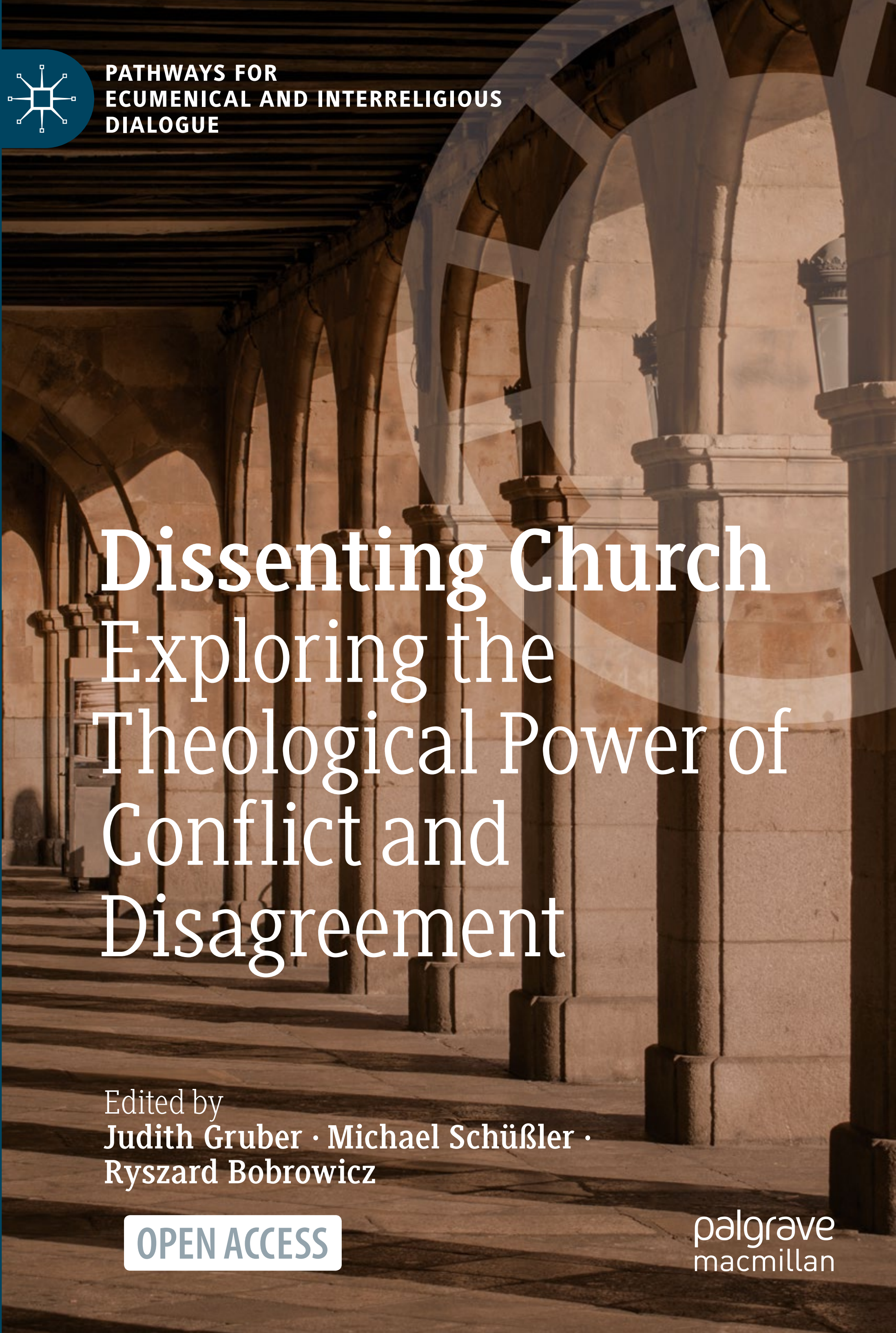

PATHWAYS FOR
ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE

Dissenting Church

Exploring the Theological Power of Conflict and Disagreement

Edited by
Judith Gruber · Michael Schüßler ·
Ryszard Bobrowicz

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Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue

Building on the important work of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network to promote ecumenical and inter-faith encounters and dialogue, the Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue series publishes scholarship on such engagement in relation to the past, present, and future. It gathers together a richly diverse array of voices in monographs and edited collections that speak to the challenges, aspirations, and elements of ecumenical and interfaith conversation. Through its publications, the series allows for the exploration of new ways, means, and methods of advancing the wider ecumenical cause with renewed energy for the twenty-first century.

