of surrender to a personal god. After all, the interpretation of those experiences, not to mention the preoccupation with sin and the need for redemption, are themselves guided by the Christian cosmology and therefore rise and fall with the cogency of that cosmology, exactly the point at issue in this essay. I thank William Wainwright for reminding me of this argument.

laws of nature and to find the world scientifically intelligible, has made us incapable of finding the world morally intelligible. These are powerful reasons for doubt, and they have certainly destroyed the faith of some believers.³¹

For a God who reportedly made man in his own image to know Him, to love Him and to abide with Him eternally in heaven, it is perplexingly odd that such a God with those intentions would create so many obstacles to knowledge and belief. We will return to the character of God as a jealous and constant tester of mankind's devotion later when we discuss the descriptions of God's interactions with the Jews of the Old Testament.

The Nature of Jesus

Intimately tied up with the Church's understanding of God as the ultimate, unique source of all creation is the personality of Jesus. The Catholic *Catechism*, following the Gospel of John, tells us that God created heaven and earth through Jesus, the "word" of God. That same word became flesh to complete God's plan for man as the redeemer following God's imposition of original sin. Upon his resurrection following the crucifixion, Jesus as Christ sits at the right hand of the father in judgment.

Naturally enough, because of the integral involvement of Jesus in the Catholic account of God and his plans for his creation, the Catholic understanding of the nature of Jesus suffers from the same paradoxes already discussed. Particularly as I will address later, if the idea of original sin and its place in God's divine plan is paradoxical and indeed baffling, then understanding Jesus as one sent to redeem mankind from the corruption of original sin has to be suspect as well.

1. *The Paradoxical Trinity*. But the Catholic understanding of Jesus introduces its own, additional levels of paradox. Most notorious is the incoherent doctrine of the trinity: the Catholic teaching that Jesus is himself divine, i.e., is God; not merely an incarnation of God when Jesus appeared on earth in human form, but eternally present as a person ever distinct from God the father, as well as from the third

³¹ Nagel, 2012.

distinct person within the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. Each is a distinct person, thus three persons yet a single personal God. In the words of the *Catechism*, "We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the 'consubstantial Trinity.' The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire."³² Yet, "'God is one but not solitary.' 'Father,' 'Son,' 'Holy Spirit' are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another"³³ The *Catechism* concludes, "The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life."³⁴

There are of course, genuine mysteries, the most profound of which is how anything could exist eternally, without beginning or, presumably, end. This is a mystery that presents itself regardless of what might ultimately be the most fundamental existent, whether a personal God, an impersonal field of consciousness or the Higgs field. If nothing can come from nothing, yet something exists, as we can see, then whatever that something is must have existed eternally. But the mystery of the trinity is not of that character. It is simply an incoherent set of beliefs. Nor is it an inevitable aspect of any comprehensive account of existence, even of accounts that admit a transcendent spiritual realm. As we will see later, it is no part of Advaita Vedanta, or for that matter of Judaism or Islam, much less of Buddhism or Taoism. It is a uniquely Christian paradox.

2. *Jesus, Wholly Human and Wholly Divine.* Yet another layer of perplexity is introduced by the Catholic understanding of Jesus as simultaneously wholly divine and wholly human. The *Catechism* tells us that Jesus "became truly man while remaining truly God."³⁵ The two, of course, are quite different and when the *Catechism* elaborates on the idea, it appears to emphasize the human at the expense of the Divine, a strange choice:

The Son of God ... worked with human hands; he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he

³² *Catechism*, par. 253.

³³ *Ibid.*, par. 254.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, par. 261.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 464.

has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin.³⁶

Jesus, according to the *Catechism*, “assumed a rational, human soul,”³⁷ and that human soul is understood to be “endowed with a true human knowledge.”³⁸ As such, this knowledge could not in itself be unlimited: it was exercised in the historical conditions of his existence in space and time. This corresponded to the reality of [Jesus’] voluntary emptying of himself, taking “the form of a slave.”³⁹

There are at least three odd aspects to this emphasis on the nature of Jesus as limited by his humanity. In the first instance it is patently false given the testimony of the gospels. According to the Catholic tradition itself, Jesus offered insights into the nature of human existence and of the divine and the proper relationship between humans and the divine that no other human had uttered in the previous history of the western world from the time of the first humans to Jesus’ own time many thousands of years later. The great profundity and resonance of Jesus’ teaching are evident in its ability to continue to inspire Christians to this day.

In addition, secondly, not too many humans have the ability to transform the substance of material things, water to wine, or to cause a limited number of loaves and fishes to replenish themselves to feed hundreds. Nor, perhaps most dramatically, have too many other humans in the history of the Abrahamic faiths, been able to bring the dead back to life. Jesus had knowledge and with it power not available to other mere mortals.

Finally, third, why should Jesus have accepted the limitations of the human mind given his exalted, indeed enormously unique role as the savior of all mankind, as Catholics believe of him? If Jesus were sent, or came voluntarily (he is identical with the God who sent him after all) to redeem mankind from sin, it would seem only natural that Jesus would retain his comprehensive awareness of the deep structure of existence, of God (his own nature) and his creation and the path for mankind to the achievement the highest telos of human existence. If God wanted to make a real impression on his children, presumably he

³⁶ Ibid., par. 470. Quoting John, 14:9-10.

³⁷ Ibid., par. 471.

³⁸ Ibid., par. 472.

³⁹ Ibid.

would have manifested his greatness and the greatness of the truth of his teaching through the most exalted possible teacher.

3. *Jesus as God*. More fundamentally, why do Catholics insist that Jesus, the bounded human, was identical with God? The *Catechism* appears to offer at least four reasons, none compelling. First, integral to the larger explanation of God's purposes in creating mankind, the emphasis on Jesus' humanity is invoked to support the idea of the privileged status of humans within the larger cosmology – that it was for the sake of sharing his love that God created humans in particular. In this narrative, the rest of creation is merely a stage set for the dynamic relationship between God and mankind. When God took a human form in the person of Jesus, that act emphatically demonstrated the centrality of humanity in God's plan and the privileged dignity of humanity. But this facet of the story continues to introduce yet more puzzles. In the first instance, Jesus incarnated to counter at least some of the consequences of human folly and sinfulness. That purpose does not suggest human dignity; it suggests human weakness and foolishness.

There is also something odd about the human need to feel elevated above other creatures. The possibility that other among God's creatures are blessed with souls should not diminish the significance of having a soul any more than my sister having an ice cream cone should diminish my enjoyment of my ice cream cone. That in fact children often feel otherwise we attribute to their age and regard it simply a childish attitude that we hope they will outgrow with time. Humility, compassion, love of others, taking delight in the happiness of others even above our own happiness, after all, are virtues. Nothing is lost by extending those virtues to the benefit of all of God's creatures.

The idea also seems to suggest that God had some choices in the matter of how he would incarnate and the choice he actually made indicates His special regard for humans. It would seem that one could view that choice in a couple of ways. Perhaps it suggests that God might have appeared as some other kind of earthly creature, say a rabbit. But rabbits do not need a savior, even within, or especially within the Christian cosmology. Rabbits do not have souls or free will; they did not muck up in Eden the way humans did. And what would be the point of incarnating as a rabbit if you really needed to instruct humans? Rabbits cannot talk and a talking rabbit probably would not be taken seriously (there may be some disagreement about this).

Incarnating as a human just makes sense if it is humans who need saving and instruction. This is a simple matter of practical reasoning not indicating anything special about humans other than their need for redemption.

On the other hand, God might have appeared as an angel, maybe especially a really big and impressive one with a deep resonant voice. If anything, that would have been more likely to get some attention than arriving as a human. Why would not God have appeared as an angel if he really meant to offer some effective help in correcting our wayward ways? Incarnating as a human who was of modest birth in a place that was spiritually rather backward surely is not a very effective way to reach many people. Why not wait for the age of Facebook at least? God waited long enough since Adam and Eve, what is a couple thousand more years?

The consideration of humanity's claimed central and unique status seems to suggest a number of not so impressive conclusions: first, that humans have a childish desire to be special and have fashioned a religion in line with those childish needs more than any insight into the spiritual. And second, once again, that God does not really care much given such a half-hearted attempt to correct for his imposition of original sin.

The second reason for regarding Jesus as divine are his miracles. According to the *Catechism*, "Throughout his public life, he demonstrated his divine sovereignty by works of power over nature, illnesses, demons, death, and sin."⁴⁰ It may well have been that Jesus' miracles were extraordinary for his time and place, but in the context of world religions, they are anything but unique. For many ex-Catholics who later discover the wonders of the East, their fascination with the lives of Catholic martyrs are replaced with the much more mythical lives of great south Asian sages. These tomes, including Paramahansa Yogananda's delightful *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and Swami Rama's *Living with the Himalayan Masters* are filled cover to cover with tales of miraculous personages predicting the future, living for thousands of years, creating palaces out of thin air, and, indeed, bringing the dead back to life. Moreover, and more importantly, those texts and others explain in comprehensive detail the mechanics of creation, revealed by these same enlightened sages, that make such

⁴⁰ Ibid., par. 447.

powers possible, explanations whose comprehensiveness and detail are found nowhere in the Catholic literature.

Third, the *Catechism* looks to the texts of the gospels where they would appear to quote Jesus' own very brief expressions of his nature to support his divinity. After explaining that the term "son of God" is used liberally to refer to "the angels, the Chosen People, the children of Israel, and their kings,"⁴¹ the *Catechism* quotes the Gospel of John as attributing to Jesus the claim that he alone was the Son of God. Apart from the remoteness of the Gospel from Jesus' own time as well as from the synoptic gospels, as well as the questionable influence of Paul, who never met Jesus, the textual evidence, particularly in the context of its concession that "son of God" is a ubiquitous idea, is thin. (Later, we will consider the status of the orthodox gospels more critically.)

4. *The Crucifixion*. Finally, the divinity of Jesus is crucial to the Catholic story of the crucifixion. Surely there is nothing in the Catholic cosmology, indeed in Jesus' own life, more central yet more baffling than the crucifixion. According to the Catholic account, Jesus' death on the cross was the necessary antidote to God's imposition of original sin with the fall of Adam and Eve. On this account, sin consists not so much in harming others or one's self. Rather sin consists in disobedience to God. Consequently, only God can forgive that sin and God chose to redeem that sin through the sacrifice of himself in the person of Jesus.⁴² We discussed earlier how this conception of God and his plans and the demand for a blood sacrifice sits uncomfortably with the idea of God as all loving and compassionate. Turning our attention from God to Jesus, however, one cannot help but be struck by the apparent ineffectiveness of the crucifixion to accomplish its ends. If the purpose of Jesus' horrific death was to emancipate mankind from the original sin, it failed, in manifold ways. The crucifixion did not eliminate original sin from creation; the sacrament of baptism is still required to expunge original sin from each soul. But even baptism does not remove the moral weakness associated with original sin. We are, as is evident from observation of the world, still steeped in the effects of God's wrathful response to the disobedience of our forbearers.

⁴¹ Ibid., par. 441.

⁴² See *ibid.*, par. 430-431.

The very weakness of the Church's interpretation of the crucifixion, including its revisionist reading of Genesis and its invention of the idea of original sin, makes the explanation look more than anything else like an enormous ad hoc rationalization for the horrifically perplexing fact of the monstrous death of Jesus on the cross. An explanation that poses more paradoxes than it solves is hardly much of an explanation at all.

In the end, the *Catechism* concedes that "Christ's whole life is a mystery."⁴³ Thus it is especially odd that the *Catechism* goes on to claim that "catechesis will make use of all of the richness of the mysteries of Jesus."⁴⁴ Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines 'mysterious' as "exciting wonder, curiosity, or surprise while baffling efforts to comprehend or identify." The *Catechism's* confession is telling; it amounts to an acknowledgement that it cannot explain or illuminate the many paradoxes and gaps in its narrative but intends nonetheless to revel in and encourage followers likewise simply to revel in the grand mythic nature of the story, the resonant themes of the glory of God, the vastness of infinity, without asking too many hard questions. This is of a piece with the emphasis on the saving importance of faith that we will discuss in the following section when we turn to the Catholic conception of the human telos and the path to the achievement of that telos.

The Human Soul, Telos, and Path

There is much that is inspiring in the Catholic narrative of the human telos of a beatific vision of God and the path of unselfish participation in God's providence. But as with everything else that we've discussed, the narrative is thin, lacking in explanatory

⁴³ Ibid., par. 514

⁴⁴ Ibid., par. 513. The notion of "divine mystery" infects every doctrine of the *Catechism* but in the portions devoted to elaborating the nature of Jesus, the notion of "mystery" is especially common and perhaps somewhat ambiguous. Paragraph 3 of Article Five, on Jesus, talks of "the mystery of the Incarnation (conception and birth) and Paschal mystery (passion, crucifixion, death, burial, descent into hell, resurrection, and ascension)" (512). One suspects that the *Catechism* here is using the word "mysteries" in the sense of miraculous, extraordinary, explainable only by reference (vaguely) to divine powers rather than the more common use as puzzling or inexplicable.

comprehensiveness and detail, and, worse, in important respects again flatly incoherent.

1. *The Telos*. Humans, according to the *Catechism*, are uniquely composites of the human body and a soul, “at once corporeal and spiritual”⁴⁵ thus “unit[ing] the spiritual and physical worlds ...”⁴⁶ The unity is so profound, we are told, that we have to consider the soul to be the “‘form’ of the body,”⁴⁷ whatever that might mean, and of course the *Catechism* does not elaborate on this idea. Yet we are also told that the soul is more than the body in at least a couple of respects. First, the soul is in some unspecified respect what animates the body, brings it to life. In the admittedly symbolic language of the Old Testament, “the LORD GOD formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”⁴⁸

It is not at all clear how to interpret this story in light of the theory of evolution, now acknowledged by the Church.⁴⁹ Surely the not-yet-totally human ancestors of mankind had forms and were animated and living. Indeed, taking that a step further, all living creatures grow and develop, move and take nourishment from the earth and the sun. They reproduce; many live in sociable communities; they communicate with one another; they exhibit affection, pleasure, fear, confusion and frustration – the entire range of emotions. Many clearly demonstrate some level of learning and rational planning, including tool making. From yet another perspective, within humankind as across the animal kingdom, these traits vary enormously. Even the trait regarded as most human, the capacity for reason, is realized among humans across a gigantic spectrum from imbeciles to Steven Hawking. And the spectrum with wisdom at one end, bringing into consideration emotional intelligence, likely is even larger, stretching from the most dysfunctional to great saints and mystical sages. It would seem, therefore, that our experience of ourselves and ourselves

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, par. 362.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, par. 355.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 365.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 362.

⁴⁹ For a recent work by a noted Catholic theologian that engages the question of evolution and proposes a revision of the doctrine of “original sin” see generally Mahoney, 2011. Regardless of the cogency of recent efforts to reconcile theology and science, it is still interesting that theologians of a 2,000 year-old church are still trying to make sense of its foundational doctrines.

within the larger community of living beings makes it difficult to see any unique role for the soul in distinguishing human life from other forms of life.

But the *Catechism* also tells us that the soul is independent of the body and immortal; it does not cease to exist with the death of the body.⁵⁰ Indeed, the soul after death, should it rise to heaven, the “celestial paradise,” will experience the divine essence face to face.⁵¹ “Soul” thus “signifies the spiritual principle in man.”⁵² Though the *Catechism* fails to elaborate on precisely these points, presumably, the soul after the death of the body would still be the person possessing the person’s capacity for awareness, a sense of identity, memory, likes and dislikes, capacity for reason and creativity – all of the things that contribute to being a person and particularly a unique person. With these traits, the soul retains definition, it has boundaries and within those boundaries dimensions and dynamism. One would think, therefore, as it follows naturally, that the soul must have some substance, perhaps not the same substance as our material bodies, but something capable of definition, of awareness, activity, dynamism.

Here the *Catechism*, whether knowingly or not, is taking a position on one of the most fascinating and controversial issues in psychology and the philosophy of mind and consciousness: the nature of consciousness and the mind. Were it to develop its position in a cogent and productive way, it potentially would be making an enormous contribution to our self-understanding. Yet the *Catechism* offers nothing other than the vaguest generalities. It consequently leaves this area, an area that ought to be within the expertise of spiritual sages, largely to scientists and philosophers whose expertise and methods are largely bounded by their ordinary sensory experience of the waking state of consciousness and the material world and none of whom, with the possible exception of Thomas Nagel, have offered anything approaching a cogent account of the nature of consciousness that gives due weight to our experience of consciousness.

Even within its own spiritual cosmos, though, the *Catechism* leaves us with little more than a punt and an unfulfilled promise. Again, on the altogether reasonable assumption that the individual soul has to have some substance to preserve the boundaries of the individual

⁵⁰ Ibid., par. 366.

⁵¹ Ibid., par. 1023.

⁵² Ibid., par. 363.

human personality, how does this bounded being with bounded senses existing in a space with other bounded persons, including angels and even a distinctly perceptible Christ, perceive the boundlessness of God, whose substance, whatever it might be, presumably is distinct from the substance of the created world, including souls and heaven? The *Catechism* tells us that “these souls have seen and do see the divine essence with an intuitive vision”⁵³ The concept of “intuition” is notoriously vague and on this most important point, the *Catechism* offers no explanation.

If the *Catechism*'s story of human nature is vague and undeveloped, its account of the human telos is patently self-contradictory. We were told explicitly in its explication of original sin, discussed earlier, that God intended the whole of history precisely as it happened, from the fall through the crucifixion culminating in the greater grace that accompanied the greater sin: Creation is the foundation of “all God’s saving plans,” the “beginning of the history of salvation” that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”: from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ.⁵⁴

But in the parts of the *Catechism* elaborating the human telos the *Catechism* tells us explicitly the opposite, that God intended man to live forever in the body and only human sin introduced death into the world:

The Church’s Magisterium, as authentic interpreter of the affirmation of Scripture and Tradition, teaches that death entered the world on account of man’s sin. Even though man’s nature is mortal, God had destined him not to die. Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin.⁵⁵

The *Catechism*'s earlier declaration that God intended exactly what happened is part of a larger narrative that appears adapted to make sense of the crucifixion as the fulfillment of God’s promise to rectify his earlier imposition of original sin. That story, though rife with paradox, is at least consistent, as we noted earlier, with the idea that

⁵³ Ibid., par. 1023.

⁵⁴ Ibid., par. 280. Again, quoting from St. Paul, this time from Romans 8:18-23.

⁵⁵ Ibid., par. 1008.

God's omniscience entails knowledge of all that ever will occur within His creation. The latter insistence that God did not intend for humans to die appears to be part of the *Catechism's* insistence that the true end of man is not the beatific vision of God in Heaven but being eternally reunited with the material body, presumably back on earth following the last judgment. Apart from the fact that this account is part of a chapter in the tale that contradicts an earlier chapter, it raises obvious perplexing questions, both practical and theoretical. In the first instance, why in the world would anyone want to be reunited with the human body, presumably back on what is surely going to be a horribly overcrowded earth?⁵⁶ We're told that the material world following the last judgment will be glorified by which it appears to mean returned to the paradise it was when God created the first humans.⁵⁷

The doctrine of bodily resurrection also further complicates a problem that we discussed earlier: how does a bounded individual perceive the boundless God whose essence is apparently distinct from the stuff of which souls are made? With the resurrection of the body, we can extend the dilemma to include the stuff of which gross bodies are made. Perhaps that is why the omnipresent God was not so omnipresent in the garden; it may have taken some extraordinary act on God's part to appear in some limited, and not altogether impressive form to Adam and Eve.

2. *The Path to the Telos* The path that the *Catechism* lays out to achieve the telos of heaven and the beatific vision, a combination of faith and at least the avoidance of sin, in some respects is inspiring but in other respects it returns us to the arbitrariness that we saw earlier first in our discussion of original sin, and of course the doctrines are closely related. In yet other respects, the path of faith demands more than it is entitled to and the insistence on works, though not to be disparaged in itself, as a condition of salvation, seems both inadequate if not somewhat childish. It is also horribly gloomy and dispiriting.

⁵⁶ This doctrine would appear to be a forerunner to the Church's blindness to the immanent threat of environmental catastrophe brought on in part by the presence of too many humans. The Church's dogmatic stand on birth control for many is yet another instance of the Church's lack of real concern for human suffering and, consequently, further evidence of its lack of spiritual authority.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, par. 997 and following.

Mixed in with both faith and the avoidance of sin is the notion of God's grace.

As we saw earlier in the *Catechism's* story of the fall, God's imposition of original sin and the redemption of sin worked by Jesus' crucifixion, the overwhelming theme is of one of sin and the need to overcome sin. Sin again is understood as an offense against God, disobedience to God's moral law.⁵⁸ It is the product, the *Catechism* tells us, of a failure to "love God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods."⁵⁹ Of course, one has to keep in mind, according to Catholic teaching, that despite the horrendous suffering and death of Jesus, each of us is nonetheless born with a sin imposed on us by God for the disobedience of our distant, mythic ancestor. That sin inclines us toward further sin. Baptism, we are told, though essential to salvation may remove original sin but it does not remove the human weakness caused by original sin.⁶⁰

Sin and the inclination to further sin are overcome only by God's grace, which is a free and unmerited gift. Apparently, the boon of God's grace is twofold. First is faith, the complete submission of the intellect and will to God.⁶¹ Second is the ability to acknowledge our sinful natures and renounce our sins. "It is by faith in the Gospel and by Baptism that one renounces evil and gains salvation, that is, the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life."⁶²

We began this exploration of the Catholic cosmology by imagining a seeker who is inclined to believe that our world is enchanted, that it has a transcendent, sacred dimension. There are reasons for trusting that inclination in the very persistence of religious thought over millennia as well as the comprehensive and cogent testimony of profoundly moving mystical sages. The openness to these phenomena and the desire to pursue a deeper understanding and connection to the divine itself could be regarded as grace. And clearly many among us share this openness and desire but many do not. We could say of those who do that they are possessed of grace simply by virtue of how we have defined grace.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, par. 1849 ("It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law.'"); par. 1950.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, par. 1849.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, par. 1426.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, par. 143.

⁶² *Ibid.*, par. 1427

But the Catholic understanding of grace as an unmerited, gratuitous gift from God, something coming from the outside and causing the inclination, once again reintroduces at yet another juncture an arbitrariness and a failure of universal compassion in the Catholic conception of God. If God's bestowal of grace is necessary to overcome our inclination to sin and to turn to God, then the enormous disparities in virtue and religious interest can only be due to disparities in God's bestowal of grace. And if the disavowal of sin and faith in the Gospels is essential to salvation, as the *Catechism* professes, many, including many who have never heard of the Gospels or who for one reason or another have been raised with suspicion of the Church or have never been exposed to religious thought, are condemned to everlasting hellfire and alienation from God. On this account, the idea of a virtuous atheist would appear to be an oxymoron, yet we know from experience that this is not true. And again, returning to our earlier discussion of original sin, those enormous disparities themselves are the product of God's imposition of original sin on all of mankind. Now, in addition to the disparities themselves being the arbitrary product of God's acts, so is his saving grace. The *Catechism* insists that the lack of grace is due to our own refusal but it also teaches, as it must for consistencies sake, that "[t]he preparation of man for the reception of grace is already a work of grace."⁶³

The paradoxes of the Catholic story naturally enough bear on the reasonableness of the *Catechism's* additional demand of faith as essential to salvation. If we understand faith as trust in the Catholic account of the goodness of God, that faith has to be strained by, among other things, God's petulant reaction to the first disobedience of Adam and Eve, the wholly arbitrary imposition of original sin on altogether innocent generations of humans, God's petty testing of Abraham's obedience, his lack of mercy in sending the deluge instead of a charismatic teacher, and ultimately his decision to redeem his own imposition of original sin by condemning his own son to the horrors of the crucifixion. All of these elements stand in stark contrast to the constant invocation of the "glory" of God and his infinite mercy and compassion. The story's thorough preoccupation with sin, corruption and the necessity of penance, particularly Jesus' crucifixion, similarly

⁶³ Ibid., par. 2001.

undermines any celebration of spirituality as something wonderful and enriching.

If the faith demanded is in the story of God and the spiritual as told by the Church, the incoherence, incompleteness, and the constant invocation of “mystery” to cover the manifold weaknesses of the *Catechism* are themselves reasons for skepticism of the Catholic account of spirituality and consequently also of the reliability of the Catholic Church on matters of spirituality. Incoherence, thinness, and the constant insistence on the unintelligibility of the spiritual are not grounds for faith.

