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Quebec's Bishops: A Contemporary Perspective on Truth

A remarkable statement on Christian truth and its communication in the Church has been made by the Quebec bishops.[1] While their text reads as if it were a reply to Pope John Paul II's "Faith and Reason," it was in fact elaborated by a commission that started its work long before the papal encyclical came out. Since the text focuses on the impact of the modern means of communication on contemporary culture, it offers an analysis that applies to Western technological societies. The text argues that persons in modern society have come to understand themselves in a new way, that they constitute themselves by the choices they make, that they do not receive truth by submitting to authority, but that, instead, they involve themselves in the quest for truth and in this process attach great importance to personal experience. The bishops argue that the old distinction between "ecclesia docens" and "ecclesia discens" is no longer appropriate. In this new situation, they argue, the ecclesiastical magisterium must find new ways of communicating the Gospel.

The following pages offer an English translation of a series of texts that articulate the bishops' contemporary perspective on truth.[2] The numbers after each text indicate its location in the French original.

The statement of the bishops has been criticized by some Catholics in Quebec because of its optimistic view of personal freedom and its lack of attention to the cultural power over the human heart exercised by competitiveness and consumerism, the fruits of contemporary capitalism.

The Editor

Excerpts from the Bishops' Statements[2]

A Culture of the Subject

The appreciation of the subject constitutes a basic feature of our culture. Persons demand more autonomy, insist on being consulted and heard, and claim a right to participate and to decide. Studies in the field of communication also increasingly recognize the importance of the role played by the subject in human communication. (p. 33)

A Subject of Experience

The emergence of the subject manifests itself in different ways. Today, personal opinion rates first among the things that count: "I think that..." becomes more important than "the tradition states that..." or "the magisterium teaches that...." Personal convictions rooted in the experience of the individual are important. People bristle at the mention of regimentation and all efforts to indoctrinate are greeted with repugnance. A thing is true to the degree that it can be verified by experience. The Theological Committee of our Assembly rightly remarked that our contemporaries are more sensitive to experience than to notional or abstract language.[3] It is not so much that they are incapable of formulating their experiences in concepts, but rather that experience carries more weight and authority than ideas put forward on a theoretical basis. All speech is measured against the yardstick of authenticity. A person's word becomes more authoritative when it is authentic, sincere, and backed up by experience. (p. 34)

A New Relationship to Tradition

The individual has pride of place in today's culture, a fact which casts a shadow over that space once occupied by arguments from tradition, by doctrinal corpuses, by churches and other bodies that regulate belief. For our contemporaries, truth may come from tradition, but it is also the fruit of their own work of exploration. It is received, but it is also discovered. It may remain beyond us, but it comes to us by way of the subject's own activity on a personal journey. In this view, tradition and teaching may have a role to play in a person's pursuits, in the quest of a subject. Tradition and teaching are not imposed as a kind of final or definitive word, but function as memory, reference points and markers or as a word which questions and confronts one's own discoveries, a word which evokes a response from the subject. Statements from tradition are critiqued before being taken up by the subject. Tradition no longer represents a catalogue of timeless, ready-made answers from which one has only to pick and choose. (pp. 33-34)

The "I" as Subject of the Confession of Faith

As the episcopal synod on catechesis has suggested in its "Message to the People of God," the confession of faith takes place at the end of an active process in which the subject is an important player. The individual wants to be able to express himself, to get to the point where he can say, "I believe." She does not get there alone, but does so by correlating her own human experience – interpreted in faith – to other human experiences lived in faith and attested to in tradition. ... Tradition is not first and foremost a source for answers. It puts us in dialogue with the quests and pursuits of individuals from the past, who, in given situations, produced a given faith-filled meaning. Conceived of in this way, tradition no longer elicits a negative response from many of our contemporaries who see in it something other than an authority which short-circuits our own attempts at discovery by providing, in advance, answers to all our questions, both now and in the future. Better yet, understood in this way, tradition allows the subject to shift her centre of concern outside the self and enter into a fruitful dialogue with other points of view which find expression in tradition. (p. 35)

Living in a "Christian" society

We are accustomed to think of access to faith as a social process. In a Christian society, one's belonging to a religious group is more a reflection of sociological pressures than an expression of personal attitude or individual choice. In today's culture, this can no longer be taken for granted. A new relationship to religion is taking hold. Rather than don a uniform tailored for the entire group or head down a road that has already been charted, people want to plot their own course and find their own way.... This is a choice. We are witnessing a shift from the prescriptive to the inscriptive. This demand for autonomy should not be underestimated; it deserves recognition. This is a new reality, one which is far from negative for the Church.

The culture of the subject has another consequence as well. It makes singularly interesting life journeys stand out. People enter into Christian experience in a manner befitting their own life's story. Christian initiation by the busload or by the group is a thing of the past. No longer simply a function of the group, the entry into Christian experience relies upon individual autonomy, decision-making and responsibility. This new trend puts an end to the uniform models of the past and encourages a plurality of different ways of entering into Christian life. (pp. 36-37)

Incorporation into an Ecclesial Community

In a culture of the subject, the experience of church is not a simple affair either. Naturally, the weight of the past plays a role in this, but this alone cannot explain what we are witnessing today. In fact, the individual increasingly expresses his or her independence from the great religious institutions which seem to infringe upon the subject's right to self-realization. The Churches are perceived as authoritarian institutions which stand in the way of spontaneity and encroach upon the freedom of the subject and his right to self-fulfillment. They are suspected of having arrogated the divine to themselves, of imprisoning the religious in moral practices and dogmas which they invented in order to control people's lives and to establish their power. Many of our contemporaries look for a primitive spiritual tradition outside the institutions of belief.

Belief in God becomes detached from the feeling of belonging to a church, as if one were dealing with two realities that contradict one another. It is not as if the ecclesial "we" has been permanently set aside, but rather that it can no longer be taken for granted. For it to be credible, the "we" must remain open and not try to hold back or imprison the individual. For it to be credible and

relevant, the ecclesial "we" must become a locus of truth, freedom and hope.

These modern sensibilities affect the way in which we think about the institutions of Christianity, whose vocation clearly sets them apart from bureaucratic structures and from the mechanisms of standardization which are the province of large public administrations. The nature of Christian institutions ought to favour relationships based on equality and brotherhood/sisterhood and to value attitudes that welcome and liberate.

In both cases – the link to tradition and the link to the Church group – the question is the same: under what conditions will the subject be able to become other-centred and enter into dialogue with people who hold a different point of view? This de-centering will not occur if the individual is persuaded that it will cost him his status as a free subject.

Rethinking Communication with the Role of the Subject in View

As a general cultural phenomenon, the appreciation of the subject has an impact in the area of communications. Old models of communication insisted upon the importance of the sender. In practice, the sender was the truly active subject who took the initiative. In theoretical models such as these, the receiver was considered to be a steady target at which one threw a magic ball, the message. This action of the sender allowed a message to be transferred to the designated receiver, seen as passive subject.

New theories of communication assign just as much importance to the role of the receiver as they do to that of the sender. The receiver is not simply a passive subject who records and stores the message communicated to him. Studies on reception carried out in a variety of fields of human activity, including that of Missiology, point out that the receiver is truly an active subject who is capable of transforming the message received. Until now, we have neglected to think of people as real interpreters of what they hear, and we have failed to understand that the process of assimilation is an active one. Communication was conceived of as a one-way, linear process going from the sender to the receiver rather than as a circular system of dialogue. (p. 40)

Consequences at the Level of the Church

Under the Catholic regime, the over-valuation of the role of the sender and the minimization of the role of the receiver was communicated in the Church through the use of the expressions "*Ecclesia docens*" and "*Ecclesia discens*." We forgot that the faithful are real actors and not simply receivers of transmitted messages. Rather than active subjects, they were subjected to the word and authority of those who governed. Hence, rather than teach people how to interpret their existence in the light of Revelation, the Church gave them definitions to learn by heart.

