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Logos versus Ethos: A Critical Examination of Joseph’s Ratzinger’s Understanding of Ecumenism

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In ecumenical endeavours while Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Benedict XVI) was still Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, his preference was for a slow, realistic, and theologically attentive approach.[1] As a result, he was very critical of shortcuts towards unity. In recent years, Ratzinger had been frequently associated with the “ecumenical winter.”[2] Critical of the various approaches to ecumenism that relied on sociological or political models, Ratzinger believed it was unlikely that full Christian unity would happen in the near future. However, as Pope Benedict XVI, he has confirmed his commitment to Christian unity as a priority in his pontificate.

Ratzinger’s understanding of ecumenism is based on his insistence on the priority of the logos over ethos as well as the priority of the universal church over the particular churches, and is conditioned by his critical attitudes towards pluralism and relativism. His approach to Christian ecumenism is also influenced by his concern for the decline of Christianity in Europe. The situation in Asia, however, is different in many ways.

This article seeks to review Joseph Ratzinger’s writings on the ecumenical situation. It proposes a practical and broader approach to ecumenism in view of the fact that Christianity is a minority religion, existing among ancient and diverse religious traditions in the Asian continent. This pastoral involvement in the lives of the faithful is particularly urgent in Asia, where the majority of the people live in poverty and lack the basic necessities of life. While agreeing with Ratzinger that ethos without logos cannot endure, ecumenical efforts must not be too dogmatic and abstract but rather directed to the welfare of people. We will first examine Ratzinger’s negative assessment of the ecumenical situation and the various ecumenical paradigms that have been adopted.

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Ecumenism from Below

The positive feeling for ecumenical effort generated by Vatican II did not last long when its initiatives had been translated into official forms. Ratzinger thus remarks that "very soon after the initial conciliar enthusiasm had waned, the alternative model of 'grass-roots ecumenism' cropped up, which tried to bring about unity 'from below' if it could not be obtained 'from above.'"[3] Ratzinger thinks that this kind of approach had the unfortunate consequence of splitting the church into the "grass-roots church" and the "official church." He claimed that in spite of its popularity, "grass-roots ecumenism" eventually divides congregations. This kind of politically motivated ecumenical activity that seeks to replace traditional ecclesiastical divisions by progressive Christianity could only contribute to more divisions and splinter groups, each recruiting members for its own parties.[4]

This "grass-roots ecumenism" or "ecumenism from below" believed that authorities should be left out of ecumenical activity because eventual reunion could only strengthen their traditional position and thus stop the development of the popular church.[5] Ratzinger is critical of such an approach because it seeks to bypass the ordained leadership and appeal directly to the laity. Besides, the church authorities would be forced to accommodate the wishes of the people. There is also the danger that the hierarchy and the faithful would be divided, and thus ecumenism from below would violate the notion of communion.

Ecumenism from below also has the tendency to focus on praxis at the expense of doctrine. Ratzinger believes that a Christianity that defines itself in terms of social involvement is not able to produce long-term unity and an established church life. People remain in the church not because of social or political commitment, but because they think the church can give them answers about the meaning of life here and hereafter. Ratzinger argues that "religion still enters into people's lives, especially when the things that neither they nor anyone else can control intrude on their lives, and then the only thing that can help is an answer that comes from the One who is himself beyond us."[6] This means that neither the popular church nor the official church acting in isolation can bring about effective ecumenical action that presupposes the inner unity of the authorities and the faith of the people.

Furthermore, Ratzinger does not believe that the ecumenical unity of the church can be built on a sociological model inspired by neo-Marxism: "It is no longer just a question of institutional ecumenism against 'base' ecumenism but of the ecumenism of a Church man can construct against that of a Church founded and given by the Holy Spirit."[7] Ratzinger has a Platonic cast of mind—his typical impulse is to see meaning already given and he is reluctant to accept new understandings or viewpoints.[8]

Ecumenism from Above

Ratzinger also criticizes the approach laid out in the 1980s by Catholic theologians Karl Rahner and Heinrich Fries.[9] The Fries–Rahner model proposes that once the proper ecclesial authority has decided on a closer relationship with other Christians, Catholics would just follow, given the tradition and structure of the Catholic Church. This "ecumenism from above" calls on church leaders to dispense normal criteria for entry into the Catholic Church. Such dispensation would allow new members to gradually integrate into the life of the church, and their initial reservation about Catholicism would disappear. Surprisingly, Ratzinger thinks that this strategy as advocated by Rahner is dependent on a gross exaggeration of papal power and episcopal authority. He is doubtful that such official ecumenism will work in both Catholic and Protestant churches.[10]

Ecumenism from the Side

Consensus ecumenism is also criticized by Ratzinger because it inverts the relationship between consensus and truth: instead of truth creating consensus, now it is consensus that creates truth. The confession of faith becomes an achievement of consensus. Praxis creates truth and thus action becomes the "actual hermeneutic of unity."[11] Ecumenism also transcends the limits of Christian churches and becomes an ecumenism of religions. Since praxis is given prominence, Christianity and other religions are judged by their contribution to the liberation of human beings, justice and peace, as well as ecological concerns. Hence these ends become the core of religious belief.[12] This approach goes against Ratzinger's belief in the priority of orthodoxy over praxis.

Connected to its stress on praxis, consensus ecumenism also focuses on the kingdom of God in place of Christology and ecclesiology. Consensus ecumenism leaves open the question of God, as the emphasis is now on the primacy of action. Ratzinger argues that this means that the doctrine of God's nature is no longer primary. It is a pluralistic understanding of religions that disregards the difference, for example, between Christian trinitarian belief and Buddhist nirvana.[13] Ratzinger is critical of this kind of religious pluralism that treats all religions as equally valid paths towards salvation. Such pluralist theology deprives religious beliefs of their contents. Ecumenism in this sense is concerned not so much with convergence as with the coexistence of Christians and adherents of other religions.

Orthopraxis and Orthodoxy

This emphasis on praxis in religions, Ratzinger believes, has become a dominant ideology that cannot last long: "Ethos without logos cannot endure; that much the collapse of the socialist world … should have taught us."[14] He also admits that in the sphere of pluralism, some elements of unity are possible while division still exists. Although Ratzinger rejects the priority given to praxis over logos, he acknowledges the need to work for a better world. Thus the urgent subject matter of ecumenical dialogues is to discover what the commandment of love means in practice at the present time.[15]

In commenting on the path of ecumenism today, Ratzinger warns of the danger of pluralism and relativism regarding the Christian doctrine. He writes: "Whenever the distinction between the personal, revealed God, on whom we can call, and the non-personal, inconceivable mystery disappears, then the distinction between God and the gods, between worship and idolatry, likewise disappears."[16] We cannot work out an ethic without logos because without a standard of judgment, we end up in an "ideological moralizing." The neglect of what is distinctively Christian and the internal conflict of churches lead to new oppositions that can be violent.[17] The disregard for religious content for the sake of unity will actually lead to more sectarianism and syncretistic tendencies. This means that ecumenism must always be seeking after unity in belief and not just working for unity of action.

Ratzinger believes that theological dialogues must continue in a much more relaxed way and be less oriented towards success: "it is enough if many and varied forms of witnessing to belief thus develop, through which everyone can learn a little more of the wealth of the message that unites us." We must be ready to face multiplicity of forms without developing self-sufficiency. We do not make the church: it is shaped by Christ in word and sacrament that will endure.[18] Ecumenism is "really nothing other than living at present in an eschatological light, in the light of Christ who is coming again."[19] This means that our ecumenical efforts are only provisional and it is only in Christ that we are journeying towards unity.

Ratzinger has proposed an ecumenism that involves the faith experience of the people, the study of theologians, and the doctrinal teaching of bishops. It is a process where interpenetration and maturity of insight will gradually enable Christians to unite at a deeper level. Theological unity found in John 17 is the work of the Holy Spirit and not the result of human negotiating skills. Even joint theological statements remain on the level of human understanding if they do not pertain to the act of faith. If we recognize the limits of "ecumenical negotiations," then we will not be disappointed. The most we can achieve is good relationship in some areas, but not unity itself. Ratzinger laments that after the success of ecumenical efforts just after the Council, many people understood ecumenism in political terms.[20]

In sum, Joseph Ratzinger rejects the primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy. This is because truth is compromised and consensus determines what is valid, and thus praxis becomes the criteria of what is true. He suggests that we should learn "praxeological patience," which means we must accept the necessity of division.[21] Ultimately this division can be overcome only through conversion of all to the truth that is in Christ.

Question of Truth

The question of truth is fundamental for Ratzinger's theology, as he insists that "ecumenical" does not mean concealing the truth so as not to offend others.[22] He believes that full truth is part of full love. This means that Catholics must not look upon other Christians as adversaries against whom they must defend themselves, but must recognize them as brothers and sisters, with whom they can speak and from whom they can also learn. "Ecumenical" means that we give proper attention to the truth that others have. It means considering the whole and not singling out some aspects for condemnation or correction. Thus we have to present the "inner totality of our faith" in order to let other Christians know that Catholicism contains all that is truly Christian. For Ratzinger, to be a Catholic "is not to become entangled in separatism but to be open to the fullness of Christianity."[23]

The real differences between churches concern the confession of faith, the creed and the understanding of the sacraments. The other differences do not really matter because they do not divide the core of the church.