Judith Gruber
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Editors

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Praise for *Dissenting Church*

"'I'm for Paul … I'm for Apollos'. This book reminds us that conflict of interpretation has marked the Christian community from the very beginning. And it claims that such a dynamism of creative contestation is indeed constitutive of the process of Christian tradition throughout the centuries. With Pope Francis' call for synodal openness to a diversity of views in the church, readers will find in this book much food for thought."

—Ormond Rush, *Australian Catholic University*

"Dissent, contestation, conflict, disagreement in Church self-understandings are all considered in theological idiom in this book. It is a book which challenges all readers to sit up and to re-think how the Church is, and how it might be. The diversity of thinking invites the reader to consider the theological possibilities that emerge when practices of contestation and informed debate are recognised as central in the making of ecclesial identity. The negotiation of controversy is an important challenge, particularly in a time of synodal considerations."

—Fáinche Ryan, *Trinity College Dublin*

"Many people are conflict averse in matters of the heart pertaining to religious issues, while others seem to thrive on antagonism on such matters. Dissenting Church offers an invaluable resource for those who are searching for ways to analyze and address conflict in these matters by exploring myriad instances of such contestation. The benefit of this volume is that seasoned scholars offer helpful examples for delineating foundational categories, arguments, and methods across a spectrum of core areas: liturgy, canon law, gender and sexuality, race and postcolonial complications."

—Bradford E. Hinze, *Fordham University*

"Explorations in Theology, Conflict, and Community' presents a truly novel perspective in contemporary theology. Rather than perpetuating the idealized portrayal of the Catholic Church as inherently harmonious, this book boldly embraces contestation and conflict as foundational elements of ecclesial life. With dissent and disagreement serving as pivotal concepts, the book offers a fresh approach to understanding global religious dynamics.

Edited to do justice to the plurality of ecclesial experience, this volume challenges conventional wisdom, urging theological reflection to engage with the complexities of dissent within Catholicism and beyond. It navigates through conflict fields such as liturgy, canon law, gender, sexuality, race, postcolonial constellations, and interreligious dialogue, compelling readers to confront uncomfortable truths and explore transformative possibilities.

Rich in subtle reflection and thoroughly engaging, 'Dissenting Church' is an essential reading for those seeking to unravel the dynamic interplay between dissent, conflict, and community within today's ecclesial landscapes. It offers a conceptual framework that brings theology into dialogue with the social dynamics of our world, providing valuable insights for scholars, clergy, and seekers alike."

—Marta Bucholc, *University of Warsaw*

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Judith Gruber, Michael Schüßler, and Ryszard Bobrowicz

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a surge in protest movements around the world. As planet Earth shows its vulnerability and a global pandemic has fundamentally recalibrated the textures of our individual and collective lives, a shared concern for survival triggers individuals and groups to contest the status quo and to call for alternative solutions to the pressing issues of our time. These problems confront us with irreducible complexity, and therefore trigger a wide variety of protest responses across the political spectrum, such as the global 'Fridays for Future' demonstrations, or the protests against coronavirus restrictions that have

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found strong support, particularly among the constituencies of right-wing, populist parties. Dissenting movements, thus, can take a range of forms. At their core, however, they share a common pattern, i.e. (1) they seek to manage the irreducible complexity of reality, (2) they make normative claims about what constitutes a good life, and (3) they offer visions of transformation and hope for a future. This is the stuff of theology, and, indeed, religious and theological messages are often explicitly present in protest movements. Yet, paradoxically, within religious communities, protest is often seen either as inherently intrinsic to, or simply antithetical to, religious loyalty (or 'faithfulness').

There are thus strong reverberations between theology and dissent. Nevertheless, little direct attention has been given to a theological assessment of contestation. This is all the more surprising since religious communities are affected to their very core by contestation around normative claims. The Catholic Church is a strong case in point. Compared to other religious communities, it has developed a very explicit discourse of normative claims and established a firmly institutionalized, hierarchical system for interpreting and applying these claims. The overall goal is to guarantee the diachronic stability and synchronic unity of its tradition.[1] However, even though the unity and stability of the church are upheld through an interplay of theological ideals, historical constructions, and institutional warrants, normative claims (and more fundamentally, the status of normativity) in the church are subject to strong contestation.