Apart from the troubling insistence on faith in the ramshackle Catholic cosmology, the idea that one earns the telos of the beatific vision by avoiding sin is in many ways rather childish and again raises many of the same paradoxes as well as arbitrary elements that we saw earlier in discussing the idea of original sin. The very idea of obedience as the benchmark of sin or entitlement to a heavenly reward appears arbitrary, particularly in contrast to what might otherwise be the standard of sin and entitlement. Consider the starting point in the narrative of sin and the need for salvation – the myth of Adam and Eve. Their sin, the first sin, the one that got the tsunami of sin going, was nothing more than disobeying God’s command not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. No one was hurt by that disobedience. It did not involve cruelty to any other creature. It did not even represent a failure of any duty of care for God’s creation. That command, as described, was nothing more than an arbitrary injunction by God.

Surely, the story of Adam and Eve and the first sin is metaphorical. Nonetheless, the metaphor is extremely simple: God commands arbitrarily, Adam and Eve disobey the arbitrary and unexplained injunction and then they and their progeny forever are punished by God. If the command were at least one that concerned the care and nurturing of creation or at least of their own lives and character it would have integrity, make some sense as a foundation for reward or punishment. But there was no such command to seek truth, beauty or virtue – the growth of positive qualities, of character or knowledge. Just obey and the obedience entailed merely avoiding doing something that God commanded not be done. The command is not only arbitrary, it is shallow; it demands no great effort of growth and development of the person.

Transposed to the world after the fall, of course, how much more could reasonably be demanded than to avoid sin? We are given one life and one life only to earn our reward and avoid damnation; those lives are of varying lengths, none especially long. Human lives begin in vastly different circumstances that make the achievement of anything approaching emotional maturity near impossible for many and at best extremely difficult for the rest of us. If the achievement of saintliness were the criterion for the heavenly beatitude, hardly anyone would achieve the telos.

But then heaven (or the repopulated earth post the final judgment) would be filled with people who have barely achieved the very lowest rung of emotional and spiritual growth.

The arbitrariness, randomness and shallowness of the path to the telos is of a piece with our observations that underlie the problem of evil – the randomness of fate, the cruelty of the natural world, the apparent arbitrariness of God’s grace, etc. It does not speak well for the Catholic conception of God.⁶⁴ But it certainly does help to explain the emphasis on the need for faith and obedience rather than deep knowledge, wisdom or a truly developed, virtuous character. The latter is too much to expect given the circumstances of human life and the former is essential given the incoherence and ad hoc character of the cosmology. But the demand for unquestioning faith and obedience in those circumstances should also be a reason for caution.

The Claim to Authority

The incoherent elements and the lack of explanatory power also bear on perhaps the most majestic and self-serving aspect of the Church’s story: its own inerrancy. The *Catechism* boldly declares the Church’s belief that in important matters of belief and faith it is

⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo observed on this account that, “there is too the difficulty that this soul inherits a past for which it is in no way responsible, or is burdened with mastering propensities imposed on it not by its own act, and is yet responsible for its future which is treated as if it were in no way determined by that often deplorable inheritance, *damnosa hereditas*, or that unfair creation, and were entirely of its own making. We are made helplessly what we are and are yet responsible for what we are, – or at least for what we shall be hereafter, which is inevitably determined to a large extent by what we are originally. And we have only this one chance This is a paradox which offends both the soul and the reason, the ethical sense and the spiritual intuition.” Aurobindo, 1952, pp. 32-33.

infallible: “Christ endowed the Church’s shepherds with the charism of infallibility in matters of faith and morals.”⁶⁵ The Church claims to benefit from the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a concept that itself contributes further to the incoherent idea of three persons in one God.

More important, though, the claim is incredible in light of the Church’s own teachings and history. In the first instance, as we’ve been exploring, the Magisterium’s claim to inerrancy is itself is one aspect of the larger Catholic narrative. As such, the authority of the claim to inerrancy is only as cogent as the larger narrative. It derives support from the cogency of the whole tapestry of belief, of each article, their coherence and consistency with our own observations of the world. If someone claims privileged knowledge but then offers explanations that barely begin to explain and are incoherent and ad hoc, it necessarily undermines the claim to privileged authority. But as we’ve seen, the *Catechism’s* elaboration of the fundamental articles of faith are a cause for caution and thus skepticism of the Magisterium’s authority on spiritual matters.

And the weakness of the *Catechism* is not the only cause for skepticism about its claims to inerrancy. The conduct of the Church over the centuries in dealing with matters of scientifically, empirically verifiable fact also must caution skepticism of the Church’s claim to infallibility, as well as its methods and its sources. The Church’s notoriously obtuse treatment of Galileo, one of the greatest of Western scientists, is only the most stunning historical example.⁶⁶

Even worse, though, is the Church’s monstrous history of silencing so-called heretics. In short order, the proto-orthodox faction, as the newly established orthodox Church went from burning what it regarded as heretical books to burning heretics themselves, real or more likely imagined – midwives, herbalists, or those who merely threatened the material and political prosperity of the church and its clergy. The practice was ended only by the Enlightenment, a reaction in part against the imperial claims of the Church that made those excesses no longer tolerable.⁶⁷ Where was the Holy Spirit when the Church for centuries went on a murderous rampage that took the lives

⁶⁵ *Catechism*, par. 890.

⁶⁶ See generally Mayaud, 1997, and Sobel, 1999.

⁶⁷ See generally the excellent recent studies by Cullen Murphy, 2012, and R. I. Moore, 2012.

of tens of thousands of innocent people?⁶⁸ The Church may now be a toothless beast but only because it had its fangs pulled by the forces of reason and compassion.

Though not of the same level of depravity, many see in the American Church's recent vociferous condemnation of Obamacare a woeful lack of compassion and foresight. The actions of the US bishops would have stalled the adoption of legislation providing greater health care coverage in the US solely because that legislation would have required provision of birth control to employees of the Church. The American Church's opposition was not only intellectually baseless, grounded in specious theology, but it threatened greater availability of health care to the poor and further was part and parcel with the patent contradiction in the Church's call to care for the natural environment while ignoring the contribution of overpopulation to environmental degradation, not to mention poverty. And then, of course, there is the Church's horrid record of dealing with predatory pedophilia among its own clergy. It is extremely difficult to sustain a claim to inerrancy and divine guidance on such a longstanding and continuing record of corruption and obtuseness.

The Catholic story might have been more compelling in a less critical era or were it the only way to account for the compelling reasons that lead us to seek a deeper understanding of our sense of the sacredness of the world. But as we now well know in the secular and epistemologically more sophisticated world in which we live, we are more demanding of the large narrative that ought to frame and guides so much of our lives. The Catholic story is rescued, to the extent that it can be rescued, largely by its elevation and celebration of "mystery" as virtue rather than a cause of concern and caution. And, as Charles

⁶⁸ A recent review in *Commonweal* by John Baldovin, S.J., of Gary Wills' recent book, *Why Priests?* focusing on what Wills regards as the failed tradition of the priesthood provides an excellent example this sort of baseless belief that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit despite centuries of evidence to the contrary as well as the incoherence of the doctrine of the trinity, of which the Holy Spirit is a part. Fr. Baldovin concludes his review with the following remarks: "To insist that only the practices of the first generation of Christians should be normative is to fall into a kind of primitivist fallacy, which denies what Catholicism means by tradition – namely, that the church continues to read the Scripture in the light of its experience and is confident in the guidance of the Holy Spirit." John F. Baldovin, "Cult Hit," *Commonweal*, February 22, 2013.

Taylor underscores, the Catholic story is far from the only theory of spirituality. And as we will see in the next section, there are accounts, at least one, that not only avoid the ample paradoxes of the Catholic cosmology, but also potentially provide productive lines of thought into problems that science, with its focus firmly in the material world, has not yet solved.

Sources of Doctrine

While the problems with the Catholic story are themselves grounds for skepticism in the Church's spiritual authority, the method of reasoning that leads to the story itself also provides an interesting contrast with the methods of interpretation and teaching that we will discuss later in connection with Advaita Vedanta. It is abundantly apparent in reading the Catholic *Catechism* that its authors were engaged in a heroic effort to make sense of the scriptures that the Church, by political fiat, some hundreds of years after the death of Jesus, elevated as the sole orthodox scriptures. The same can be said for the pillars of the church on which the *Catechism* also relies: Paul, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, et al. They too are striving, often ingeniously, to reconcile the biblical stories, those of the Old Testament and the New, and to provide answers to the host of questions, practical and theoretical, raised by those texts, relying only on reason and their own experiences in the ordinary waking state of consciousness.

The Old Testament is a difficult text to reconcile. While it is replete with expressions of great spiritual piety and worldly wisdom, it is also the source of much that is incoherent in Catholic theology. In particular, its characterization of God in the baffling stories of Adam and Eve and the fall, of Abraham and Isaac, the deluge and the many petulant and petty interactions between God and the Jewish people. Far from revealing a God of infinite love, wisdom and mercy, the God of the Old Testament, notoriously, shows less patience and mercy than we expect of an ordinary human father. It is not at all difficult to appreciate Marcion's impetus in proposing that the God of the Old Testament is not the singular highest God but some lesser

transcendent being, a demi-god, and that the mission of Jesus was to introduce the real God of love and mercy.⁶⁹

Marcion's theory might have more force if it were not for the fact that the God of Jesus, the God of the New Testament, continues to demand blood sacrifice to redeem his people from a burden that God himself arbitrarily imposed. And the New Testament adds its own layers of incoherence to that of the Old Testament. As we've seen, confronted by the confounding crucifixion of Jesus and the emerging idea that Jesus is himself one with God the father as well as a third shadowy person, the Holy Spirit, the Church founders invented the idea of original sin, a concept that was no part of the Jewish understanding of Genesis.⁷⁰ The greatness of Jesus' sacrifice had to be matched by an equal, justifying depravity of mankind, a depravity so deep that only God's grace and mercy could redeem it. Therein, too, we confront the source of the Church's debilitating preoccupation with sin and the perverse celebration of suffering, not just weathering inevitable suffering, but suffering itself as a virtue.

The very selection of the New Testament texts and the origins of the Church itself present another level of problem for the Catholic cosmology. In this essay, I have been exploring and emphasizing the paradoxes of the Catholic narrative taken on its face. I've highlighted the weakness of the *Catechism* in providing deeper, comprehensive and detailed insight into the spiritual dimension. To a lesser extent, I've suggested that the story fails to square with facts in the world, i.e., that its claims are not only internally inconsistent and insufficiently elaborate, but that many of the views are inconsistent with our own experience of the world. That is the case with the problem of evil, for instance. Seen against the presence of suffering in the world and its arbitrary distribution, the claim of God's perfect infinite mercy and justice is untenable. But the history of the emergence of the Orthodox Church and the selection of the New Testament is another, and even more blatant example of the latter, of the Catholic narrative being contradicted by facts, though in this case even more directly.

⁶⁹ I thank my colleague Professor Gordon Hylton, a constant source of invaluable conversation on matters religious, particularly concerning the early history of the Church, for introducing me to Marcion and his intriguing heresy.

⁷⁰ I am grateful to Professor Joel Richeimer for his patient and ever insightful fielding of my questions about the Jewish faith.

Beginning with the work of the three German Enlightenment theologians, Hermann Reimarus in the 18th Century, F C. Baur in the 19th Century and especially by Walter Bauer in the 20th Century, and confirmed by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi library in 1945, a treasure trove of alternative gospels and other writings contemporaneous with the orthodox gospels, we now know that one of the most important claims of the Catholic church, that it is the vicar of Christ by virtue apostolic succession, is a myth. According to that doctrine of apostolic succession, Jesus taught the truth about himself and salvation to his original apostles. That teaching has been handed down uncorrupted through the unbroken line of succession of bishops. In his book *Lost Christianities*, Bart Ehrman summarized the results of historical inquiry:

As a result of this ongoing scholarship, it is widely thought today that proto-orthodoxy was simply one of many competing interpretations of Christianity in the early Church. It was neither a self-evident interpretation nor an original apostolic view. The apostles, for example, did not teach the Nicene Creed or anything like it. Indeed, as far back as we can trace, Christianity was remarkably varied in its theological expressions.⁷¹

What finally became the orthodox theology, canon and institution did not come to dominate Christianity until the end of the third century after Jesus' death. Prior to that time, there was a profusion of gospels and narratives by groups, all claiming to be Christian and to be in possession of the true teachings of Jesus. Again, Barth Ehrman:

As historians have come to realize, during the first three Christian centuries, the practices and beliefs found among people who called themselves Christian were so

⁷¹ Ehrman, 2003, p. 176. The pernicious persistence of the Church's commitment to this myth despite the historical evidence to the contrary is manifestly evident in its treatment of the Irish priest, Rev. Tony Flannery. The Vatican's doctrinal office, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, instructed Fr. Flannery's superior to remove Fr. Flannery from his ministry for questioning whether "the priesthood as we currently have it in the church originated with Jesus." Fr. Flannery went on to suggest, "It is more likely that some time after Jesus, a select and privileged group within the community who had abrogated power and authority to themselves, interpreted the occasion of the Last Supper in a manner that suited their own agenda." *The New York Times*, January 20, 2013.

varied that the differences between Roman Catholics, Primitive Baptists, and the Seventh-Day Adventists pale by comparison.⁷²

Ehrman argues that the proto-orthodox became dominant through a combination of forged writings professing to have been written by the apostles, fraudulent texts, and personal attacks against rivals. They were also better organized than their Gnostic rivals because, unlike the Gnostics, they emphasized dogma and a church hierarchy that was invested with authority to determine what constituted proper belief.

The books of the New Testament themselves show evidence of how the orthodox Church, once in power, rewrote history to serve its authority. The Acts of the Apostles, for example, portray the apostles as converging on the Pauline doctrines. Yet Paul himself in his own letters admits to disagreements with Peter and other of the apostles, apostles who, unlike Paul, knew Jesus in the flesh and were his close disciples, that belie the account in the canonical Acts. Non-canonical writings from the same time show Peter harshly condemning Paul. As evidence by the discoveries at Nag Hammadi, the emergent orthodoxy not only rewrote history, it attempted to eradicate any evidence of the enormous profusion of varied gospels and other teachings, many of which sharply disputed the views of the orthodox as superficial, sometimes laughably so.⁷³

The suppression of Christian Gnosticism was especially significant for the development of Catholic doctrine and practice. In light of the orthodox condemnation of Gnosticism, none of the church fathers could claim any authority from mystical insight nor could the Church take seriously any insights from Catholic mystics that might have diverged from orthodox Catholic teaching. Yet, as William James observed, “Churches, once established, live at second-hand upon tradition; but the *founders* of every church owed their power of originality to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine.”⁷⁴

One might want to be more cautious in attributing mystical insight to the founders of every church as James here seems to do. At the extreme, there are religions whose founders claimed some kind of

⁷² Ibid., p. 1.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 185.

⁷⁴ James, 1902, p. 30.

direct communication with at least angels but whose claims are utterly and demonstrably fraudulent. Indeed, one of the greatest dilemmas in any comparison of religions is discerning true mystical experience from other kinds of experience as well as discerning experience from the interpretation of the experience, a subject beyond the scope of this essay. It may also be the case that some religions maintain effective practices for nurturing mystical awareness and are blessed with the presence in every generation of profoundly enlightened teachers who teach from experience rather than received doctrine. That is the claim at least of the major eastern religions; of Hinduism, as we will see in the next section, as well as Buddhism and Taoism. Each of these religions is essentially mystical in that they regard mystical awareness as the telos of human life and the focus of spiritual practice. In any event, James is surely correct, though: religion is about the transcendent and any profound insight into that dimension can happen only through some state of awareness other than our ordinary awareness in the waking state of consciousness. Any tradition that denies that in favor of an institutionalized body reasoning from a set of obscure and likely false scriptures cuts itself off from its own roots and the source of spiritual knowledge. It is a commonplace in Eastern movements that enlightened teachers teach from a depth of insight and that unless they leave behind disciples capable of the same mystical insight, the teaching inevitably is lost.

With regard to the Catholic encounter with mysticism after the suppression of gnosticism and the dominance of the proto-orthodox strain, it is enough to observe here that the mystical tradition has been peripheral to the articulation and teaching of Catholic orthodoxy. There have been great Catholic mystics and mystical writing, to be sure,⁷⁵ but for the Church, the cultivation of mystical knowledge is no part of the telos of humankind and given that, naturally enough, the Church does not teach practices whose aim is to cultivate mystical spiritual knowledge nor does the Church have any detailed account of the nature of mystical experience or how it is possible except to regard it as a miraculous gift from God, another non-explanation. The Church's dealings with its own mystics in the past is indeed mixed. It seems to tolerate mystical experience only so long as these mystics do not utter anything contrary to Church teaching, in which case they can

⁷⁵ See Fanning, 2001.

be celebrated as miraculous confirmation of orthodox theology. Bernadette Roberts, the extraordinary contemporary Catholic mystic, based on her own experience has speculated:

To journey beyond self ... means going beyond our usual frames of reference and encountering areas of theological sensitivity which, alone, might necessitate such accounts remaining unrecorded or unpreserved. I have always been of the opinion that John of the Cross, with the Spanish Inquisition breathing down his neck, failed to give us the full story. We know that his writings were left incomplete.⁷⁶

Ms. Robert's own experience with Catholic teachers provides an interesting example of this lacuna in the Catholic understanding of spirituality and the loss for Catholic teaching. Ms. Roberts from an early age had experiences of the silence of pure consciousness, going beyond the relative, bounded experience of the mind and self, what anyone familiar with Advaita would recognize as beginning experiences of Samadhi – mystical, spiritual enlightenment. She joined a Carmelite convent in her teens where these experiences continued during periods of prayer. When she confessed these experiences to her spiritual counselor, she was met with horror and derision:

One day she asked me about my prayer, so I told her: I do nothing; there is just silence. This astonished and upset her; without asking another question, she told me in so many words: because my prayer was not in keeping with my virtue – I had none – it was obvious I had gone wrong somewhere, and was probably suffering from illusions such as St. Teresa described in those who think they are more advanced than they are. My prayer was nothing more than a "natural" silence, and therefore not from God; it was a form of quietism – a heresy in the Church. She ended by saying the devil could well have his hand in this; he was leading me to think I must remain silent, when all the time I should be practicing mental prayer.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Roberts, 1993, p. 119.

⁷⁷ Roberts, 1985, p. 57.

Later in life, after Ms. Roberts had left the convent and raised a family, her experiences deepened into a permanent state of the very highest Samadhi in which she experienced not only her own identity with the fundamental field of pure consciousness but also the entire phenomenal world as nothing other than that field reveling in its own imagination. We will revisit these experiences in the next section. When she related these experiences to a Benedictine friend and confessor searching for insight and assurance, he reacted with bafflement:

With that he threw up his arms and said, "Oh, God, that's far out!" But while I went on complaining, he sat there musing to himself about what would happen to scholastic theology if science proved there was no such thing as a permanent substance in matter.

Eventually, I found myself trying to reassure him

But Father was not listening; he was off in one of his theological head-trips, and I knew where it would end up. He would eventually draw a blank and then just sit there and stare out the window, over the hillside, and out to the sea in to which every theory and insight has a way of eventually dissolving and disappearing.⁷⁸

Of course, interestingly, science some time ago came to the conclusion that at least the material world of our ordinary experience is not as it seems; it is built up out of combinations of particles, which ultimately themselves are nothing but perturbations of a unitary field. And how do we mediate among these various large cosmological narratives, each potentially positing a different human telos and ways to achieve that telos? By objectively and rigorously comparing and contrasting each against the other to see which is more or less internally coherent, which are contradicted by well-established facts in the world, which provide the most cogent explanations for the largest expanse of experience and which might predict experiences and phenomenon not otherwise anticipated.

What we've seen so far is that the Catholic cosmology suffers from incoherence, paradox and simple weak explanations in all of its fundamental doctrines. We've reviewed the well-known problems of

⁷⁸ Roberts, 1993, p. 57.

God's foreknowledge, theodicy and the trinity, but we've also seen that the Church's teaching on original sin not only contributes to the problem of theodicy it also seems ad hoc, an attempt by the Church to give meaning to the otherwise startling and baffling crucifixion of Jesus. That explanation, that Jesus died to redeem mankind from original sin, itself seems paradoxical. Not only does it further contribute to the problem of theodicy (that God would demand a blood sacrifice to appease his own wrath at the first disobedience) but the crucifixion did not even accomplish its goals: it neither eliminated original sin nor the moral weakness that is the result of original sin. The Church also does not seem able to decide whether God intended the fall, which would raise problems of its own, or intended mankind to live forever in the body. Finally, we saw that the Church's narrative of its own origins is contradicted by recent careful scholarship enriched by new found evidence of a rich collection of varying Christian groups in the period following Jesus' death. The Church, of course, demands faith, belief despite the lack of reason, as well as despite paradox, as a crucial condition of salvation but the demand for faith itself is part of the larger Catholic cosmology and rises and falls with whatever support it finds or fails to find in the narrative as a whole.

The Alternative Cosmology of Advaita Vedanta

The Tradition of Advaita Vedanta

We began this essay with the image of a seeker as someone committed to the possibility of there being more to existence than the material world of our ordinary experience but also committed to rigorous standards of rational belief in discerning the nature of the transcendent world and its significance for us. In the preceding section, we considered the reasons why a seeker might be skeptical of the Catholic account of spirituality, as developed in the Catholic *Catechism*, and consequently over the Church's own authority as a reliable guide to the spiritual world. In this section, I want to suggest that looking beyond the Catholic tradition there are other accounts of the spiritual that may well go further in satisfying the demands of epistemic rigor. In particular, we are going to be exploring the main tenants of Advaita

Vedanta, the metaphysical aspect of the Vedic tradition of India, often referred to by modern Advaitins as Classical Hinduism.

Vedanta: the End of Knowledge in the Cognition of Non-Duality

'Vedanta' means the end ('anta') of knowledge ('Veda') in a number of related senses. In the first and the most literal sense it refers to the *Upanishads*, the last, fourth sections of each of the four *Vedas* and the most broadly philosophical of each Veda. The *Vedas* are the most fundamental scriptures of the Hindu tradition. The earlier chapters of the *Vedas* include, first, the *Mantras*, the eternal, self-existing hymns which are regarded as the very seeds of the manifest world; second, the *Brahmanas*, which contain instructions on the continued use of the *Mantras* for liturgical purposes; and, third, the *Aranyakas*, philosophical reflections on the *Mantras* and their use in liturgy. The *Upanishads* appear as distinct parts of the *Aranyakas*. The whole of the *Vedas* are regarded as *Sruti*, i.e., revealed texts in a sense that we will consider later. The *Upanishads*, along with the *Brahma Sutras* of Badarayana and the *Bhagavad Gita*, also composed by Badarayana, are regarded as the *prasthanas-traya*, the triple canon of Vedanta. The *Brahma Sutras* are a systematic presentation of the more poetically styled and mythic teachings of the *Upanishads*, though themselves extremely condensed and in need of explication. The *Bhagavad Gita* consists of the middle eighteen chapters of the great Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna, regarded by the tradition as an incarnation of the god Vishnu, on the cusp of a battle that will plunge the world into an age of ignorance, instructs his friend and disciple Arjuna on Advaita and the path to knowledge.

But 'Vedanta' more fully, also refers to the aim of knowledge, the completion and the fulfillment of knowledge. Unlike the earlier portions of the *Veda*, which are limited to the *mantras* and then their use in liturgy, the *Upanishads* are regarded by Advaitins, and themselves claim to present the depths and completeness of the Vedic cosmology. Swami Gambhiranananda, for example, a translator of the major *Upanishads*, has said of the *Upanishads* that "they mark the summits of the *Veda* which is *Sruti* (the heard, the revealed). They are the pristine springs of Vedantic metaphysics; Vedanta is the name given to them because they are the *end* (aim as well as concluding

parts) of the Veda (Veda + *anta*)."⁷⁹ 'Advaita,' which means non-dual ('dvaita' – dual with the prefix 'a' which negates), indicates that the completion of knowledge is in the transformation of consciousness that brings the immediate and permanent experience of the non-dual nature of existence.

The metaphysics of Advaita⁸⁰ could not be further from the cosmology of Christianity, though it bears some striking similarities to modern quantum field theory. Where in the Christian tradition, God is unique but distinct and apart from his creation, in Advaita there is ever only one thing that exists, an infinite field of consciousness: "One indivisible is that pure existence."⁸¹ Where in the west, consciousness generally is regarded as an emergent quality of the physical nervous system, in Advaita the entire phenomenal world, subtle and gross, is a cosmic play within the field of consciousness; it is an emergent play of the one unbounded consciousness.