However, division within the central sphere threatens the church's existence and its very being. In this regard, Ratzinger distinguishes between human and theological divides. Human division is the "silent divinization" of our own ideas and works – it is a widespread temptation of human beings. In most religious schisms, such divinization of human thinking plays an important role in the conflict. Ecumenism requires us to liberate ourselves from such subtle distortions. Ratzinger believes that the differences between the various Christian communities can remain but should not distract from the nature of the church.[24]

This means we can tolerate differences, but we must not be indifferent to the truth. It is thus important to distinguish between human tradition and divine truth. Hence the first task of ecumenism, according to Ratzinger, is to recognize what is variable and what forms the heart of the church that cannot be changed. Theological reflection alone does not bring about reconciliation, and at the same time it is the non-theological factors that produce division. The worst scenario is those who defend their own ideas as ideas coming from God himself.[25]

Truth cannot be decided by majority vote: either something is true or it is not. Ratzinger is opposed to consensus ecumenism: "it is not consensus that offers a basis for truth, but the truth that offers one for consensus."[26] This means that authority comes from truth, not agreement by many people. The Anglican John Macquarrie, however, has argued that "truth is not something at which one arrives, but more of an ongoing process, involving the interplay of different views which sometimes agree, sometimes conflict, sometimes correct each other, but which defy all attempts to subsume them into a single truth."[27] This means that the fullness of truth belongs only to God and we can share this fullness only at the end of time. Joseph Ratzinger, on the other hand, believes that the church already possesses the authority to teach the truth.

Unity Through Diversity

According to Ratzinger, diversity is healthy and even desirable when the "poison of hostility" has been removed. Studying Augustine's interpretation of the Pauline statement "there must be factions" (1 Cor 11:19), Ratzinger argues that even though divisions and fractions are human realities, they are also part of divine arrangement. We can do all we can through penance and sacrifice to heal the division, but it is God who will ultimately draw all people to himself.[28] Being open to plurality and diversity, Ratzinger adopts a cautious and realistic attitude towards Christian ecumenism. He has experienced personally, in his homeland, how Catholics and Protestants can live together peacefully.

In Germany there is a healthy and fruitful co-existence between Protestants and Catholics. Initially there had been great hostility between the two churches, but gradually they developed on both sides into a positive factor for the faith. This may explain why St. Paul speaks about the necessity of factions. Ratzinger questions: "Could anyone really imagine an exclusively Protestant world? Is not Protestantism instead, in all its declarations, precisely as a protest, so completely connected with Catholicism that it would be scarcely imaginable without it?"[29] Lamentably, Ratzinger does not argue that the converse is true: Catholicism needs Protestantism to remind itself of the need for constant reformation and purification based on the Word of God.

According to Ratzinger, Catholic understanding of plurality is different from the Protestant idea about independent national churches like the Anglican Church or federations of churches like the Lutheran Church. In fact, from the beginning, Catholic theology has recognized the plurality of churches. This means the acceptance of the multiplicity of churches existing within the framework of the one and visible church of God, each presenting the totality of the church. These particular churches are in close communion with one another as they help to build up the one church. This unity is born of a vigorous multiplicity. Thus there exists a Church of God in Athens, in Corinth, in Rome: each local community assembled together with the bishop presiding over the eucharistic celebration; it partakes of the essence of the church and is truly a "church." For Ratzinger, to be a church, it must not exist in isolation, but must be in communion with the other churches which, together, form the one church.[30]

Plurality of churches had a legitimate existence within the church, but unfortunately, in the course of history, the plurality slowly receded in favour of a centralized system. In this process, the local church of Rome began to absorb all the other local churches, and thus unity became uniformity. This plurality of churches had no room *within* the church and thus developed *outside* of it in the form of autonomous separate churches.[31] The Catholic Church since Vatican II has tried to remedy this situation by its ecumenical endeavours.

Ratzinger acknowledges that the Catholic Church is not yet prepared to accept the phenomenon of multiplicity in unity. It is a renewal that involves a process of opening up, which takes time. He asserts that there is the one Church that is identified with the historical continuity of the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church considers itself the Church of Christ in spite of its historical deficiency. It also recognizes the plurality of churches that should exist within it, but today this plurality can only exist outside.[32] As we have seen, Ratzinger recognizes the valid existence of the plurality of churches under one universal church, but he is opposed to the present plurality of denominational churches, which is a particular characteristic of Protestantism. Ratzinger is also realistic enough to accept that division among churches represents not only an evil tendency in human beings; it also can be a divine necessity. This is because separation is necessary for our purification. Unity in diversity or a reconciled diversity is thus an acceptable formula for Joseph Ratzinger in our ecumenical endeavours.[33]

Eastern Model

While he argues that it is presumptuous for Catholics to demand that all the other Christian churches be disbanded and incorporated into the Catholic Church, Ratzinger hopes that the churches existing outside the "Church" will eventually enter into communion with Rome. They can remain in existence as "churches," modifying only those features which unity demands.[34] Here Ratzinger's position appears to be that the various Protestant denominations may eventually be received into the full communion as Uniate rites. These churches will be like the Eastern rite churches: in union with Rome and at the same time retaining their own distinctive spiritual, liturgical, and canonical traditions. Besides having a different liturgy from the Latin Church, many Eastern rite churches have married clergy.

This Uniate model could be the basis for reunion between the Catholic Church and the Anglican Church, for example. It would replace the existing denominationalism with a visible unity among the churches. At the same time, it would protect the rich heritage of the various Christian traditions. This could be the goal for the next stage of the ecumenical movement.

Unity is not to be identified with uniformity in ecumenical dialogue. It is the duty of Christians to defend the legitimate interests of pluralism against the forces of uniformity. However, maintaining a healthy pluralism in unity is a complex process. There is always this tension existing between unity and division. Paul Tillich has observed, "The dynamics of life, the tendency to preserve the holy even when it has become obsolete, the ambiguities implied in the sociological existence of the churches, and, above all, the prophetic criticism and demand for reformation would bring about new and, in many cases, spiritually justified divisions."[35]

Ratzinger supports the idea of a "fruitful pluralism" and acknowledges the positive aspect of division. Thus he says that a way to promote unity through diversity is not to impose on the other party anything that threatens his or her core identity as Christian. This means that Catholics should not try to force Protestants to recognize papal authority, the sacraments, etc. Protestants should not pressure the Catholic Church to allow intercommunion based on their understanding of the Eucharist. Such respect for the "otherness" of the other, which is inherent in the division, would not delay unity, but is a prerequisite for it.[36]

Ratzinger rightly says that this kind of tolerance and acceptance can produce charity and proximity, but that urgent insistence can only create tension and aversion. Ultimately, we must leave God to do what is actually God's business—Christian unity.[37]

In the meantime, Christians can still come together to engage in practical or secular ecumenism, which this author believes is urgently needed in Asia.

Practical Ecumenism

Asia is a vast and diverse continent where various religious beliefs, including different branches of Christianity, continue to flourish. In spite of modernization and rapid economic development, Asia is steeped in religious traditions. At the same time, the gap between the rich and poor is growing rapidly, and the majority of the people lack the basic necessities of life in many parts of the continent. Hence, a practical or secular ecumenical approach that strives towards the common good in the midst of religious pluralism is more appropriate and meaningful. For example, Christians from different denominations, including Roman Catholics, can cooperate in charitable and social justice work.

Practical ecumenism implies "a unity with true existential foundations, rather than one that has come about as the blueprint devised by a high-powered ecclesiastical commission."[38] Thus it is not "ecumenism from above." Although Joseph Ratzinger insists that ethos without logos is not sustainable, as evidenced by the collapse of socialism, he has admitted that an ecumenism of praxis has its value in fulfilling Christ's commandment of love. However, focusing on practical ecumenism does not imply that we are indifferent towards the truth. In fact, we uphold the truth found in Matthew 25:31-46.[39]

Given the present situation, where impasse in ecumenical dialogue is inevitable, practical ecumenism also has the advantage of setting realistic intermediate goals. While doctrinal or liturgical differences may be intractable, charitable works as a witness of the gospel can be readily organized by different churches in harmony with one another. Likewise, the different churches can witness together regarding the great moral questions of our time. This can be done through joint testimonies of faith before a world torn by doubts and fears. These small efforts should point to the common features of Christian living despite separations. Working together in these modest projects shows that separation no longer serves as opposition.[40] Christians will be challenged to understand and accept members of other churches as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ecumenical effort aims at fostering unity among Christian communities that is meaningful only when churches are willing to work together on the practical tasks of helping the poor, visiting prisoners, alleviating poverty and suffering, etc. In short, Christians should be united to bring more abundant life to the world. John Macquarrie argues that the basis of this practical ecumenism "is not a nicely worked out ecclesiology or even a doctrine of redemption but simply that natural morality which is common to all men by virtue of their humanity."[41] This means that we do not have to force adherents of other faiths to be baptized or even call them anonymous Christians. It is enough that they have "the law written on their hearts" (Rom 2:15). Macquarrie rightly asserts that this non-exclusive practical or "secular" ecumenism is a recognition that all humanity is a creation of God and has a share in the image of God that is expressed in Christ.[42]

Practical or secular ecumenism seeks first the unity of humankind rather than the unity of the churches. It reminds Christians that the end of history is not the church, but the kingdom of God—the gathering of both church and world in an eschatological unity. Thus our primary aim is not the ecclesiastical unity, but the unity of the world. Once we focus on the unity of the world, the unity of the church may come more quickly as a provisional stage on the way.[43] Augustine Cardinal Bea writes that the church, as it is a society, which is also perfectly human, "feels itself intimately linked with all mankind, and co-operates in the achieving of unity for mankind."[44] Similarly, Konrad Raiser, the former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, stresses social concerns over doctrinal issues. This means that ecumenical effort should be directed to combating social problems like racism, economic inequality, sexism, and other injustices, rather than debating theological issues and ministry. Raiser thinks that previous ecumenical efforts were too introverted, dogmatic, and abstract.[45] At the same time there is always the fear that this newer ecumenical model, which seeks to bring Christians from different confessions together, would lead to a denial of Christ's divinity and unique salvific role. This is also Ratzinger's concern. However, there is no concrete evidence to show that Christians would deny the salvific efficacy of Christ or divinity just because they are too involved in charitable and social justice work.