The controversies surrounding Pope Francis' papacy exemplify it well. Francis' leadership of the church is faced with various forms of protest that have amounted to open dissent in the so-called 'Dubia'-letter by four cardinals, published in response to papal reform proposals.[2] The 2019 'Amazon-Synod', part of the pope's program toward a synodal church, too, gave rise to heated conflicts that even culminated in a criminal act—the theft of the 'Pachamama' Statues from the Carmelite Church of Santa Maria Traspontina in Rome. For the synod members, the display of these traditional statues from the Amazon region during background events of the synod symbolized the need to decolonize the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), so that its theological tradition can unfold its full universal potential. Among traditionalist Roman Catholic (RC) circles, however, it caused outrage, including charges of heresy and apostasy, and, ultimately, the statues were stolen and tossed into the Tiber. The perpetrator was a self-professed RC traditionalist with ties to US-American white supremacist movements, and a founding member of the 'St. Boniface Institute', that "fight[s] from the heart of Europe for the restoration of our wonderful Catholic culture" to protect it against "paganism" and a "globalist agenda."[3] Within the church, there is thus ongoing, strong contestation regarding the appropriateness of divergent theological stances, and, as the Pachamama incident clearly shows, the conflict surrounding normative theological claims within the church is inextricably tied to wider political fault lines which shape societal debates beyond the church.

Sociological research documents that such contestation is not an isolated incident limited to Francis' pontificate, or the Catholic Church.[4] Over the last few decades, a host of social-empirical studies has highlighted the malleability of ecclesial identity and identified some of the conflicts that arise from these ongoing negotiations regarding its scope, form, and content. To pick just one example: Beaudoin and Hornbeck[5] use the lens of deconversion studies[6] to interpret qualitative data collected in narrative interviews with (former) members of the Catholic church in the US. This allows them to show how persons traverse in and out of the orbit of normative Catholic beliefs and practices at various points in their faith biography. These stories undermine static and binary notions of religious belonging and further show that the right to construct, maintain, and police the boundaries of normative Catholicism is distributed unevenly along axes such as race, gender, and ecclesial status. Other studies show the fluidity of ecclesial identity at the institutional level.[7]

It would be a mistake to understand this elasticity of ecclesial identity and the conflicts that surround the politics of belonging to the church as recent phenomena that could be solely explained through the secularizing and individualizing tendencies of modernity. On the contrary, historical research provides abundant evidence to confirm that such conflict deeply pervades and informs ecclesial traditions. In view of this research, the history of Christianity must be read as a history of conflict and disagreement. More recent studies through the lens of cultural studies even argue that contestation around normative claims has been a formative feature of ecclesial traditions that is inscribed into their very beginnings. Studying the political, cultural, social, intellectual, and economic milieus in the midst of which the church has consolidated itself, these studies do not assume the existence of a pre-given normative ecclesial identity but reveal how a discourse of orthodoxy has emerged from intensely contested negotiations regarding what counts as normative. Ultimately, this challenges us to critically interrogate the traditional Eusebian mode of church history in which orthodoxy represents a pure and original Christianity, with heresy as its later corruption.[8] Instead, it offers interpretative frameworks for the narration of ecclesial history that allow us to consider orthodoxy and heresy as twinned discursive constructions.[9] The normative discourse of orthodoxy, in other words, is not simply a matter of naming pre-given differences. Rather, it proceeds by establishing clarifying doctrinal distinctions and serves to simplify relations of power in diverse historical contexts which are characterized by profound social, cultural, and theological complexity and ambiguity.[10] Historical and sociological research, in short, suggests understanding contestation not as an extraordinary phenomenon, but as a constitutive dimension of normative ecclesial traditions.

The question, then, is how we can relate these constitutive practices of contestation to normative claims of diachronic stability and synchronic unity in the church. Grating harshly against the theological self-understanding of the church as "one, holy, catholic and apostolic", these empirical re-readings of ecclesial identity press for a theological reflection of conflict. This does not mean that contestation has not been examined from theological perspectives before. However, theological ideals and historical narratives of unity, rather than conflict, typically remain the organizing principle in a theological interpretation of contestation in the church. Differences within, across, and beyond ecclesial traditions are often subjected to linear narratives of church history that frame them as either a history of decline from a pristine origin or as ongoing development towards an ever greater knowledge of God. Ultimately, however, such patterns that privilege cohesion in the theological self-understanding of the church result in a theological lacuna: Subjecting inner-ecclesial conflict to the orienting principles of unity and stability, such theologies of conflict fail to grasp contestation as a constitutive dimension of ecclesial tradition and thus cannot develop a robust theological response to the challenge of historical and sociological research and its exposure of how fundamentally contestation has shaped the development of normative claims in church traditions. In this sense, contestation remains a blind spot in theological reflection.