The tradition of Vedanta refers to this unbounded field of consciousness as *Brahman*. From time to time, in its own time, the silent unperturbed Brahman awakens to itself and to its own infinite capacity of imagination. It then rises up in thought and imagines the sequential and orderly unfolding of the great cosmic drama of creation. According to Vedanta, all of creation is nothing other than the play, the *lilla*, of consciousness within itself. Sri Aurobindo, one of the great Vedantins of the 20th Century explained that, "All creation or becoming is nothing but this self-manifestation. Out of the seed there evolves that which is already in the seed, pre-existent in being,

⁷⁹ Gambhirananda, 1993, p. v.

⁸⁰ It bears some mention up front that Advaita is one version of Hindu metaphysics. There is an old saying in the Hindu tradition one hears often that there are more religions within Hinduism than outside of Hinduism. This is no doubt due in part at least to the fact that the account of Advaita is radically different from our ordinary experience of the phenomenal world, much in the way that quantum theory presents us with a world radically different from our ordinary experience of the phenomenal world (indeed, as we will see there are substantial similarities between Advaita and quantum theory, not the least of which is that according to both, the fundamental and sole existent is an undifferentiated field) and thus there is a great spread between Advaita and ordinary experience for many narratives to flourish .

⁸¹ Chandogya Upanishad VI. 2. 1.

predestined in its will to become, prearranged in the delight of becoming.”⁸²

The tradition describes in careful detail the elaboration of creation within a silent, unbounded ocean of consciousness. T.M.P. Mahadevan, for instance, in his Forward to Sir John Woodroffe’s *Garlands of Letters*, writes:

The philosophy of S’aktism is a kind of non-dualism (*advaita*), similar to that of Kashmir S’aivism. In both the systems, the highest Reality is styled S’iva-S’akti. S’iva and S’akti are not different; they are one. S’iva is consciousness as stasis (cit); S’akti is consciousness as dynamis (cidrupini). S’iva is pure awareness which is the ground of all existence. Through his Para S’akti, he effects the manifestation of the universe. He is the sole and whole cause of the world. Only, he becomes the cause, not in his aspect as stasis, but through his dynamic aspect which is spoken of as his feminine part.

Evolution, we are told is the result of self-movement (spanda) on the part of Siva-S’akti. It is the movement of

⁸² Sri Aurobindo, 1939, p. 120. Some modern scholars of Vedanta distinguish between early advaitins, represented by the great 8th Century interpreter and saint, Shankara, who, among other things, wrote extensive commentaries on the *prastana traiya*, and more contemporary Advaitins, like Sri Aurobindo. See, e.g., Radhakrishnan, 1957, p. 573. The distinction, however, is contrary to an essential element of the tradition of Advaita itself, that Advaita is not a mere speculative philosophical theory. Rather, the tradition regards Advaita more along the lines of science, as descriptions of the observations of enlightened sages, i.e., men and women who are immediately and permanently aware of the true nature of existence as nothing other than Brahman as well as the orderly mechanics of the play of Brahman within its own imagination. Moreover, that tradition of enlightened sages continues in every generation and sages are known by, among other things, the depth and comprehensiveness of their insights. Different saints may express themselves differently depending on the interests and aptitudes of those to whom they teach but they are describing and teaching about the same universe and their experience of it in detail. One of the more remarkable aspects of Bernadette Roberts’ accounts, quoted in the text, is how her descriptions of her experiences, including the evolution of those experiences, is readily recognizable to anyone familiar with the non-dual account of Advaita, and this despite the fact that she was and may well remain completely unfamiliar with any accounts of Advaita. Again, I am grateful to William Wainwright for the opportunity to clarify this important point.

God that brings about the distinctions of word (*sabda*), object (*artha*), and cognition (*pratyaya*). These three are, in fact, aspects of God's primal energy. It is the causal impetus of the Divine that makes them emerge out of itself. The world of sounds, things, and thoughts, is the self-manifestation of the non-dual Spirit.

The line of evolution is from the subtle to the gross. The Reality in itself – Para Siva – is transcendent it is beyond the levels of Matter, Life, and Mind. It is without parts ..., without activity, and beyond the reach of word ..., and mind. The same Reality as the cause of the world-process is called Paramesvara (the Supreme Lord). From Paramesvara arise at first the five categories of pure (*suddha*) creation; and then begins the course of finitization consisting in the emergence of the thirty-one categories composing impure (*asudha*) creation.⁸³

As Mahadevan begins to describe, creation proceeds from the field of consciousness through three levels, emerging sequentially within Brahman, with each succeeding level more dense than the one out of which it emerged, from a most subtle level, often referred to in English as the causal level, through a mental/emotional/vital and finally the gross physical level of our own waking experience. Each subtle level supports the levels above it.

All individual sentient beings have aspects, bodies with particular structures and functions, on all levels with the enduring soul existing on the most subtle, the causal level. The intermediate bodies are home to the different functions that we associate with consciousness: the most subtle perturbation of the field of consciousness, the causal body, with memory and intuitive, wholistic knowledge; the subtle body with reason, the intellect, and perception, the emotions and desires; the physical body as a vehicle for life in the gross physical world. Beneath all of these active levels of cognition, thought and emotions, though, continues to lie the silent field of consciousness as that which experiences in every creature and in that sense, the real Self of every sentient being: "All this is the Brahman; this Self is the Brahman and

⁸³ Mahadevan, 2001, pp. iii-iv.

the Self is fourfold. Beyond relation, featureless, unthinkable, in which all is still."⁸⁴

In this way, Brahman, the field of consciousness, not only experiences and witnesses the whole of its manifestation, Brahman also enters into its own play as the deepest Self of all beings to experience the lilla from every possible perspective:

He desired, "May I be Many." He concentrated in Tapas, by Tapas, he created the world; creating, he entered into it; became the expressed and the unexpressed, he became knowledge and ignorance, he became the truth and the falsehood: he became the truth, even all this whatsoever that is. "That Truth" they call him.⁸⁵

Of course, this is not how we experience ourselves in the ordinary waking state of consciousness. We experience ourselves as distinct loci of awareness. This raises the question: How does the tradition explain how the one consciousness loses awareness of itself as it is projected through the limiting cognitive activity of distinct sentient creatures? The key concept here is maya, explained as both the creative power of Brahman and the power of Brahman to veil itself from itself. Thus the creative power becomes the power to make Brahman appear to itself as the multiplicity of creation. Creation is thus the creation of an illusion of multiplicity presented to consciousness itself as that consciousness is projected through the mind and senses of individual sentient creatures, themselves nothing other than particular excitations of consciousness, out of what is in reality nothing but the play of consciousness within itself. Sri Aurobindo explains:

If Brahman is the sole existent, Maya can be nothing but a power of Brahman, a force of his consciousness or a result of his being; and if the Jivatman [Brahman as projected through each sentient creature], one with Brahman, is subject to its own Maya, the Brahman in it is subject to Maya. But this is not intrinsically or fundamentally possible: the subjection can only be a submission of something in Nature to an action of Nature which is part of the conscious and free movement of the

⁸⁴ Mandukya Upanishad Verses 2 and 7.

⁸⁵ Taittiriya Upanishad II. 6.

Spirit in things, a play of its own self-manifesting Omniscience. Ignorance must be part of the movement of the One, a development of its consciousness knowingly adopted, to which it is not forcibly subject but which it uses for its cosmic purpose.⁸⁶

Unlike Catholic teaching, with its exclusive focus on humanity and the allocation of eternal souls to humans only, the Vedic tradition regards all sentient creatures as possessed of souls and destined to enjoy the universal telos of enlightenment, of complete knowledge of its own true nature and the nature of the phenomenal world. Each soul begins its existence in a rudimentary state, attached to the simplest forms of life. But the transmigrating soul in each creature, undergoing innumerable lives and deaths, continually grows in its capacity for awareness. Again, Sri Aurobindo:

The pure self is unborn, does not pass through death or birth, is independent of birth or body, mind or life of this manifested Nature. It is not bound by these things, not limited, not affected, even though it assumes and supports them. The soul, on the contrary, is something that comes down into birth and passes through death – although it does not itself die, for it is immortal – from one state to another, from the earth plane to other planes and back again to the earth-existence. It goes on with this progression from life to life through an evolution which leads it up to the human state and evolves through it all a being of itself which we call the psychic being that supports the evolution and develops a physical, a vital, a mental human consciousness as its instruments of world-experience and of a disguised, imperfect, but growing self-expression. All this it does from behind a veil showing something of its divine self only in so far as the imperfection of the instrumental being will allow it. But a time comes when it is able to prepare to come out from behind the veil, to take command and turn all the

⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo, 1914, p. 587.

instrumental nature towards a divine fulfillment. This is the beginning of the spiritual life.⁸⁷

Thus also unlike the Catholic narrative with eternal winners and losers, every sentient creature in the Vedic cosmology is destined for enlightenment and no single life determines eternal bliss or hollow deprivation. The path is long, involving the reincarnation of the soul in millions of lifetimes from the simplest to the most spiritually advanced human. In the course of human lives, the soul gradually turns away from the fleeting pleasures and suffering of the material world to search inwardly for its true nature, the experience of which is unbounded knowledge, peace, and contentment. The journey, even in the human form, is gradual and begins simply by turning away from self-centered desires to compassion for others. This is referred to as the path of karma yoga, karma in this context meaning action. It is the yoga, or the spiritual discipline leading to re-union with the source, of action marked by a focus on others, a concern for righteousness and a relinquishment of the concern for the fruits of one's action. In the Gita, Krishna instructs Arjuna, "You have control over action alone, never over its fruits. Live not for the fruits of action, nor attach you yourself to inaction."⁸⁸

A second step enlarges the spiritual imagination and practice to include bhakti, or devotion to the world of the devas who, within the cosmic drama imagined by Brahman, govern the subtler levels of creation that also support life in the gross. Bhakti takes the attention higher and further away from our preoccupation with the phenomenal world of our ordinary experience. It expands the sense of possibility and spiritual longing and awareness of the interdependence of creatures in the larger cosmic play:

In the beginning, having created men along with yagya [action that promotes evolution], the Lord of Creation said, 'By this yagya shall ye prosper and this shall bring forth the fulfillment of desires. Through yagya you sustain the gods and those gods will sustain you. By sustaining one another, you will attain the highest good.'⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo, 1989, p. 13.

⁸⁸ BG II.47; Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1967.

⁸⁹ BG III.10-11; Ibid.

A third level in the continuing evolution of spiritual practice is *jyana*, or knowledge. But knowledge here is the discernment of what is real from what is not real, a growing intellectual appreciation of the illusory nature of the whole of the phenomenal world as a world of multiplicity rather than the play of consciousness, an understanding of which leads naturally to a yearning for the immediate and permanent experience of the true nature of reality. The final step toward the awakening of that transformation of experience is meditation, turning the attention inward and allowing the activity individual awareness, thought and feeling to subside back into the silent ocean of awareness of which the individual mind is just a complex perturbation. In the depth of meditation, when the mind subsides, consciousness is awake to itself. Ordinarily overwhelmed by the outward experience of the senses and the inner experience of thought and emotion, undistracted by those experiences it settles back into itself.

The regular experience of transcending cultivates a more refined functioning of the subtle physiology responsible for experience. With time and repeated experience, the physiology attains the ability for consciousness to re-enter the phenomenal, to experience the world of the senses, thought and feeling without losing awareness of the Self, of unbounded consciousness as the true depth of one's Self. But this is only the beginning of enlightenment. Consciousness, awake to itself, no longer overshadowed by experience, witnesses the activity of consciousness but this is nonetheless an experience of duality, of the Self to be sure, but the Self as separate and apart from the relative, phenomenal world. That experience of the Self is referred to as the experience of *Atman*, the universal Self, the field of consciousness. The *Bhagavad Gita* declares that "Witness, consentor, sustainer, enjoyer – the great lord is called the highest self, man's true spirit in this body." But, per the tradition, the whole truth is that nothing is anything other than that same consciousness experiencing itself at play.

That experience, of the fullness of knowledge, is the result of the gradual continued refinement of the instruments of knowledge, of the individual nervous system. Across the entire spectrum of spiritual evolution, from the most rudimentary awareness to the fullest enlightenment, the growth is the result of the refinement of the physiology, not just the gross nervous system, but the physiology of the subtle bodies down to the level of the soul itself. The maturity of

the highest states of consciousness from witnessing awareness to the immediate experience of everything as Brahman is the result of this continued refinement. Each practice from karma yoga through meditation and beyond refines the functioning of the nervous system and the refined functioning of the nervous system in turn permits a higher level of comprehension, insight and virtue which generates a yet higher level of spiritual aspiration. Beyond witnessing, the subtle senses evolve to experience the depths of the relative world to the finest celestial impulses of consciousness. At some point, the senses become so refined, so capable of seeing deeply into the phenomenal, to the most subtle movements of consciousness in the celestial, that the distinction between the Self – the Atman, the experience of which is already established, and Brahman, the universal consciousness, can no longer be sustained and they collapse into the experience of all things as nothing other than the consciousness that had already been experienced as one's deepest Self. "When one who sees the multiplicity of beings as abiding in the One and plurality as proceeding from that One alone," The Gita explains, "he becomes Brahman."⁹⁰ In the words of the Upanishad, "Truly, all this is Brahman."⁹¹

Bernadette Roberts, the contemporary Catholic mystic quoted earlier, describes her own dawning experience of Brahman consciousness vividly:

Before the journey, I could look out the window and see a tree as the object of my mind and perception. Today I look out the window and see, not only the visible, manifested aspect of pure subjectivity, (the tree) but I also see its invisible, unmanifested aspect; and with such an emphasis on the latter, it is only with perceptual strain that I can focus on the former. In fact, I can no longer focus on visual form alone. Where once the manifested had been seen first, now it is seen second. This does not mean that the manifested is of lesser reality; it only means that it is (or at least *was*, before this journey) a gateway. It is like a crust on a loaf of bread which is not separate from its more profound depths. In this way, the unmanifested

⁹⁰ BG XIII.30. Krishna Warrior, 1983.

⁹¹ Chandogya Upanishad 3.14.1.

is also the manifested; they are not separate realities, but only two aspects of the One truth. The seer of this reality is not myself, and what is seen is not merely a tree; rather, seer and seen are two aspects of the eye seeing itself, which I have defined as pure subjectivity.

The object or manifested aspect of reality is ever changing, and therefore we say it is perishable. But in truth, nothing is perishable, because the unmanifested aspect (of any object) does not change even though it moves – constantly moves to manifest itself.⁹²

She concludes later in the same text, “Although the first movement of the journey ends in the revelation of our union with God, which is an unmistakable transformation in itself, it nevertheless lacks the finality, the definitiveness, and the abruptness of this second movement, wherein the union of two falls away to reveal the One remaining.”⁹³

In a relatively recent book recounting an abandoned effort to provide a new commentary on the Brahma Sutras of Badarayana, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of the Transcendental Meditation Movement, provides a more theoretical description of this final transformation of experience:

See, this full sakshitva (state of being a witness) has already been lived by him from the time he has gained Cosmic Consciousness [the first stage of enlightenment described in the text above] and God Consciousness [the experience of the celestial level of the manifest world]. What speciality takes place now when Unity gets established? The sakshitva was full; The Self-awareness was one hundred per cent. But one hundred per cent also was the

⁹² Roberts, 1984. The paragraphs quoted here are from the Shambhala publication. These paragraphs, and the chapter in which it appeared titled “Pure Subjectivity,” do not appear in the revised edition published in 1993 by SUNY Press. Remarkably, Ms. Roberts appears largely unfamiliar with any version of Hinduism and it would seem reasonable, therefore, to assume that her descriptions of her own experiences are uninfluenced by any exposure to Advaita and the descriptions of similar experiences in the Upanishads and the writings of Hindu sages.

⁹³ Roberts, 1984, p. 203.

awareness of the multiple creation; the non-Self was one hundred per cent. Now he [Badarayana] says the non-self should get reduced to one quarter of its value, of its intensity. In God Consciousness this [experience of the Self] is full. But the ordinary world, I mean earthly [world of objects], becomes celestial. So the celestial is also non-Self.

...

One hundred percent non-Self. Now, this one hundred percent non-Self is dissolving. [On the level of the Self] there cannot be anything more than the one hundred per cent Self which has already been established. So the only criterion [of evolution] which has to be established is on the level of the non-Self. What happens here? He [Badarayana] says that only one-fourth remains.

Now that sakshitva establishes only duality. So now duality drops off seventy-five per cent and that is called Unity, that is called Unity.

Because that is the state of Brahman. It is the teaching of Unity from the angle of the cognition of the world.⁹⁴

Placing the evolution of individual consciousness back into the larger context of creation as the lilla of Brahman within itself, Sri Aurobindo wrote:

Thus by the very nature of the world-play as it has been realized by Sachchidananda in the vastness of His existence extended as Time and Space we have to conceive first of an involution and a self-absorption of conscious being into the density and infinite divisibility of substance, for otherwise there can be no finite variation; next an emergence of the self-imprisoned force into formal being, living being, thinking being; and finally a release of the formed thinking being into the free realization of itself as the One and the Infinite at play in the world and by its release its recovery of the boundless existence-consciousness-bliss that even now it is secretly, really and eternally.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Katz, 2011, pp. 310 – 312.

⁹⁵ Ibid., at 121 – 122.

Or, as Maharishi Mahesh Yogi once explained, combining the individual and the cosmic, “The search for total knowledge starts from the Self and finds fulfillment in coming back to the Self, finding that everything is the expression of the Self – everything is the expression of my own Self.” We will discuss later in the following section the implications of the development of higher states of consciousness for the growth of moral virtue.

The explication of the evolution of higher states of consciousness, and in particular the nature of the highest state of enlightenment, Brahman consciousness, also explains the origins of Advaita and the Vedic tradition. The Upanishads are not regarded as speculative philosophy, as an attempt to make sense of our experience in the ordinary waking state of consciousness. Nor are they vaguely explained revelations, allegedly “inspired” writings, or non-demonstrable truths. They are regarded as cognitions, the immediate experiences, of enlightened rishis whose awareness encompasses every aspect of the manifest field from most subtle vibrations of consciousness to the gross level of our ordinary embodied existence. The Vedas, the mantras in particular, are said to be uncreated, eternal and not the product of any human mind. Rather, they were heard by the early rishis (literally, in Sanskrit, the “seers”), recorded by them and passed down through generations of brahmins to the present. That is the sense of ‘sruti’, the category of scripture that encompasses the texts of the Veda: what is heard. The mantras of the Veda are the most subtle, the original vibrations of consciousness whose interactions evolved into the whole of the manifest world. The rishis, in the capaciousness of their awareness, focused their attention on that subtle level and heard the continuing echoes of the mantras of the Vedas.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Thus the sound of the Veda, the sequence of phonemes along with the silences between the phonemes are of much greater significance than whatever meaning they convey. That in part accounts for their obscurity – they are not explanations but part of the causal mechanism in the elaboration of the phenomenal world. The grammar of Sanskrit, the language of the Veda, is thus thought to mirror the structure of the phenomenal and the words, the combinations of phonemes, represent the most fundamental aspect of the referents of those words. To truly understand Sanskrit is to understand the basic structure of the phenomenal world. This relationship of name and form within the Sanskrit language also explains the efficacy of the recitation of mantras in Vedic ceremonies as well as of meditation that makes use of mantras.

Indeed, the whole of the Vedic literature, including the remainder of the *prasthanas* as well as the foundational texts of the myriad other disciplines within the tradition, from architecture to the science of music to medicine to political theory and ethics, are regarded as reports or explanations by enlightened sages over the centuries of various fields within the manifest, all in the light of their experience of Brahman and the structure and dynamics of the entire range of the manifest world.⁹⁷ Moreover, the tradition of enlightened sages is a continuing tradition. The tradition preserves the general knowledge as well as the practices to raise those who are ready to the highest level of experience. This is the sense of a guru, one who is able to remove the darkness of ignorance. Thus the telos of enlightenment and the efficacy of the practices are verified over and over again and available in every generation in the lives of practitioners.

In addition to gurus who become enlightened in their present lives, there is a second category of guru, the avatars. Avatars are souls who became enlightened in earlier lives but who return again and again to assure that the knowledge of non-duality, the telos of enlightenment and the spiritual practices that lead to enlightenment are never forgotten. Among avatars, the greatest are those of Vishnu, one of the three highest gods within the relative world responsible within the relative for the continuing elaboration of the relative world. As Krishna, his most recent incarnation, Vishnu tells Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita* that:

Though I am unborn and of imperishable nature, though
Lord of all beings, yet remaining in My own nature, I take
birth through My own power of creation. Whenever
dharma is in decay and adharma flourishes, O Bharata,
then I create Myself. To protect the righteous and destroy

⁹⁷ The collection of these texts are regarded as *smṛiti*, literally 'remembered' as opposed to *śruti*, 'heard'. *Śruti*, as discussed, in the text, consists of the Vedas themselves. *Smṛiti* are lesser works composed by humans but related to the Veda and deriving their authority from their relationship to the Veda and the enlightened accounts of their authors. *Smṛiti* includes the *Upavedas* which address medicine (*ayurved*), music (*ghandārvaved*), architecture (*stapatyaved*), and weaponry (*śastra-śastra*), and the fine arts (*śilpa-śastra*). *Smṛiti* also includes the works on ethics and political philosophy, the *Dharmasāstra*, and on some accounts the epics and stories, the *Puranas*, including the two great epics (the *Mahapuranas*), the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, the latter of which which includes the *Bhagavad Gita*.

the wicked, to establish dharma firmly, I take birth age after age.⁹⁸

As all good teachers understand that they must accept students on their own level and lift them up from there, and because individuals are at different places on the path to enlightenment, or because of differences in temperament and orientation, different gurus or the same guru with different audiences may emphasize certain particular practices suited those students. For students who are drawn to selfless service to others, the guru provides opportunities for charitable work. Many of the great gurus of the 20th and 21st Centuries, including Swami Rama and Sri Mata Amritananda Mayi Devi, founded hospitals in their native India. Some gurus encourage the performance of the ancient Vedic rites. But, for those so inclined and interested, they also teach meditation and other practices for the direct experience of Brahman.

It is also a commonplace and realistic observation that with the passage of time, the teachings of any particular guru inevitably decay. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, in his introduction to his translation of the Bhagavad Gita, speaking of the great proponent and reviver of Advaita in the 8th Century, wrote, "This is the tragedy of knowledge, the tragic fate that knowledge must meet at the hands of ignorance. It is inevitable, because the teaching comes from one level of consciousness and is received at quite a different level. The knowledge of Unity must in time shatter on the hard rocks of ignorance. History has proved this again and again."⁹⁹ But then new gurus arise, avatars are born and the knowledge is available for those able to receive it in every generation. This is implicit in Krishna's assurance to Arjuna quoted above that he, Vishnu, takes birth again and again when knowledge is lost and unrighteousness grows to reestablish the

⁹⁸ BG III. 6-8, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Some scholars interpret declarations like this to suggest a theistic interpretation of the BG. The more cogent interpretation of Krishna's/Visnu's description of himself, as Advaitins urge, and in light of the larger tradition of non-dualism beginning with the Upanishads, however, is that Krishna/Visnu, as a supremely enlightened but nonetheless discrete being, is simply completely identified with Brahman as his own Self rather than that he, Krishna/Visnu is the highest being who generates the phenomenal world, as in the Abrahamic tradition.

⁹⁹ Maharish Mahesh Yogi, 1969, p. 13.

completeness of spiritual knowledge and the virtue that results from the evolution of individual and collective consciousness.

Of course, as we discussed earlier in assessing the authority of the Church, one cannot accept on their face claims to complete spiritual authority, whether based on presumed assurances of a supposedly divine founder or on attributions of complete mystical awareness of great sages. Such claims themselves are aspects of the larger narratives and rise or fall with the cogency of those larger narratives as a whole. This is abundantly clear in descriptions of enlightenment within the Vedic tradition or elsewhere as in Bernadette Robert's own accounts and explications. The description of enlightenment is completely dependent on and can be understood only within the metaphysical theory of Advaita.

In the case of the authority of the Church, we saw that every major turn in its account of God, Jesus and the human telos that the story is at best thin, lacking detail, comprehensiveness and explanatory power. At worst it is incoherent or at least paradoxical, raising more issues with every seemingly ad hoc rationalization. The Church's own story of its history grounded in the myth of apostolic succession appears to be contradicted by the actual historical record; its claim to being guided the grace of the Holy Spirit not only contributes to the paradox of the Trinity, it is also amply undermined by the disgraceful history of the Church and its own suppression of its enemies most horrifically in the inquisitions.