Practical ecumenism safeguards the diversities of churches and also prevents their absorption. As Ratzinger is cautious about ecumenical efforts and the rush to unity because of serious doctrinal differences, it is appropriate that the various churches can begin by first coming together to work on some common social projects to help to alleviate the suffering of the poor and marginalized. It is also important to understand ecumenism as "the science of bridge-building, a science of dialogue across different groups."[46] This means that eventually ecumenism will include not just Christians, but people of other faiths and even those who have none.

Ans Van der Bent rightly insists that there must be dialogue between the church and the world; though the church is not of the world, it is in the world to serve and minister to it. He stresses service within the world. While the church is discovering the world, it should also help the world to discover the church.[47] The church must re-evaluate its structure to deal with problems such as secularization, poverty, the environmental crisis, and new threats to justice and peace. Facing the same problems in the world draws churches closer together than they were before. This will help them to deepen their theological investigations and work out a consensus that allows common action.[48] There is enough ecumenical doctrinal and ethical consensus among the churches to deal with problems like torture, foreign debt of developing countries, refugees, etc.[49] This means that we must start with where we agree first regarding our social commitment to the world. Our practice cannot be separated from our doctrine. Only a deep solidarity with our broken world will reveal to us how narrowly the social teachings of the churches are still defined.[50]

Ans Van der Bent is critical of the Roman Catholic claim that the unique church of Christ "subsists" in the Roman Catholic Church, because this implies that other churches are not in a position to produce valid social teaching.[51] The main ecumenical task is for all churches to be involved in the pastoral task of judgment and reconciliation regarding social issues. Van der Bent believes the fullness of the church subsists "in its manifestation of Christ's redemption of the entire human race."[52]

Conclusion

Joseph Ratzinger's ecumenical approach is influenced by his concern for the decline of Christianity and his hope for a united Christian Church to combat the threat of aggressive secularism in Europe. Ratzinger believes that for Europe to build a humane society, it must return to its original Greek roots and Christian heritage. This means that Europe must rediscover the objective and eternal values that stand above politics and stress the rule of the law. In view of this, he stresses the Greek concept of *eunomia*—the enactment of good laws and the maintenance of civil order.[53] Ratzinger thinks that Christian values can help to halt the decline of European civilization. Thus in view of rebuilding Europe, Christian unity can play a significant role.

This ecumenical concern of Ratzinger's may be justifiable and timely given the present situation in Europe. However, the challenge for the churches in Asia is to be united to fight against poverty and oppression, and to promote justice and peace, as part of witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ratzinger's reflection on the ecumenical situation takes place within a particular cultural context. John Paul II called for a dialogue between faith and culture, and the Vatican Council recognized the need of "accommodated preaching," but to Ratzinger this may veer towards relativism.[54]

Although Christianity in Europe has slowly been made irrelevant with the surge of secularism, the West continues to exercise authority and control over the churches of Asia. In the Catholic Church, the Petrine Office and the Magisterium keep the local churches in Asia under Western tutelage. In the various Protestant denominational churches in Asia, the economic support of the Western mother churches is still crucial for their functioning and even for their survival. Thus K.M. George rightly says, "while the spiritual vitality of the Western churches is probably drying up, their institutional power over the churches of the South is still going strong."[55]

Asian theologians, from both Catholic and Protestant churches, have been calling for a recovery of Asian Christian identity. This means that the churches in Asia must shed their Western trappings. There is an obvious gap between the theological understanding of identity and institutional reality of our church. This poses an obstacle to Asian ecumenism.[56] Perhaps a more appropriate approach to ecumenical endeavour in Asia lies in the various branches of Christianity coming together, putting aside their doctrinal differences, making a concerted effort to deal with the problems related to poverty, justice, peace, and ecological issues.

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[1] In taking a cautious and critical approach to ecumenism, Ratzinger is actually following the precedent of previous popes. Pius XI's encyclical of 1928, *Mortalium Animos*, criticized the ecumenical movement and accused it of seeking to reach unity by easy compromise and by focusing too much on service. In 1896, Leo XIII also expressed similar sentiments in *Satis Cognitum*. The common assumption then was that the ecumenical movement was a Protestant affair. There was no need for Catholics to search for Christian unity because unity was already established in the Chair of Peter in Rome in the Mystical Body of Christ. There was also a fear that the ecumenical movement could threaten the identity and nature of the Catholic Church. It was only in 1939 that Pius XII's encyclical *Summi Pontificatus* expressed friendliness towards Protestants. However, the "return" of "separated brethren" remained the aim of dialogue. Jeffrey Gros, F.S.C., Eamon McManus, Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 29.

[2] See Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion, eds., *The Ratzinger Reader* (London: T & T Clark, 2010), 139–40.

[3] Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 133.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones of a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 303.

[8] Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 45.

[9] Heinrich Fries and Karl Rahner, *Unity of the Church: An Actual Possibility* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press; New York: Paulist Press,1985).

[10] Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 134. According to Aidan Nichols, "Such ecumenism from above is a caricature of the Catholic view of the ministerial priesthood, just as ecumenism from below is a caricature of the Protestant view of the priesthood of the laity." Aidan Nichols OP, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI* (London: Burns & Oates, 2007), 192.

[11] Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005), 260.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 261. Defending *Dominus Iesus*, the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), Ratzinger says that its teaching is "intended to transform the indifference with which all churches are regarded as different but equally valid." If all churches are equally valid, the validity of the faith "disappears into scepticism." This means that when

everything is regarded as valid, then nothing is important. Here we see Ratzinger criticizing relativism and pluralism. It is not about tolerance, he argues, but it is about the truth that we must suffer for it. See Joseph Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 241.

14 Ibid., 262.

15 Ibid., 263.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 264.

18 Ibid., 266.

19 Ibid., 269.

20 Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 134.

21 Quoted in Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger: Life in the Church and Living Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 440.

22 Joseph Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 1966), 45.

23 Ibid., 46.

24 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 255.

25 Ibid., 256.

26 Ibid., 257.

27 John Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1975), 34.

28 Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 135.

29 Ibid., 136.

30 Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 111.

31 Ibid.,112–13.

32 Ibid., 115.

33 Ratzinger, *Pilgrim Fellowship of Faith*, 258.

34 Ratzinger, *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, 114–15.

35 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Volume III (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), 169–70.

36 Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 137.

37 Ibid., 138.

38 Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity*, 23.

39 See Ambrose Mong Ih-Ren, "Challenges and Opportunities for the Church in Secular Societies," *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol. 25, no.1, April 2011, 157.

40 Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 119.

41 Macquarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity*, 24.

42 Ibid., 25.

43 Ibid.

44 Augustine Cardinal Bea, *Unity in Freedom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 214. K.H. Ting claims that "The Christ who rose and now sits at the right hand of God is not only the Lord of the churches but also the Lord of the secular World. The secular movements of the people have an important significance. What man achieves in history is not finally to be negated or destroyed but, in the new heaven and new earth, will be received in Christ and transfigured." See Kim Yong Bock, "Human Rights and the Structures of Injustice," in Ninan Koshy, ed., *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, Volume II (Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation, Asia-Pacific Region, Asia and Pacific Alliance of YMCA, Christian Conference of Asia, 2004), 296.

45 Christopher Ruddy, *The Local Church: Tillard and the Future of Catholic Ecclesiology* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 155.

46 Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 135.

47 Ans Van der Bent, *Commitment to God's World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 171.

48 Ibid., 172.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 175.

51 Ibid., 176.

52 Ibid.

53 Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 216.

54 I am grateful to the editorial board of *The Ecumenist* for this suggestion.

55 K.M. George, "Ecumenism in Asia: Some Theological Considerations," in *Windows into Ecumenism: Essays in Honour of Ahn Jae Woong* (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2005), 123.

56 Ibid., 124.

James Cone's Interpretation of Jesus' Resurrection

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Because of its centrality to Christian faith, its many aspects and meanings, and its controversial nature in a secular age, Jesus' resurrection has been a major topic in Western Christian theology in recent decades. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, James Cone developed a distinctive interpretation of Jesus' resurrection that, although often neglected in contemporary discussions of the topic, has a special relevance in a time plagued by globalized capitalism and American imperialism. This paper will examine Cone's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection, comparing it first to that of Dorothee Soelle and Carter Heyward and then to that of Paul Molnar, in the process showing how it can provide a moral source for struggles for justice today. Cone adapted the Christus Victor atonement theory of the resurrection as a means of articulating opposition to white racism and providing a transcendent principle of "expectation" for a critical theory that seeks to overcome racial oppression. This perspective overcomes the chasm between those who argue the resurrection was an objective event and those who argue that it occurred in the confines of the subjectivity of the disciples. For Cone, Jesus' resurrection is a transformational event. The risen Christ has an objective reality that is a source of Christian hope and is *actually* present in the lives of those who struggle against injustice and racism.

Cone's Interpretation of Jesus' Resurrection

According to Cone, oppressive social powers crucified Jesus to stop his ministry of liberating the poor. He died as "the Oppressed One," "taking upon himself the totality of human oppression."[1] Jesus' resurrection revealed God's love to be greater than the deadly powers of oppression. It bestowed finality upon his person that gave his followers freedom from fear of death as an ultimate fate.[2] In the risen Christ, oppressed peoples have an identity that oppressive forces cannot destroy. This empowers them to struggle for freedom against injustice and violent repression.