Revised communication models make us rethink what it means to speak and communicate in the Church. Current models of communication bring us into a relational world which emerges from the meeting of two subjects. The interpretive activity and the expression of both subjects become important, and it is only in this context that dialogue can happen. Today it has become obvious that the only kind of communication which has a chance to succeed is communication which affirms the activity of both subjects as they explore and converse. Our culture is profoundly marked by the spirit of democracy. Democratic society values the participation of all. (pp. 40-41)

A New Relationship to Truth

The democratic spirit builds a new relationship to the truth. The Church is to proclaim the Gospel in a relevant way. It is not sufficient to insist that the Church is not a democracy, even if that statement is correct. Integration into the Church in a democratic society leads to a new relation to authority and a different manner of proclaiming the Gospel. What is required is a certain degree of participation and a careful listening to all the voices that want to be heard. Nothing can be imposed simply by authority: there is no single word. [Rien ne s'impose d'autorité et il n'y a pas de parole unique.] (pp. 42-43)

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1 Assemblée des évêques du Québec, *Annoncer l'Évangile dans la culture actuelle au Québec* (Montréal: Fides, 1999).

2 Translated by Prof. Robert Hurley of the Faculty of Theology at Laval University, in Québec City.

3 *Mission de l'Église et culture québécoise* (Montréal: Fides, 1992), 79.

Vatican II's Theological About-face on the Jews:* Not yet fully recognized

The recognition of Jewish religion as a biblical tradition accompanying the Christian Church on its journey was a startling innovation introduced by the declaration *Nostra aetate* of Vatican Council II. According to the presentation of Christine Athans,[1] the whole of Christian theology beginning in the second century was infected by the idea that the Church had replaced the "old" Israel in the covenantal relationship with God, leaving the Jews to a marginal and miserable status that could be overcome only through their conversion to Christianity. *Nostra aetate* corrected this perspective in its brief but substantial fourth chapter. The Jews are now seen as integral to the ongoing divine covenant. Jesus and early Christianity are portrayed as deeply rooted in a constructive sense in the faith of Second Temple Judaism. Jews may not be held collectively accountable for the death of Jesus. Vatican II did not "forgive" Jews of the so-called crime of deicide, as some newspapers have claimed; it totally exonerated them of this historic charge. In so doing, it undercut the basis of the classical Christian theology of Jewish covenantal displacement which was rooted in this deicide charge.

This Radical Change Has Not Yet Been Assimilated

One indication of the newness of this teaching can be seen in the references used to support the argument for a fundamental turn in the Church's understanding of its relationship with the Jewish people. Examining the fourth chapter of *Nostra aetate,* we find scarcely a reference to the usual sources cited in conciliar documents: the Church Fathers, papal statements and previous conciliar documents. Instead, the declaration continually returns to Romans 9–11, as if to say that the Church is now taking up the theme initiated by Paul when he insisted that the Jews remain part of the covenant after the Resurrection, despite the unresolved theological issues raised by this. Without saying so explicitly, the 2,221 Council members who voted for *Nostra aetate* were, in fact, acknowledging that everything that has been said about Christian–Jewish relations since Paul wrote has moved in a direction which they could no longer support. The theological about-face on the Jews at Vatican II represents one of the central theological developments at the Vatican Council. Unfortunately its full significance has not yet been recognized.

Johann-Baptist Metz has insisted that the implications of the theological rethinking of Judaism begun by Vatican II go far beyond the Christian–Jewish dialogue. After the Holocaust, this rethinking involves a "revision of Christian theology itself."[2] However, *Nostra aetate* has had little impact on Christian theology, thus far. One looks in vain for citations from this document in books or articles reflecting on Christian identity. Since, in the past, this identity had been centrally shaped by a theology of the Church as fulfillment and displacement of Judaism, theologians must ask themselves how to define Christian identity today. That they do not do this has been noted with dismay by some Jewish participants in the dialogue with Christians. Does *Nostra aetate* have significance only when Christians are speaking with Jews? Or is it also brought into the picture when Christians are conversing among themselves? Only if the latter is true can we say that *Nostra aetate* has been genuinely received within the Christian community.

Let me cite two examples of this resistance which I have witnessed. In the preparatory drafts for the international ecumenical gathering held at Santiago de Compostela, Spain, several years ago, the vision of Christian self-understanding was dangerously close to displacement theology. Yet little objection was raised to this perspective by Catholic leaders involved in the process, until some of us connected with the Christian–Jewish dialogue raised a fuss. Eventually the final document was altered to back away from the displacement motif. However, it still did not draw upon the full implications of *Nostra aetate*. A second example is the dismay I experienced during the October 1997 meeting at the Vatican on the Church and anti-Judaism, at the lack of acquaintance with the teaching of *Nostra aetate* displayed by some of the participants, including high curia officials. The process of implementing the conciliar declaration remains largely incomplete.

Three Key Notions Implicit in *Nostra aetate*

This paper is not the place to summarize the content of *Nostra aetate*'s fourth chapter. Nor do I wish to render an account of how a number of leading Catholic and Protestant theologians have tried to explore this new theological framework for thinking of Christian–Jewish relations.[3] Instead, I wish simply to articulate three key notions that appear, which in turn will significantly influence Christian self-understanding. These include: 1) that the Christ Event did not invalidate the faith of Israel; 2) that Christianity is not the fulfillment of Judaism as is traditionally claimed; and 3) that Christianity must reincorporate dimensions of its original Jewish matrix in its contemporary expression of faith.

These assertions may appear controversial. However, they are, in my opinion, implicit in *Nostra aetate*. The first of these assertions – that the Jewish covenant remains valid after the Christ Event – challenges the classical expressions of Christology. For if God remains faithful to the early covenant, Jews can attain salvation apart from the Christ Event. While *Nostra aetate* clearly implies that the Church has no mission to convert the Jews, this issue is left ambiguous in the ecclesiastical documents on evangelization. In 1978 Professor Tommaso Federici, a highly respected lay theologian in Vatican circles, was selected to prepare a paper on evangelization and the Jews for the international Vatican–Jewish dialogue held near Venice.[4] In the oral version of his presentation, Professor Federici called for a formal renunciation of evangelical outreach to Jews, since Vatican II had declared them to be within the framework of the covenant. Yet in the published version of his lecture, which appeared several years later, he had replaced his call for formal renunciation with an appeal to renounce "undue" proselytizing of the Jews. In subsequent statements on evangelization, the issue of missionary outreach to Jews has been passed over, leaving the impression that the Catholic Church's approach at present is deliberately ambiguous. According to my own interpretation of this "studied ambiguity," the Vatican is well aware that formally to relinquish evangelical outreach to the Jews has profound Christological implications that it is unwilling to confront at this time. The Vatican does not encourage proselytizing Jews, but it does not wish to declare this effort theologically dead because of the far-reaching implications of such a declaration. The furor that has arisen in some quarters of evangelical Protestantism over the formal renunciation of missionary outreach to Jews illustrates how profound a challenge such a renunciation represents for traditional Christological understanding. The extent to which we create theological space for Jewish faith, against which Christianity had defined its identity, to that extent we moderate, albeit implicitly, the absolute claim of Christian faith.[5]