But the cogency of the narrative of Advaita is very different. Not only does it avoid all of the paradoxes of the Catholic story, as we will discuss in the following section, it is itself not only more comprehensive, detailed and coherent, it also potentially contributes to the explanation of issues that western science has itself so far failed to explain, including the mind-body problem, the origin and nature of mystical experience as well as the origin and persistence of the spiritual sensibility, a phenomenon not easily explained by evolutionary theory alone.

The theory of Advaita and its description of the emergence of the manifest world as the sequential development of the play of consciousness within itself can also reasonably lay claim to being a naturalistic theory, based on a naturalistic epistemology altogether consistent with the demands of naturalistic science in a way that Catholic theology cannot begin to approach. In the first instance it

nowhere insists that the spiritual is unintelligible. Indeed, the Vedic cosmology provides a detailed, causal description of the emergence of the ordinary phenomenal world from the field of consciousness. It thus provides a theory whose purpose is to explain the features of the phenomenal world of our ordinary experience including our own capacity for awareness, through the highest mystical experience, that so far confounds materialist scientific explanation.

To be sure, the Vedic account includes elements not now acknowledged by materialist science. But the existence of those elements has to be judged by their contribution to a theory that has explanatory and predictive power. Those elements are, in the vernacular, theoretical entities, not unlike atoms, sub-atomic particles or the Higgs field itself, the acceptability of which depends on their contribution to a coherent, comprehensive, and explanatorily powerful theory of the natural world.

The Vedic theory is also testable and indeed the practices of meditation have been the subject of extensive scientific testing for decades. Paramahansa Yogananda was keenly interested in the parallels between Vedic knowledge and scientific knowledge.¹⁰⁰ Swami Rama in the 70s and 80s submitted himself to scrutiny at the Mayo Clinic.¹⁰¹ The Transcendental Meditation Movement, founded and guided by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi inspired and sponsored dozens, maybe hundreds of carefully constructed studies on physiological changes that accompany the practice of meditation and the growth of higher states of consciousness.¹⁰² Even the claims of the upavedas, of the treatises on medicine, architecture and music, can all be objectively tested to see whether they produce the predicted results. The results of studies so far demonstrate that the practices of the Vedic tradition possess a unique efficacy. In that regard, the power of those practices supports the theory that explains the practices. It bears emphasis that nothing in western materialist science could have predicted or generated those practices.

Thomas Nagel in his very recent book, *Mind and Cosmos; Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* argues that:

¹⁰⁰ See generally Yogananda, 1946.

¹⁰¹ Tigunait, 2001, p. 245.

¹⁰² See, e.g., Dillbeck, 2011.

The existence of consciousness is both one of the most familiar and one of the most astounding things about the world. No conception of the natural order that does not reveal it as something to be expected can aspire even to the outline of completeness. And if physical science, whatever it may have to say about the origin of life, leaves us necessarily in the dark about consciousness, that shows that it cannot provide the basic form of intelligibility for this world. There must be a very different way in which things as they are make sense, and that includes the physical world, since the problem cannot be quarantined in the mind.¹⁰³

If Nagel is correct, and there are good reasons to believe that he is onto something, then the comprehensive, causally-detailed, non-dual theory of Advaita Vedanta, grounded in a field theory of consciousness, potentially provides a powerful, testable, alternative to reductionist materialist science. Needless to say, it also provides an alternative to Catholic theism that offers no alternative explanation for any natural phenomena beyond the weak assertion that “God made it so.”

In the following section we return to the paradoxes of the Catholic cosmology both to show how Advaita avoids those dilemmas but also to further develop the Vedic account of these important elements of spirituality.

The Theistic Paradoxes and the Vedic Alternative

The Nature of God

In discussing the Catholic conception of God, we saw that the Catholic narrative generates at least two substantial paradoxes. The first is the dissonance between the claim, on the one hand, that God is perfectly good, merciful and just but on the other hand the depictions of God in both the Old and New Testaments and what the Catholic *Catechism* as well as the Old and New Testaments have to say about God’s interactions with humans. The second is the incompatibility between God’s omniscience, another aspect of his perfection, and in

¹⁰³ Nagel, 2012, p. 53.

particular God's knowledge of the future, and the existence of free will. Neither of these paradoxes arises within the Vedic cosmology, not because the Vedic cosmology solves the paradoxes; they simply do not appear within that cosmology.

Consider first the very basic problem of evil, putting aside the many ways in which God himself appears to contribute to the very existence of evil and behaves in ways that fall far short of an emotionally mature, enlightened, loving, and compassionate being. The basic problem is that of a God described as all powerful and all merciful who nonetheless remains passive and fails to protect altogether innocent creatures, humans and animals, from suffering. What makes this paradox compelling and difficult is the picture of God as having brought into existence sentient creatures and placing them in a world where they are exposed to suffering but then failing to care for them. Essential to the problem is duality, the distinction between God and those he brought into existence but fails to protect.

In the Advaita there is no such duality.¹⁰⁴ There is nothing but Brahman, the field of consciousness both eternally silent in its depths and from time to time actively imagining the great cosmic drama projected on the screen of its own consciousness, the great eye experiencing itself as Bernadette Roberts described the experience of that reality. In the Vedic cosmology, humans, indeed all sentient creatures are not different from Brahman. Brahman is all that there is, the capacity for experience in every sentient creature is as a result of the one consciousness projecting itself through the mind and senses of each creature. Brahman alone is and Brahman alone experiences all things, not distinct beings who exist as independent loci of awareness. Sri Aurobindo well captures the contrast:

In truth, the difficulty thus sharply presented arises only if we assume the existence of an extra-cosmic personal God, not Himself the universe, one who has created good and evil, pain and suffering for His creatures, but Himself stands above and unaffected by them, watching, ruling, doing His will with a suffering and struggling world or, if not doing His will, if allowing the world to be driven by an inexorable law, unhelped by him or inefficiently

¹⁰⁴ For a particularly thorough and engaged discussion and attempted reconciliation of Advaita and Catholic theology, see Grant, 2002.

helped, then not god, not omnipotent, not all-good and all-loving. On no theory of an extra-cosmic moral God, can evil and suffering be explained¹⁰⁵

In such a narrative, it would indeed be odd to describe Brahman as either good or evil or possessed of any other duality. Brahman transcends duality. Indeed, all dualities are said to resolve in the boundless oneness of Brahman. The same is true of enlightened beings who are immanently aware of their deepest Selves as nothing other than the one field of consciousness and the whole of the manifest world as waves of the same consciousness. The Isa Upanishad, describing the Self, declares that "He is all-pervasive, pure, bodiless, without wound, without sinews, taintless, untouched by sin, omniscient, ruler of the mind, transcendent, and self-existent" Shankara in his commentary on this verse explains that the Sanskrit term denoting sinlessness, "*Apapaviddham*," means, "untouched by sin in the form of merit and demerit, etc." Swami Gambhirananda, in his further gloss on Shankara's commentary, explains that, "The idea is that the Self transcends morality, though a man of knowledge never acts immorally, his past training being a sufficient guarantee against this."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, the Bhagavad Gita reiterates that "He whose intellect is united (with the Self) casts off both good and evil even here."¹⁰⁷ Apparent evil is the product of ignorance and appears only within the cosmic dream whose real nature is veiled for the unenlightened by the power of maya.

For a similar reason, though Brahman is omniscient, the problem of the paradox of free will does not arise either. When there is nothing but Brahman, when the whole of the manifest world is nothing other than the imaginative play of Brahman, waves of the one field of consciousness, there is in reality no individual free will. The tradition is altogether explicit about this. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna explains to Arjuna that "God is in the heart of all beings, Arjuna, causing them all to revolve through maya, as though they are mounted on a machine."¹⁰⁸ The experience of free will is itself an aspect of maya, the result of consciousness weakly projected through

¹⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo, 1939, pp. 101-102.

¹⁰⁶ Isa Upanishad, v. 8, in Gambhirananda translation, 1957.

¹⁰⁷ BG II.50, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, 1969.

¹⁰⁸ BG XVIII.61, Krishna Warrior, 1983.

the mind, intellect emotions and senses of an unenlightened human, unaware of its true nature and identifying with the deliberations and experiences of that discrete person, that complex wave of the one consciousness. But for the enlightened person, who has regained the immediate knowledge of his or her real nature as the field, "He really sees who sees that all actions are performed by nature alone and that the self is not an actor."¹⁰⁹

This discussion of good and evil belonging to the field of maya and not applicable to the transcendent Brahman and the illusoriness of free will raises an essential element in understanding the Vedic narrative: the need to be mindful at all times of two distinct frames of reference. The first is the perspective within the veil of maya, the experience of those who see multiplicity and experience themselves as deliberative agents; the second is the experience from outside the veil of maya, of the self as the field of consciousness and all things as manifestations of that same field. There is an old parable that I have heard attributed to a number of gurus. A guru traveling with a group of students stops for lunch at the home of an older devotee. While the guru and students are enjoying lunch, the host asks his guru, "What are you eating?" Before the guru can respond, one of the young students eagerly declares, "Why we are Brahman; everything is nothing but Brahman." The host repeats the question to his guru, "What are you eating?" The guru responds, "Rice."

The distinction is of enormous practical significance to those still identified with the limited ego, experiencing themselves as agents who deliberate, make choices and experience the consequences of our own choices. We cannot live well, cannot attain the telos of enlightenment, pretending to be enlightened sages and mistaking inaction for the state of knowledge in which we experience ourselves as the silent field of consciousness and even the most dynamic action as belonging simply to the nature of manifest consciousness. As Krishna explains to Arjuna in the Gita, "Always do prescribed work; work is superior to inaction. Indeed, even life in the body is impossible without work."¹¹⁰ Indeed, "Man does not achieve freedom from works by abstention from them. None attains perfection through the mere renunciation of works, either."¹¹¹ Krishna enjoins the enlightened not

¹⁰⁹ BG XIII.29, Stoller Miller, 1986.

¹¹⁰ BG III.8, Krishna Warrior translation, 1983.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, III.4.

to bewilder the ignorant by speaking of detachment to those not ready to understand its meaning and mistaking a state of awareness for instructions on how to live their daily lives, "The integrated man of wisdom should not bewilder the mind of the ignorant attached to works; performing them all, let him cause them (also) to do so."¹¹²

The experience of enlightenment according to Advaita is also an experience of complete contentment and fulfillment. The enlightened person has no further needs or pressing personal desires. They experience all that they see as manifestations of their true Selves, the unbounded abstract field of consciousness. They see themselves in all other beings profoundly because all other beings are nothing other than themselves and they act out of love and compassion then for the sake of the world. Speaking even of himself, Krishna tells Arjuna, "I have, Arjuna, no duty whatever to discharge in all the three worlds; there is nothing I have not won, and nothing remains to be won by me; still I ceaselessly work Prince of the Bharata line, just as the ignorant work with attachment to that work, so should the wise work, unattached, seeking the world's integration."¹¹³

There is an old saying often repeated in this context: "Before enlightenment, the man cuts wood and carries water; after enlightenment, the man cuts wood and carries water." But after enlightenment, the man or woman does so securely and supremely content in the immediate experience of himself or herself as the unlimited field of consciousness and that the apparent multiplicity is simply the play of that consciousness within itself. A life profoundly transformed by knowledge.

The Nature of Jesus

The Catholic understanding of the nature of Jesus similarly involves a number of puzzling conundrums. First, the Catholic tradition's conception of Jesus as an incarnation of God himself contributes both to the paradox of the trinity and to the paradox of God as both divine and human. In light of the experience of non-duality, however, each of these paradoxes, like the problem of evil and free will, appears to derive from the Catholic understanding, or

¹¹² Ibid., III.26.

¹¹³ Ibid., III.22 and 25.

misunderstanding, of God as distinct from his creation. It is consistent only with the ordinary experience of people in the waking state of consciousness rather than from the state of enlightenment. From the perspective of the non-duality of Advaita and its account of the fulfillment of the human telos in the immediate experience of the oneness of our own consciousness with the primal field of consciousness, neither of these conundrums arise.

In that light, there is nothing at all uniquely exalted about Jesus' own descriptions of himself as "One with the father." That would be the experience of every enlightened sage. Indeed that realization is the very essence of enlightenment as described by the Vedic tradition and as realized by lineages of sages stretching back to antiquity. When Krishna in the Gita says of himself, "The entire world has been pervaded by Me in My unmanifest form. All Beings dwell in me, but I dwell not in them"¹¹⁴ or that "Nature with me as her inner eye, bears animate and inanimate beings; and by reason of this, Arjuna, the universe continues to turn,"¹¹⁵ he is most reasonably interpreted as speaking from the most capacious and complete experience of his own identification with Brahman. And Jesus himself could just as easily have said, as Krishna said, "Deluded men despise me in the human form I have assumed, ignorant of my higher existence as the great lord of all creatures."¹¹⁶

The third conundrum, the crucifixion and its significance, is not so easily resolved. We saw that the Catholic rationalization of this startling event appears ad hoc and inadequate. In the first instance, Catholic teaching invents a doctrine of original sin that only a cosmic sacrifice can erase. But the doctrine not only requires a revisionist reading of Jewish scripture, it also perpetuates the worst Old Testament depiction of God as a jealous and unmerciful being who demands a blood sacrifice to eliminate a condition that he himself imposed in his anger. On top of all that, the crucifixion nonetheless fails to eliminate original sin – each of us must still undergo baptism to accomplish that, and even after baptism the effect of original sin remains: human weakness that leads to sin. Thus even on the Catholic account, or especially on the Catholic account, it is not clear what this enormous sacrifice amounts to.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., IX.4.

¹¹⁵ BG IX.10, Stoler Miller, 1986.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., IX.11.

Within the Vedic tradition, it is a commonplace that enlightened gurus have the power to relieve their disciples of at least some of their accumulated karma. The autobiographies of great contemporary saints, from Paramahansa Yogananda¹¹⁷ to Swami Rama,¹¹⁸ are replete with stories of gurus saving disciples from injury and even death. For seekers whose travels began in the Catholic tradition, the stories of miracles performed by eastern saints replace the stories of miraculous martyrs that we grew up on. But nowhere in the Vedic literature is there any account of a saint having to sacrifice his own life in so dramatic and ghastly a fashion to remove the sins of his followers. Nor is there any claim that a guru could erase sins not yet committed by any living person. To remove karma is to relieve someone of the vestiges of acts already committed.

Perhaps the best explanation of the crucifixion comes from Bernadette Roberts, the contemporary Catholic contemplative who more than anyone else has worked to understand the life and teachings of Jesus in light of her own complete experience of enlightenment. She declares unequivocally that "I am as convinced today as I was momentarily convinced as a child, that the real tragedy of Christ's death is that so few understand it." She explains:

The general interpretation is that Christ gave up his self so the rest of us would not have to do so. He did it, so now the rest of us are free. That we should have a liberated self when Christ (in the resurrection) has no self, makes no sense. Self is not our true life or our eternal nature; it is but a temporary mechanism useful for a particular way of knowing, and in some ways, equivalent to our notion of original sin. Self may not be sin, but certainly it is the cause of sin, and what needs to be overcome is not the effects, but the cause itself. To be forgiven is not enough; eventually there must be an end to the very need to be forgiven.

Christ did not overcome our individual self for us; he only showed us by his death what we too will have to go through to be truly free, not merely free of sin, but free in the most divine sense. Christ not only mediates this

¹¹⁷ Yogananda, 1946.

¹¹⁸ Swami Rama, 1978.

overcoming of self, but in the end is “that” which goes beyond the self to endure the passage and finally see. If the truth be known, when self’s transformation into Christ is complete, it is only Christ who dies, and Christ who rises. For some people this is a hard saying, but as Christ said, “Let those who can take it, take it!”¹¹⁹

In later writings, Ms. Roberts more carefully distinguishes between Jesus, the historical figure who walked the earth and died on the cross, and Christ, the eternal oneness of God and man.¹²⁰

The Human Soul, Telos, and the Path

We saw earlier in our discussion of the Catholic conception of the human telos and the path its achievement that the *Catechism’s* account is at best thin, at worse incoherent. Despite all apparent evidence, among sentient creatures humans alone are regarded as composites of body and a soul. The soul is the spiritual principle but we are given no account of its nature, function, of what it is composed, how it retains its individuality after death or how the soul might be responsible for consciousness and all of the functions that we associate with consciousness. We’re told that God had intended initially that humans were to live eternally embodied but that Christ’s mission was always part of God’s intentions; also that at some point, we will be united with our bodies on earth. There is no explanation for how a limited being ever will perceive the boundlessness of God either in heaven or back reunited in the body for all eternity.

And the scourge of sin dominates all, a sin imposed by God in his wrath, a sin that could only be overcome by a blood sacrifice, but was not, and now can only be overcome by God’s grace, even the openness

¹¹⁹ Roberts, 1984.

¹²⁰ See <http://www.bernadettesfriends.blogspot.com/>. The website is a source for a privately published book by Ms. Roberts, *The Real Christ*, but the site also contains the following warning about the book: “Those who believe the man Jesus who walked this earth 2000 years ago was God, should read no further. Since I hold no human being is God, those who disagree will only find this book upsetting and disagreeable ... Given all the Jesus-talk these days, Christianity comes across as a personality cult, the worship of a human being, which has nothing to do with Christ, it even turns people away. The reason for this writing is my perception that the real Christ has been all but lost to Christianity.”

to grace is by God's grace. And we are given a single life in which to overcome the natural inclination of that sin and to prove our worthiness for heaven, or heaven on earth as the case may be, a task so huge that it led Calvin to declare that the outcomes must be predestined since no human could possibly earn heaven. In the face of this strange and frightening account of the human telos and the path, we are told that absolute faith in and obedience to the Church is demanded, indeed according to Paul at least, faith is the key even more than works.

The Human Soul and the Summum Bonum of Self-Knowledge

As with the larger cosmology that we briefly described earlier, the Vedic account of the human soul is detailed, elaborate and an integral aspect of the larger narrative. The human person consists of three interpenetrating bodies. The most subtle of those bodies is most frequently referred to in English as the causal body. Below and more dense than the causal body is the subtle body which itself is composed of the intellectual, the mind and the vital or emotional sheaths. Finally, those bodies, integrated with one another, are united with the physical body as something of a vehicle for life in ours, the most dense, most concrete of the worlds. As with the rest of the relative field, these bodies themselves ultimately are nothing other than thoughts within the self-existing field of pure consciousness. They emerge sequentially with the elaboration of the subtle and grosser realms. Underlying all of these bodies and being the consciousness within each person is the field of consciousness experiencing itself in the manifest world. When the physical body dies, the more subtle bodies remain and after a period during which the person assimilates the lessons of the past life, the person is reborn to continue the process of evolution to the summum bonum of enlightenment. That evolution consists in the gradual refinement of the operation of the subtle bodies and reflected in those operations the ever more expansive and complete expression of the boundlessness of consciousness culminating in consciousness experiencing itself free of the binding influence of maya and then ultimately experiencing the whole of the phenomenal world as

nothing other than itself, the “eye seeing itself” as Bernadette Roberts described her own experience of this state.¹²¹

In his recent book, *Mind and Cosmos*, Thomas Nagel takes seriously the difficulty of accounting for the phenomenon of consciousness within a reductive materialist cosmology. His preliminary conclusion is that “[a] genuine alternative to the reductionist program would require an account of how mind and everything that goes with it is inherent in the universe.”¹²² Nagel’s own proposed solution is a form of panpsychism. Though he does not himself endorse or indeed even acknowledge the existence of Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualism of Advaita potentially provides precisely the kind of explanatorily powerful, universal account of consciousness and the material world that Nagel describes. Moreover, the evolution of consciousness and the soul from its most modest expression in the sentient world to humans is an essential aspect of Advaita, not merely something grudgingly finally acknowledged but incapable of being integrated into its narrative as it is in the Abrahamic accounts. Though the account of Advaita invokes elements so far foreign to materialist science, the nature of the explanation is nonetheless thoroughly causal in a way familiar to scientific explanation. It is a field theory, like quantum field theory. By grounding the theory in a field of pure consciousness, however, potentially, Advaita provides an explanation for issues that so far have eluded materialist science, issues that western religion does not even begin to address, and in a manner consistent with scientific naturalism.

The Path, In the Vedic tradition, there is no demand for groundless faith in a cosmology that floats along celebrating its own lack of intellectual clarity and completeness in a vague reverie of “divine mystery.” The Vedic tradition to the contrary celebrates knowledge, complete knowledge of the true nature of the Self and existence. Indeed, the summum bonum is a state of complete penetrating knowledge in which virtue is a natural result. There is not just one enlightened savior in all of human history, but ever-present

¹²¹ The discussion of the nature of the soul, its functional parts, their contribution to the whole and the nature of evolution is a vast topic. The beginning of this discussion in the Vedic literature begins with the Chandogya Upanishad. For brief but complete summaries see Swami Nikhilananda, 1946, especially pages 81 to 87, his translation of the Vedanta Sara and Aurobindo, 1989.

¹²² Nagel, 2012, p. 15.

enlightened souls keeping the knowledge fresh and vital for every generation. And the stories that they tell are comprehensive, coherent, detailed, and compelling, supporting their own personal authority as true sages. The practices that they each are based on and are integrally related to the detailed causal explanations of the larger narratives. And those practices are testable in the scientifically verifiable experiences of its practitioners.¹²³

Nor is there anything as dispiriting in the Vedic tradition as the Catholic notion of sin, particularly sin as disobedience to some wrathful heavenly father and ultimately the cause of eternal damnation. The closest concept to Catholic sin in the Vedic tradition is that of karma. Karma is understood broadly as the consequences of past actions. Karma as related to humans determines the environment in which we find ourselves, for good, ill or otherwise. And though certainly for those at the lowest rungs of Kohlberg's moral scale, karma might appear as no more than punishment to be avoided, more importantly, karma, as the consequences of our actions is not so much a punishment as an opportunity for lessons in the art of living in the relative world as it is structured. Sri Aurobindo has observed, for example:

The reward and punishment theory of rebirth, if a little more elevated or at least less crudely sensational, comes to be as ineffective [as belief in an eternal reward or punishment in Heaven or Hell]. And it is good that it should be so. For it is intolerable that man with his divine capacity should continue to be virtuous for a reward and shun sin out of terror And it is inconceivable that the system of this vast and majestic world should have been founded on these petty and paltry motives. There is reason in these theories? The reason of the nursery, puerile. Ethics? Then ethics of the mud, muddy.

...

And what of suffering and happiness, misfortune and prosperity? These are experiences of the soul in its training, helps, props, means, disciplines, tests, ordeals, –

¹²³ See especially the studies done on practitioners of the Transcendental Meditation Technique and the records and discussions of reported experiences of higher states of consciousness in *Collected Papers, 1976 to 2011* and *Invincible American Assembly, 2012*.

and prosperity often a worse ordeal than suffering. Indeed, adversity, suffering may often be regarded rather as a reward to virtue than as a punishment for sin, sin it turns out to be the greatest help and purifier of the soul struggling to unfold itself. To regard it merely as the stern award of a Judge, the anger of an irritated Ruler or even the mechanical recoil of result of evil is to take the most superficial view possible of God's dealings with the soul and the law of the world's evolution.¹²⁴

By far the more important ethical concept is that of *dharma*, indeed Hindus identify themselves as followers of *Sanatana Dharma*, the eternal path of righteousness.¹²⁵ Dharma upholds the evolution of sentient beings toward the summum bonum of enlightenment, complete and perfect knowledge of the Self and of all things existing in the Self. Nor is dharma conceived of as the commands of a sovereign creator. Dharma is expounded rather by the great enlightened sages intimately aware of the summum bonum and from their mystical awareness of the structure of the relative world, how both individual life and character and society are to be arranged to permit the most rapid growth towards the summum bonum. In that context, one can appreciate Sri Aurobindo's explanation that karma instructs more than it punishes or rewards.

The telos, the summum bonum of enlightenment is the destiny of all sentient creatures. They are provided endless opportunities, endless births, endless encouragement and the availability of instruction for those ready for it. Indeed the point of the play of Brahman within itself as we discussed earlier, is to traverse the whole of its creation, experience the infinity of its creative powers and ultimately return to itself. Growth and evolution, knowledge, and delight in knowledge is the whole point.

There is no eternal damnation to reconcile with an all-loving God; no single life with an infinite variety of starting points but each

¹²⁴ Aurobindo, 1952, pp. 9-11.