Through his resurrection, Jesus became more than he was as a historical person. The risen Christ is continuous with the historical Jesus, but is "not bound by first century possibilities."[3] What can be known about his ministry points to where he is present today. He can be encountered wherever his liberating work goes on in contemporary form.[4] Cone argued that in racist America, the goal and message of the Black Power movement was "consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ" and continued his work.[5] Jesus was and is present in the struggle of African Americans for freedom and dignity, and he must be understood as black.[6] The resurrection of Jesus is thus a source of hope and dignity for the oppressed.

Cone's Critical Appropriation of Bultmann

Cone developed this position partly through critical appropriation of Rudolf Bultmann's understanding of Jesus' resurrection. Bultmann is famous for his program of demythologization.[7] The New Testament describes Jesus' life, death, and resurrection in mythological terms. According to Bultmann, the passage of time and the development of modern science have made these mythological descriptions an obstacle to belief. The gospel message must be demythologized and reinterpreted existentially so it can once again challenge and enable people to live in "struggling freedom"[8] from sin. According to Bultmann, the mythic terms of the Christus Victor theory of atonement,[9] which describes cosmic powers of sin and death as being overcome in Jesus' resurrection, must be discarded.[10] Instead, Jesus should be understood as risen in the faith of the early church and those who continue to proclaim him as risen.[11] In recent years, critical theologians such as Dorothee Soelle and Carter Heyward interpreted Jesus' resurrection in this way.[12] This enabled them to avoid the theoretical clash between faith in Jesus' resurrection and the dominant ethos of modern Western societies that Bultmann described, while affirming Jesus as an empowering exemplar of God's love that can move people to resist the destruction and oppression caused by globalized capitalism, militarism, and religious fundamentalism.

Like Bultmann, Cone argued that the message of Jesus' resurrection demands a radical decision that transforms a person's self-understanding and empowers them to live in freedom from the power of sin.[13] Cone also accepted that the nature of Jesus' death and resurrection demands that the mythological terms of some New Testament understandings of this be reinterpreted in relation to the present. However, Bultmann related Jesus' resurrection only to individuals' self-understanding, without considering their place within the conflicts of modern societies. Cone related it to the oppression of the poor. This led him to evaluate some aspects of New Testament mythology differently.

For Cone, most white theology in America ignored "domestic problems on race";[14] thus it failed to engage its context. The relation of Karl Barth's theology to Nazi Germany provided an exemplary contrast, especially in Barth's emphasis on the otherness of God, how "God stands in judgment against all political systems."[15] Barth emphasized the radical otherness of God in opposition to Schleiermacher's notion that Christian theology must demonstrate an eternal covenant between Christian faith and modern Western culture. In Barth's view, this eternal covenant domesticated God and sacralized Western culture, shielding it from thoroughgoing critique in light of the gospel. Cone argued that a version of Schleiermacher's "eternal covenant" was implicit in liberal white theology in 1960s America—with similar effect—making it "possible to view America as the 'land of the free and the home of the brave', despite the oppression of blacks."[16]

This eternal covenant was based on the view, partly shared by Bultmann, that Western modernity had reached an intellectual maturity surpassing that of previous eras. Science and technology were believed to have ushered in an understanding of the world devoid of myth to which all other forms of knowledge and experience should conform and which was, in principle, beneficial for all. This worldview, shaped by the impact of modern technology on Western cultures, harboured a notion of time and human consciousness that attributed an underlying permanence to the class and social structure of Western societies. As the human race had now grown up, the future would not be fundamentally different from the present. Any social improvement would come only through "incremental addition" to peoples' present status rather than through the type of "structural transformation"[17] that movements for black liberation sought. These beliefs were prevalent among white liberal theologians in America in the 1960s and 1970s. Cone analyzed these as elements of the ideology of a particular social group, i.e. White America.[18] In this sense they constituted a myth exercising a formative influence on American society.

Cone argued that this idea of Western intellectual maturity was complicit in the "myth of white superiority."[19] It led white theologians to interpret the gospel in relation to questions and concerns shaped by the interests of their own culture without questioning how these reflected the values of the racist society in which they lived.[20] These two myths combined to reinforce white paternalism so that well-meaning white liberals in the United States believed that "help" for black people meant "bringing them into white cultural patterns and institutions."[21]

Myth, Evil, and Racism

Cone recognized that racism in America was a powerful social reality based partly on myths that no individual African American could overcome by self-effort. In this sense it resembled the mythological power of demons and Satan portrayed in the New Testament.[22] In light of this, Bultmann's assertion of a fundamental difference between the mythological worldview of the New Testament and that of Western modernity was an oversimplification.[23] Jesus' saving significance had to be related to the myths undergirding racism in America and the social institutions enforcing it so that people suffering under them could be transformed by hope for liberation. Bultmann's demythologization could not do this because it related the gospel only to an individual's self-understanding.[24]

As Karl Jaspers pointed out to Bultmann, modern science has not made all myths unbelievable and powerless in Western societies. Myths promulgated by Hitler helped lead Bultmann's society to an orgy of destruction. Bultmann also overestimated the ability of the natural sciences to provide a comprehensive worldview.[25] These can never fully grasp and explain the context out of which they emerge, and what they cannot grasp is frequently interpreted in mythic terms. The worldviews of people in Western societies are determined by science, as Bultmann claimed,[26] but also by cultural heritages, myth, and more. The idea that myth has been or could finally be eradicated by critical thinking was a widely held illusion in Western modernity.[27] However, as Jurgen Habermas noted, "theory presupposing a demythologized understanding of the world is still ensnared by myth."[28] Myths, in the sense of ideas and beliefs that are not founded on facts, continue to function ideologically in all segments of Western societies, mobilizing people to act and giving socially influential expression to the self-interests of particular groups. In recent years, critical theologians have affirmed the importance of religious traditions and their mythic expressions for empowering a liberating praxis.[29] These can provide "key resources for the creation of meaning and identity" and have "a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of life."[30]

In interpreting Jesus' resurrection, Cone was primarily concerned with how the gospel expressed in New Testament mythology could function as the basis of a black theology of liberation. Like Bultmann, he emphasized the soteriological aspects of Jesus' resurrection and its existential significance[31] and argued that the risen Christ was present in the faith of believers. However, Cone had to affirm an objective dimension to Jesus' resurrection in arguing that it was part of the "decisive event of liberation"[32] that pointed towards a future overcoming of the cultural and economic oppression inflicted on black people by white racism. He drew on the "witness of the black Church tradition and the contemporary testimonies of black people"[33] to argue that the risen Christ was not limited to their faith but, through it, manifested himself to them as a radical otherness who was present with them in their trials and struggles, enabling them to resist dehumanizing racism and live with dignity in spite of it. Cone adapted the Christus Victor atonement theory to relate the opposition of the risen Christ to white racism and modern myths supporting it. He used the Christus Victor theory to interpret the mythical meaning of the event of Jesus' resurrection. Interpreted this way, Jesus' resurrection provided a transcendent principle of expectation for a critical theory oriented towards the overcoming of racial oppression.

Still, a question driving Bultmann's program of demythologization remained: how to affirm an objective dimension to Jesus' resurrection when it cannot be expressed in "the ordinary language of modernity."[34] Cone recognized the validity of this question. He asserted an objective dimension to Jesus' resurrection but did not present it as a fact that could be proven. Instead he invoked the traditions of the black church and the biblical witness as testimony[35] to the present reality and empowering finality of the risen Christ. Testimony is usually associated with trial settings, but can be found wherever a judgment must be rendered between conflicting points of view.[36] Credible testimony is not objectively demonstrable, but its account of events is never purely subjective. It includes 1) a narrative open to investigation, and 2) a confession of its meaning. Testimony is never unequivocal and requires interpretation and decision. Yet through it the absolute can come to expression—at least in a relative way.[37] Cone argued that the lived testimony of the black church pointed to "the presence of the divine power, wholly different from themselves,"[38] sustaining them in the face of racist oppression, and that this challenged any quick dismissal of Jesus' resurrection as the mythology of a bygone age. Thus he affirmed the transcendent reality of the risen Christ in an intersubjective way without attempting to prove more than is possible.

Cone's Understanding of the Saving Significance of the Finality of Jesus' Resurrection

Theologians such as Dorothee Soelle and Carter Heyward powerfully express the conflict between Jesus and contemporary forms of injustice. However, there is a "lack of fit"[39] between their interpretations of Jesus' resurrection and the magnitude of the forces of injustice they struggle against, similar to the gap Cone identified between Bultmann's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection and the entrenched power of racism in America. In their interpretation, Jesus is risen in their commitment to what he represents, in the way he empowers them to exercise their own power in opposition to sin and evil. Yet the contemporary forms of injustice that Soelle and Heyward struggle against dwarf their own powers of resistance. To provide hope for the overcoming of transpersonal forces of oppression like white racism, Cone stressed that the risen Christ is present in the faith of those who believe in him. Cone also stressed the eschatological or final nature of Jesus' resurrection, how it reveals God's love to be the ultimate power in creation. This is one of its central meanings in the New Testament.[40] Cone used this finality of Jesus' resurrection to demythologize the ethos and institutions of racist America and to provide an identity for African Americans that racist oppression could not strip away.

This sense of Jesus' resurrection as a source of an identity that earthly powers cannot destroy is also important for critical theologies opposed to American empire.[41] The unilateral actions of empires imply a claim to ultimate power and authority. This claim and the violent power backing it up meet a greater yet very different power and authority in the resurrection of the crucified Christ.