This volume invites readers to depart from an understanding of contestation as a phenomenon in a church that is 'normally' stable and cohesive. Instead, it seeks to make conflict and disagreement the point of departure for theological reflection and construction. The question that guides all its contributions is how we can understand conflict and disagreement theologically, in a constructive way that resists the temptation to subject the contestative heterogeneity within ecclesial traditions to notions of pre-existing stability and unity. And while in this introduction so far, the Catholic church has served as an example to map the theological issues at stake in a theological reflection of conflict, the book chapters will explore these themes more broadly within and beyond what has been identified as the boundaries of Christian traditions. The syntactic ambiguity of the volume's title, *Dissenting Church*, is thereby deliberate. Speaking both of a church that dissents, as well as to ways of dissenting to the church, it serves as an initial way of trying to capture the many and divergent forms of contestation practices that we have to consider as we reflect theologically on the role of conflict in the making of ecclesial identity.

Two Research Niches: The Role of Religious Communities in Conflict and the Role of Conflict in Religious Communities

Because this volume argues that conflict and disagreement are constitutive of the ecclesial community, it is situated not only in the peculiar practical surrounding described above but also in a specific theoretical context. Although theological considerations of dissent remain underexplored (at least within the context of Christian theology),[11] the broader questions of conflict and dissent observed a systematic growth of academic interest in recent decades. The research units concerned with the so-called "peace and conflict studies" gradually increased in numbers since about the 1950s,[12] highlighting the complex role of conflict in the life of communities and providing the theoretical foundations for successive generations of peace operations, most visible in the activity of the United Nations, from traditional peacekeeping, through peace enforcement, to peacebuilding and hybrid missions.[13]

But while conflict itself received a more in-depth treatment, religion remained an underappreciated element of such studies, which led some to go as far as to consider religion "the missing dimension of statecraft."[14] Even in 2018, during the preparation of the UN's Global Compact on Refugees, the Vatican had to insist on recognizing religious communities and faith-based organizations (FBOs) as essential actors in refugee relief.[15] However, since the 1990s, a smaller subfield of religion, peace, and conflict studies has begun to grow.[16] Providing an alternative to the traditionalist thinking (which assumed that religious devotion is required for peace) and hard secularism (which negates the possibility of any peace with religion still present), the new subfield offered what Nathan C. Funk and Christina J. Woolner described as a “flexible approach,” which underlined the ambivalent status of religion in peace-making.[17]

And yet, even then, as Atalia Omer argued, the treatment of the subject did not go far enough. Just as the broader field of conflict studies emphasizes that conflict is neither inherently good nor bad, the primary argument made by scholars working in religion, peace, and conflict studies states that “religion can be good and bad.”[18] The key lines of understanding followed two main lines: either religion was a subject of interest because of religiously articulated violent ideologies or because of the constructive function, “utility,” it provided.[19] By that, the field, in its current form, is guided by a neoliberal logic that reduces religion to a capital that can be used and abused and is focused on terms such as “public good,” “inclusive societies,” and “social cohesion.”[20] As Omer wrote, the field was focused primarily on

> practice to show the effectiveness and usefulness of religion as a tool and capital rather than a substantive scrutiny of religion, violence and justice-oriented peace. Hence, distinct from what Muslim South African liberation theologian Farid Esack calls “liberatory religion,” the religion of the religion and peace field is accommodationist.[21]

The practical focus did not leave too much room for reflexivity. Thus, Omer underlined the need to put peace and conflict studies in collaboration with critical studies to provide space for both decolonization and critical reflection on the use of such terms as ‘religion’ and ‘peace’ and their employment in peace-making practice.[22]