¹²⁵ The term '*Hindu*' is of foreign origin, coined by the ancient Persians to refer to those living east and south of the Indus River in the Northwest of India. *Hinduism* likewise derives from *Hindu* and refers to the religious beliefs of those living east and south of the Indus. Indians themselves refer to India as *Bharata* and their religion as *Sanatana Dharma*.

inflicted with the product of God's wrath, and no problem ever of perceiving a distant God. Nor is there a fall that submerges us in a preoccupation with sin, no demand for a blood sacrifice and the need for a salvation that may or may not be there. Enlightenment is the inevitable destiny of every sentient creature. "World existence is the ecstatic dance of Shiva which multiplies the body of the God numberlessly to the view: it leaves that white existence precisely where and what it was, as ever and ever will be; its sole absolute object is the joy of the dancing."¹²⁶

Conclusion

The purpose of this essay has been to provide those concerned for the future of the Church with some insight into the reasons why an epistemologically demanding seeker might become disenchanted with the Catholic narrative, expressed in its official *Catechism*, and becoming disenchanted with the Catholic narrative begin naturally to doubt the authority of the Catholic Church as a reliable guide to the spiritual and the spiritual life. Turning elsewhere for guidance, particularly to the narrative of Advaita Vedanta, we also considered what the epistemologically demanding seeker might find as an alternative to the Catholic story. The essay thus brings together the two threads with which it began: first Charles Taylor's mischaracterization of the seeker and second the ready immediacy of alternative accounts of the spiritual.

It bears emphasis that this is not a skeptical account of the possibility of an enchanted world. On the contrary, it takes seriously the possibility that a sufficiently rich and comprehensive enchanted theory might indeed provide insights into the fabric of existence and in particular to the long challenging hard problem of consciousness that has eluded reductive materialist science.

This essay does not deny that Jesus lived and taught and may well have been a supremely enlightened person with critical lessons to teach. Nor does it deny that there is much in Catholic social teaching that obviously has and should be a source of inspiration. Moved by the message of the Gospels, there are and have always been great Catholic saints working quietly in the world to relieve suffering and

¹²⁶ Aurobindo, 1939, p. 85.

elevate our vision of the possible. The message of Jesus' teachings have also inspired powerful works of art and music.

What this essay does raise, though, is the possibility, indeed likelihood that the Catholic Church, perhaps long ago with the emergence of the orthodox from the proto-orthodox, has misunderstood the nature of Jesus and his teachings and has little insight into the nature of the spiritual, including the nature of the human *summum bonum* and how to achieve it.

In part, that misunderstanding may well be based on a myopic focus on the earlier Abrahamic sources, the most concrete and worldly of the gospels and epistles, and ignorance of other, vastly older and richer traditions of spiritual knowledge. If the Church were serious about knowing Jesus and preserving his wisdom and knowledge and making that knowledge available to the modern world, it would do well to put aside the mythology that it has created for no reason other than to secure its own hegemony and finally adopt a critical 21st Century epistemology. With that methodology and the insights of historians, philosophers and scholars of comparative traditions, not to mention the insights of great enlightened saints from those traditions, it needs critically to revisit its own roots and the learning that the proto-orthodox suppressed. In that reflection, it could then draw on the richness of other, older, more comprehensive and rigorous traditions that could well not only illuminate the nature of Jesus and his teachings, but provide practices capable of leading the seeker to profound experiences of spiritual awakening.

We will leave the last words to Bernadette Roberts, in many ways the ultimate seeker who nonetheless found her place within the Church, but not without a radical transformation of her understanding of Jesus and Christ in the spirit urged by this essay:

But we can see how the tragedy of Christ is linked to the tragedy of the church, in that few people see below the surface of either. But the moment one of us sees below the surface, then it becomes our personal tragedy as well. In an obscure way, I knew this tragedy most of my life; for me, the sight of the cross was a sight of some unknown, tragic impasse to the full realization of God. It would be many years before I looked at the cross to see how the deepest, most profound tragedy shades into pure bliss, and that the outstretched arms of the dire abandonment

are also the outstretched arms of bliss. Thus there comes the time when tragedy is bliss, or when Christ, despite the tragic impasse, gives way to reveal his clear identity. What this means is that bliss awaits those who can possibly make it through the tragedy of what has happened to Christ in the Church.¹²⁷

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¹²⁷ Roberts, 1985, p. 189.

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Part IV
From Disjunctions to Wholeness

Invisible Missions: The Grace That Heals Disjunctions

ROBERT M. DORAN

1. Situating the Disjunctions

Charles Taylor's four disjunctions within the contemporary Catholic Church and of the Church from the world it purports to address would, among other things, prompt a quite negative judgment on the manner in which the church has heeded the challenge of the Second Vatican Council.

As we know, there is a disjunction, first, of the 'seekers' from the 'dwellers,' which plays out often as a disjunction of the official magisterium from the spiritual seeking that prompts people to ask questions that some religious authorities do not want to entertain.

Next, there is a disjunction between the model of authority that some in the magisterium are holding onto and a contemporary instinct that distinguishes authority and power and that grants authority only where the authenticity of that authority is acknowledged by the community.

Third, there is a disjunction around the sexual morality and gender equity that contemporaries, and especially younger contemporaries, increasingly accept as correct, a disjunction only exacerbated by the hierarchy's failure to comprehend and respond to the sexual abuse crisis. Moreover, some battles that the church should not have been fighting in the first place are over, and the church has lost. Same-sex marriage is exhibit A. Much time and energy and credibility in the public arena have been lost by the way the hierarchy has dealt with this issue.

And fourth, there is a disjunction between plural forms of spirituality, including those drawn from other religious traditions, over against exclusive emphasis on the sufficiency of the Christian dispensation.

The disjunctions need not be contradictory or dialectical, but in fact as the positions harden, that is precisely what they are becoming.

These four disjunctions may be included, I believe, under a more all-embracing category: the disjunction of the church from the very work of God in the contemporary world, a work that I will argue *includes, encourages, and even demands, rather than forbids or laments, a great deal of secularization*. I wish to call for attention to, discernment of, and participation in the invisible missions of both Word and Spirit, divine Truth and divine Love, as the source of a quotidian, indeed secular grace that, if received, would heal that all-embracing disjunction and provide the criteria for discerning legitimate from illegitimate secularization. That discernment would in turn be a central element in healing Taylor's four disjunctions or at least prevent them from hardening into dialectical oppositions. Some on each side of the four disjunctions, as they have hardened in their positions, fail to make some key distinctions with regard to secularization and sacralization. A hardened fixity in the opposed sides of the four disjunctions risks a secularization that becomes secularism. The key is the discernment of sacralization and secularization. One contribution to the explicit horizon required for that discernment at the present time, I would like to propose, is the acknowledgment of the universal presence of divine healing and elevating grace in the world through the invisible missions of Word and Spirit, divine Truth and divine Love, both inside the church and beyond the explicit contours of ecclesial membership. In my view, it is in the realm of these quotidian and often secular instances of grace that we must search as we strive to find a way to a new evangelization, a new journey as a global community gathered for mission in the name of Christ Jesus. Otherwise 'new evangelization' is little more than a cover-up for refusing to face the real issues and to renew the task of implementing the Second Vatican Council.¹

Thus it is that meeting the fourth of Taylor's disjunctions, which would find grace outside the Church, and which is less a matter of ideal types or models than the first three disjunctions, may be the best way not only to meet the overarching disjunction that I have mentioned but also to address the first three of Taylor's disjunctions. The fourth disjunction is transcended, I believe, as the explicit

¹ I must point out that major portions of this paper were written before the election of Pope Francis. The probability of the church succumbing to the danger mentioned here will be greatly reduced if the major thrusts of *Evangelii Gaudium* are taken seriously by the universal church.

acknowledgment of so-called visible missions of both Word in Incarnation and Spirit at Pentecost are seen as the revelation of a divine Truth and a divine Love that are universally given even when they are not known. A genuinely 'new' evangelization can be effected only as the church has the humility and discernment to acknowledge these divine gifts wherever they are found, to point them out, to welcome them, to participate in them, and to cooperate with them.

2. Doctrinal Continuity

The universal mission of the divine Word is affirmed in the prologue to John's Gospel. The Word that became flesh and dwelt among us in the man Christ Jesus, in the so-called visible mission of the Incarnation, that very Word through whom all things were made and in whom is the life that brings light to all, the real light that shines on all who are born into the world – the church is called to point to *that* Word, and especially to the presence of that Word in all efforts of women and men to speak truth in situations of injustice, poverty, and oppression, in attempts to formulate economic, social, political, and cultural meanings that address these situations with transforming power, in efforts to mediate science and faith in a manner respectful of the legitimate concerns of both, and in efforts to heal divisions and promote reconciliation.

The divine Love that was poured forth in a palpable mission on Pentecost is present everywhere in the world, as Vatican II and subsequent church teaching have emphasized. The church is called to acknowledge and foster that gift of divine Love wherever it is found, and to call people together on the basis of this universal gift, a gift that is not restricted to realms of explicit Christian belief but manifests itself in a universalist faith born of the divine gift of unqualified love.

3. Comments on Sacralization and Secularization

If the work of grace in the world includes and encourages a great deal of secularization, we need a heuristic structure for discriminating various attempts in this direction. Not all of them are genuine, but many are. How can we tell the difference?

As long ago as 1973, Bernard Lonergan proposed the heuristic categories of (1) a sacralization to be dropped, (2) a sacralization to be

fostered, (3) a secularization to be welcomed, and (4) a secularization to be resisted.² I have attempted to provide a 'lower blade'³ for these heuristic categories, with the help of the mimetic theory of René Girard. Here I can do little more than indicate the conclusions I have proposed.⁴

(1) Setting the standard of *sacralizations to be dropped* in the conduct of human affairs are any and all misuses of the name or word of God to justify, or perpetuate a system that justifies, not only natural evils, but also persecution, exclusion, and scapegoating both of carriers of the genuine religious word and, given the character of that word itself, of *anyone else*, and any and all attempts to use the name of God or religion to advance personal career or ideology (where by 'ideology' I mean a conceptual justification of inauthenticity). While an astute philosophy of God will speak of physical evils in terms of what Lonergan calls emergent probability,⁵ God is not the cause of basic sin and moral evils in any way whatsoever, nor is God well-disposed to being used for personal or ideological advance. The divine presence is offered rather as consolation and strength to those affected by natural disaster and human sinfulness. And calls to serve God in the church come from God, not from oneself, and have nothing to do with 'career.'

² See Bernard Lonergan, "Sacralization and Secularization," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, vol. 17 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Robert C. Croken and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 264.

³ On the scissors metaphor used to illustrate the relation between a heuristic structure and concrete data, see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, vol. 3 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). See the index, Heuristic method: scissors-action of.

⁴ Complementary discussions of Lonergan's heuristic anticipations have been proposed by John D. Dadosky and Gordon Rixon. A full articulation would have to take their work into consideration. My own attempt here is to name an element of the lower blade without which the discernment of authentic sacralization and secularization cannot succeed. See John D. Dadosky, "Sacralization, Secularization, and Religious Fundamentalism," *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 36 (2007), pp. 513-29, and "The Church and the Other: Mediation and Friendship in Post-Vatican II Roman Catholic Ecclesiology," *Pacifica*, October (2005), pp. 302-22; Gordon Rixon, "The Papacy in the Post-Modern Church: Reform and Renewal in the Ministry of Solidarity," paper presented at the Lonergan Workshop, Boston College, June 20, 2013.

⁵ See Lonergan, *Insight*, chapter 4.

Pope Francis has made the latter point clearly and bluntly, on several occasions.

(2) The standard of *sacralizations to be fostered* in the conduct of human affairs can be spoken of in Christian terms as adherence to what Lonergan calls the just and mysterious Law of the Cross, returning good for evil in the details of daily living. These terms have some correspondence in other religions: the servant of God in the Hebrew bible, the bodhisattva ideal and perhaps even enlightenment in Buddhism, Gandhi's non-violent appropriation of Hindu spirituality, etc. This standard entails recognizing and celebrating the transformation of evil by love into a greater good, indeed the supreme good of a new community, precisely through the absorption of evil in love, so that good is returned in exchange.

For Christians such love imitates and embodies the attitude of the Incarnate Word of God, to see whom is to see the Father. The reality of the Law of the Cross, which for Christians is revealed progressively in the Israelite scriptures and paradigmatically in the deuterо-Isaian Servant Songs, and embodied in the Incarnate Word, is itself a specification of a genuine or authentic religious component that can be found in other traditions as well. I continue to wager that it is more clearly differentiated progressively in the revelation given in the Hebrew bible and definitively bestowed in the New Testament, even if existential fidelity to it is at times no more prominent in the lives of Jews and Christians than elsewhere. What is specific to Christianity are the mysteries of the Incarnate Word and the Trinity, but part of what is specific to the Incarnate Word himself as embodying a Trinitarian mission is that in him there is revealed a law of utmost generality affecting the very constitution of history: a law that specifies the primary locus of grace and so of the supernatural order in history.

It seems clear from the study of other religions that this law is present there as well, even if not as clearly articulated as it may be in the anticipations to be found in the Hebrew bible's suffering servant of God and in the realization of those anticipations in the Passion, death, and Resurrection of the Incarnate Word. It was, after all, the Hindu Gandhi who quotes from the Gujarati didactic stanza, 'And

return with gladness good for evil done.’⁶ And it was a Chinese student who may have had little contact with any religious tradition that stood in front of a massive tank in Tianenmen Square, forever providing one of the most beautiful images of resistance to evil ever bequeathed to the rest of us. That *is* the Law of the Cross. This reality, wherever it is found, is determinative of what in my first point I called the genuine religious word, as that word affects historical action or praxis, no matter what language is used to express it. Any word that would purport to be ‘religious’ but that neglects, shortchanges, or runs counter to this dimension is fraudulent, a manifestation of deviated transcendence. But wherever this dimension is found, there the sacred occurs in a preeminent way in human history.

(3) Setting the standard of *secularizations to be welcomed* in the conduct and organization of human affairs are, first, any realities that correspond to what Lonergan formulates in his transcendental precepts: Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. These precepts name what alone qualifies as ‘natural law.’ The natural orientation of the human spirit to intelligibility, the true and the real, and the good, and to beauty as the splendor of these objectives, along with the concomitant affective dispositions that match this spiritual orientation, will disclose over time and over the development of human culture which cultural and social arrangements can and should be granted their own autonomy from the mantle of sacral authority, while still encouraging the influence of religious and personal values in the cultural and social spheres. But it should be noted at once that, as Lonergan makes abundantly clear, sustained fidelity to the integrity of human nature is possible only by the gift of God’s love, and so only by some lived participation in Trinitarian life, in the genuine sacred, and so in the love embodied paradigmatically in the Law of the Cross, whether these realities are named as such or not.

(4) Setting the standard of *secularizations to be resisted* in the conduct and organization of human affairs are any and all attempts, whether or not grounded in a false sacralization, to condemn or scapegoat carriers of the genuine religious word in whatever tradition – the assassination of Oscar Romero for political reasons may be taken as

⁶ See Mohandas K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), p. 35.

paradigmatic – and any efforts to locate human ‘coming of age’ as a perfection to be attained exclusively in this life and exclusively on the basis of human resources.⁷

4. Theological Continuity

Not only is the point I am attempting to make in doctrinal continuity with the Christian scriptures, as I argued in section 2 above. It is also in harmony with some major strands in the Catholic intellectual tradition. I mention here only one somewhat neglected development on grace that is found in the work of Thomas Aquinas and that is very important to my overall position on these matters.

Among the several questions that Vatican II raised but did not answer is the question, How are we to understand the council’s doctrinal affirmation in *Gaudium et Spes* that ‘the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery?’⁸ The same combination of a doctrinal affirmation of the universal offer of grace and a systematic question as to how this doctrine is to be understood appears in at least two encyclicals of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* and *Redemptoris missio*. The Pope writes:

This [the Council’s affirmation in *Gaudium et Spes*] applies to everyone, since everyone is included in the mystery of Redemption, and by the grace of this mystery Christ has joined himself with everyone for all time ... Every individual, from his or her very conception, participates in this mystery ... Everyone without exception was redeemed by Christ, since Christ is somehow joined to everyone, with no exception, even though the person may not be conscious of it.⁹

⁷ The account of these heuristic categories offered here is a development on what may be found in Robert M. Doran, *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 1, *Missions and Processions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012). See chapter 10.

⁸ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, § 22.

⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, § 14. One has to wonder why a recent similar statement by Pope Francis caused so much bewilderment. One also has to wonder why the word ‘all’ is changed to ‘many’ in the words of consecration in the recent and disastrous English translation of the Roman Missal.

Again, John Paul writes,

Universality of salvation does not mean that it is given only to those who believe explicitly in Christ and join the Church. If salvation is meant for all, it must be offered concretely to all ... The salvation of Christ is available to them through a grace which, though relating them mysteriously with the Church, does not bring them into it formally but enlightens them in a way adapted to their state of spirit and life situation.¹⁰

The answer to the systematic question of how these affirmations can be true may well have been given by Thomas Aquinas in an entirely different context and so without any intention on Thomas's part to answer such a question. In *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 5, Thomas, possibly for the first time, extends the meaning of *gratia gratum faciens*, the grace of justification, beyond the habitual grace infused with baptism: 'every effect that God works in us from his gratuitous will, by which he accepts us into his kingdom, pertains to the grace that makes one pleasing'¹¹ and so to sanctifying grace, the grace of justification. This explicitly articulates a *second* way in which justification is offered; the first is through baptism. This second way is quotidian and, we may legitimately say, secular. It occurs through what the Catholic tradition has come to call actual grace, which as operative is from God alone and as cooperative seals our acceptance of the divine help and in many instances elevates us into participation in divine life, however anonymously this may take place.

There are other texts in Aquinas that make the same point, including the texts that Jacques Maritain relies on to argue that in the first moral act of every individual justification and elevation to a share in divine life are at stake.¹² In a recent paper and again in the third chapter of the second volume of *The Trinity in History*, a work still in progress, I trace an argument to the effect that such a position was not only maintained but also developed by Aquinas for the remainder of

¹⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, § 10.

¹¹ "... omnem effectum quem Deus facit in nobis ex gratuita sua voluntate, qua nos in suum regnum acceptat, pertinere ad gratiam gratum facientem ..." Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 5.

¹² See Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (New York: Scribner, 1952). See also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, q. 89, a. 6.

his life. And I go on to maintain that, as we seek to determine which instances of actual grace qualify also as infusions of sanctifying grace, as elevation into participation in Trinitarian life, we may turn to the passage already cited from Vatican II. What the Holy Spirit offers everyone in a manner known only to God is “*the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery*” and so in the Law of the Cross, where I would locate the principal instance of the sacred in history.

Paradigmatic of the instances of actual grace that are justifying, that are also sanctifying graces, are those in which the recipient is called to those instances of insight and decision in which she assents to the invitation to participate in the dynamics of what Christians know as the Law of the Cross, the dispensation whereby the evils of the human race are transformed into the greater good of a new community through the loving and non-violent response that returns good for evil.¹³ That dialectical posture is a function of supernatural charity. It is by no means limited to the baptized members of Christ’s church or even to those outside the church who have in some way become heirs of the positive effective history, the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Christ’s historical causality, an influence of which René Girard makes so much.¹⁴ It is present everywhere. As I wrote in the same paper:

Among the principal supernatural acts that qualify as actual graces, then, are (1) the inverse insight that the violence that returns evil for evil solves nothing, (2) the direct, reflective, and deliberative insights entailed in concrete instances of non-violent resistance and the return of good for evil, and (3) the divinely proposed invitation to participate in a manner of living that concretely and, whether acknowledged as such or not, is patterned on the just and mysterious Law of the Cross ... We are here moving into the territory staked out by charity, and charity and sanctifying grace are inseparable.

¹³ For the first installment on this argument see Robert M. Doran, “Moving Vatican II Forward: The Multi-Religious Context,” Essay 46 in *Essays in Systematic Theology: An E-Book*, on www.lonergranresource.com, found under “Scholarly Works/Books.” A developed argument will be offered in chapter 3 of *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 2, *Missions, Relations, and Persons*.

¹⁴ See for instance, René Girard, *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*, trans. James G. Williams (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), pp. 161-69.

There is never one without the other. The grace-enabled assent to the promptings of the Holy Spirit regarding an act of charity that would return good for evil brings with it the justification that is meant by *gratia gratum faciens*. At least *these* actual graces are also sanctifying graces, and they are so by definition, because of the intimate relation of charity with sanctifying grace.¹⁵

In what follows I wish to summarize some aspects of the development of these themes in the work I have tried to do over the past ten years or so. In doing so I hope to point to the way in which Lonergan's thinking and my own attempts to implement it do in fact transcend Taylor's fourth disjunction. I begin with the universal mission of the Holy Spirit, since it is in that area that most of my work has been done. I am currently working to develop a theology of the mission of the Word, visible and invisible, and what I will say here in that regard indicates the direction in which I think this very incomplete work will head over the next seven years or so, if I am given the time to develop it. I will conclude with a brief statement of the way in which this theological approach can lead us to move beyond the first three of Taylor's disjunctions as well. To repeat, meeting the fourth disjunction will also address the danger that the church will be disjoined from the very work of God's grace in the contemporary world, since that grace is at work far beyond the explicit boundaries of church membership, and discovering it there will enable us better to acknowledge it also in our own midst; but meeting the fourth disjunction will also help the church transcend the first three disjunctions.

The technical development of what follows on the missions of the Holy Spirit and the Word is worked out in detail in the first volume of *The Trinity in History*. It cannot be repeated here except very briefly. However, it should be kept in mind that it is only in the second volume that there will be worked out the key role of actual grace in operating the reception of both divine missions. This is the usual, not the extraordinary way to participation in divine life. Sacramental incorporation into Christ renders explicit an elevation of human

¹⁵ Doran, "Moving Vatican II Forward: The Multi-religious Context," p. 9.

spirituality that occurs much more frequently in the everyday events of ordinary living.

5. The Universal Mission of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is God's first gift. 'Gift' is a personal, not appropriated, name for the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ All other supernatural divine gifts, including the Incarnation of the divine Word, are given 'in' the Holy Spirit. This gift is universal: wherever there is human attentiveness, intelligence, rationality, and moral responsibility pursuing the transcendental objectives of the intelligible, the true and the real, the good, with these pursuits encased in a tidal movement that includes aesthetic and dramatic intentions of the transcendental objective of the beautiful, there is the offer of the gift of God's love, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit, as the inchoate supernatural fulfilment of a natural desire for union with God, and as a pledge of the beatific knowing and loving that is our supernatural destiny. In the transactions of God with us in ordinary living, the offer and inchoate fulfilment take the form of insights from God into the demands of the exercise of charity, and of horizon-elevating willing of the ends that these insights propose. The insights themselves are the initial instance of invisible missions of the Word, and the transformation of horizons the initial instances of invisible missions of the Holy Spirit. There is never one divine mission without the other.

The mission of the Holy Spirit, the gift of divine love, was revealed, made thematic, in the visible mission of the incarnate Word, where it plays a constitutive role. Jesus, we are told, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, baptized under the sign of the Holy Spirit at the Jordan, driven by the same Spirit into the desert for forty days, led back by the Spirit to preach the coming of God's reign, and raised to life from death by the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the course of his public life he was constantly receiving not only the gift of the Spirit but also the insights that enabled him to utter the knowledge of God that in itself was ineffable. That same Holy Spirit was then sent by the Father and the Son on the apostles and the other women and men gathered in the upper room on Pentecost, in what may be called a visible or palpable mission of the Holy Spirit, to

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q. 38, aa. 1 and 2.

fulfill the twofold mission of the Son and the Spirit, and to enable a public acknowledgment that what happened in Jesus was indeed the revelation of the triune God in history. The mutual interplay of divine and human freedom can now be carried on in explicit recognition of what, prior to the revelation that occurs in the mission of the incarnate Word, necessarily remained *vécu* but not *thématique*, implicit but not recognized, conscious but not known, or to employ a Scholastic designation that still has some usefulness, present *in actu exercito* but not *in actu signato*.

If this is the case, Christians share religious community with other human beings, including people of the world's other religions. And yet this community is, at the present time, for the most part only potential. There is a shared *experience* of what Christians call the gift of God's love through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us, but shared experience is merely potential community. The principal task in front of us, it may be legitimately claimed, a task that it will take decades and perhaps centuries to work out, is to find ways to elevate potential community to formal and actual community through the elaboration in linguistic form of common meanings and values.