The second of my assertions, that Christianity is not simply the fulfillment of Judaism, follows from the first. In the history of Christianity, theologians have engaged in a twofold effort to denigrate totally the Jewish tradition in theology, liturgy and art and, in their better moments, to argue that this tradition contained inchoatively religious perceptions that became fully understood only in the New Testament. The Old Testament became a foil, or at best, a prelude to Christian belief. Post-biblical Jewish thought, including Jewish critical perspectives from the first century of the common era, played no role at all in Christian theology. The common line of argument has been that anything worthwhile in Judaism had been subsumed into Christianity through Christ. In recent years, theologians have rediscovered that the Jewish tradition contains insights that had been underplayed or even lost sight of in Christianity. The assertion that the notion of "love" in the New Testament is superior to anything found in the Jewish literature has been shown to be overly simplistic. Yet many theologians and ethicists, including the authors of the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* continue this line of argumentation despite the new scholarship on the subject. Again, recognizing that the New Testament tradition is not as totally "new" or as fully "complete" as we once glibly proclaimed, is to moderate, however implicitly, the classical Christological vision. These recent insights have persuaded many Christians that it is no longer appropriate to speak of "Old Testament" and "Old Covenant" as if they had been replaced by a new divine dispensation.[6] Some authors therefore prefer "Hebrew Scriptures" (which I favour), or "First Testament" or "Tanakh." Some Christian and Jewish scholars have argued for retention of "Old Testament" on the grounds that since the arrangement of the books in the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures is different, the two should be referred to by different names. Christian scholars who are eager to find a new term for "Old Testament" are, in fact, questioning the "promise-fulfillment" thematic in which the traditional name is rooted. They realize that renaming the Scriptures in this manner will have a significant impact on the

theological interpretation of the Christ Event.

The final assertion – that there is a need to recapture Christianity's original Jewish matrix – has found expression in *Nostra aetate* and been applied in the Vatican documents on Catholic–Jewish relations issued in 1974 and 1985.[7] Individual scholars have also contributed to this effort. Cardinal Carlo Martini of Milan has said, "In its origins Christianity is deeply rooted in Judaism. Without a sincere feeling for the Jewish world, therefore, and a direct experience of it, one cannot understand Christianity. Jesus is fully Jewish, the apostles are Jewish, and one cannot doubt their attachment to the traditions of their forefathers."[8] Passages such as this imply that something important was lost to the Christian tradition in the separation that finally occurred between the Jewish and Christian community. Jews need to ask if something was also lost in their tradition. In other writings, Cardinal Martini has characterized the Church–Synagogue separation as a "schism" and suggested that in this "original schism" Christianity lost far more than it did in the subsequent rupture between the Eastern and Western churches and the later rupture within the Western church at the time of the Reformation.

Nostra aetate obliges Christian theologians to rethink their ecclesiology. For if the Jewish community belongs to the divinely established covenant, then the Church cannot express its full theological identity without the Jewish core that went into its making. Reflection on the Jews, whom Vatican II calls "a people according to the election most beloved by God because of the fathers"[9] summons the Christian community to recognize the lack of fullness in the Church and the incompleteness of the order of redemption. Both Synagogue and Church, as two sister communities, are waiting for the complete fulfillment of the divine promises. The rethinking of the Christ Event which this demands has been avoided by most theologians, including the authors of radical theologies writing from a feminist or Third World perspective. Regrettably, the Church has undertaken little theological reflection exploring the meaning and power of *Nostra aetate* for the revision of Christology and ecclesiology in keeping God's abiding covenant with the Jews.

Recently I allowed myself to be encouraged to find the following paragraph in the Report to the General of the Society of Jesus from the Krakow Congress on "Jesuits and Jews" that met from December 27-31, 1998:

> How can we assimilate the impact of the Jewish–Christian dialogue into every aspect of our theology? In particular, how can we bring our appreciation of the Jewish identity of Jesus to bear upon our Christology, and our recognition of the permanent witness of Judaism as a living faith to bear upon our Ecclesiology and upon our understanding of what inculturation means in the multiple cultures of our world today? How do we reflect upon the Jewish roots of Christianity, the presence of Jews in our societies, on their vocation and their understanding of covenant? What do our insights about Jews and their insights about Christians imply for a Christian understanding of religious pluralism? [10]

John T. Pawlikowski

John T. Pawlikowski, OSM, is professor of theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and the author of many books on Jewish–Christian relations.

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* This article is an edited version of a paper presented by Dr. John Pawlikowski at the 54th annual convention (1999) of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

1 Christine Athans, professor at St Thomas University in St. Paul, MI, gave a presentation on the pre-history of *Nostra aetate* at the same 1999 convention of the CTSA .

2 Johann-Baptist Metz, "Facing the Jews: Christian Theology after Auschwitz," in *The Holocaust as Interruption, Concilium* 175, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza and David Tracy (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1984), 27.

3 I have attempted to summarize these post-Vatican II developments and added my own theological perspective in *Christ in the Light of Christian–Jewish Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982) and *Jesus and the Theology of Israel* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989).

4 Tommaso Federici, "Mission and Witness of the Church," in *Fifteen Years of Catholic–Jewish Dialogue 1970–1985*, International Catholic – Jewish Liaison Committee (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana and Libreria Editrice Lateranense, 1988), 46-62.

5 For the implications of the Christian–Jewish dialogue on the theology of religious pluralism, see John Pawlikowski, "Toward a Theology of Religious Diversity," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 1 (Winter 1989), 138-153.

6 See *Hebrew Bible or Old Testament: Studying the Bible in Judaism and Christianity*, R. Brooks and J.J. Collins, eds. (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1990).

7 "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration NOSTRA AETATE," no 4 (December 1, 1974) by the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews and "Notes on the Correct Way to Present the Jews in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church" (June 24, 1985), also by the Vatican Commission. For the texts, see Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (eds.), *In Our Time: The Flowering of Jewish–Catholic Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press,1990), 29-50.

8 Carlo M. Martini, "Christianity and Judaism – A Historical and Theological Overview," in *Jews and Christians: Exploring the Past, Present, and Future*, J.H. Charlesworth, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 19.

9 "Populus secundum electionem Deo carissimus propter patres," *Lumen gentium*, 16.

10 B.W. Oppenheim (ed.), *Conference Proceedings: Examination of Conscience: Polish Church Confronts Antisemitism* (January 20, 1999), (Los Angeles: Loyola Marymount University, 1999), 81.

Belgrade Women in Black Against Violence and War*

"We, Belgrade Women in Black Against War, demand that the government members of NATO:

– *stop immediately the bombings of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia;*

– *establish peace negotiations and an international peace conference on the Balkans;*

– *enable the refugees, the expelled and displaced population of Kosovo, to return or go to third countries.*

We urge that Women in Black and all women's peace organizations give this appeal to their governments. Human rights and democracy cannot be imposed by bombs and weapons but can only be achieved by negotiations and by support for all powers that stand firmly for human rights and democracy."

Belgrade Women in Black Against War, Belgrade, 20th April, 1999.

In 1991, the Women in Black group was founded in Belgrade, with the following political aim: "to strengthen solidarity among women who have been divided by guns and borders."[1] Stasa Zajovic, the founder of the group, explained why this form of women's organizing has been important:

> The Belgrade Women in Black is the most visibly political women's group. We express clearly and publicly our attitude towards those who produce the violence. I think that women must engage in politics because it's not something disgusting or just for men.... There are problems with some men [in the anti-war movement], because they think that our anti-militarism is a part of our traditional women's role – mothers and sisters get together to support sons and brothers. Lots of women who have joined the group during the war have resisted that, and have been explaining that they are not [just] mothers and sisters, that their activism is not just that.
>
> Women in Black was started in Israel in 1988 by Israeli women protesting against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. It was they who established the characteristic form of action of mainly silent vigils by women, standing alone as women, wearing black, in public places at regular intervals.[2]

In Belgrade, Women in Black made their first appearance on October 9, 1991. Since then, every Wednesday afternoon, Women in Black have stood in silence in the Square of the Republic, in the heart of the city, protesting against war, militarism, nationalism and violence against women. These women were inspired by the Israeli group who wore black and protested in silence their government's involvement in the Gulf War.