Violent oppression not only terrorizes people. It can also brutalize its victims so that they endorse terrorism themselves. Cone encountered this in a speech by Black Panther David Hilliard.[42] Cone's assertion that Black Power meant achieving liberation by "whatever means black people deem necessary"[43] caused some to worry that Cone himself leaned towards this kind of violence.[44] Such was not the case. To prevent compassion and resistance to evil from degenerating into resentment and dehumanizing violence, people must know themselves to be empowered by a transcendent moral source that gives meaning to their efforts even when these are unsuccessful.[45] Cone interprets Jesus' resurrection as empowering determined struggle against racist oppression, but it is a struggle in which "hatred and vengeance have no place."[46] The ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus express God's love for humanity that seeks the redemption and reconciliation of all through the liberation of the oppressed.[47]

The Christus Victor theory of atonement that Cone used to interpret the saving significance of Jesus' resurrection has been criticized for its tendency to dualism, which can demonize the people, institutions, or nations one struggles against.[48] Cone did insert Gerald Ford and various American institutions into the place traditionally occupied by the devil in the Christus Victor theory, insisting that they symbolized the powers and principalities that Christ died to overcome.[49] However, Cone saw the gospel as a call to struggle against evil, never as a mandate to slaughter whites or seek revenge. In arguing that liberation from racist oppression must be the first goal of Christians, and that reconciliation must begin between blacks within their divided communities, he was insisting on the moral autonomy of black Christians from white paternalism and on the liberation of blacks from white racism as the way to reconciliation between blacks and whites.[50]

The Christus Victor theory of atonement, particularly as contextualized by Cone, does risk demonizing those labelled as oppressors. However, the challenge in the United States of the 1960s and 1970s was to adequately articulate the depths of white racism and the suffering and injustices endured by blacks. Cone demanded that Jesus' resurrection be interpreted concretely in relation to this injustice, and that the oppressors and their sins be named. The basis for his demand was the preferential option for the poor that Jesus demonstrated in his ministry, which led to his death and was vindicated in his resurrection.

For Cone, Jesus' resurrection is a source of love and dignity that will not sacrifice the values it upholds by adopting dehumanizing means in the struggle for freedom.[51] It empowers determined resistance to injustice, but it also inspires revolutionary patience, because the dignity and hope it offers do not depend on one's own achievements.[52] While there is truth to Soelle's and Heyward's assertion that God has no hands but ours,[53] this needs to be framed by Cone's affirmation that the risen Christ is a source of hope empowering human hands and hearts to love, but reaching beyond what humanity can do, giving meaning to life even in the face of evil that human hands cannot overcome. Soelle's and Heyward's emphasis on how Jesus functions as a moral example to guide and inspire Christian praxis is necessary, but must be undergirded by Cone's affirmation of the otherness and transcendence of God revealed in Jesus' resurrection.

Cone's Understanding of the Objective Nature of the Risen Christ

The importance of the objective reality of Jesus' resurrection is emphasized very differently in Paul Molnar's recent book, *Incarnation and Resurrection*.[54] Molnar begins by studying how Karl Barth, Thomas Torrance, and Karl Rahner conceive Jesus' resurrection, then surveys the understandings of contemporary theologians such as Roger Haight, Sallie McFague, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, finding Rahner and the latter all unsatisfactory for failing to affirm Jesus' bodily resurrection as God's incarnate Word. For Molnar, affirming the bodily resurrection of Jesus is a central affirmation of true Christian faith, the basis of coherent Christian theology and effective Christian witness.[55]

Molnar uses a typology of traditional, liberal, and radical interpretations of Jesus' resurrection to analyze these theologians' work. A radical interpretation like Bultmann's reduces Jesus' resurrection "to the rise of faith in the disciples."[56] A liberal view like Edward Schillebeeckx's also suggests that Jesus' resurrection "is created within or realized through the faith of the disciples."[57] Though Schillebeeckx argued that Jesus' resurrection was an eschatological event that gave rise to the faith of the first believers,[58] Molnar concludes that this collapses "back into the radical position because the resurrection is presented as no more than an event in the life of the believer."[59] The traditional view, which Molnar finds in Barth and Torrance, affirms the resurrection of Jesus' physical body and the historicity of the empty tomb. Here the risen Christ is seen to have an objective existence apart from the faith of believers. This is all-important as the basis and object of their faith. Without it, Christian faith "becomes little more than a matter of projecting subjective feelings and experiences onto reality,"[60] resulting in idolatry and self-justification.[61]

Cone also affirms an objective dimension to Jesus' resurrection, but he and Molnar conceive the nature and significance of this very differently. Molnar is concerned with the nature of the body of the risen Christ as depicted in some New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection. Cone is concerned with the risen Christ's public presence today. Both realize that affirming an objective dimension to Jesus' resurrection means challenging the secularism of Western modernity. Cone does this dialogically. As noted earlier, he argued that the experiences of Christians in the black church give public witness and presence to the risen Christ. That black Christians were able to live with dignity, love, courage, and hope amid racist oppression requires explanation and points to an empowering presence "wholly different from themselves."[62] Molnar forgoes apologetics and simply asserts that "Jesus is the Son of God because he is."[63] In his view, the risen Christ is correctly understood only when seen as a transcendent object of belief wholly separate from the faith of Christians.

Molnar's separation of the risen Christ from Christian faith underlies the dichotomy he posits between traditional views affirming the objectivity of Jesus' resurrection and liberal and radical views that he claims locate it in the transformed subjectivity of believers. This dichotomy clashes with New Testament descriptions of Jesus' resurrection as an eschatological event that would have remained incomplete without the rise of faith in believers.[64] Jesus' resurrection cannot be described as a merely objective or merely subjective event. Its transcendent nature includes both dimensions.[65] Molnar's failure to recognize this leads to his understanding of Jesus' resurrection exhibiting the same fault that Michael Welker finds in New Testament scholar N.T. Wright's book[66] on Jesus' resurrection: an emphasis on the continuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ that affirms the event of Jesus' resurrection but overlooks how this transformed Jesus' existence.[67] As Welker argues:

> [T]his event is not simply the discovery of a new order and truth – rather the person and the life of Jesus is present and highlighted here in a new way. The pre-Easter life and body continues in a new way, extends far beyond itself, yet remains faithful to itself. He, Jesus of Nazareth, is risen. In his stubborn yet enormously rich individuality, and thus "bodily," he is present "again." But this does not mean that his biological body is "alive again", but rather his entire life which was borne by the biological and mental-spiritual body, but which now seeks and finds a new body for those and in those who witness to him, a new body to be the bearer of his earthly, historical existence. … a body mediated by the Spirit and by faith in him. Yet we have to differentiate this faith in him … from such things as Bultmann's individualistic "certainty of essentiality" … and from other so-called subjectivistic concepts of faith which do not begin with and root in the reality of the resurrected Christ.[68]

In contrast to Molnar (and Wright), Cone attends to this transformation that Jesus' resurrection brought to his existence. Cone argues that in light of it, the risen Christ must be understood in three related dimensions of past, present, and future.[69] Because the risen Christ is continuous with Jesus who was crucified, Jesus' past as witnessed to in the gospels and critically recovered through the quest for the historical Jesus "is the medium through which he is made accessible to us today."[70] However, Jesus' resurrection extends his presence beyond the limits of his past to dwell among society's victims and wherever his liberating work continues. This is the public or political side of Jesus' resurrection.[71] It is the source of a transcendent identity empowering the oppressed to live with dignity and hope. This new identity creates a moral necessity for believers to seek to realize in history, for themselves and others, the freedom they know in faith.

This new identity depends on the risen Christ being present in the faith of believers and with victims of injustice, but also on the otherness of the risen Christ to them, his transcendence as the "Lord of the future who is coming again to fully consummate the liberation already happening in our present."[72] Though the risen Christ is transcendent to victims and oppressors in his future dimension as the coming Lord, his transcendence cannot be understood abstractly. As the risen Christ is continuous with Jesus who was crucified, his transcendence is only properly understood when related to the social injustices of one's context in light of Jesus' public ministry. The risen Christ, transcendent to all as the coming Lord, is present within the conflicts of history in the faith of believers, wherever his liberating work continues, and among the victims of sin and evil. A refusal to recognize this breaks the continuity of the risen Christ with Jesus as remembered in the gospels. It overlooks how the risen Christ finds a new spiritual body in the faith of those who believe in him, and in and with the victims of history and those who seek to liberate them. This interpretation of Jesus' resurrection helped make Christ present in American public discourse in a prophetic way, faithful to the New Testament witness regarding the transcendence and immanence of the risen Christ. Molnar's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection lacks the latter dimension and any concrete prophetic address.

Molnar's central concern is to affirm the objective reality of Jesus' resurrection as the incarnate Word.[73] He locates this objective reality in the risen body of Jesus. Trying to understand the form in which the risen Christ appeared to the Easter witnesses is an important task that Cone never takes up. However, while this is important, contrary to Molnar it is not the one point upon which the truth of the gospel depends. Attending to the differences between the depictions of the risen Christ's presence and that of Jesus of Nazareth in the New Testament shows Molnar's excessive claim about the significance of believing in the physical nature of the risen Christ's body to be "'a fallacy of misplaced concreteness'."[74] Cone's attention to the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus of Nazareth and the risen Christ is an important corrective to this, and to the lack in Molnar's interpretation of any concrete engagement with social issues in his context.

In the decades since Cone argued that Christ is black, discussion of Jesus' resurrection has continued apace. Yet Cone's emphasis on the finality of Jesus' resurrection and the transformation that the resurrection brings to Jesus' person remain pertinent. His emphasis on how the resurrection transformed Jesus' mode of presence also gives Cone's interpretation ethical content and public meaning that Molnar's sadly lacks. Cone's insightful and significant interpretation should be attended to in ongoing discussion of Jesus' resurrection.