We may better participate in the promotion of such community the clearer we are about the immanent constitution of life in God through the first gift, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift offered to all in the silent voice of grace. Even then, as Lonergan was well aware, we will have to forge a new language as we develop these common meanings in an explicit fashion, and that effort will go through the vicissitudes of historical dialectic, much in the way Lonergan lays out in his spring 1963 course "De methodo theologiae," reported on in volume 24 of the *Collected Works, Early Works on Theological Method 3*.¹⁷ But what

¹⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method 3*, vol. 24 in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013). See especially pp. 11-18. In the human sciences, philosophy, and theology, there is (1) the commonsense understanding that characterizes the object of the science, (2) the understanding of that object that the human scientist is searching for, which is not coincident with (1), (3) the mutual influence between (1) and (2) so that (1) itself undergoes a *Wendung zur Idee* under the influence of the human science that studies it, (4) the experimental correction of (2) as history goes forward, (5) the histories that are written about (1), (2), (3), and (4), and finally (6) crises that affect (1), (2), (3), (4), and (5). See my paper "No Other Gospel: Ecclesial Integrity in the Appropriation of the Second Vatican Council," presented at the West Coast

follows is an attempt, using language familiar to Christians, to indicate precisely what it is that we will be expressing in that new language. The development of the requisite new language will be, I believe, a principal arena for cooperation with the invisible mission of the divine Word in our time.

What has been called sanctifying grace is, ontologically, nothing but a created term that serves as a supernatural base, in the form of the *gift* of a habit, for a created relation to the uncreated Holy Spirit. Since the Holy Spirit is an uncreated relation to the Father and the Son, however, to be in relation to the Holy Spirit must entail being related also to the Father and the Son, as distinct terms of a distinct created relation. The base of that distinct created relation is charity, the love of the God who has first loved us and bestowed divine love upon us in the Holy Spirit. The divine gift thus establishes relations to each of the divine persons. Those relations share in and imitate the Trinitarian relations, and so bestow on us a distinct participation in the divine life of each person, in keeping with the distinct fashion in which each of them exercises the divine creative love. For Christians these relations are thematic; but they exist even when they are not formulated in the Trinitarian terms that name for Christians what is going on.

While the ontological character of what we have known as sanctifying grace is that it is simply a created term that serves as consequent condition for the truth of a contingent predication about God, namely, that God has bestowed upon us the uncreated gift of the Holy Spirit, we are driven by theological exigence in our time to attempt as best we can to find psychological correlatives to such ontological terms, at least when this is possible. I have argued for some time that here we can be helped by one of the statements in Lonergan's so-called four-point hypothesis that links the four divine relations to four created participations and indeed imitations.¹⁸ In that hypothesis the created base of a created relation to the uncreated Holy

Methods Institute, April 2013, Loyola Marymount University, now uploaded to www.lonerganresource.com as essay 48 in *Essays in Systematic Theology: An E-book*. In this paper I apply this schema to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* to date of Vatican II.

¹⁸ For the hypothesis itself see Bernard Lonergan, *The Triune God: Systematics*, vol. 12 in *Collected works of Bernard Lonergan*, trans. Michael G. Shields, ed. Robert M. Doran and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 470-73.

Spirit is understood as a participation in and imitation of the divine relation called active spiration, that is, a participation in and imitation of the Father and the Son as together, as one principle, they consciously 'breathe' the Holy Spirit. Augustine found after much struggle that perhaps the self-presence of mind, *mens*, that he called *memoria*, might function as a way of understanding the Father's role in this relation, while scriptural revelation itself gave grounds for understanding the Son's role in terms of *Verbum*, the Word that issues from the self-presence of divine Intelligence and Love. There is a transformed self-presence experienced on the part of one who finds herself on the receiving end of unqualified love, and from that transformed self-presence there issues an ineffable 'yes' of value judgment that constitutes a universalist faith. From these two together there issues charity as created participation in the passive spiration that is the Holy Spirit, as well as, I believe, the supernatural hope that constitutes the created relation to the Father.

The triad of self-presence, faith, and charity-hope is the created participation in the Trinitarian relations that, while named in terms drawn explicitly from Christian doctrinal and theological sources, is really something that can be found unthematically just about everywhere, through the working of actual grace.¹⁹ What I am suggesting is that it is the church's responsibility in our age to discern the presence of such participation in Trinitarian life wherever it may be found, and then to foster it and join hands with it in working for the establishment of God's reign in human affairs.

6. The Universal Mission of the Divine Word

Participation in the *Verbum spirans Amorem* that is the eternal divine Word takes place first through the gift of insights from God into the appropriate responses to human situations, and then through a created supernatural judgment of value, an often ineffable 'yes' uttered in response to the gift of divine love recalled in the self-presence of one who acknowledges his or her giftedness. Here I am putting Christian language to an experience that more often than not occurs without any such reflective objectification. The gift of God's

¹⁹ For details see chapter 2 of my *The Trinity in History: A Theology of the Divine Missions*, vol. 1: *Missions and Processions*, "The Immanent Constitution of Life in God."

love includes a participation in an invisible mission of the divine Word. The judgment or judgments of value that participate in the Word's role in breathing the Holy Spirit, our participation in the invisible mission of the Word, constitutes a universalist faith, a faith common to all who have assented to the reception of unqualified love. Faith thus grounds the proceeding charity that a Christian theology acknowledges as a created participation in and imitation of the passive spiration that is the Holy Spirit.

This universalist faith Lonergan distinguishes in his later work from the beliefs of particular religious traditions. The faith reflected in such judgments of value can be and is found in diverse traditions, and is responsible, it would seem, for Lonergan's hope that the religions of the world will find common ground and common cause in the gift of God's love. Such faith is the knowledge born of religious love, a knowledge contained in judgments of value consequent upon the reception of the gift of unqualified love. Articulating those common judgments of value represents, I believe, the locus of interreligious dialogue today. Christians will regard that locus as a share in the invisible mission of the divine Word. It is the articulation of common judgments of value that will raise our community with the people of the world's religions from the potential community constituted by a shared experience to the formal and actual state generated by shared understanding and affirmation, and because the judgments in question are judgments of value, also to the status of a community that can act in solidarity in the collaborative constitution of the human world. That elevation to articulate shared understanding will entail the emergence of a new language, and the work of developing that new language is a major arena of collaboration with the invisible mission of the divine Word in our time and for many years to come.

Most of what I want to say about the invisible mission of the Word remains to be worked out in the second volume of *The Trinity in History*. But part of the heuristic structure for understanding that mission is already available in the scale of values that constitutes perhaps the central set of categories in my *Theology and the Dialectics of History*²⁰ and that remains central to the positions expressed in the first

²⁰ Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1009, 2001). See chapter 4 for an overview. The elaboration of the scale of values constitutes the principal point of the book. Part 2 is devoted to personal values, part 3 to social values or the good of order, and part 4 to cultural

volume of *The Trinity in History*. The scale of values presents in effect the structure of what we may call social grace, where 'social grace' is perhaps a contemporary way of talking about the kingdom of God. From a metaphysical point of view, social grace refers to the formal effects of grace in the creation of cultural values and the transformation of social structures.

Social grace demands constitutive meaning, and the elaboration of that constitutive meaning will represent a major instance of human collaboration with the invisible mission of the divine Word. The discernment of social grace, of the presence of divine Truth and Love in cultural forms and social structures, is perhaps the central theological and pastoral challenge of our time. The scale of values, understood as the social objectification of the structure of authenticity due to the isomorphism of the scale with the levels of consciousness, will be central to that discernment. But a heuristic structure remains an upper blade. Even upper blades develop, and they do so in particular when they are brought to bear on the data of everyday living. Collaboration in the mission of the Word entails reorientation of human science and of myriad forms of common sense. To a large extent, this is the theological challenge of the present century. I am not yet prepared to delve into it further.

7. The Multi-Religious Context and the Structure of Systematic Theology

What I am suggesting has important implications for the work of theology, and especially of systematic theology, whose objective is to express the meaning of Christian constitutive meaning in terms that can be assimilated by contemporary women and men. Lonergan understood the massive shift called for in theological method in terms of the cultural factors of modernity: modern science, modern historical consciousness, and modern philosophy. To these must be added the deference to the other that constitutes the postmodern phenomenon. In particular I stress the interreligious context within which systematic theology must be conducted from this point forward, as well as the vast call that both God and humanity are uttering for social and

values. The entire scale is isomorphic with the levels of consciousness as worked out by Lonergan. This for me is the source of its exceptional validity and normative capacity.

economic justice, for gender equity, and for an up-to-date notion of sexual differentiation. The triune God with which a contemporary systematics begins is a God whose gift of grace is offered to all women and men at every time and place and in a manner that calls for the transformation of cultural meanings and values and the elaboration of social structures that deliver the goods of the earth in an equitable fashion to all. The Incarnation of the Word of God is the revelation of that universal offer of grace and of the demands that come with it. Once meaning is acknowledged as constitutive of the real world in which human beings live and know and choose and love, soteriology can be phrased largely in revelational terms: the introduction of divine meaning into human history, which is what revelation is, is redemptive of that history and of the subjects and communities that are both formed by that history and form its further advance in turn.²¹ It is first and foremost the mission of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the universal realm of religious values in the integral scale of values, and by and large the systematics that I envision would articulate the relation of that mission and of the revealing visible mission of the Word to realities at the other levels of value: personal, cultural, social, and vital.

As the previous two sections have argued, the invisible mission of the Spirit is not isolated from an equally invisible mission of the Word. The elaboration of the gift of the Spirit enables us to develop a new variant on the Augustinian-Thomist psychological analogy for understanding the divine processions. As the gift of God's love comes to constitute the conscious *memoria* in which the human person is present to herself or himself, the summation, as it were, of life experiences as these constitute one's self-taste, it gives rise to a set of judgments of value that constitute a universalist faith, a faith that gives thanks for the gift, a faith that in fact is the created term of an invisible mission of the Word. Together this self-presence in *memoria* and its word of Yes in faith breathe charity, the love of the Givers and a love of all people and of the universe in loving the Givers of the gift.

Thus the theology that would move Vatican II forward, I believe, has to follow Frederick Crowe in understanding the visible mission of

²¹ On revelation and the Incarnation, see Charles C. Hefling, Jr., "Revelation as/as Insight," in *The Importance of Insight: Essays in Honour of Michael Vertin*, ed. John J. Liptay, Jr., and David S. Liptay (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), pp. 97-115.

the Word in the context of the universal offer of divine healing and elevating grace in the invisible missions of the Holy Spirit and of the Word. While I would bring the invisible mission of the Word into greater prominence than did Crowe, his emphasis on the invisible missions of Spirit and Word introduces multi-religious advances on the theological situation, and these change everything in that situation. They do so in ways that are enriching but at the same time for many anxiety-producing. They also do so in ways that are as yet unforeseen. We do not know what God has in mind. As Crowe has insisted, there is no answer as yet to the question of the final relationship of Christianity to the other world religions. We are working that out. God wants us to work it out. We will work it out with divine assistance, with the actual graces of insights and horizon-converting intentions of the ends that God wants us to pursue. The relation of Christianity to the other religions is a set of future contingent realities, and nothing true can be said about them now. There will be no answer to that question until we have worked it out, and we are at the very beginning of that elaboration.²²

It was with this in mind that I have also suggested that the functional specialties in which Lonergan elaborates the overall structure of theology, a structure in which systematics is but one set of tasks among many, need to be considered as functional specialties for a global or world theology.²³ The functional specialties, which I number as nine rather than eight,²⁴ are really functional specialties for a vast expansion of theology, and of every functional specialty in theology, beyond what even Lonergan had explicitly in mind. The data relevant for Christian theology become all the data on the religious living of men and women at every age, in every religion, and in every culture. For the Holy Spirit and the invisible Word are at work, on mission, everywhere, and not simply in the post-resurrection, Pentecostal context of Christian belief. It is the responsibility of

²² See the concluding comments in Frederick Crowe, *Christ and History* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2005; reissued by University of Toronto Press, 2015).

²³ See Robert M. Doran, "Functional Specialties for a World Theology," *Lonergan Workshop* 24 (2013), pp. 99-111. This paper can also be found in *Essays in Systematic Theology*, as Essay 36.

²⁴ See Robert M. Doran, "The Ninth Functional Specialty," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies*, new series, 2: 1 (2011), pp. 12-16. This paper can also be found in *Essays in Systematic Theology*, as Essay 38.

Christians to discern the workings of the Holy Spirit and the Word on a universal scale, and in theology that responsibility will take the form of interpreting the religious data, narrating what has been going forward in the religious history of peoples, dialectically and dialogically discerning what is of God from what is not, discriminating genuine transcendence from deviated transcendence in the various religions of humankind including Christianity and Catholicism, and taking one's stand on what is of God wherever it may be found, articulating this in positions that all can accept, and understanding the realities affirmed in such judgments. At the heart of that discernment is the Law of the Cross that returns superabundant good for evil done.

8. Transcending Taylor's First Three Disjunctions

Addressing and transcending Taylor's fourth disjunction in this manner may contribute to moving beyond the first three disjunctions as well.

The theology of the missions of Word and Spirit is thoroughly rooted in doctrinal and theological tradition, and so it should, in the ideal order at least, appeal both to Taylor's seekers and to his dwellers. This would be the case unless the dwellers are really what Lonergan calls the solid right determined to live in a world that no longer exists and the seekers are really the scattered left with no center to hold them together. But then both seekers and dwellers are called back to the issue of their own personal authenticity, where this first disjunction can be, it seems to me, very easily transcended.

The disjunction between a sense of responsibility to bring church teaching into critical convergence with contemporary trends and exigences and a conception of the church as a jurisdictional authority to which is due mainly obedience is also fairly easily reconciled, I think, when one acknowledges, first, that the teaching authority of the church has itself called for a critical reading of the signs of the times, and second, with Lonergan, that authority is legitimate power, and that legitimacy is conferred only by authenticity acknowledged by the community. Without that, there is no authority; there is only power.

The difficult disjunction is the third. For while the formulation of the disjunction may be almost a caricature, since genuine natural law ethics is not based on abstract essences but on concrete exigences

demanding attentiveness, intelligence, reasonable judgment, and self-transcending responsibility, still the issues to which this disjunction is applied by Taylor and at least some of his commentators – issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual differentiation – remain neuralgic in our time and in our church. This is particularly true as gender issues lead to discussion of the ordination of women, and as sexual differentiation leads to discussion of same-sex marriage. My own position is that the official teaching of the church on both of these issues may have attempted a premature systematization and closure. But I am not so naive as to believe that perhaps needed developments are going to happen quickly. How and when this might play out is anyone's guess at the present time, and I can only propose that the sole means of resolving the issues will be through the discernment of the movements of Word and Spirit inviting us into collaboration with Trinitarian grace in our history. Any judgment as to where this will lead us has to do with future contingents, and as Frederick Crowe reminded us several times in last writings, on such matters no judgments of fact may be passed. As Aristotle emphasized that it is neither true nor false that there will be a naval battle tomorrow, as Crowe argued that it is neither true nor false that Christian relations with other religions will take this or that form, so too it is neither true nor false that future generations will judge this way or that on the issues at stake in the third disjunction. We must, however, as a church acknowledge that these issues have not yet been closed.

Conclusion

The emphasis on the primacy and universality of the mission of the Holy Spirit and the invisible mission of the Word will be one source of the church's redirection of its energies so as to heal the disjunctions. Vatican II, I suggest, began with what is first for us: the church. It followed the way of discovery. As a pastoral council it acted appropriately in so proceeding. But now we must acknowledge that the theology of the church is not first in the order of teaching but close to last, and so that a theology and an ecclesial praxis that would understand the topics that in reality come before the church – Trinity, the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation, revelation, creation, original sin,

redemption, and at least the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist²⁵ – a theology that would understand these realities in terms of an assumed ecclesiology rather than understanding the church in terms of these prior topics, is itself a distorted theology. The mission of the church is an extension of the missions of the Spirit and the Word, of divine Love and divine Truth. ‘As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ The appropriate systematic-theological understanding of the church can occur only within the dogmatic-theological context set by an adequate Trinitarian theology and within the unified field structure established by joining that Trinitarian theology to the integral scale of values. In accord with Vatican II, we may justly list the paschal mystery as the central articulation of what the mission of the Holy Spirit is always about: incarnating, whether the gift is recognized as such or not, the Law of the Cross in the dynamics of human history, the Law that enjoins human beings in the promptings of grace to cease returning evil for evil and to begin to resist in a new way, by heaping up superabundant good in the face of hatred, malice, corruption, ignorance, and decline.

²⁵ For a fuller elaboration of these categories, see Robert M. Doran, “A New Project in Systematic Theology,” *Theological Studies* 76 (June 2015), pp. 243-59.

Disjunctions and a Jesuit Imaginary

DANIEL HENDRICKSON

1. Introduction

The two-year training program for novices of the Jesuit order – referred to by the organization as a ‘school of prayer’ – is dawdling and discreet. Instantly more taciturn than ordinary life, the novitiate program, however, burgeons with intentionality and intensity. What is slow and quiet eventually manifests inter-personal, introspective, and socially, communally, emotionally, and prayerfully intimate experiences, much of which ensue in three programmatic expressions: persistent examination, assigned experiments, and a sense of enchantment.

As these formative techniques are valued in how they shape Jesuits, they can also be recognized as exigent strategies that can begin disarming two malaises within the philosopher Charles Taylor’s contemporary purview: an array of relational disjunctions that ultimately entangle us within ourselves, and specific disjunctions that entrap the Church. Herein, the three exercises of young Jesuits will be related to Taylor’s sense of “fullness,” and discussed as pedagogies that cultivate an alternative *imaginary*. Within the context of Jesuit higher education, the pedagogies open students of a secular age to a network of relationships. For a governing Church hierarchy, the pedagogies would encourage a similar openness.

2. Charles Taylor and Fullness

Before looking at the experiments, and their correspondent pedagogies, it is important to understand Taylor’s conception of fullness. In 2007, he published a 900-page narrative of western-especial secularism, *A Secular Age*, that was a monumental achievement. The academy responded with book reviews, websites, campus conferences, manuscripts, and honors. That year, Taylor won the prestigious Templeton Prize for his prescient ability to engage spiritual concerns.

The book is distinctive in its tone – and this in two ways. First, it is more narrative than his other works. In covering a 500-year swath of western culture, it is conversant with poetry, politics, philosophy, art, architecture, and many other culturally formative practices. For western Christendom, *A Secular Age* tells a story of where we once were, and of where we now are. Second, it is more transparent of his life. As a premier philosopher of our time, Taylor comes fully out-of-the-Catholic-closet. About ten years earlier at a Catholic institution of higher learning, Taylor indicated in an address that being openly religious in the American academy is not always wise, or safe. He suggested that it may compromise a sense of intellectual respect from colleagues, or for young faculty it can frustrate the processes of tenure and promotion. In the book he writes candidly about his Roman Catholic faith, including, moreover, Buddhist impulses and observances that enrich his sense of being Catholic. His address, “A Catholic Modernity” (1996), begins to discuss the dynamics of Western European and North American secularism that becomes the focus of his 2007 award-winning publication.

Western secularism is a variety of its own, and Taylor is upfront about the unique roles and forces of secularism in other places around the globe. He is aware that secularism in some contexts is a catalyst for human dignity, political rights, and gender equity. And as he focuses upon the kind of secularism of industrialized, capitalist, and free-market countries, he is perspectival. The kind of northern-Atlantic secularism Taylor dwells upon in the book is one trope among others. Moreover, within the quadrants of Western Europe, Scandinavia, Canada, and the United States are important differences, such as a religious undercurrent in American patriotism, or manifestations of social and political identity in Sunday worship around the United States.

The point is this: secularism is complex, and the kind that Taylor says we live within proffers an existential cost that he says we are failing to understand, much less acknowledge. He describes such a cost in terms of relationships.

In his first pages, Taylor explains that anyone of us can have a certain kind of experience that makes life purpose-filled, connected, driven, and genuine. He describes it as a phenomenal moment – a kind of epiphany – that facilitates a profound sense of interior peace, or of personal wholeness. It is an experience that “unsettles and breaks

though our ordinary sense of being in the world ... when 'ordinary reality is abolished and something terrifyingly *other* shines through.'"¹ Taylor refers to such an experience as fullness, and in a secular age, this is what he says we are losing. Important to Taylor's depiction of fullness are the relationships it reveals, meaningful connections Taylor refers to as *points of contact*.

One such point of contact is with God, or with a higher power, or with some sort of external spiritual reality. In western secular assessment, a cosmic sensibility is deflated, or flattened. Impeded, blocked, suppressed: a metaphysical dimension, he reminds us, is cut out of our lives. This is the primary relationship Taylor is worried about. He does not necessarily want us to be observant Roman Catholics, or Buddhists, or Muslims, or Hindus, and so on, but, philosophically, he does want us to recognize that we are not all there is. He insists that you and I, on our own, are not the sole arbiters of meaning and reality. Something Other exists, and Taylor wants each of us to negotiate a spiritual point of contact in our lives with what he calls an "ontic commitment." Maybe it can be said that he wants us to lean out of ourselves. For those of us who are discomforted with such a challenge, it gets worse: Taylor does not offer a metaphysical argument to prove his point. Rational, factual, evidence-based metaphysical argumentation is in fact symptomatic of western-secular perspective. An ontic commitment in our lives is not grounded in epistemology. Instead, it is existential.

As secular perspective shaves away one relational dimension in our lives, Taylor suggests it shuts out other points of contact. A secular orientation is portrayed by Taylor as a burgeoning individuality, particularly as a strident form of invulnerability. An increasing inability for any of us to be open to other influences and sources in our lives is the focus of Taylor's 1989 book, *Sources of the Self*, in many ways a prequel to *A Secular Age*. Much of Taylor's diagnosis about the emergence of western-style secularism is concerned with the 16th Century enlightenment perspective and a consequent rage in our lives for scientific evidence and instrumental rationality. Taylor is impatient with the Cartesian-Kantian strand of epistemology in Western philosophy. With Descartes, we took a wrong turn, and we

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), p. 5.

strode headlong into an obsession with rationality. A caricature of fully blossoming secularity suggests that we are less emotionally integrated, socially engaged, culturally influenced, politically active, and so on. Put simply, relating wanes.

In his account of secularity Taylor gives us the philosophy of two subjectivities – that is, he describes two ways of being human. He refers to one as the Buffered Self, an impenetrable, invulnerable, independent, coldly rational individual who shuts out the intuitive, emotional, external, and spiritual impacts that shape, challenge, and transform our lives. He refers to the other as the Porous Self, she or he, conversely, who is open to forces and influences of the world and others, including one's own incarnational impulses. Closed subjectivity, or open; encapsulated within, or inwardly and outwardly connected; compartmentalized, or networked; Buffered, or Porous.

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, gives us a similar account in the meditation of the two standards whereby retreatants are asked to envision the actions and impacts of two kinds of monarchs, a ruthless king and Christ the King. A brutal, impulsive, and avaricious king is more and more despicable in description: self-aggrandized, -absorbed, -referential, and so on, while the other is enticing, inclusive, curative, and courageous. Ignatius asks which of the two we are drawn towards.

Taylor's description of fullness is also about important contrasting points of contact in our lives. The Jesuit programmatic expressions of examination, experiments, and enchantment, and corresponding pedagogies of fullness, appreciate and embrace such points of contact. In doing so, they dismantle relational disjunctions.

3. The Jesuit Program

Of three programmatic expressions of Jesuit formation, examination is a fundament. In Jesuit spirituality it is notable for its ability to assess the dynamics of one's conscience, that is, it recognizes and wrestles with the impulses and influences of good and bad within and about our lives. Moreover, examination is significant in its ability to manifest consciousness. Deeply within, and broadly around, when properly deployed the Ignatian tool of examination facilitates awareness. Moral, ethical, epistemic, and phenomenal insights can be achieved out of the classic and pragmatic Jesuit examen.

The next experiments are the tests and trials of the two-year Jesuit boot camp, such as the Spiritual Exercises, a pilgrimage, a hospital experiment, the long experiment, and a host of other trials within the program. Of value is the ability of the Jesuit experiments within the course of two years to *assay* individuals in myriad ways. The Jesuit is tried, tested, evaluated, and educated in realms that are both familiar and foreign. Such milieus range from immersions within Jean Vanier's L'Arche communities, a high school classroom, an impoverished inner-city district, a parish, a prison, a Native American reservation, as a school-bus driver on a Native American reservation, a month of silence, a hospice facility, etc. Jesuits are sent into contexts that might seem commonplace and comfortable, as well as strange and surreal.

Finally, there is enchantment. At least in Ignatian parlance, it is a sensation of God's grace, and in the context of the Jesuit novitiate program, an impression of divine presence in one's life is potent. The Jesuit quest to find God in all things begins instantly, and in a more recent generation weekly spiritual direction sessions with a mentor and faith-sharing meetings with classmates sharpen, and maintain, a sensibility for the transcendent.