The silent street protests of the Women in Black became a crucially important and transparent way of breaking the invisibility of women in the peace movement. This form of protest has required a high level of courage and commitment by these women, not just to express their anti-war policies publicly, and thus to risk the consequences of the regime's political attacks, but also to expose themselves to both verbal and physical abuse from fellow citizens who support the militant politics of ethnic nationalism in Serbia/Yugoslavia. The level of risk they have been taking and the amount of courage they have demonstrated are perhaps best illustrated by the fact that the Belgrade Women in Black have publicly and unequivocally expressed their political view concerning the responsibility for war in the region. On June 10, 1992, they issued the following public statement:

> We say that the Serbian regime and its repressive structures (Federal Army and paramilitary formations) are responsible for all three wars, in Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbian regime leads wars in the name of all citizens of Serbia. This way all the citizens become hostages of their imperialistic politics.[3]

In spite of risking stigmatization and overt physical attacks, the visibility of these anti-war protests has been a way of reaching out to those who share the views of Women in Black, and of encouraging them to join the

protests. Tanja, a refugee woman of ethnically mixed background from Bosnia-Herzegovina, recalled the way she got in touch with the Women in Black:

> I remember it was March 8, 1994. As I was passing by, I saw a woman who was carrying a banner with the slogan, "My Mostar [a town in Bosnia-Herzegovina] will be forever young." That got to me; I started crying, I came up to her, asked her where she got the slogan. She told me, "Come on, join me. You carry this banner." I asked, "What is this gathering?" and she said, "The group Women in Black." She added, "One of our activists is here, she's from Mostar." We continued talking, and since then I have sometimes felt the need to join the group on Wednesdays when they stand, protesting against war and violence. That's how we grew close.

The cooperation among predominantly women's anti-war groups within the region of post-Yugoslav states has been a high priority for the Women in Black. They have made an effort to establish a network of these groups within the region and to link it to similar groups internationally. This endeavour has resulted in an annual meeting of women's solidarity against war, nationalism and violence. Since the summer of 1992, an international meeting has been held every year in Novi Sad, a city in Northern Serbia/Yugoslavia. Each year, the Belgrade Women in Black publish an extensive report of the meeting, entitled *Women for Peace*.[4]

The significance of this endeavour is grounded in the fact that these meetings have been the sites of communication among feminists in the region, as well as refugee women who did not originally consider themselves feminists, but whose experiences of war, flight and exile made them sensitive to women's issues. However, the importance of these encounters goes beyond their relevance for the creation of new alliances and solidarity among diverse groupings of women. Their importance also lies in the wider political context, i.e., the conflict and the exclusionary politics of ethnic nationalism, in which literally any form of contact across ethnic-national lines has been considered anti-patriotic and subversive of the political interests of the new nation-states. In such a situation, especially during the years of the armed conflict (1991–1995), participation at these meetings has entailed enormous risks for all the women participants from post-Yugoslav states. Not only has it required an extreme personal effort to get travel documents and visas, and undertake a long and exhausting journey, avoiding the war zone, but it has often confronted these women with the prospect of social and political stigmatization and the possibility of losing their jobs. Regardless of these difficulties and the obstacles created by the regime, these women have succeeded in maintaining and further developing their contacts as well as some forms of cooperation.

The significance of this movement and the commitment of these women to open communication across ethnic-national boundaries are highlighted by the fact that during the first years of the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, these meetings were the only organized public gatherings of people now divided by the conflict and the borders of their new nation-states.

The recent NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, euphemistically called a "special mission," dangerously undermined all democratic organizations and women's anti-war and anti-nationalist initiatives in the region. Most of the women activists have been in hiding or have fled abroad out of fear of retaliation. They have found themselves trapped between Milosevic's regime on the ground and NATO in the sky.

Maja Korac

Dr. Maja Korac, born in Belgrade, emigrated to Canada in 1992 and received her doctorate in sociology at York University, Toronto, in 1998. She is involved in the Women and Conflict Zones Network Project, initiated and housed at York University.

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1 Hughes, *et al*, "Feminist Resistance in Serbia," *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, 2, 4 (1995), 517.

2 Now there are Women in Black groups in several different countries An e-mail network is developing in Spanish and English. In Spanish: <roal@nodo50.ix.apc.org>.

3 Zajovic, ed, *Women for Peace* (Belgrade, 1993), p. 50. Emphasis in the original.

4 Ibid.

ARCIC: Authority as God's Gift

In 1966, Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Ramsey appointed a joint international commission to promote greater unity between the Churches. In 1967, the commission "registered considerable areas of Roman Catholic–Anglican agreement" whereupon the present Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) was formed. Its Eucharistic Doctrine *(Windsor, 1971) claimed "substantial agreement";* Ministry and Ordination *(Canterbury, 1973) affirmed that "in what we have said here both Anglicans and Roman Catholics will recognise their own faith."* Authority in the Church, I *and* II, *marked "the growing convergence of method and outlook of theologians in our two traditions."* Authority III, *the most recent statement, offers their primates sufficient ground for agreement on the remaining substantial barrier to full communion; it has yet to be officially received.* *The Editor*

ARCIC's joint statement on authority, *Authority III*, is shaped by the image drawn from Saint Paul in 2 Cor 1:20, which is ARCIC's point of departure – Jesus Christ: God's "Yes" to us and our "Amen" to God.[1] "In Jesus Christ, Son of God and born of a woman, the 'Yes' of God to humanity and the 'Amen' of humanity to God become a concrete human reality"(8).

Unlike a concept, which is abstract, an image is a symbol: it embodies thought. We use the term "authority" in many ways. And so "authority" conjures up the parent, the police, government, naked power, learning, the "accepted," judgment, wisdom. How could the Commission reach agreement using a word so wide-ranging in its reference and especially in its imaginative, affective resonance?

The ecumenical strategy is crucial. Centuries of controversy have befogged terms, freighting them with interpretation and feelings that cloud and tangle discourse until it is fruitless; abstract doctrinal propositions like "primacy of ordinary power" are heard/received differently on every side. However, when explored through Scripture and tradition, authority emerges; it ceases to be hypothetical and becomes real – hence, identified, defined, assented to.

The Commission invokes and explores the biblical images of authority. In a style typical of the English Church, reflecting the genius of the language that was formed by Shakespeare and the translators of the Bible, ARCIC relies upon the strength and defining power of imagery.

The result is that ARCIC's joint statement is thoroughly scriptural, traditional, historical, positive theology. Midway through the document we arrive at a *sensus fidelium* regarding authority that the "Anglicans and Roman Catholics can agree in principle on" and so "move closer to an undivided sharing in Christ's one 'Amen' to the glory of God" (31).

Christ's "Amen"

The Commission turns to God, the author of life, who is the root of all true authority. God has renewed this life in Christ, and continues this work through his Spirit (7).

Authority is found in God's words and made most evident in the speech and action of the Son: "The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves" (Jn 14:10-11). Thus, *Gift of Authority* begins by establishing the scriptural foundation of Christian authority. "The life-giving obedience of Jesus Christ calls forth through the Spirit our 'Amen' to God the Father . . . . incorporated in the 'Amen' of Christ, through whom, with whom, and in whom we worship the Father" (10).

From the very beginning, the Commission takes Christ, the leader who serves, as the exemplar of authority: "For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). "For which is the greater, one who sits at table, or one who serves? Is it not the one who sits at table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Lk 22:24-7). "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (Jn 13:14).

The Church's "Amen"

ARCIC goes on to trace and clarify the Amen of the Church. The Father, Lord of all, sent the Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who sent his Spirit to guide and confirm us in the Way: "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6). "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and will declare to you the things that are to come" (Jn 16:13).