Conclusion

Cone's interpretation of Jesus' resurrection, developed amid the racial conflict in America during the 1960s and 1970s, presents the risen Christ as an empowering moral source that can sustain resistance to trans-personal forces of oppression, like those unleashed by globalized capitalism today. It also provides a critical basis for demythologizing the claims of American empire. Further, it shows how Christian theology can do this in a public way, without withdrawing into a private language and unsupported demands for faith. Cone's interpretation provides a more adequate basis for radical discipleship than Bultmann's, Soelle's, and Heyward's subjective interpretation of Jesus' resurrection. Conversely, Cone's attention to how Jesus' mode of presence was transformed by his resurrection, in conjunction with his attention to the historical particularities of Jesus' ministry, gives his interpretation critical ethical content in relation to contemporary struggles for social injustice. For these reasons, Cone's insightful and significant interpretation continues to be relevant and should be included in ongoing discussion of Jesus' resurrection.

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3 James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 223.

4 Ibid., 30.

5 James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 48.

6 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 121. Cone's position is discussed in Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 58–60.

7 *Kerygma and Myth* Vol. I and II, ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch (London: SPCK, Vol. I, 2nd ed., 1964, Vol. II, 1962).

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9 Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor* (London: SPCK, 1950), 20–23.

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13 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 53–54.

14 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 84. Cone reiterated this in James Cone, *Risks of Faith* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 130–31.

15 Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 87.

16 Ibid. See also Cone, *God of the Oppressed,* 45–53. Ronald Thiemann also noted the presence of a version of Schleiermacher's eternal covenant between Christian faith and modern Western culture in the thought of leading white liberal theologians of this time; Ronald Thiemann, *Constructing a Public Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 80–82.

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21 Ruether, *Liberation Theology*, 139.

22 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 155.

23 Ibid., 77.

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26 Rudolf Bultmann, "The Case for Demythologizing: A Reply," in Bartsch, *Kerygma and Myth*, Vol. II, 183.

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31 Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 119–20.

32 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 192.

33 Ibid., 122.

34 Pheme Perkins, *Resurrection* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 320.

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36 Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. with an "Introduction" by Lewis Mudge (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 125. Ricoeur adds that "most human situations are like this." Ibid.

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52 Ibid., 192–94.

53 Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 149.

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60 Ibid., 311.

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69 Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 130.

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72 Ibid., 126.

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Why Unions? Why Now?

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In 2009, the full-time faculty and academic librarian at St. Jerome's University, a small Catholic university federated with the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, voted to certify as a labour union. As president of the faculty association and one of the faculty members who led the union drive, I noted that St. Jerome's was not alone in turning to certification. The year before SJU faculty certified as the St. Jerome's University Academic Staff Association (SJU-ASA), professors at Saint Paul University in Ottawa had formed a union. While we were moving to certification I learned that faculty from Queen's Theological College and the Atlantic School of Theology were also undertaking union campaigns. The following year, theology faculty and the librarians at the University of St. Michael's College[1] voted to unionize. Soon after, it was the turn of faculty at Brescia University College, a women's university founded by the Ursuline Sisters of Chatham in 1919 and now federated with the University of Western Ontario.

It is not unusual for faculty to unionize in Canada. In fact, most Canadian associations representing faculty and academic staff (usually librarians) are locally certified unions (i.e., not attached to any larger union). However, theological colleges and faith-based schools of higher education did not follow this trend as often. What explains this dramatic change in labour relations at theological colleges and faith-based post-secondary institutions? In order to examine this question, we organized a panel at the 2011 meeting of the Canadian Theological Society, held at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, New Brunswick.[2] Representatives from St. Michael's, St. Jerome's, and Queen's University, as well as the Atlantic School of Theology, discussed the specific circumstances behind their union drives. After the session, we wondered why these changes should occur now and at so many institutions.

In an attempt to answer this question, *The Ecumenist* has asked scholars involved in these union drives at Queen's Theological College (now Queen's School of Religion) and the University of St. Michael's College to recount the stories of their certification and to reflect on what was gained and what was lost in the process. Their reflections describe both the particular experiences at their home institutions as well as a broader social analysis of why these events have occurred now rather than earlier. Consequently, they have something to say about the broader social changes that are affecting theological education in Canada and similar societies.

Richard S. Ascough and Pamela Dickey Young recount the movement towards unionization at Queen's Theological College. However, this process was overtaken by broader social change, namely the secularization of Canadian society. Partway through the negotiations of the first contract, the theological college was incorporated into Queen's University as the School of Religion. Lee Cormie contextualizes the experience at St. Mike's in the broader (even global) challenges facing theology and theological education in the 21st century. You will find their articles on the following pages.

Our own experience at St. Jerome's led me to reflect on Catholic social teaching and unionization. In an open letter to our faculty, I argued that certification would not destroy the sense of identity and *communitas* upon which our small Catholic university was founded.[3] In fact, because Catholic social teaching is so strongly supportive of labour unions, I was able to state bluntly: there is nothing as Catholic as forming a union.

Since Pope Leo XIII first affirmed the Church's support of unions and workers' associations in 1891, the Church has consistently supported the right of workers to form such groups. Indeed, labour unions are explicitly affirmed in the papal encyclicals *Rerum novarum* (1891), *Quadragesimo anno* (1941), *Laborem exercens* (1981), and *Centesimus annus* (1991). According to Catholic social teaching, unions and workers' associations protect the subjectivity of workers, promote social justice, and allow employees to work towards the common good. While not a Catholic organization, the SJU-ASA would be committed to these values.

In fact, the first amendment to the proposed constitution of our union was one that contextualized the prime objective of the Association (to "promote the welfare of the academic staff of the University") by adding the phrase "keeping in mind the good of the University as a whole." This change was directly inspired by the social teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In *Laborem exercens*, John Paul II wrote,

> The purpose of unions is not simply to defend the existing wages and prerogatives of the fraction of workers who belong to them, but also to enable workers to make positive and creative contributions to the firm, the community, and the larger society in an organized and cooperative way. (#20)

While our union would work to protect the rights and interests of its members, it will do so in the context of serving the greater good.

While most Catholic social teaching on labour addresses unions from the point of view of poor workers, various passages speak directly to the condition of employees in general. For the Church, labour unions are a means of protecting the "subjectivity" of employees. In *Laborem exercens*, John Paul II writes,

> Workers not only want fair pay, they also want to share in the responsibility and creativity of the very work process. They want to feel that they are working for themselves – an awareness that is smothered in a bureaucratic system where they only feel themselves to be "cogs" in a huge machine moved from above. (#13)

Canada's pre-eminent Catholic theologian Gregory Baum explains the reasoning behind the Pope's encyclical. Baum writes,

> Human beings, created in God's image, are meant to be "subjects," i.e., responsible agents, of the institutions to which they belong. If they are not allowed to share in the important decisions that affect their lives, they are reduced to mere "objects" …. [Pope John Paul II] argues that the dignity of workers is such that they are meant to be "subjects," not "objects" of production.[4]

According to Pope John Paul II, the dignity of the human person—that is, the person's subjectivity—is secured only when employees are able to participate in decisions about their terms of employment and places or work. The ethic of collegiality, the foundation of university governance until recently, was one means of expressing that subjectivity. Under the changing circumstances at Canadian universities described by Dickey Young and Ascough and Cormie in the following pages, unions are now the preferred means of securing that participation at many Canadian theological colleges and faith-based schools.

As I said before, there is nothing as Catholic as forming a labour union. Since 1891, the Catholic Church has supported the rights of workers to form unions and associations. It is a right predicated on the foundational principle of the Church's social teaching: the dignity of the human person, created in the image and likeness of God. In this respect, the initiative to create a labour union is in line with St. Jerome's University's mission statement, its Catholic ethos, and its history of employee participation.

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1 The Arts faculty at USMC is employed by the University of Toronto and is represented directly by the University of Toronto Faculty Association, a non-certified association that bargains on behalf of full-time professors and librarians. Hence the St. Michael's faculty union includes only professors in the theology program and librarians. Thus the union at St. Michael's represents only theology faculty and librarians.

2 In fact, St. Thomas, a Catholic university affiliated with the University of New Brunswick, made national headlines in 2007, when its Board of Governors locked out its unionized faculty over the Christmas break, a move that was countered by a successful strike in January 2008.

3 These reflections contain sections of my open letter to St. Jerome's faculty dated March 30, 2009.

4 Gregory Baum, *Essays in Critical Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1994), 211–12.

Union Certification at Queen's Theological College

Richard S. Ascough and Pamela Dickey Young
School of Religion at Queen's University

On a chilly Tuesday morning in March 2009, the two of us walked over to the office of Queen's University Faculty Association (QUFA) to make our annual request to have the faculty members employed at Queen's Theological College (QTC) join the union. Legally, QTC is a completely separate institution from Queen's University and thus a separate employer. Yet QTC operates the theology programs and the Department of Religious Studies at the University, the degrees for which are granted through the University. Faculty members at QTC are paid through Queen's and share all the benefits of being University employees. Yet we were not part of the Faculty union. This was not for want of asking. Each year for more than a decade, such a request had been made, and each year it was turned down, largely on the legal opinion that our having a separate employer prevented us from joining QUFA.

Much to our surprise, this year would be different—less than an hour after we arrived at the QUFA office, we had a mandate to hold a certification drive. When we presented our initial case to QUFA, its response was to offer us status within the union as a bargaining unit separate from the faculty at the University. We would have to negotiate our own collective agreement with QTC's administration, but we would have the support and the resources of the QUFA office. Such a proposal had not been considered in the past, but it made eminent sense. We concurred.