In assaying the Jesuit's self toward degrees of awareness, elasticity, and awe, the formative practices of examination, experimentation, and enchantment can be valued in their ability to facilitate fullness, that is, points of contact. In my estimate, they correspond to three of the pedagogies of fullness that I glean from Taylor's *A Secular Age*: a pedagogy of study, a pedagogy of alterity, and a pedagogy of grace.

4. Pedagogies of Fullness

Study

As with good Jesuit examination, the pedagogy of study explores the full domain of the self. As an educational method, the basic strategies of personal inquiry and experience engage multiple intellectual capacities of students by formulating, assessing, or inspiring one's thoughts, feelings, intuitions, and imaginations. A comprehensive focus upon the self appreciates the inner construals of insights and emotions, interests and impulses, confusions and conflicts, beliefs, and so on, and is also mindful of social realms wherein students dwell. Family, friends, a campus, a church

community, a civic sector, a political sphere, an economic environment, and the many other contexts that comprise the wide ambit of social influences upon individuals are integral. In study's ability to explore the self, an ancient Roman poet's maxim, 'Nothing human is foreign to me' [*"Humani nil a me alienum puto"*], is helpful. Terence (c.190-159 BCE) lets us appreciate the role of study in classical regard, and he represents a willful and inquisitive orientation that navigates the vast landscape of the self.

This first pedagogy has precedent in the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* (1599). Generally regarded as administratively excessive and rigid in curriculum, there is a special sensitivity in the *Ratio* for a Renaissance humanist and Modern philosophical expression of study that is akin to the thinking and writing of the philosopher Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). The definitive *Ratio* was published in 1599. Montaigne's first essays were available in 1580.

For Montaigne and in his *Essays*, study is regarded as a self-assaying, that is, a trying, testing, and deeply probing method of self-exploration. It is a philosophical method that cultivates abilities of profound subjective awareness. In an essay entitled "Of Experience," Montaigne describes an inward gaze that will "study myself," revealing to himself wisdoms of many kinds. He explains that "my metaphysics ... my physics" will better inform him about his own life, the lives of others, and of the world around.² When he indicates in another essay, "Of the Education of Children," that "[m]y concepts and judgments can only fumble their way forward, swaying, stumbling, tripping over; even when I have advanced as far as I can, I never feel satisfied, for I have a troubled cloudy vision of lands beyond," we see a value in the openness of inquiry, and a caution against closed-off certainty.³

Shy, impudent, loquacious, reticent, wasteful, judicious, Montaigne names and wrestles with his many moods and behaviors and comes to know them intimately.⁴ Such a spectrum is just one way

² Michel de Montaigne, "Of Experience" in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), p. 821.

³ Michel de Montaigne, "On Educating Children" in *The Essays: A Selection*, trans. M. A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 38.

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, "Of the Inconstancy of Our Actions" in *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), p. 242.

of manifesting the basic realities of human life. I “portray passing,” he explains, and not stagnation in life, that is, fixity of perspectives and habits that resist challenges and possibilities.⁵ In another essay he states, “[m]y aim is to reveal my own self, which may be different tomorrow.”⁶ Montaigne’s method – “a thorny undertaking ... to penetrate ... dark depths”⁷ tunnels into the dimensions of human experience to acquaint individuals with their many intellectual capacities and not only facilitates an honest assessment of oneself but recognizes and exercises the emotions, intuitions, and imaginations that can go unexplored.

Increasing self-knowledge and engaging a wide range of intellectual abilities, the practice of Montaigne’s study also honors the social dimensions of the self. Interacting with others, meeting new people, hearing new ideas, seeing different rituals, and navigating unconventional mores impact and expand one’s personal horizons.⁸ But with Montaigne, doing so also teaches us more about the beliefs we each embrace and the socio-cultural spheres we are already familiar with, letting us confirm and validate our values and practices, or refashion them, or perhaps even form ones anew.⁹ The Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum* prescribes a rich, deep-diving sense of study that is often buried under the administrative details of the text.¹⁰ A closer look reveals a conception of study in Jesuit educational practice that is not unlike the practice of the Ignatian examen.

Reverend Adolfo Nicolás, the thirtieth Superior General of the Jesuits, is interested in the cultivation of such a penetrating pedagogy of study. In 2010, he convened a global conference on Jesuit higher education. Over two hundred Jesuit higher educational institutions

⁵ Michel de Montaigne, “Of Repentance,” in *The Complete Works of Montaigne: The Complete Essays of Montaigne*, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1948), p. 611.

⁶ Montaigne, “Of the Education of Children” in *The Essays*, p. 41.

⁷ Michel de Montaigne, “Of Practice” in *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. M. A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 1991), p. 424.

⁸ Montaigne, “Of the Education of Children” in *The Complete Works of Montaigne*, p. 112.

⁹ Michel de Montaigne, “Of Cannibals” in *Michel de Montaigne: The Complete Works: Essay, Travel Journal, Letters*, trans. M.A. Screech (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), pp. 150-52.

¹⁰ Robert McClintock, “Toward a Place for Study in a World of Instruction” in *Teachers College Record* 73, 2 (1971), pp. 176-177.

around the world sent delegates to the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City where Nicolás, in his address, “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today,” encouraged the global network of colleges and universities in pointed ways that encourage a pedagogy of study engaging the full domain of the self in its relation to the world.¹¹

One challenge that underscores an urgent need for such pedagogy arises from the impulsive patterns of social media today. Nicolás described the thoughtless, efficient, and hasty expressions of communicating that happens through new technologies, and he encouraged Jesuit higher education to espouse in fresh pedagogical ways the tools of analysis, reflection, and discernment that are embedded within the Jesuit tradition. He spoke specifically about a new problem of superficiality in the lives of students.

Michelle Molina’s recent book, *To Overcome Oneself: The Jesuit Ethic and Spirit of Global Expansion* (2013), is helpful for delimiting important aspects of such a pedagogy.¹² She is fascinated by the vast, and fast, international network of the Jesuits in the Seventeenth Century and beyond. In part, her book characterizes the outreach of the Society of Jesus as an urgent response to engage a wayward world. That outreach to others begins, however, she says, by turning inward. Molina does not talk explicitly about a pedagogy of study, but she just as well could. She details the techniques of self-examination and its dimensions of personal awareness as catalyzing for the impulse to constructively engage other people and places, and for doing this, as the Jesuits did, with global impact.

Alterity

As the pedagogy of study relates to the self, alterity relates to otherness. More personally described, it engages others. It can also be called a pedagogy of solidarity.¹³ In focusing on a sense of otherness,

¹¹Adolfo Nicolás, “Depth, Universality, and Learned Ministry: Challenges to Jesuit Higher Education Today,” Conference Address, Universidad Iberoamericana, Mexico City, Mexico, April 2010, see [http://www.loyola.edu/Justice/commitment/NicolasSJ.JHE.April23.2010\[1\].pdf](http://www.loyola.edu/Justice/commitment/NicolasSJ.JHE.April23.2010[1].pdf).

¹²Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

¹³Peter-Hans Kolvenbach’s call for a well-educated “solidarity” is an influence for this pedagogy of fullness. See: “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of

it hopes to cultivate in students a pliability of their lives to the new environments – the lives, cultures, customs, and concepts – of other people. Not only are the numerous intellectual capacities of the pedagogy of study triggered in special ways, culling or developing, for instance, thoughts, emotions, intuitions, interests, and imaginations, but alterity facilitates new relationships to other places, persons, and perspectives.

Because of this pedagogy's connection to dimensions of otherness, Cicero's (106-43 BCE) phrase, 'We are not born for ourselves alone' [*Non nobis solum nati sumus*"], is a worthy ancient representative. It is the classical antecedent to Pedro Arrupe's Jesuit educational outcome, "Women and men for and with others."¹⁴

Consider for a moment those experiments that send young Jesuits into foreign contexts. The experiments are prescribed in the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (1558), and their objectives are not unlike those of study. They assay the self, that is, they try, challenge, and stretch the self in disparate places, with unfamiliar programs, and with dissimilar persons. The aspect of alterity is important.

A concern for such alterity helps to explain why the 17th Century *Ratio Studiorum* is so excessive in administrative detail: It was to allow Jesuits to have, in-hand, a comprehensive and successful plan for quickly establishing schools around the world. This is also one of the reasons the *Ratio* is today regarded as a static relic of Jesuit educational efforts. "Part IV" of the Jesuit *Constitutions*, however, is also a foundational educational document of the Society, and the core of its message is for Jesuit educational efforts to "adapt" to "times, places, and persons." Jesuit schools – at whatever level they educated – were to be culturally and socially adaptive. They were to appreciate, and appropriate, difference. The mandate to adapt is directly related to the experiments. Both Jesuit education and the experiments for Jesuits exude an interest in engaging otherness, and of course, others.

Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education," Conference Address, Commitment Justice in Jesuit Higher Education conference, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, October 2000, see http://www.sjweb.info/documents/phk/2000santa_clara_en.pdf.

¹⁴ Pedro Arrupe, "Men for Others: Education for Social Justice and Social Action Today," Conference Address, Tenth International Congress of Jesuit Alumni of Europe," in Valencia, Spain, July 1973, see <http://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/men-for-others.html>.

The early Jesuit pedagogue, Jerónimo Nadal (1507-1580), is known for saying that the highway is a Jesuit's home.¹⁵ In referring to the home as a "highway" Nadal not only recognizes a worldly disposition of Jesuits, but, literally, their international momentum. The activity of travel, physical movement, and being elsewhere – the hallmark expression of Jesuit life is being "missioned" or assigned to places and projects – is well captured by the highway metaphor. But the movement of the metaphor need not just be literal. It also represents the searching dispositions of inquiry, examination, growth, and possibility right where one is.

In approaching alterity and creating solidarity, the mandate to adapt – that is, to be flexible and friendly to difference and to feel at home in otherness – respecting both what is home to others and to oneself – stages a pedagogy of solidarity. Adaptation was recognized in the life of Ignatius in his own ability to appropriate life experiences in self-fulfilling and socially transformative ways. A capacity for emotional, intellectual, and spiritual malleability was also expected of his Jesuits, a global workforce that would intimately engage the lives of others – proximate and afar, familiar and foreign – in expressions of personal ministry or social justice. That is a significant reason why new Jesuits were stretched and tested by the classic "experiments" in the novitiate program.

For engaging others positively and productively, there is much to draw from in the canon of Jesuit educational writing, especially from the current and recent superiors general. With Pedro Arrupe, Peter Hans-Kolvenbach, and Adolfo Nicolás, higher educational emphases from the recent half-century of leadership of the Society of Jesus stress the realities of having and sharing faith and doing justice. The justice prong of this dynamic, in particular, necessitates a solidarity with others in the grittiest of circumstance, and with alterity it is important to be mindful of Taylor's relational concern. Toward the end of *A Secular Age*, the parable of the Good Samaritan emerges as an important image of fullness. The particular lesson of the parable that Taylor especially likes is the teaching on neighborliness, and the wideness of kinship and connection it portends. The crisis of secularism of the west is in its tendency for individuals not to connect,

¹⁵ William V. Bangert and Thomas M. McCoog, *Jerome Nadal, S.J., 1507-1580: Tracking the First Generation of Jesuits* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1992), p. 40.

network, and engage in meaningful ways, but to retreat, withdraw, and isolate.

Grace

Essentially, the third pedagogy, grace, cultivates an orientation to a transcendent other, or at least invites a kind of transcendental orientation. As the first pedagogy of fullness cultivates the inner construals of individuals and the second facilitates meaningful associations with other persons, places, and perspectives, a pedagogy of grace relies upon the work of study and solidarity to facilitate an openness to unusual dimensions of revelation and signification.

Terence phrases a notion of inwardness and Cicero invites us out of ourselves. Another ancient Roman, Horace (65-27 BCE), in his famous command, "*carpe diem*," instructs us 'to harvest today without thinking of tomorrow' [*"Carpe diem, quam minimun credula postero"*].

In 'seizing the day,' Horace encourages people to be attentive to the activities and opportunities at hand, that is, to be aware of the present. He wants us to be *seized* by it. Horace's focus on the present does not disregard the intentional work of study and the deliberate associations of solidarity, but it offers an alternative intentionality, or an orientation that is perhaps *less* intentional, or even unintentional. It can even be said that the work and relating of study and solidarity help to cultivate the conditions of this third pedagogy, a disposition not of suspicion, or fear of the unexpected, but of ready – or *already* – openness.

The pedagogy of grace, then, represents what is not planned, or what is unprepared, or surprising. It is a pedagogy that cultivates an openness in students for inexplicable and phenomenal moments of wonder, awe, inspiration, gratitude, consolation, or confirmation. These are powerful and important moments that occur within any of us, including the lives of students, and Taylor wants us to realize both their importance, and their sources.

Openness of and to grace is a fundament of St. Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, a personal experience of praying that is not only attentive to the reality of a transcendent Other but recognizes the world itself as graced by such an Other. Taylor describes a secular age as disenchanting, a term he borrows from the sociologist Max Weber (1864-1920). And, really, in some way, Taylor wants us (and students)

to be re-enchanted. He does not want us to be haunted in ancient and medieval ways, but mystified in moments that flex and sharpen a spiritual aptitude of human life.¹⁶

Andrew Delbanco's recent book is helpful. In *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be* (2012), he speaks about a sense of enchantment in higher education. "Every true teacher," he explains, "understands that, along with teacher and students, a mysterious third force is present in every classroom." He continues: "While most of us who work in education have no language to account for this mystery, that does not mean the mystery does not exist."¹⁷

Later in his book, when Delbanco returns to this mysterious educational source – a source, he contends, that was once upon a time referred to as grace – he admits that he is less worried about where it comes from, or what exactly it is, and is instead invested in what it leads to. Delbanco speaks of the transformative nature that was once part of college education, much of which is a movement from self-interest into a meaningful life of service.

As a pedagogy of fullness, grace facilitates conditions of belief in a secular age. By Taylor's admission, the crisis of fullness in a secular age is first and fundamentally appreciated by reference to a transcendent source, a reality the pedagogy of grace relies upon.¹⁸ In pointing students more intentionally into themselves and others, the pedagogies of study and solidarity open new possibilities of knowing and relating. In orienting students *less intentionally* to an ulterior source of wonder, awe, and inspiration, including the correspondent sensations of gratitude, consolation, and confirmation – and encouraging them to be seized by any of these – students begin to value the essential components of fullness in an age which distrusts, denies, or denigrates the meanings and purposes they proffer.

The pedagogy of grace, then, in yet another level of relating, helps to meet Taylor's existential desires for meaning and purpose. In cooperation with the strategies of study and solidarity, the pedagogies of fullness in Jesuit higher education condition ways of relating. As

¹⁶ Please see David McPherson's essay in this volume, "Seeking Re-enchantment."

¹⁷ Andrew Delbanco. *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 48.

¹⁸ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 13-16, 143-145.

the cultivation of various contacts forms students, it lets them better imagine a relational way of life.

A Jesuit Imaginary

If expressions of fullness, that is, points of contact, can indeed be enabled and encountered in the learning dynamics of higher education, they could instill within the lives of our students a Jesuit *imaginary*. In *A Secular Age* and elsewhere, Taylor speaks about a “social imaginary” whereby people who live together in societies and communities organically envision how they want to relate with one another and the different roles and responsibilities that allow for such relating. “What I’m trying to get at,” Taylor explains about the social imaginary,

is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality ... I am thinking rather of the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations.¹⁹

For example, and in a larger context, the Arab Spring sought to manifest new social imaginaries within the lives of citizens of specific nationalities. On a smaller scale, you might think of a parish community and the expressions of involvement and leadership in the life of the parish, including the liturgy, and how its members imagine and implement a sense of being the Church. A social imaginary represents the ways a group of people imagine myriad interactions; manifests the hopes and visions that are widely shared amongst the members of a group, rather than that of a sole structure of leadership; and allows for interactions and practices that are eventually recognized as commonplace, appropriate, and even necessary.²⁰

The pedagogies can cultivate within students of Jesuit higher education a Jesuit imaginary. True to a sense of Taylor’s fullness, they

¹⁹ Charles Taylor, “Modern Social Imaginaries,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): p. 106.

²⁰ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 171-172.

reflect points of contact. To self, others, and an Other, study, alterity, and grace are richly relational. Taking students into themselves, toward others, and to an Other, they let students of Jesuit higher education imagine living relational lives. The pedagogies reinforce networks of existential import that the world has to offer, particularly those connections that Taylor argues are increasingly closed. A Jesuit imaginary of such openness in the lives of graduates of Jesuit higher education would manifest dimensions of porosity that brings the world into them, and leads them into the world.

6. Disjunctions

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor suggests that his Church, that is, the Roman Catholic Church, is partly responsible for the flourishing of western-especial secularism, and that it also manifests secular tendencies. Some of the symptoms would include perspectives in Church teaching and governance that are notably rational and bureaucratic, and they have established the kinds of secular-age buffers that discourage Taylor. He loves the Church, and in his life has been engaged in it at the highest level. For a period of time early in Saint John Paul II's papacy, Taylor was part of a think-tank that convened monthly at the Vatican to discuss social and cultural issues of the day. For a significant amount of time in his life a number of years ago, he was a member of an Ignatian-based faith-sharing group in his hometown of Montreal. Today he continues to participate in the sacramental life of the Church. But for an institution that he loves, he is also widely and historically circumspect, and sometimes critical.

Taylor refers to four "disjunctions" between the Church and the world. The disjunctions – points of disconnect, so to speak – represent buffered expressions in the Church itself. As he characterizes a Buffered Subjectivity in our lives, he portrays a buffered institution in the life of the Church. The four disjunctions indicate, first, a narrow perspective on what it means to live as a Roman Catholic; second, modes of leadership that are inaccessible, and removed from or resistant to, certain queries and conversations; third, medieval strictures in moral teachings that do not reflect credible perspectives related to issues of human dignity, such as gender and sexuality; and fourth, an unwillingness to recognize spiritual experiences that are not explicitly Christic, that is, not exclusively Christian. In brief, Taylor's

disjunctions focus upon conceptions of daily religious living, dogmatic authority, natural law, and interreligious dialogue.

The disjunctions Taylor names precede the changes of style and tone represented by Pope Francis, and, in fact, Taylor himself says at the end of *A Secular Age*, published five years before the retirement of Pope Benedict XVI, that our secular age needs someone the likes of a contemporary Francis of Assisi. And yet, I suspect that in Taylor's purview, Church-related disjunctions will persist. To each of the four, but particularly with the disjunctions of daily religious life and interreligious dialogue, a Jesuit higher educational imaginary is instructional, if not also inspirational. In as much as students of higher education can be assayed in self-examination and experimentation, and be enchanted, that is, exercised in study and alterity, and prepared for grace, they can imagine a world of possibilities. Both for how any of us find and experience God, and for how we discuss and appreciate seemingly competing points of view, Taylor's point is that the Church can do so too. The Church can open itself to new possibilities. The Church, too, can be porous and more vulnerable. In doing so, we, the Church, would be on the way for fulfilling the hope Pope Francis has expressed in *The Joy of the Gospel* (§ 49): "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting, 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."

**Seekers, Dwellers, and the Plural
Contingencies of Grace:
Hospitality, Otherness, and the Enactment
of Human Wholeness**

PHILIP J. ROSSI, S.J.

“We are now living in a spiritual super-nova, a kind of
galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane”

Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*¹

**Seekers, Dwellers, and the “Nova Effect” as
Immanent Otherness**

The “nova effect” – a “galloping pluralism” of an “ever widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and even beyond” – is a central socio-cultural phenomena that Charles Taylor sees emergent in and with “a secular age.” This expansive multiplication of the possibilities for giving shape, substance, and direction to human moral and spiritual lives has significantly altered the context for understanding the contours and structure of the religious beliefs and practices that engage the cultures of the globalized twenty-first century. It plays a key role in setting the conditions for belief, for unbelief – and even for indifference to either as a possibility for oneself – in a “secular age” and thereby delimits a new horizon for the self-understanding of all who now inhabit the ambient cultures of the twenty-first century.

According to Taylor’s account in *A Secular Age*, this force for multiplicity receives its initial impetus from the dynamics of “Reform,” then moves along an historical trajectory through “Providential Deism,” and across the “Age of Mobilization.” It emerges into its fully explosive stage in the “Age of Authenticity,” making an impact that continues to carve fissures and cross-fissures across the contemporary landscape of belief and unbelief. Though deeply implicated in the long

¹ (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 300.

and complex historical processes that have shaped modernity, the nova effect also manifests strong affinities to a dynamic of highly contrastive multiplicity that, in contrast to an undifferentiated universality often deemed characteristic of “modernity,” has then been cast as a marker of the so-called “post-modern.” The nova effect thus provides an encompassing ambient dynamic of expanding and irreducible plurality for all who live in these times of secularity. Plurality now explicitly forms a constitutive element of the life contexts and a framework for cultural meaning in which “dwellers” and “seekers,” along with everyone else, are challenged to orient their patterns of activity and to make sense of the world and humanity’s place within that world.²

Within Taylor’s account, the nova effect functions to provide an imaginative and conceptual grid for construing the dynamics that have opened a seemingly unlimited plurality of pathways, both old and new, on which individuals and communities can see themselves moving on the journeys constituting their moral and spiritual lives. Such plurality of life shaping possibilities – particularly when imaged as “pathways” and “journeys” – seems, however, to privilege “seekers” over “dwellers” in terms of the dispositions each might bring to bear on these plural possibilities. Implicit in being a “seeker” is a readiness to see oneself already “in motion,” prepared to strike out on an unfamiliar path and move along it even the absence of clarity about its endpoint. For some seekers, moreover, the journey may itself be given a value that is not dependent upon whatever end point a particular path may reach. In contrast, implicit in being a “dweller” is

² “Seekers” and “dwellers” might best be understood as ideal types that represent endpoints of a continuum for reflectively engaged life trajectories along which there are a range of possible combinations and configurations relative to both points. It is also important to recognize that, particularly with respect to self-identification, “seekers” and “dwellers” are not exhaustive categories with respect to a full range of possible spiritual and moral life trajectories; in an age of secularity, that range must now take account of the indifferent, the unconcerned, and, perhaps most significantly, those who place themselves among the “religious nones.” See “A closer look at America’s rapidly growing religious ‘nones,’” May 13, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/13/a-closer-look-at-americas-rapidly-growing-religious-nones/> (accessed June 21, 2015). Essays in this volume by James South, Thomas Hughson, Theresa Tobin, and Alan Madry, articulate a number of alternate ways to construe the contrast Taylor, following Robert Wuthnow, has drawn between seekers and dwellers,

that one stands in place of stability, a place of familiarity and settled meaning which provides one's orientation upon the world; being a seeker, experiencing the restlessness and uncertainty of the journey, plays a role only as prelude to reaching the place of dwelling that completes the journey. Dwelling puts one in a place from which embarking on a new pathway holds neither attraction nor urgency; to a "dweller," the prospect of such a (further) journey does not present itself, to use a term from William James, as a "living option."³

To the extent that one takes the "nova effect" to lend more – and perhaps even decisive – weight to the "seeker" side of the seeker/dweller disjunction, it may not seem to provide a particularly apt interpretive grid from which both seekers and dwellers might find common ground on which to engage each other about the shape and substance of human moral and spiritual life in the aftermath of modernity. Where a seeker might see a plurality of attractive life shaping possibilities now on offer within the immanent frame, a dweller might see instead a disorderly field of distractions drawing attention away from a settled center that offers true, reliable and lasting life-orientation. In order to avoid a further bifurcation that might exacerbate this seeming polarity between seekers and dwellers, this essay proposes to construe the import of the nova effect not primarily in terms of the multiplicity of spiritual paths it presents, but rather in terms of its manifestation of what I will argue is a more fundamental form of plurality. This is a plurality of otherness that is embedded in the contingency and fragility of the finitude that is an abiding condition of humanity and the created cosmos it inhabits.