This Gospel comes to us in many ways – from the example of a parent's life, to direct participation in the liturgy – and all of these are words/deeds of God's Spirit dwelling in our hearts; they are examples of his love received and lived. So, people accept the Gospel in ways just as various. Moreover, when a believer says "Amen" to Christ individually, an "Amen" to the faith of the Christian community is always included. (12) Sustained by grace – through Holy Scripture, catechesis, prayer, sacraments, worship, the witness of believers of all times and places – "the believer is incorporated into an 'Amen' of faith, older, deeper, broader, richer than the individual's 'Amen' to the Gospel" (13).

"The 'Yes' of God commands and invites the 'Amen' of believers." Tradition refers to the process whereby this "Amen" is given (14). "I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received," Paul assured the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:3). ARCIC comments: "The Word who became flesh and dwelt among us is the centre of what was transmitted from the beginning and what will be transmitted until the end" (14). "The process of tradition entails the constant and perpetual reception and communication of the revealed Word of God in many varied circumstances and continually changing times" (16). This Tradition/Word is authority embodied. So, in an act of obedience, the Church discerns and receives the Scriptures as the norm of faith. At the same time, in an act of authority under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the Church received and handed on these texts, declared them inspired and that others were not to be included in the canon (22).

In a review of New Testament passages, ARCIC points to the early Church's development of doctrine, and its indefectibility (41). "In its continuing life, the Church seeks and receives the guidance from the Holy Spirit that keeps it faithful to apostolic Tradition (42). "God's 'Yes' revealed in Christ is the standard" of truth (43). The Commission cites Vatican II: "The whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 2:27) cannot err in matters of belief (*Lumen gentium*, 12).

Tradition as Ongoing Interpretation

God's designs as revealed in the First Testament, the beginnings of his "Yes" to humanity, we recognize as being received in a new way in the communities of the New Testament; they were reinterpreted and re-received. Reinterpretation continues.

The particularity of the people of God at different times and places results in varied reception as well as re-reception of the Word, with its particular expression:

> In the rich diversity of human life, encounter with the living Tradition produces a variety of expressions of the Gospel. . . As God has created diversity among humans, so the Church's fidelity and identity require not uniformity of expression and formulation at all levels in all situations, but rather catholic diversity within the unity of communion. This richness of traditions is a vital resource for a reconciled humanity (27)... The people of God as a whole is the bearer of the living Tradition, which is the *sensus fidelium*. This in turn is formed by the *sensus fidei*, which is discernment formed by worshipping and living in communion as a faithful member of the Church (29). The "sense of the faithful" is complementary to the *episcope* – the bishop's charism and function of ministry of memory and of oversight through discernment and judgment (30).

Anglicans and Roman Catholics can agree in principle on all of the above, but need to make a deliberate effort to retrieve this shared understanding. When Christian communities are in real but imperfect communion, they are called to recognize in each other elements of the apostolic Tradition which they may have rejected, forgotten or not yet fully understood. Consequently, they need to receive or re-appropriate these elements, and reconsider the ways in which they have separately interpreted the Scriptures. Their life in Christ is enriched when they give to, and receive from, each other. They grow in understanding and experience of their catholicity as the *sensus fidelium* and the ministry of memory interact in the communion of believers. "In this economy of giving and receiving within real but imperfect communion, they move closer to an undivided shar-

ing in Christ's one 'Amen' to the glory of God" (31). "The believers are held together in their communion by the 'common way' (*syn - hodos*, synod) that they walk together" (34). The Spirit confirms the local church in the truth: the life of the local church embodies the saving truth revealed in Christ" (35).

The Church's Synodality

The hitch seems to be in the exercise of authority – churches fall short of the Christ, their practice short of his way. ARCIC turns from the Good News to church history. ARCIC concludes that consulting the faithful is an aspect of episcopal oversight, which normally takes place at local and provincial synods or regional, national, or international councils.

> When bishops take counsel together they seek both to discern and to articulate the *sensus fidelium* as it is present in the local church and in the wider communion of churches. Their role is magisterial: that is, in this communion of the Churches, they are to determine what is to be taught as faithful to the apostolic Tradition. Roman Catholics and Anglicans share this understanding of synodality, but express it in different ways. (38)

According to ARCIC (44), the duty of maintaining the Church in the truth is one of the essential functions of the episcopal college. The authenticity of the teaching of individual bishops is evident when this teaching is in solidarity with that of the whole episcopal college. The exercise of this teaching authority requires that what it teaches be faithful to Holy Scripture and consistent with apostolic Tradition. This is expressed by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. "This teaching office is not above the Word of God, but serves it" (*Dei Verbum*, 10).

ARCIC starts from the Petrine texts in the New Testament and then quotes Augustine of Hippo, who linked the Lord's gift of the Spirit to the apostles, to the keys, and to church unity. This is a position which ARCIC supports on the basis of church history (46). On these grounds, ARCIC finds the meaning of the universal primacy. The papal ministry is to express the faith of the whole Church. "Any such definition is pronounced within the college of those who exercise *episcope* and not outside the college. . . . We believe this [specific ministry of the pope] is a gift to be received by all the Churches" (47) .

Fragility and Abuse

In the next section ARCIC recalls the fragility of God's ministers; it quotes Paul's "we have this treasure in clay jars" (2 Cor 4:7) and Christ's prayer for Peter "when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:32). Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (4), recognizes this fragility: "I have a clear sense of my own human frailty." Since authority is an exercise of God's love, ARCIC emphasizes that authority respects conscience: the divine work of salvation affirms human freedom. At the same time, as the Christian grows in the way of salvation offered through baptism, the disciple grows in the discipline of being a member of the Body of Christ. Lastly,

> There is also a discipline required in the exercise of authority. Those called to such a ministry must themselves submit to the discipline of Christ, observe the requirements of collegiality and the common good, and duly respect the consciences of those they are called to serve. (49)

There remain some issues, not so formidable when due weight is given to rite and collegiality. The practice of ordaining married men, hallowed in Eastern rites, has been enlarged by Anglicans and Lutherans to include women. The development is an enrichment of their rite. ARCIC realizes that the complex nature of authority in the Church points to an ongoing dynamic and leads to untidy concrete situations. The tension and seeming contradiction between reason and grace, obedience and freedom, and unity and diversity appear as fundamental Christian paradoxes. If recognized as such, they could resolve the last important block to Anglican–Roman Catholic unity. What remains? The main task: the reception of the theologians' work by the two communions.

In this context it is instructive to reflect on the address (reported by CNS[2]) of Timothy Radcliffe, the general superior of the Dominican Order, at the European Synod of Bishops in the fall of 1999. "Christianity makes an absolute claim for Christ. In our society, any absolute claim may appear to be totalitarian. In this century, Europe has been crucified by ideologies that made absolute claims: communism, fascism and nazism." Radcliffe explained that the doubts modern men and women have in regard to any absolute claim have led to a "crisis of authority" in the Church. Even Catholics take

the approach that "any external authority which tells me what I should believe or do is suspect." We should not respond to that fear, he continued, by merely asserting the authority of the Church ever more strongly. "People will either resist or take no notice." The church's attitude, he said, must be that taken by Jesus as he walked with the doubting disciples on the road to Emmaus, listening to them describe their sadness and fears as well as explaining the Scriptures to them. "The church must appeal to the minds of men and women, to make sense of their experience." "But this will not be enough, for our society is marked by a crisis of confidence in reason, too." Like Jesus, the Church must walk with people, sharing their journeys and being touched by their doubts. "We cannot respond to the crisis of authority just by asserting ever more strongly, hammering away," Radcliffe said. "For many people, this will confirm their fears about the nature of church authority."

Ken Johnstone

Dr Ken Johnstone, a Roman Catholic theologian and author of *Poetic Statement in Job*, is the Chair of the Edmonton Archdiocesan Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission.

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[1] Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, *The Gift of Authority: Authority in the Church III* (London and New York: Catholic Truth Society and Church Publishing, 1999), 31. References, by paragraph number, are run into the text.