We held our certification drive four weeks later. There was clear, and unsurprising, resistance on the part of the QTC administration and the Board. Relationships between administration and faculty had become tenser of late, making the issue of unionization more pressing than in previous years. Despite the administration's rhetoric of transparency, many faculty members felt left out of critical decisions or at least under-informed about all the circumstances that required particular decisions to be made. In addition, although QTC had a Governance Manual, guidelines for grievance processes were unworkable, which we sought to address through the unionization process. Finally, as with many institutions, financial pressures resulted in the loss of full-time faculty and the increasing use of adjuncts; our Governance Manual provided little protection for such people.

Since our faculty is small, the certification process was not laborious, although it was somewhat acrimonious with respect to the administration. We were able to inform our members of the process and garner enough signatures to hold a unionization vote. Although it was clear that all the full-time faculty members teaching in either theology or religious studies or both were eligible to vote, the status of some of our adjunct faculty and special appointments was challenged by the administration. This required a trip to Ottawa to present our case to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB), a task the QUFA lawyer undertook on our behalf. Although the OLRB ruled in our favour, and thus included the members under dispute, even without their votes we had enough (in fact, near unanimous) support for certification.

In speaking with faculty members, both before and after the vote, there was general agreement that the institutional climate at QTC was such that unionization had become necessary. However, there were some concerns expressed, primarily by faculty members teaching in the theology program. QTC is associated with the United Church of Canada (UCC). Ironically, although the UCC has long supported the labour movement, the UCC administration had successfully resisted the unionization of UCC ministers. Some QTC faculty members were concerned that our own certification process would not sit well with the top-level administrators of the UCC. Their fears may have been well founded, as the UCC has subsequently cut funding to QTC (and two other institutions), although the justification for doing so was cost savings, and no explicit link to our unionization was made. Others were worried about the loss of collegiality and the setting up of adversarial dynamics. Within the larger institution of the University, there was not much reaction beyond surprise that we were not already members of the union, since many faculty members at Queen's assume that members of QTC are full members of the University.

The process of bargaining our first collective agreement was not easy. We had assumed that we would simply adopt and adapt the current collective agreement between QUFA and Queen's University. The adaptations

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would be those necessitated by our slightly different organizational structure. We had good reason to assume this would be the case. Since QUFA was certified in 1995, the administration of QTC had regularly followed much of each successive three-year collective agreement, granting to QTC faculty members matching pay and merit increases and almost all of the benefits negotiated by the union. Our intention in certifying was not to ask for anything more, thus we stood to gain nothing in terms of increases in our overall benefits. Our concern was with processes of governance.

We were thus surprised when the administration announced that they would not use the current QUFA-Queen's collective agreement as a starting point, but wanted to begin bargaining from "scratch." This approach slowed the process of negotiation and was very frustrating. Given that the administration's bargaining team did not include anyone with experience as a teaching faculty member at a University, we spent much of our time explaining why their suggestions were impractical given the reality of university teaching and research. In the end, almost everything we wrote from "scratch" and for which we had signed agreements was in fact very similar to the extant collective agreement between QUFA and Queen's. That is, we arrived where we wanted, but through a circuitous and laborious process.

It is difficult to establish what was gained or lost through certification, since the ground shifted significantly as we were about halfway through the bargaining process, which had already taken more than a year. The QTC administration announced that they were suspending bargaining as they were turning attention to opening negotiations with the University for the full integration of QTC (including faculty and programs) into the University. That is, QTC would no longer exist as a separate institution but would become part of the University. Indeed, this is what is happening, and in May 2012, exactly100 years from the separation of the University from the then Presbyterian theological training school, QTC will formally become part of Queen's University.

We should also note there that at this point in time, the legal entity Queen's Theological College is now known as the School of Religion, a name change reflecting the reality of our role in teaching religious studies courses. The change in name occurred before the certification process, but had almost no impact on the structure of our programs or on our governance. With our integration into the University we will become the School of Religion at Queen's University, but now our entire structure will be changed as we become part of the Faculty of Arts and Science and responsible to its Dean (there no longer will be a Principal at QTC, but we will have a Director of the School of Religion).

For some faculty, students, and alumni this (re)integration into the University represents a significant loss of identity and autonomy and is sometimes blamed on the certification process. Others are enthusiastic about QTC faculty becoming full members of the University and full members of QUFA, thus falling under the collective agreement negotiated between QUFA and the University. For the latter group, the QTC certification process is to be celebrated for bringing this about. In both cases, the reality is rather more complex, and the certification process is but one of the catalysts for the process that will culminate in the (re)integration (other factors include but are not limited to the cut of funding by the UCC and QTC's increasing commitment to undergraduate teaching in Religious Studies).

Because we are an institution that teaches both Religious Studies and Theology, not all of us are accustomed to thinking in terms of theological reflection. Most of the faculty would see the move to unionize as one that has brought about a greater sense of justice and participation in the governance of the institution. Being part of a union has meant that there is a group that will advocate for faculty when there are struggles with administration. A few would argue that procedures now trump flexibility and that this does not necessarily conduce to justice in all cases. Most faculty members feel a greater sense of inclusion within the University as a whole even before the merger becomes effective on May 1, 2012.

Would we do it again? Definitely! The gains of unionization have, in our view, far outweighed the losses. Notwithstanding that one of us has since moved from rank and file to management, from either perspective we think that unionization has been a good thing for QTC.

Crisis and Transition in Theological Education

Lee Cormie
University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, Ontario

This essay is the fruit of one about-to-retire person's reflections on involvement in theology and theological education for a half-century, and in particular on my long involvement with the University of St. Michael's College, a medium-sized Catholic university federated with the University of Toronto, Canada's largest university. This involvement includes my first encounter with the college as a first-year undergraduate in 1961; my MA studies from 1965 to 1976, which overlapped with the closing of Vatican II; and over 30 years of teaching and learning in the Faculty of Theology and the Toronto School of Theology (TST) since 1979. Moreover, my recent stint as chair of the governance subcommittee for the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) accreditation review of the Faculty provoked many questions about the past being left behind, what has changed, and the challenges we confront in moving forward. I hope that readers will compare and contrast my account with their own experience, and help to fill in the record, as we broaden the dialogue about the renewed mission of the church and the future of theological education in a changing and deeply challenging world.

Unionization

As we have learned from chaos theory, small events (like the flapping wings of a butterfly in Brazil) can unexpectedly trigger large scale dynamics (like a tornado in Texas). The event provoking the unanimous decision of the faculty and librarians at the University of St. Michael's College (USMC) to unionize was the administration's decision to freeze wages from March 2010 to March 2012, despite decisions by the University of Toronto and all the other federated colleges to award small increases.

The actual money involved was modest. However, the administration's action highlighted the disparity in compensation between USMC academic staff and other federated colleges' staff, and, more importantly, the lack of formalized compensation policies. Perhaps most significantly, it highlighted the marginalization from the USMC policy-making processes of faculty members and librarians, who had no voice in decision making on many fronts: declining faculty complement, expanding administrative responsibilities that effectively changed job descriptions without clarity concerning implications for pay and tenure or for overall faculty profile, reputation, recruitment of students, and students' job prospects upon graduation. Faculty were also concerned about the lack of grievance procedures in the Faculty Handbook, related to issues such as workload, discrimination, harassment, and workplace environment. Moreover, they were worried about the lack of a development officer and the absence of a strategic plan at USMC.

Unionization and contract negotiations promise to bring much greater administrative clarity and procedures to our small university. Meanwhile, this process is fostering more intense dialogue among faculty members and librarians, deepening our solidarity and sense of community. Beyond the details of the first contract, these will be essential in coming years in navigating a way forward in the whirlwinds transforming theological education and higher education more generally across Canada and around the world. In the words of then president of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Marc Renaud, "Change is mandatory; survival is optional; choose wisely"![1]

Winds of Change

The story of theology and theological education over the last half-century is full of good news: the unprecedented incorporation of laypeople and especially women; the vast expansion of faculties, schools, and programs; the graduation of thousands of theologically educated students; the multiplication of conferences, publishers, websites, and blogs; the entry of the "new" voices of historically marginalized peoples, groups, and concerns into theology. Theology—research, dialogue, and debate—is flourishing around the world as never before.

At the same time, though, multiple forces have been eroding the foundations of the institutions that made this possible. As Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, has pointed out, in the mid-20th century, seminaries and theological faculties participated in an unwritten "social contract" with their denominations: denominations sent them well-prepared students for further study; the schools educated them in the traditions of their denomination; and the denominations hired the graduates and financially supported the schools. In recent decades, though, this contract has frayed as the winds of change have swept through religious communities and institutions, too.[2]

The Decline of Religious Communities

For Catholic institutions in particular, a central feature of the story is the decline of the religious communities, which for over a century had been major actors in building and staffing Catholic institutions serving long-established communities as well as recently arrived immigrants and their children. They forged alternative economies too, channeling money from donations into these institutions. Especially before the mid-20th century expansion of the welfare state, with its social services, publicly funded schools, hospitals, and socialized medicine, these "missions" were vital to immigrants, contributing to their successful integration into Canada and, for many, movement into the middle classes. Like the Basilians at St. Mike's, the Jesuits, and the Oblates, these communities were central in theological education, providing the majority of professors and students. These institutions were central in the waves of renewal associated with Vatican II in the 1960s and 1970s. As well, they were the foundation for the great expansion of theological education marking the closing decades of the century.

The decline of these communities is central to the increasingly precarious character of these institutions, with their diminished capacities for providing professors, sending students, channelling graduates into ministry and theological scholarship, and funnelling donations into theological education. There are other, often unnoticed, costs associated with the decline of these religious communities concerning the mission, culture, and governance of theological education. At their best, these were vibrant communities whose members were generally well educated and involved in many aspects of the life of the local church and the international Catholic community. They had articulated visions of theological education as central to the mission of the church. Lines of authority in these communities were hierarchically organized, certainly before Vatican II. However, in their dining rooms, liturgical life, community meetings, and informal socializing, the rich web of community life was renegotiated daily in a thousand ways. This spilled into their participation as students, teachers, and administrators in the daily life of theological education. In countless ways, theological education was linked through them to other aspects in ongoing community and church life. Consequently, long before the invention of formalized data gathering, assessment, and institutional review processes, professors and administrators were plugged into broader networks with their many feedback loops.