The practical focus did not leave much space for dialogue with theology either. While religion, peace, and conflict studies underlined the need to analyze the role of religion and religious communities in conflicts, theologians increasingly voiced the need to provide a greater understanding of the role conflicts play in religious communities. For example, in her recent *Introduction to Christian Ethics*, Ellen Ott Marshall argued that conflict, the fact of different ideas and visions of the good life striking together, should be placed at the center of ethical concerns within Christian communities. Marshall argued that, unlike violence, conflict could be an adequate reaction and a positive force for change in situations of injustice. Thus, she argued not for conflict avoidance or management, which for long dominated peace and conflict studies, but for conflict transformation, an approach that viewed conflict as a possible means of changing the structural causes behind injustice.[23]

The need to seriously consider instead of avoiding conflict understood as the struggle over conceptions of the good life has been recently reiterated by various Christian denominations. The recent revival of Scandinavian Creation Theology in Nordic Protestant theology underlined serious consideration for conflict as an essential element of human interdependence. The tension between different ideas of the good life striking together and the underlying universality of creation is a critical consideration for what K.E. Løgstrup described as an "ethical demand."[24] The papal call "for a culture of encounter" pointed to the need to "not just seeing, but looking; not just hearing, but listening; not just passing people by, but stopping with them; not just saying 'what a shame, poor people!' but allowing yourself to be moved with compassion," calling for the move away from indifference to action.[25] The World Council of Churches' reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine also showed a more nuanced understanding of conflict. The fact that the Russian Orthodox Church was not expelled despite its support for the aggression resulted from the institutional self-understanding as an open platform for conversation, confrontation, and reconciliation, rather than simple exclusion.[26]

This volume is meant to fill both the theoretical and theological niche for a more nuanced understanding of conflict and dissent highlighted by these different stakeholders. For this purpose, it turns to the Roman Catholic Church as a particularly apt case for thinking through the conceptual relations between normativity and contestation in community-formation: The RCC is a social body and corpus of knowledge that has an explicitly normative discourse of self-understanding, in which sovereignty of interpretation is distributed in a firmly institutionalized, and hierarchical, way. It can thus serve as a test case to explore the ways in which contestation can be acknowledged as a foundational part of any community and the normative claims it makes about reality. Focusing primarily on Roman Catholic ecclesiology but also inviting voices from other religious traditions, it aims to bring systematic theological reflection, sociological considerations, critical studies, including the inequalities of power relations, as well as practical experience to grasp the significance of dissent in concrete conflict fields and offer constructive proposals on how theology and ecclesiology of dissent could be shaped.

Contested Fields of Conflict

Churches and religious communities are not separate parts of culture and society, but variously combined and intertwined social power structures. While the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council followed the discovery of its "*ad intra/ad extra*—constellation" as a Church in the modern world (*Gaudium et spes*), this opened up blurred lines of common borders today. Consequently, asking what should be the current *loci theologici* aims beyond traditional religious or ecclesiastical boundaries and calls for a broader public theology. This volume leaves aside traditional categorizations and discusses more church- and socially linked conflict fields, regarding their entanglements, on the same level. Having a closer look, one can see how other differences seem to cut across many fields, like unity/identity/diversity, the decolonial critique of Western patterns, or the persistence of gendered categories in religion. Thus, the book is divided into six sections, each dealing with another conflict field.

The first field explores the theological cogency of conflict and contestation from different perspectives. It asks which theological methods and frameworks are suitable to grasp the formative role of contestation in ecclesial traditions—and can contestation become a point of departure for theologizing? It is about the *philosophical and theological foundations of conflict, contestation, and community.*

This section begins with a theological reflection by *Annemarie Mayer*, who, by taking a closer look at ecumenism and the consequences of the Protestant Reformation, argues that a moralizing view of conflict should be replaced by a constructive one. Mayer underlines the need to reject the temptation to turn conflict personal, by ascribing it to a particular person rather than a set of ideas, making it easy to dismiss it as a shameful, personal weakness. Instead, as she argues, conflict should be faced and resolved, in line with what Pope Francis described as "the third way." An ecumenical effort, thus, is an effort at overcoming contradictory identities in the process of engaging with conflict, rather than reifying it within different confessional identities.

John Caputo develops an even more radical theological proposal by arguing that dissent is the very expression of living—the necessity and standard, rather than the exception and extraordinariness. He rejects the notion that things can possess an 'essence' which can simply settle the debates on a particular issue. Quite the opposite, he argues that under the seeming continuity, one can find a series of interruptions, differences, and contestations—instead of essence, things possess a history. Thus, Caputo argues that living is about a continuous process of contestation and dissent as the norm, viewed as creative processes that support the search for truth. He postulates a turn to radical theology, then, as an ongoing search for the kingdom-to-come, in which the words "to-come" take precedence in the exercise of apophatic imagination.