[2] *The Prairie Messenger* (Oct 13, 1999), 2.

The Church We Love: A Conversation with Miroslav Volf

Readers of *The Ecumenist* know how much I admire Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace* (reviewed in Vol. 36, 3, pp 20-22). More recently, the same author has produced *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). The latter book was written in German, prior to *Exclusion and Embrace*, and later edited and reworked for a North American readership. Again, this book is learned and brilliant. Written in the first place for churches in the congregational tradition, the book offers an ecclesiology that is ecumenical in spirit and thought-provoking also for readers of other church traditions: in particular, Roman Catholics. In this article I respond to Volf's new book, acknowledge its ecumenical significance, and express my reservations in regard to some aspects of his study.

An Ecumenical Ecclesiology for the Free Churches

Volf stands in the tradition of what he calls "the free churches," which are gathered churches or churches that think of themselves as constituted as assemblies of believers. He recognizes that this form of Christianity is, at this time, greatly increasing its membership in the USA and also spreading rapidly in Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia. The biblical passage that guides these churches in their ecclesial self-understanding is Christ's saying, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be in the midst of them."

While Volf loves his own tradition, he is also critical of it. If the Church is simply the coming together of believers in Christ, of men and women who have a personal relationship to God in Christ, then the Church is tempted to understand itself as a human creation, the work of individual believers. Moreover, if each believer arrives with his or her own relationship to Christ, then the Church they set up remains external to their faith and, without their intending it, promotes an individualistic understanding of Christian and human existence. This is followed by problematic political and cultural consequences. Volf wants to reinterpret the free church tradition, in order to heighten its awareness of the Church as God's creation and to heal it from the cultural individualism inherited from the past. To accomplish this, Volf engages in an extensive conversation with Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic ecclesiologies, learning from some of their insights and clarifying what he regards as their shortcomings.

Whom does Volf choose as representative of these two traditions? For Eastern Orthodoxy, he turns to John Zizioulas, a well-known theologian active at the World Council of Churches; for Roman Catholicism, he turns to Joseph Ratzinger, an even better-known theologian holding a high position at the Vatican. Each author is carefully studied; each one gets forty pages. Volf realizes that Ratzinger represents only one theological current in the Catholic Church. He suggests that if he had taken Karl Rahner as his dialogue partner, he would not have found the contrast he sought. Volf tells us that he wanted to enter into conversation with theologians who provide a high ecclesiology, that is, an ecclesiology "from above."

For Zizioulas and Ratzinger the Church is God's creation, the body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, mediating faith, hope and love to its members. For Zizioulas the total redemptive mystery is present in the local church as it celebrates the apostolic liturgy. For Ratzinger, the total economy of salvation, God's triune self-donation, is present in the entire apostolic church in communion with the Pope. What Volf wants to learn from these theologians is that the Church is indeed God's doing and in this sense "from above"; faith and grace are not isolated divine gifts to individuals, but communicated by and through the believing community. He wants to show that even in his own tradition salvation is ecclesial.

At the same time, Volf is critical of several aspects of Zizioulas' and Ratzinger's ecclesiologies. I will mention three of them. First, according to both ecclesiologies, Christ is incarnate in the Church, which is his earthly body, so that the Church is lifted to the divine sphere and becomes a sacred subject or hypostasis over and above the community of the faithful. The Church is seen as possessing divine gifts independently of its members, gifts which it mediates to them from

above. Related to this is a second critique. If the Church is Christ's mystical body or the total Christ, then the individual members appear simply as cells of this body, serving the well-being of the whole, and thus lose their identity as persons exploring their own destiny in freedom. The third critique is that these two ecclesiologies provide no theological principles for understanding the relation between the one and the many. Orthodox ecclesiology offers theological grounding for the local church but provides no theological principle for its relation to the Church universal, while Catholic ecclesiology offers such strong theological grounding for the Church universal that the local churches lose their own ecclesial identity. In Ratzinger's theology, in particular, the Church as Christ's mystical body becomes a sacred monarchy.

In critical conversation with these classical ecclesiologies, Volf presents an ecclesial self-understanding appropriate for the free church tradition, one that appreciates the Church as God's creation and hence as mediatrix of faith and grace. Volf's theology recognizes the essentially social nature of Christian and human existence. Volf offers a deeper understanding of the biblical text, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I shall be in the midst of them." Here the people who gather in Christ's name are not the authors of the Church. Instead, the author of the Church is Christ, in the power of the Spirit, reconciling the community to the Father. The Church is, therefore, God's work.

At the same time, Volf insists, the Church is simply the assembly of the faithful in whose hearts God is pleased to dwell. This assembly celebrates the life-giving rituals Christ has initiated and is served by a ministry of charismatic origin, rather than being based upon what episcopal churches call the apostolic foundation. In the free church tradition, the Church does not become a sacred subject over and above the assembly.

Volf offers anthropological arguments, supported by personal experience, to overcome the individualistic heritage of the free church tradition. We come to be believers as we come to all of our ideas and commitments, namely through the mediation of other people: parents, family, friends, schools and parishes. Because their witness has spoken to us, because the Bible they gave us has impressed us, because the sermons we have heard have made sense to us, because conversations with others have cleared away some difficulties – thanks to all these interactions, we have become believers, and then we recognized that the Spirit had been at work in our journey from the very beginning. In this sense, then, Volf is willing to see the Church as "mother," giving birth to children of faith, but this "mother" is simply the assembly of the faithful, not a sacred subject situated above them.

In this, the first part of the book, Volf elaborates an ecumenical ecclesiology that transcends the radical either/or between episcopal and free churches. He moves beyond the old idea that if one interpretation of the Gospel is true, another must necessarily be false. Volf shows that the two types of ecclesiology, congregational and episcopal, are actually both "from below" and "from above": the two contain both objective and subjective elements and have catholic and eschatological significance, anticipating humanity's divine reconciliation on the last day. Volf's ecclesiological proposal has something important to say to theologians of any tradition. As a Roman Catholic, I am encouraged to enhance the congregational aspects given in my own tradition without fearing that I thereby delegitimate the apostolic inheritance.

In the second part of the book, Volf develops the same ecumenical theme by exploring, in great detail and in an original way, the nature of the Church through an analogy with God's internal communion as Father, Son and Spirit. While I greatly admire Volf's interesting contribution to theology, I am unable to follow him on his intellectual journey exploring the analogy between the Church and the triune God. My difficulties are related, in part at least, to the fact that my pastoral starting point is different from his. Volf's well-argued study has provoked me to express more clearly what I had held in rather vague terms in the past.

A Roman Catholic Reaction to Volf's Ecclesiological Proposal

While Volf is uneasy about possible inadequacies of low church ecclesiologies, I worry about the inadequacies of high church ecclesiologies. I am concerned that the latter emphasize biblical images proclaiming the Church's eschatological destiny and thus tend to obscure the Church's historical reality. What Catholics are looking for, I think, is an ecclesiology that sheds light on their experiences in the parish, the diocese and the wider church, including the gifts of grace – and the experiences of routinization, mediocrity, internal conflicts, and compromise with the powerful. If ecclesiastical teachers speak of the Church only as people of God, body of Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit, without clarifying

the eschatological meaning of these terms, then Catholics want to know what actual parish, diocese or world church they are talking about. In ecclesiology class, students often call the beautiful texts of Vatican Council II "science fiction," an imaginative world that does not exist anywhere. Is the true Church invisible (as Lutheran theologians like to say)? Or is it visible? If the latter is true, then the internal power struggles, the external political affiliations and the institution's economic sources are part of the Church; they may not be bracketed. Miroslav Volf does not address this pastoral issue directly.