On this construal, plurality is a function of the more encompassing categories of contingency and finitude inasmuch as they each delimit the myriad ways in which whatever is stands in contrast to what might be, or has been, other and otherwise. In consequence, a key aspect of the significance of the nova effect lies in the ways in which it manifests the full range and the immense depth of the plurality already enmeshed in the contingency of our human finitude. It does so, moreover, in ways that are both consonant with, and challenging to, the immanent frame that is its context: *consonant* in that the immanent frame has helped to make this sharpened attention to

³ "The Will to Believe," *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), p. 3.

plurality possible, *challenging* in that the kind of plurality manifest in the nova effect unsettles the closure of the self-sufficiency that the immanent frame has embedded in its performative structure. This construal of plurality as a plurality of finitude and contingency, moreover, will function as part of a larger claim about an element in the dynamics of late modernity that I will argue is especially valuable for discerning the workings of grace. This element consists of the manner in which secular cultures of late modernity have laid bare in particularly striking and even compelling ways the thoroughness with which contingency and fragility stand in their plurality and otherness as a key locus for receptivity to grace within the contours of the human condition.

One consequence of this encompassing dynamic of plurality of the nova effect is that it provides what post-modernity takes as the disruptive energies of particularity, fragility, and incompleteness with enhanced power to fracture and interrupt many of the settled cultural contexts out of which we have been accustomed to exact the meanings that render the world and the place of our humanity in it intelligible. The nova effect authorizes both old and new forms of otherness, sometime with great boldness, to enter into what we may have previously presumed to be fields of settled meaning. Of even greater import for purposes of this essay, moreover, this dynamic of plurality seems to be shaping new possibilities for the self-understanding of our own humanity in its efforts to exact intelligible meaning from the world.⁴ It is not only the world and the human experience of the world that is being pluralized – *the dynamics of multiplicity have started to play a role in how we constitute and understand our very identity as human.*⁵

An important aspect of such plurality that will emerge in this essay is its role in shaping the self-understanding of our humanity in the guise of what I will term an “immanent otherness” at play in our agency. This aspect of the nova effect is embedded within the context

⁴ George Steiner has perceptively explored important dimensions of this dynamic of the pluralization and fragmentation of meaning in *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and *Grammars of Creation* (London: Faber and Faber 2001).

⁵ Cf. Lieven Boeve *God Interrupts: Theology in a Time of Upheaval* (New York; Continuum, 2007); “Theology and the Interruption of Experience,” in *Religious Experience and Contemporary Religious Epistemology*, ed. Lieven Boeve, Yves De Maeseneer, Stijn Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 11-40.

of the dynamic of multiplicity that has become part and parcel of the global culture of the early twenty-first century. Its significance lies in the bearing that the recognition of otherness has for charting the trajectories of modernity and its aftermath with reference to the possibility that human wholeness and flourishing are most appropriately, adequately, and truly located by reference to a horizon of transcendent reality.⁶ I shall thus argue, along lines staked out by Taylor, that even as modernity has brought in its wake a pluralizing fracturing and fragilization that has been construed as reason for taking a stance of resignation to the enclosed immanence of a world void of transcendence, the best account we can give of our deepest aspirations as human in the face of such fracture and the otherness embedded in it tells us otherwise: This explosive multiplicity invites us to engage our fractured world from a horizon of hope, framed in reference to the encompassing kenotic hospitality of God, that enables us to discern, even in the “galloping pluralism” of the nova effect, enlarged possibilities for intensifying and expanding our capacity for enacting wholeness for our humanity and for our world.

I will be thus be arguing that this disruptive dimension of the dynamic of plurality provides an opportunity and invitation to locate Christian belief and practice within a horizon of “grace in multiplicity.” This horizon has come into view through the fissures and differences that, in the aftermath of modernity, we now can see more clearly at work in the human cultures in which our identities are embedded and which shape our self-understanding. This horizon of plurality, I will argue, provides significant conceptual and imaginative resources for a renewed understanding of the workings of divine and human interaction in the fragility of an enfleshed human finitude located in the contingencies of both creation and human history. These resources offer a basis for understanding and appreciating both the varied and incomplete character of the human receptivity into which God seeks entry in grace, and the richly plural operative modality of the grace with which God appropriately nurtures that receptivity along paths to fullness. They enable us to identify an emergent dynamic of multiplicity and otherness within the very constitution of the fundamental relationality of human moral and spiritual agency.

⁶ Put in in most general terms, this is a question about whether, and to what degree, the otherness inscribed in human relationality provides a trustworthy marker of the transcendent Otherness that is rightly named “God.”

My claim here is thus that important elements of the plurality that Taylor terms “the nova effect” have already become factors in the larger dynamics of human self-understanding – they are now ingredient in what may aptly be termed an emergent “re-making of the modern identity” in which the recognition of “immanent otherness” has a part to play.⁷ This plurality, as well as the conditions have brought it into play in the matrix of interdependent global cultures, offer seekers and dwellers alike a challenging horizon, one shot through with the pressures of what Taylor calls “fragilization,” from which to engage one another in articulating more adequate modes for mutually understanding the thoroughness with which God graces both us and the world entrusted to us.⁸ Within that horizon, I will further argue, one fundamental and particularly striking way in which seekers and dwellers are both called upon to empower hope for human wholeness is through practices and enactments of hospitality that, amid a landscape of pervasive plurality of meanings and values, accord welcome to otherness in all its variety and radical contingency.⁹

Taylor’s account of the nova effect thus provides a basis for articulating a conceptual grid to frame these dynamics of plurality within both the concrete human side of the relationship to God that grace constitutes and the transcendent divine graciousness of the enacting of that grace. In particular, this grid will provide possibilities for articulating the horizons of hope toward which both seekers and dwellers are empowered, in different yet eventually complementary ways, to orient their lives; this horizon is constituted in terms of the

⁷ I put it in these terms with the intent of indicating that Taylor’s earlier *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) is an indispensable prelude to *A Secular Age*.

⁸ “This mutual fragilization of all the different views in presence, the undermining sense that others think differently is certainly one of the main features of the world of 2000, in contrast to that of 1500,” *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304.

⁹Such capacity for welcoming of otherness takes on more urgent significance in time in which circumstances seem to have exponentially increased the temptation that we eventually render ourselves as *all* hostile strangers to one another: In the face of the other whom we perceive threatening our identity, our capacity for welcome falters; in consequence, our failures, great and small, to welcome the displaced, the uprooted, the homeless, then give license to drive any and all “others” away with coldness, hostility and even violence,

promise of human wholeness to which all are invited in a world that increasingly manifests itself as shaped by the multiplicity, fragility and fractures of its abiding contingency. On the reading I am proposing, the “nova effect” is a manifestation of the deep contingency of human finitude that, in its wake, helps to render the fracturing of life and meaning into an appropriate locus from which to discern and to enact the hope by which grace is awaited, through which grace becomes manifest, and by which grace is enacted. The “nova effect” thus provides new and enlarged possibilities for recognizing and engaging the religious/spiritual “other” that already lies *within* the dynamics of both dwelling and seeking in the radical contingency of the world. Within this context, the acts and forms of a hospitality in which such otherness – an otherness that we might very well term an otherness from and of the Spirit – finds welcome will be a key marker of the possibilities and the presence of the working of grace.¹⁰

Contingency, Otherness, and the Graced Enactment of Human Wholeness

What, then, are these new and enlarged possibilities offered by the nova effect for recognizing the religious and spiritual other, and, more pertinent for this essay, what makes these possibilities ones whose significance for seekers and dwellers alike takes form in graced enactments of welcoming the other? As Taylor describes the nova effect, he places it on a conceptual grid in which multiplicity certainly constitutes a key line of reference; located along this line, moreover, is the apparent “optionality” of the paths the nova effect presents to humans in search of moral and spiritual orientation.¹¹ Such

¹⁰ This suggests that the depth and importance of what has become at stake in the extensive and continuing instances of involuntary human displacement that are now endemic in the early twenty-first century is hardly captured by calling it a “humanitarian” crisis: It is a crisis that, the longer it lasts in both its episodic and systemic avoidance of welcoming strangers in the depth of their human need, makes us complicit in the erasure of any moral meaning to our humanity.

¹¹ The extent to which “optionality” is itself optional is a key question that will not be pursued here. For an initial posing of this question, see Hent deVries, “The ‘Option’ of Unbelief, The Immanent Frame, see the web: <http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/>

optionality, moreover, may be appropriately seen as one coordinate on another line that traces the prominent trajectory given to freedom within the articulations of human agency and self-understanding that have emerged in the cultures of modernity.

While these lines of reference may not constitute axes of orientation along which dwellers readily situate themselves, there is a further line, constituted by the contingencies of history and of the cosmos, that runs athwart them, one that serves to constitute them into a field of “fragilization” that affects both dwellers and seekers as they locate themselves under the “cross-pressures” of late modernity’s “social imaginary.”¹² It is when the nova effect is coordinated to this line of fragilization that it can be seen to be a manifestation not merely of a multiplicity referenced to a freedom exercised as a putatively autonomous individuality but also as a manifestation of the dynamics of the concrete contingencies of the historical, cultural, and social contexts within which a finite, enfleshed humanity inhabits the social imaginary of an immanent frame that displays a full array of fractures, interruptions and fragility.¹³

On this reading of the nova effect, multiplicity, along with its counterpart in optionality, may still pertain more immediately to “seekers,” particularly in function of the scope and importance that autonomy, including its exercise in the expansive modality Taylor designates as “personal resonance,” has taken within the immanent frame of secularity.¹⁴ Yet, by reading the nova effect through the

2008/12/19/the-option-of-unbelief/ (accessed July 7, 15). A more extensive discussion is found in Hans Joas, *Faith As an Option: Possible Futures for Christianity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

¹² Cf. *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304, 531-532, 595, 833n19. My use of the terms of “orient” and “locate” are intended to evoke an important point that Kant’s makes in 1786 essay, “What Does It Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking?” about how thought and action are appropriately framed by reference to a transcendental horizon for intelligibility.

¹³ For a discussion of the possibility of a social construal of autonomy that disputes its often uncritically assumed association with an individualistically rendered autonomy, see Philip J. Rossi, “Faith and the Limits of Agency in a Secular Age,” in *At the Limits of the Secular: Catholic Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William Barbieri (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 226-249.

¹⁴ Taylor’s notion of “personal resonance” issues from his account of the expressive function of language and plays an important role in *Sources of the Self*, Part V, “Subtler Languages.” See Philip Rossi, “Divine Transcendence and the “Languages of Personal Resonance”: The Work of Charles Taylor as a Resource

perspective of the pervasive contingency of the human condition, it can be seen more fundamentally to manifest, to seekers and dwellers alike, what Taylor calls the “fragilization” of even the most entrenched and cherished world-perspectives that result from the cross-pressures of the immanent frame.¹⁵ As Taylor describes it, fragilization is a phenomenon rooted in dynamics by which the “strangeness” of world view inhabited by the religious “other” – including the other of non-belief – no longer stands as “really inconceivable” for me, in part because the cultures of modernity have lessened the differences of other kinds between us. The religious other has become “more and more like me, in everything else but faith. Then the issue posed by difference becomes more insistent: why my way and not hers?”¹⁶

On Taylor’s account fragilization affects seekers and dwellers alike – as well as whatever points of reference that may lie between and beyond them – by creating spaces of uncertain or occluded meaning that unsettle the closure that constitutes the buffered identity of modernity’s punctual self. “The interesting story [of secularity] is not simply one of the decline [of religion], but also of a new placement of the sacred or the spiritual in relation to individual and social life. The new placement is now the occasion for recompositions of spiritual life in new forms, and for new ways of existing both in and out of relation to God.”¹⁷ Such “recompositions” may seem to be more evident in the trajectory taken by seekers to the extent that fragilization serves as part of the impetus setting their quests in motion. Yet dwellers are by no means immune inasmuch as they are also participant in the identity of the buffered self of modernity: they thus may experience fragilization not so much as an “option” for new meaning, but as a force impinging upon the contours of the spaces of meaning they inhabit. While it may not impel a movement to “seek,” its impingement may nonetheless prompt a reflective re-surveying of the lines that demarcate the spaces of one’s dwelling and open possibilities for a least a partial glimpse of how things look from

for Spirituality in an Era of Postmodernity” in *Theology and Conversation*. Eds. J. Haers, P. De Mey (Leuven: Peeters-Leuven UP, 2003), pp. 783-794.

¹⁵ See *A Secular Age*, pp. 303-304, 531-532.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

within the spaces of meaning inhabited by that “other” – or perhaps even by a number of different “others.”¹⁸

In the face of such fragilization, questions of identity may thus surface, even for the most secure and tranquil of dwellers. All of us now inhabit a human world in which many boundaries of meaning and practice that once delimited spaces for dwelling in secure possession of our identities, be they ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural, have increasingly become fragile and porous. Such fragilization makes possible an awareness of how deeply our identities are embedded in the otherness in which and from which we delimit ourselves; it also may allow us to discern the extent to which our identities may be shaped by dynamics of hybridization in which the “other” already stands within the ambit of our identity. Fragilization offers the opportunity to recognize the extent to which that our identity and agency has come to be constituted in an “immanent otherness” that has its roots in our very sociality. Fragilization thus provides a sharp and stark reminder that a fundamental human project is finding ways, in the face of all the otherness we communally and individually bring with us, to dwell together in the contingencies of time with one another on the finite and fragile planet entrusted to us. As George Steiner quite aptly put it “I believe we must teach other human beings to be guests of each other ... We must teach people we are guests of life on this crowded, polluted planet.”¹⁹

The nova effect thus manifests neither simply nor primarily an undifferentiated plurality keyed to the arbitrary freedom of what Taylor has termed the “punctual self.” It also manifests – in ways that resonate with, yet also deeply challenge, the dynamics of the “immanent frame” – the contingency and fragility of the otherness with which we all face one another in the workings of history, society, and culture. This manifestation of our contingency provides a key locus for discerning the workings of grace in a secular age: the very fracture, incompleteness, and interruption that thoroughly interlace

¹⁸ The emergence of the practice of “comparative theology,” as found, for instance in the work of Francis Clooney, S.J., manifests such an effort to engage religious otherness “from within.” I am grateful to William Wainwright for pointing out this connection.

¹⁹ Theo Hobson, “On Being a Perfect Guest: The Tablet Interview: George Steiner.” In: *The Tablet* 259 (August 13, 2005), p. 15.

the immanent frame and all who inhabit it are key loci in which humans are called upon to be participants in the enactment of grace. In consequence, the fracture, incompleteness, and interruption that subtraction accounts of secularity read as markers of the unintelligibility of a world taken to stand within the ambit of God's provident graciousness, may be read otherwise. They need not be taken as indices of the absence of God, but instead as indices of the shared condition of the contingency of our human otherness before one another, and thus as invitations to be bearers of grace to one another.²⁰ As Steiner's remark suggests, a primary mode for being bearers of grace to one another is in enactments of welcome to each other in our mutual contingency.

It is thus with reference to this shared contingency that dwellers and seekers are together called upon to discern in their common fragility a call to grace that empowers them to embody in practices of mutual and inclusive welcome a radical hope for human wholeness. Such hope for wholeness needs to be radical inasmuch as the fracturing so pervasively marking the workings of contingency in the cultures of late modernity renders provisional and precarious even the best of our efforts, be they individual or communal, at attaining and sustaining human wholeness. As Taylor has sagely observed, one consequence of the bloody and brutal failures of twentieth century attempts to realize "the most lofty ideals of human perfection"²¹ is that "[p]rudence constantly advises us to scale down our hopes and circumscribe our vision."²² Susan Neiman also notes how awareness of the deep fractures interlacing late modernity brings in its wake great pressure to scale down the horizons of our hope: "... where so many structures of modern thought have been shattered, whatever sense we find must be incomplete. Attention to the pieces is now all the more important."²³

²⁰ See Philip J. Rossi, S.J., "Human Contingency, Divine Freedom, and the Normative Shape of Saving History," in *The Shaping of Tradition: Context and Normativity*, ed. Colby Dickinson, with Lieven Boeve and Terrence Merrigan (Leuven: Peeters Press, 2013), pp. 117-130.

²¹ *Sources*, p. 519.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 520.

²³ *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 326.

Taylor and Neiman, moreover, both recognize that paying careful “attention to the pieces” in a fractured world is by no means the same as “scaling down our hopes” in the face of such fracture. “Scaling down of our hopes” in our fractured world marks out what Taylor has called a “neo-Lucretian stance,” most notably anticipated by David Hume, that, by making us “able to take our lives as they are” allows us to recognize and be relieved of “the crushing burdens laid on humans by [our] great spiritual aspirations.”²⁴ On Neiman’s account, such scaling down is the “realism” that is “a form of sloth. If you tell yourself that a world without injustice is a childish wish fantasy, you have no obligation to work toward it.”²⁵ They both discern that in settling for the immanent frame as that which determines not only “all that there is” but also “all that there can and should be,” we *thereby radically truncate the contours of what it is to be human*. They thereby recognize that orienting ourselves to a transcendent frame of reference, whether we name it, give it no name at all, or simply take it as no more than a marker of human finitude, is crucial for how we construe the make-up of our humanity as well as for our capacity to imagine possibilities for enacting a wholeness to our humanity and for our world.²⁶

In contrast to this neo-Lucretian stance of resignation to the permanence of fracture, “attention to the pieces” provides a point from which hope for the enactment of human wholeness takes its origin inasmuch as it is constituted by the recognition of our shared human vulnerability in the face of contingency. In theological terms “attention to the pieces” provides invitational space for participating in the enactment of grace that enables us to address our human vulnerability in concert with one another. Within such space, moreover, the invitation to participate in the enactment of grace draws attention to the deep commonality of our human vulnerability: contingency is no respecter of persons, we all stand in need of being made welcome, and we all have the capacity for offering welcome. In

²⁴ *Sources*, p. 345.

²⁵ *Moral Clarity: A Guide for Grown-up Idealists* (Harcourt, Orlando: 2008), p. 145.

²⁶ This affirmation of an orientation to the transcendent as ingredient in the (anthropological) construal of our humanity and its significance thus stakes out what is arguably the crucial locus of contention in the emergence of the immanent frame of secularity: the field upon which the possibility and legitimacy of belief in God and, indeed, the possibility of God, is put in question.

consequence, this space also invites recognition of the shared hope requisite for sustaining efforts to “gather the pieces” and to bring them together in due reverence for their fragility: in terms of Neiman’s trope, we must have the kind of hope that makes it possible us to “pick up the pieces” not merely for one another but especially *with* one another. Hope thereby opens possibilities for enacting, in the first instance, that which reverences and treasures the remnants we are left with, as well as possibilities for envisioning ways to bring them to a renewed wholeness. Such hope enables us to envision and undertake these efforts as tasks we are called upon to share with one another in virtue of our common human vulnerability.

Conclusion: Accompaniment as Shared Enactment of Grace

Steiner and Neiman thus provide in their commentaries on the aftermath of modernity conceptual and imaginative resources, complementary to those offered by Taylor, that help to locate the fragmented landscape of the contemporary human condition as a central locus from which human agents are invited to participate in the enactment of grace.²⁷ Like Taylor, they each characterize the circumstances of late modernity and its aftermath in terms of fragmentation and interruption, particularly with respect to human efforts to make sense of the world in a comprehensive way. They all

²⁷ The principal works for their accounts of the fractures that have marked human efforts to find and construct meaning in the aftermath of modernity are: Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). I have previously discussed dimensions of the work of Neiman, Steiner, and Taylor that bear on questions of grace in Philip J. Rossi, S.J., “Theology from a Fractured Vista: Susan Neiman’s *Evil in Modern Thought*,” in *Modern Theology* 23 (2007), pp. 47-61; “Finite Freedom: Kant’s Anthropology as Resource for a Postmodern Theology of Grace,” in Éric Gaziaux, (ed.), *Philosophie et théologie: Festschrift Emilio Brito*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 206 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 47-60; “Seeing Good in a World of Suffering: Incarnation as God’s Transforming Vision,” in Terrence Merrigan and Frederik Glorieux, (ed.), *Godhead Here in Hiding: Incarnation and the History of Human Suffering* (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), pp. 453-466; “Faith and the Limits of Agency in a Secular Age,” in *At the Limits of the Secular: Catholic Reflections on Faith and Public Life*, ed. William Barbieri (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2014), pp. 226-249.

recognize that the tectonic shifts taking place across human cultures in the wake of new technologies, global interdependence, and varied forms of secularity have made the construction and maintenance of “master narratives” offering comprehensive and universally compelling horizons of meaning a far more precarious and contested enterprise than it once had been. Deeply entrenched patterns of injustice, inequality, and exclusion, as well as the persistence of violence at all levels of human culture, add to the precariousness of the conditions for dwelling with one another. These are circumstances for which Neiman, Steiner, and Taylor all find images of fracture, brokenness, and rupture providing apt tropes for the societal and culture terrain upon which seekers must find their paths, dwellers must make their places of habitation, and, above all, all of us must be attentive to making spaces for the welcoming of one another.

Yet in the face of such fracture, these thinkers also all recognize a deeply rooted human drive and disposition to put the pieces together, to make sense of the world, not simply as ordered in a conceptual framework, but as a locus in which human activity can shape stable conditions for bringing about some lasting degree of human wholeness. They thus all see that the enterprise of making sense of the world consists not simply of what and how we think, but also of what we do and, of at least equal importance, how we do it. The sense we make of the world needs to be an “enacted” sense, a sense for which we are accountable and in which we have a hand in making. Making sense of the world is thus both a conceptual enterprise and a practical, moral enterprise, encompassing all the capacities of human thought, imagination and agency to effect what is needed to make the world a place in which human good, human wholeness and human flourishing are possible.²⁸ Seekers and dwellers alike have to contend with a fractured world, as agent-participants in its fracturing, even as they are called upon to share the task of rendering it sufficiently whole to be a place for the enactment of human good.

Tomas Halik has provided an insightful trope to characterize the shared task that is incumbent upon both seekers and dwellers for their

²⁸ The conceptual part of the enterprise may aptly be named “metaphysics” and the practical part “ethics”; Neiman astutely remarks, “Ethics and metaphysics are not *accidentally* connected. Whatever attempts we make to live rightly are attempts to live in the world” (*Evil in Modern Thought*, p. 327).

mutual sojourning in such a fractured world.²⁹ He urges all of us to become versed in practices of accompaniment. I understand such practices to consist in a “being with” that encompasses both a “travelling in the company of” seekers on their quests and an “abiding” with them, as well as with dwellers, wherever and whenever their quests might come, for however briefly or however long a time, to a place of “rest.” Fully interwoven with these practices of accompaniment, moreover, is an engagement in dialogue, in conversation, in listening and attending to the voices – of *all* the voices, and most especially to the barely audible whisperings of those who seem voiceless – of those in whose graced company of otherness we are blessed to be. What marks out such practices of accompaniment as significant for engaging one another in putting together the fractured pieces of our human world is how these practices run both with and athwart the pervasive and intensive “plurality of otherness” that marks the globalized and fractured age to which we have now brought ourselves and, along with us, our environing world. These are dynamics of an age that seem that, even as they offer greater opportunities for global interconnectedness, also increasingly enable us to render ourselves as all (hostile) strangers to one another.

Halik’s trope of accompaniment thus complements the accounts Taylor, Neiman, and Steiner provide of how we are to comport ourselves in accord with our humanity in the fragmented context of modernity. This enterprise requires imagining in hope possibilities for our human interaction to engage the consequences of the human conduct that leaves in its wake a crushing and persistent ravaging of our embodied human vulnerability as well as the vulnerability of our planet. Such hope provides the moral space for empowering us, as reflective agents, to enact, from out of our fragile, fractured humanity, the meanings and the practices that bring a measure of wholeness to a fractured world and to our agency as itself participant in that fracture.

When transposed into a theological register, these accounts affirm “grace” as that locus in which and from which we are offered *possibilities empowering us to enact the overcoming of fracture*. “Grace” creates a space of possibilities for us to act, even as we ourselves are

²⁹ “The Afternoon of Christianity: Church and Theology for a Post-Secular Age,” at: https://ndias.nd.edu/assets/181243/tomas_halik_colloquium_intro-ductory_esay.pdf, pp. 4-5; accessed December 4, 2015.

fractured, in ways that help one another in the work of healing the fractures of the world.³⁰ In that space, it becomes possible, whether we consider ourselves seekers or dwellers, to become “guests to one another” and to accompany one another by enacting forms of hospitality that genuinely welcome the other – and accept such a welcome – in full mutual recognition of the shared fragility that marks our human finitude. Practices of welcoming, hospitality, and accompaniment thus provide signal instances for such shared enactments of grace in response to the invitational space opened by the contingencies that insistently call upon us, fractured as we all are, to find ways to dwell in peace with one another across the range of the particular fractured times and places in which we encounter one another.

³⁰ On this point, the Jewish notion of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world) provides a significant point of reference. See Elliot N. Dorff, *The Way Into Tikkun Olam (Repairing the World)* (Jewish Lights Publishing: Woodstock VT, 2005).

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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 crosscultural 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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