The ritual dimension of religion is often described as a crucial identity marker of Churches and religious communities. It is therefore no wonder, that *liturgy*, the subject of the second section of the book, is one of the most contested fields in Christianity. On the one hand, worship and Sunday services are seen as religious core practices defended against the smallest modifications. On the other hand, the liquidity and diversification of society and religious belongings are transforming and challenging those descriptions and underlying the need for the "planetary turn" away from the Anthropocene and towards the land and earth.[27]

This section begins with a chapter by *Joris Geldhof* who describes the current conflict within the Catholic Church between liturgical traditionalists and defenders of the liturgical reforms started by the Second Vatican Council. Geldhof criticizes both sides as, in his view, they employ the logic of division, which accentuates the essentialization of differences and particularism. This problematizes differences and does not allow us to answer what Geldhof views as the most important liturgical question: How can expressions of liturgy respond to people's lives, with their concerns and commitments? Instead, Geldhof argues that there is a need to embrace the logic of diversity instead, with an understanding of liturgy as a response to Christ's universal call to holiness, which brings together people of different languages, from diverse cultures in diverse circumstances.

Cláudio Carvalhaes argues that the history of Christianity is a story of "extraordinary contestation" that is normalized. He sees grave danger in that, as it leads to self-enclosure and loss of life in a religious tradition. Thus, Carvalhaes postulates a need for awakening from such normalcy via two ways of dissent. Firstly, he views dissent of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, with their dialectical thinking, as a space for engaging with truth understood as always in a relationship. Secondly, he argues for an ecological transformation via the "dissent of the land," the need to reconceptualize theology from an earthless focus on humankind to one that appreciates other forms of land and considers the broader environment in which we live.

In the Catholic Church, *canon law*, discussed in the third section of the book, defines some of the constitutional foundations as unchangeable divine law. After the scandals of child abuse by Catholic priests and reform processes like the German "Synodal Path," the pressure rises for a constitutional reform of the clerical and hierarchical ecclesiology of the canon law in force. The theological discourse analyzes that there is not only a need for a personal change of priests and bishops, but for systemic changes in the normative, theological groundings. This section explores these groundings and discusses emerging conflicts and disagreements.

The chapter by *Bernhard Sven Anuth* provides a review of the position of the Catholic Church on conflict and dissent as regulated by canon law. As Anuth argues, the canonical position is clear—conflict and dissent should be reduced to the highest extent possible, allowing for only minor deviations from it in the form of obedient silence. He points to the general obligation of all Catholics to maintain communion with the church both in expression and behavior, followed by regulations that aim at keeping dissent within the private sphere. Anuth also describes the special status of clerics and other multiplicators, including religious education teachers and theologians, as well as how conflict is regulated in specific relationships: between individuals, between Catholic employers and employees, as well as between individuals and church authorities, especially in terms of discipline and doctrine.

While Anuth discusses the law in books, *Judith Hahn* refers to the law in practice. She argues that deviation and deterioration of institutional norms within the Catholic Church are widespread, which is a result of a mismatch between the cultural goals and the social structures that obstruct them. Based on Robert K. Merton's approach, Hahn argues that this mismatch finds expression in four deviant approaches to institutional norms: innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Each of them leads to anomie, i.e., norms losing the power to regulate behavior. As Hahn argues, the absolutist approach of the standard normative model, however, is unable to account for these problems, as it ignores the sociological reality, instead embracing the simplified model of command and obedience. Thus, Hahn postulates a socio-theological reassessment of dissent as having a prophetic dimension, indicating malfunctions of the system and possible ways of improving it.

The intersection of *gender and religion* plays a major role in current ecclesial debates. They are often framed in ways that make non-male, non-heterosexual members of the church hypervisible: Most prominently, they revolve around the question of whether women or homosexual believers can be granted access to ecclesial decision-making processes and sacramental performance. In a fourth field of conflict, this volume asks for the complex nature of gender discourses with the global church by looking into the different ways in which categories of gender, religion, race, and class have been intersected in ecclesial traditions. Which theologies can emerge when we unsettle the deadlocked conflict around gender and religion in the church and expose the toxic masculinity that it reproduces?