An obvious answer to parishioners and students is that faith in God's Word makes us recognize God's redemptive presence in the Church. Only the eyes of faith can detect the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit in the historical church. The Church is "a mystery," according to Vatican II. Yet this is only a partial answer, for faith in God's Word also discloses God's judgment of the world, beginning with "God's own household," the Church itself (1 Pet. 4:17). While faith opens our eyes to the Church's undeserved indefectibility and its supernatural destiny, faith also reveals to us the manner in which the Church fails to live up to its high vocation. In the book of the Apocalypse, Christ addresses the seven churches as saviour and accuser. I still remember my excitement when reading – in the fifties! – Hans Urs von Balthasar's long essay, "*Casta Meretrix*" (in English: "The Chaste Whore"). In this essay, von Balthasar argues that church fathers and mediaeval theologians often spoke of the Church in paradoxical language; they saw the Church as at once holy and sinful, ever faithful and ever in need of conversion, as both *virgo* (virgin) and *meretrix* (whore).[1] These authors recognized contradictory dimensions in the history of the believing community. On the one hand, there is the indefectible divine presence in the Church, while on the other hand there are the Church's alliance with the powerful, its subservience to the rich, and its unwillingness to be led by the Spirit. Again, these failures are met by the divine gifts, the gospel message and the sacraments, ever summoning and enabling the Church to repent and renew its fidelity. After the Reformation, this paradoxical discourse was no longer used in the Catholic Church.

Volf's critique of Zizioulas' and Ratzinger's ecclesiology is well taken. According to both of these theologians, Christ's identification with the Church is so complete that the Church must be seen as his earthly body, a sacred subject, the bride of Christ "without spot or wrinkle," standing over and above the historical gathering of the faithful. Since the Reformation, the Catholic Church, relying upon this ecclesiology, has been increasingly unable to acknowledge its faults and failures. In this view, the Church *qua* church cannot sin. The members of the Church are sinners, and some of them sin in the name of the Church. However, the Church remains holy, ever free of sin. Today Pope John Paul II wants the Catholic Church in various parts of the world to confess its infidelities. Nonetheless, he continues to insist that these betrayals were committed by the sons and daughters of the Church and not by the Church itself, which remains immaculate, as sacred subject. If the Church's approval of slavery, its blessing on colonialism, its identification with the powerful, its teaching of contempt for Jews and other outsiders and its opposition to religious liberty and human rights are simply failings of the Church's sons and daughters, and do not involve the Church as such, then the Church is no longer a visible, historical entity. Instead, it follows the Lutheran proposal and becomes an invisible church.

Volf believes that the Church must be seen to be in harmony with itself. He explores the possibility of understanding the Church, the Churches and their interrelation as an image of the Trinity. However, because of the Church's earthly condition and its need of repentance and renewal, certain conflicts which challenge the believing community and its leaders belong – I would argue – to the Church's well-being. The Church creates community and mediates communion; yet from the beginning, it has also been a place of internal tensions. This is well documented in the Acts of the Apostles; this is confirmed by the study of the Church's history; moreover, this agrees with our own experience in the Church to which we belong and which we love. There is no renewal in the Church without antecedent conflict. Thanks to God's fidelity to the divine promises, the Church is never allowed to settle down in the *status quo*; it is always summoned by voices from within, or accused by voices from without, to become more faithful to its divine vocation. The paradoxical ecclesial discourse of ancient and mediaeval Christian authors, mentioned above, can be understood as pointing to this inner, Spirit-guided, repenting and recreating dynamism.

No sociologist has seen as clearly as Max Weber that the same religion gives rise to different interpretations according to the social location of the believers. In three famous essays in his *Sociology of Religion*,[2] Weber shows that the same religion has been understood and

practised differently by the aristocracy, soldiers, merchants, craftsmen, bureaucrats, workers, peasants, the poor, and so forth. Christians tend to flatter themselves by thinking that the inequalities of the wicked world are not replicated in the Church. As a consequence, Richard Niebuhr, in the wake of Max Weber, wrote *Sources of Denominationalism,*[3] revealing the impact of these social inequalities on the development of American Protestantism. Patterns of domination and marginalization in the Church are the material conditions in response to which the Spirit generates renewal movements and creates salvific tensions. This is a long way from the internal dynamics of the triune God.

This is one reason why I am not persuaded by Volf's idea that the Church as community and intercommunion has been made, in some significant way, in the likeness of the communion of God: Father, Son and Spirit. Volf admits (on page 196) that theological authors of the past have only occasionally and fleetingly made remarks likening the Church to the Trinity, and that this analogy has been explored in depth and in detail only in recent decades. I am not persuaded, for the reason mentioned above, that this new theological development is helpful.

There is a second reason why I read Volf's trinitarian theology with admiration, but fail to be persuaded by it. My earliest training in theology, guided by Thomas Aquinas,[4] created in me a preference for *apophatic* theology, the *via negativa*, the knowledge of God's unknowability. One consequence has been a reticence in regard to exploring the inner trinitarian life. We can know what God is not, rather than what God is. Even the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) declared that the dissimilarity between God and creatures is always greater than the similarity. Some theologians do prefer a *kataphatic* theology, a theology based on this similarity, and mention only in passing that God is really more different from us than like us. To the incautious reader, such a discourse easily suggests that thanks to the revealed dogma, we have become knowledgeable about God. According to negative theology, concepts such as father, son and spirit, inevitably drawn from the created order, do tell us something true about God in an analogous sense. However, such concepts do not shrink God's unknowability; they reveal, rather, the ever greater measure of our ignorance. Every truth which we hold about God (similarity) discloses at the same time the ever greater extent of divine incomprehensibility (dissimilarity). I do not wish to give up this agnostic side of the Roman Catholic tradition. While God, the Father, Son and Spirit, is announced in Scripture and tradition and hence plays a central role in the spiritual life of Christian believers, there seems to me no good pastoral reason why one should make extended theological speculation on the inner life of the Trinity part of the proclamation of the Good News.

Gregory Baum

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[1] Hans Urs von Balthasar, "*Casta Meretrix*," in *Sponsa Verbi* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1961), 203-305. For years I was unable to find this volume, then Volf's new book prompted me to make a new search, this time successfully. Von Balthasar's ground-breaking essay should be published in English translation.

[2] Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 80-137. This work was originally published in 1922.

[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: H. Holt, 1929).

[4] See especially Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, part I, q 12,13.

The Spirit of Hope: Conversations on Politics, Religion and Values

Charles Villa-Vicencio

Johannesburg, S.A.: Skotaville Publishers. 285 pp.

Well-known South African theologian Charles Villa-Vicencio was an appointed member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for several years. Now he has produced a remarkable book of conversations with people who resisted the apartheid legislation and who, in most instances, suffered persecution, exile or prison. In these conversations Villa-Vicencio explores a variety of questions. What prompted these persons to struggle against a powerful and ruthless state? What was their cultural and religious inheritance? What were and continue to be their spiritual resources? Among the twenty-one men and women interviewed are black people, people of Asian origin and white people. They include Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and people born into a believing community who, in despair over its indifference to justice, have lost their faith. The conversations with these men and women reveal their childhood experiences, the reasons why they became activists, the nature of their concrete political involvement and their involvement with religion and faith.

Because many courageous men and women resisted apartheid and risked their future in the land of their birth, choosing these twenty-one persons must have been a difficult task. Friends, colleagues and valiant allies of the author may have wondered why they were left out. Will they have a chance to tell their own story?

From a theological point of view, this book of conversations is both valuable and disturbing. What is puzzling for the theologian is that these men and women from different religious backgrounds, including some atheists, seem to have had the same faith: the deep conviction that apartheid was an outrage, that it had to be stopped, that it could be stopped, and that risking one's future and even one's life in the service of justice was worthwhile. These men and women felt that what they were doing was not a daring acrobatic exercise to test their hardiness, but an engagement that corresponded to the destiny of humanity. They felt obedient to a summons not of their own making; they were at peace with their own decision; and they felt reconciled with their deepest being. All of them thought they were faithful to a spiritual or ethical tradition.