The decline of these communities has radically disrupted the traditional culture, channels of dialogue, decision-making processes, staffing, administration, and financing of these institutions. Inevitably, these institutions have been caught up in re-visioning and restructuring processes. At the University of St. Michael's College, for example, one step was to modernize the board (Collegium) membership, requiring that a majority would be "external" (i.e., not faculty, staff members, or students) as a strategy to promote outsiders with disinterested, more objective perspectives on issues and options. Whatever the advantages of this shift, it failed to address the range of other important issues involved in the transition to a post-religious, community-based institution, especially the questions of theological literacy and the St. Mike's community's capacity to renew the vision of theological education for the 21st century. Moreover, without a strategy to renew or replace community-based networks of communication and consultation, decision-making actually proceeded on a narrower base—both within the institution and beyond.

Many of these issues fall outside of the usual boundaries of concerns of unions and contract negotiations. However, to many St. Mike's faculty and librarians, they were (and are) central to our workplace environment and its future. These issues all turn on faculty and staff involvement in the processes of re-visioning, prioritizing, and strategic planning. During the 1980s and 1990s, the "Business" shelves in bookstores were full of advice to managers about "flattening" corporations, transforming them into more "horizontal" organizations that promoted full participation of employees in more aspects of decision-making by encouraging their creativity, commitment, and responsibility. This strategy was the key to success in a changing economic environment. How much more relevant is this in education, where knowledge and "knowledge workers" are the "products"—and when Catholic social teaching and ethics point to "participation" as key in the development of whole persons and communities!

Shifting Cultural and Religious Landscapes

Meanwhile, as historians and sociologists tell us—and our own experience confirms—waves of immigration are transforming the makeup of our communities, workplaces, churches, and schools, decentering Christianity as the central religio-cultural discourse, and introducing interfaith and intercultural voices into the centre of every debate. At the same time, new globalizing media are transforming the dynamics of every culture and tradition.

In all this turmoil, contrary to popular belief, religious cultures and institutions everywhere are not disappearing but changing.[3] In particular, mainstream Christian churches in the global North are generally in decline. Their membership is aging and the older religious communities that supported their institutions are shrinking. They are less often refreshed by new immigrants, and their own younger generations, being formed in a world so different from the one that formed their parents, are drawn in different directions. At the same time, Christianities in the global South are flourishing, with great creativity and energy, and in new ways drawing on their own local traditions in responding to the challenges and possibilities of the new world.[4] In the North, church leaders, theologians, and theological educators face many fundamental questions about theological and education paradigms forged over half a century ago for a different world.

Precarious Planetary Civilization

Meanwhile, many other developments are propelling processes of world historical transition, what some designate literally as a new stage in the history of life on earth, the *anthropocene era*.[5] Cascading waves of breakthroughs in knowledge and technology are expanding human capacities to act on ever more profound and far-reaching scales, forging in the process a planetary civilization for the first time in human history. These developments point toward multiple possible futures.

At one pole, influential voices are heralding the dawn of a new golden era in which humans are not only prospering but transcending the frailties and limitations of the human condition. These visions promise improved forms of humanity, indeed posthuman or transhuman descendants enhanced by bio-, info-, pharmo- and cogno-technologies. In fact, some commentators wonder if human nature is already obsolete, that is, already in the process of being transcended with new and improved models.[6] At the other pole, growing choruses are crying out about the nightmares haunting the emergent global civilization and planet Earth itself. They speak of increasing suffering, growing gaps between the few rich and many poor (the 1% versus the 99% of the Occupy movements), cascading ecological and social apocalypses, as well as the increasing concentrations of power and the deepening distortions and irrationalities of conventional politics.

Meanwhile, tossed to and fro in the swirling currents of transition and pulled in opposite directions by competing visions of the present and future, it is increasingly difficult to avoid the conclusion that we are all witnesses to, and actors in, a world historical transition with God knows what implications for the future of humanity—indeed, for the evolution of life on earth or even the evolution of the cosmos.

It is also increasingly clear that age-old religious issues are swirling at the heart of these conflicts over the future: the relations between Creator, creation, and humans created in the *imago dei*; the shifting boundaries between matter and spirit, time and eternity, earth and heaven, life and death, as well as inevitability and possibility; the epistemologies and hermeneutics we use to reflect on the limits of science, as well as the shifting relations among mystery, ignorance, knowledge, uncertainty, hope, and faith; the competition of hope(s) and faith(s), false gods and true God. More and more, people are reaching beyond (without necessarily repudiating) "science" and turning to ancient religious symbols and images in their efforts to articulate their nightmares and dreams for the future.

At the centre of these debates lies the perennial question of where we should look for signs of hope: the celebrated authorities at centres of affluence and power (as usual) or the margins? Two thousand years ago, countering the "good news" of the Roman empire, Jesus and the movement around him announced another "good news," that of the coming kingdom of God. In our day, too, there are many voices on the margins announcing that "another world is possible." They are found in the anti-neoliberal globalization movements, World Social Forum processes, global mobilizations in opposition to the war in Iraq, activism around climate change, the Arab spring, Spanish *indignados* and European summer, and recent irruptions of Occupy spreading like wildfire so far and wide.

It is impossible to know with any certainty how this future will unfold, or what our places in it will be. There is no doubt, though, that we confront many fundamental choices in sorting out possibilities and promise, many challenges to conversion, and many choices requiring sacrifices—especially for us in the middle class and our middle-class institutions. Every choice involves a leap of hope and faith. In the 21st century, theological education can succeed only through addressing these questions and challenges.

Conclusion

Theological schools of the 1930s and 1940s, even at their best, were not adequate to the new challenges and possibilities of the 1960s and 1970s, and their transformation required deep conversions in many aspects of their institutional cultures, programs, and administration. That many of them successfully navigated those shoals of change explains why many of us in succeeding generations are in theological education today. The challenges we face today are even more daunting. In many cases, like the University of St. Michael's College, unionization is absolutely necessary to empower faculty members to participate in the development of the institutional culture as well as management policies and procedures. This is why unionization of theological faculty and librarians happened at St. Mike's, and this is why it is happening across Canada. This is very good news. Forging deeper bonds of solidarity and community enables us to address the larger story of crisis and transition, as well as the many challenges to conversion in the renewal of the Church, theology, and theological education.

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1 Marc Renaud, "Universities: Change Is Mandatory; Survival Is Optional; Choose Wisely." Fred A. Aldrich Lecture, Memorial University, St. John's, NF, 2004. http://www.mcgill.ca/files/researchoffice/aldrich_lecture_e.pdf. Accessed March 1, 2008.

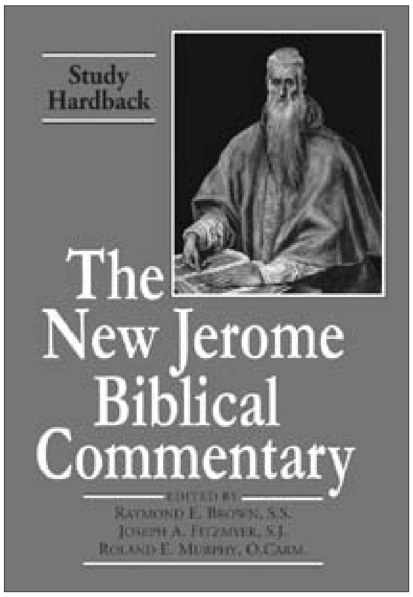
2 Daniel Aleshire, "Denominations and Seminaries: Searching for the New Contract," *Colloquy*, January/February 2001: 4–6.

3 Charles L. Harper and Bryan F. LeBeau, *Social Change and Religion in America: Thinking Beyond Secularization*. The American Religious Experience. (2002) http://are.as.wvu.edu/sochange.htm. Accessed May 10, 2011.

4 For an excellent expression of the recent explosions of biblical, historical, and theological scholarship and their impact in expanding our perceptions of the past and of present realities and trends, see Daniel Patte, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christianity*, "Bibliography" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Of course, these developments have many implications for basic categories, theoretical frameworks, methods, and hermeneutics in every theological discipline as well as for theological education; see especially the "Theological Education Cluster," 1219–26.

5 J. Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Will Steffen and Paul Crutzen, "The New World of the Anthropocene," *Environmental Science & Technology* 44 (7) (25 February 2010). http://pubs.acs.org/doi/abs/10.1021/es903118j?prevSearch=anthropocene&searchHistoryKey=. Accessed October 3, 2009. See also Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

6 Harold W. Baillie and Timothy K. Casey, eds. *Is Human Nature Obsolete? Genetics, Bioengineering, and the Future of the Human Condition* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).



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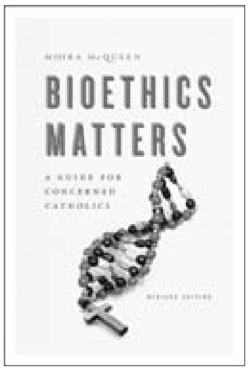

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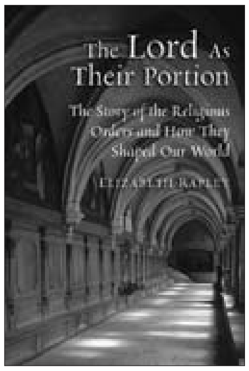

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