Since they talked about their conviction in different ways, some invoking the name of God and others not, a purely conceptual analysis of what they believed would lead to the conclusion that they had very little in common. Yet the experience of solidarity which they all shared and their awareness that they were deeply united as brothers and sisters on the same path suggests that they shared the same praxis and the same inner light.

This praxis and this inner light were not shared by the religious communities to which these persons belonged! In the fourth volume of the five-volume report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we find an account of the role played by the Christian Churches and the other religious organizations during the apartheid years. Apart from a minority in their midst, these religious bodies adopted a compromising position. While they opposed the blessing of apartheid on the part of the Afrikaaner Church, they did not resist apartheid, nor did they tell their members to resist it. In other words, they did not share the praxis nor the inner light with the resisters interviewed in this book.

For Christian theologians this is a disturbing phenomenon. Must Christian ecclesiology take into account historical experiences such as those described in this book? Are there situations where the God of Jesus Christ becomes manifest not in the Church, but only in a remnant of the Church and in the remnants of other religious and secular communities? Are we thus to understand the scriptural passage "the Spirit blows where he wills"?

For the theologian, Villa-Vicencio's study raises another problem related to the first. We learn from the conversation with Nelson Mandela that, during his long years in prison on Robbin Island, the prisoners often engaged in religious conversations and learned to honour and appreciate religions other than their own. Christians were encouraged and sustained by the spiritual discourse of Hindus and Muslims. The Church is nervous

about such a practice. Why? Because such a practice, it is said, leads to relativism. Were the prisoners on Robbin Island truly relativists? Were they not willing to lay down their life in resistance to injustice? Relativists, I think, were the South African Churches who wanted to follow the teaching of Jesus without resisting apartheid.

Villa-Vicencio's book suggests that resistance to injustice and oppression, accompanied by solidarity with the victims, is the historical location where the world religions, including Christianity, reveal their depth and their power. This is where an identical praxis and a shared inner light graciously emerge, where we find a common faith that yet allows the believers to remain faithful to their own religious tradition. Conversely, conformity to a world of inequality, contempt and exclusion leads to spiritual blindness and the absence of faith in all religious traditions, including Christianity. Is this true?

Gregory Baum

The Twentieth Century: A Theological Overview[1]

Gregory Baum, ed.

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books; Ottawa: Novalis; London: G. Chapman, 1999. 263 pp.

It was a splendid idea for Gregory Baum to invite some of his ecumenical colleagues to contribute to this valuable and sometimes provocative survey, which seeks to show that the story of twentieth-century theology has been one of both fidelity and anguish – fidelity to God's revealed word under changing historical conditions, and anguish over the unanswered questions and the powerlessness of truth in a sinful world.

His team comprises both Protestants and Catholics from leading North American universities, as well as some distinguished European scholars. Predictably they cover such major topics as the two World Wars, the Great Depression, the rise of Fascism, the Holocaust, as well as more far-reaching developments such as the impact of the women's movement or the ecological crisis in today's world.

Douglas J. Hall leads off by pointing out that the catastrophes of the First World War were made more acute because the dominant liberal Christian theology of the day had so completely fostered the optimistic climate of "the religion of progress," and had largely abandoned the vocabulary of earlier Christian (and Jewish) attempts to come to terms with disaster. It was no less fateful that the more conservative theologians so readily endorsed their nation's war-time cause, and claimed divine approval for their side. The spectacle of such mutually exclusive pronouncements, and the incompatibility of the war's conduct with Christian doctrines of love and peace, destroyed Christianity's credibility for many of the survivors, and discredited much of theology as hypocrisy.

The post-1918 theological scene was marked by extreme confusion and uncertainty. Striking political events, such as the Communist Revolution in Russia or the rise of National Socialism in Germany, took their toll. Bernard Dupuis describes sympathetically the response of the Russian exiles seeking to defend Orthodoxy, while James Reimer outlines the scandalous divisions amongst the German theologians of the 1930s, when neither Paul Tillich's religious socialism nor Karl Barth's and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's defence of confessing church neo-orthodoxy prevented the widespread support of Nazism by the theologians of the so-called "German Christian" movement, who indeed betrayed their craft. More notable was the renaissance of Catholic intellectual life in France where Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, Henri de Lubac and others in conjunction with literary and philosophical scholars represented what Joseph Komonchak calls a return from exile after the bleak crisis over "modernism." Both he and Victor Consemius see these men's ideas as formative in the restoration of a publicly significant Catholic theology which not only held the Church together during the Second World War, but provided the seed-bed for the Second Vatican Council.

Not surprisingly the recurrent crises of the capitalist order prompted North American theologians in particular to formulate their protest against the resulting in-

justices. Donald Schweitzer gives a splendidly succinct description of Reinhold Niebuhr's trenchant and influential critique of existing political circumstances, and also of the parallel movement in Canada, the Fellowship for a Christian Order. In fact, the latter, though largely unknown today, was seminal in setting the moral agenda for much of Canadian politics, both at home and abroad, and can be said to be still having an impact decades later. Certainly the Canadian political scene allowed these advocates more direct influence than was possible in the United States. The Fellowship's champions were, and often still are, possibly too eager to see God's Kingdom in terms of an achievable political utopia. But their debate with Niebuhr was valuable in delineating what can be hoped for in history.

In the 1950s, Protestant theology lived off the massive achievements of Niebuhr and Barth. But in the following decades, as described by Gary Dorrien, the challenge to all authority, and especially to Christian authority, spawned a host of liberationist, feminist and other politically radical movements which repudiated the past.

For Catholics, the sense of renewal launched by the Second Vatican Council did something to preempt many of these feelings. The Council, and equally the 1968 Medellin Conference, as analyzed by the Mexican-American scholar Virgilio Elizondo, expanded horizons, challenged the Roman Catholic Church's European predominance and established the preferential option for the poor, especially of the Third World. The pastoral and theological significance of these developments is still being worked out. But the impact is undeniable. For the future, claims Lee Cormie, the great themes at the heart of Jewish and Christian theologies – creation, fall, liberation/redemption, salvation – will have renewed relevance in meeting the challenges of social, political and technological globalization. The sceptic must, however, ask whether this is not just wishful thinking at a time when faith and ethics are so often treated as irrelevant, or reduced to the private sphere. However, Harvey Cox, in his essay, joins others in disputing the view that growing secularization would and will lead to the disappearance of religion. The evidence is just not there. Rather, even where institutional and intellectual Christianity of a traditional type has been weakened, there are many other plural forms of religion which seek a re-ordering of worldviews, with or without the Enlightenment's blessing.

Gregory Baum, in his own chapter, examines the impact of Marxist ideas on Christian theology, suggesting that these have strengthened the sense of outrage against structural injustices and lent impetus to the theological praxis supporting the healing and redemption of the world. In a world now dominated by neo-liberal ideologies, such ideas are still necessary. In his concluding remarks, Baum suggests that one of the most significant shifts in the last forty years has been that "the emancipatory dimension of divine redemption has assumed, for the first time, a central place in the construction of Christian theology."

These essays portray the intellectual creativity, the rich imagination and the passion displayed by theologians in recent decades. Baum is confident that future theologians will demonstrate similar qualities. If they do, then indeed, as Baum says at the end of his concluding article, "the Spirit will continue to speak to the Churches in the coming century."

John S. Conway

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[1] This review was written by John S. Conway, professor emeritus of history at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C, Canada. It is taken, by permission, from his Newsletter (VI, 1, January 2000) on contemporary church history. (e-mail: <jconway@interchange.ubc.ca>; internet: http://omni.cc.perdue.edu/~gmork/akz/index.html).

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