Nadine Bowers Du Toit engages with the deadlocked conflicts affecting most of those on the margins in terms of gender, race, sexuality, or class by discussing the increasing challenges faced by women in the South African ecclesial context. As she points out, the gains made by the previous generations of female church leaders and theologians are eroded by the re-emergence of right-wing and fundamentalist discourses. This is magnified by the patriarchal normativity of ecclesial structures, theological positions that often play the role of "locks" on them, and the added challenges of intersectional marginalization. To counteract the increasing polarization, Bowers Du Toit encourages allyship, partnership, and solidarity. While she is clear that the engagement of those in advantageous positions is not necessary for social change, it is warranted. As she points out, the 'separate tables' created by those on the margins are separate only because of exclusion; they should not be understood as linear, thereby barring the non-excluded to stand in solidarity with the marginalized.

Michael Schüßler turns to the construction of the advantageous group and discusses the challenges arising from an essentialist approach to masculinity, which views it as a stable category with a set of given, unchangeable characteristics developed in contrast to femininity. As he argues, such a hegemonic view is a stumbling block in the development of more inclusive environments, to which the Catholic Church contributes in its defense of the traditional family and the ideal of a clerical man. This underlies the sexual abuse crisis, discrimination of LGBTQI+, or the concealment of colonial heritage in the theological understanding of the Global South. Thus, Schüßler calls for recognition and normalization of diversity, instead of a continuous reproduction of toxic ideals of masculinity. He views the existence of the conflicting masculinities as hopeful and sees the developments of the so-called Synodal Path as promising.

In several regions of the world, the relationship between Christians and Muslims, in particular, is framed as conflict. In many of these instances, the category of religion is intersected with categories of race and ethnicity.

The fifth field of conflict investigates the theologies that emerge through these *interreligious encounters in a postcolonial constellation*. More specifically, it explores how Islam as a minority religion in Europe and the USA is informed by Christian pre-conceptions of 'religion,' and seeks to critique the white Christian privilege that is silently, but pervasively, at work in these interreligious encounters. Overall, they thereby call attention to a contestation that goes beyond mere doctrinal or practical differences between religious traditions (possibly to be addressed and solved in interreligious dialogue). Instead, they show how contestation of religious identity is key to shaping the political and epistemological frameworks of modernity/coloniality.

Adil Hussain Khan exposes the absurdity of secularism by highlighting the conflict at the boundary between interreligious relations and international relations. Khan points out that the principle of secular liberalism which undergirds modern political theory emerged in response to the post-Reformation Catholic-Protestant wars. Although the separation of politics and religion soothed this European crisis, Khan insists that secularism is a European creation that fails on an international stage full of nations that refuse this separation. Domestically, the very need for interreligious relations debunks the secular promise of a nation free from religious conflict. Secularism is made absurd when religion explicitly mixes with international relations (in the case of the Pope meeting the Iranian president in 2016). The fact that the failures of secular liberalism are invisible to European nation-states demonstrates a festering neo-colonialism in the current world order. Khan ends by pointing out that Europe imposed and continues to impose secularism as a way to make other nations docile, despite their refusal to take it up.

Mara Brecht discusses the conflation of race and religion emerging from Donald Trump's 2015 pronouncement to ban Muslims from entering the USA. Intrigued by the points of reasoning for and against this ban, and its relevance for Christian theology, she states that the link between a person's body and their religion is constructed in the social imagination and that some groups are overracialized (Muslims and Sikhs, for example) while white bodies are underracialized. Considering that the concepts 'race' and 'religion' were both developed in the European imagination during the colonial era, 'white privilege' is simultaneously 'Christian privilege'. However, Brecht builds upon the political concept of Christian privilege by proposing that the link takes place between a body and one's soteriological status. The reason which barred the Muslim Ban was formulated by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is violating the principle of religious tolerance as well as having the potential to exacerbate the link between dark skin and religious threat. Brecht goes further, though, to argue that it is Christian soteriology that lurks in the background of the racialization of religion and determines who ought to have access to life in the USA, revealing how inextricably entangled Christian knowledge production is into the distribution of racial privilege.

The last section revisits the questions posed by the first section. After being through these generic case studies of dissent and disagreement, what can be followed about *constructing theology and describing ecclesiology*? What kind of epistemological questions are at stake, when it comes to conflict as a grounding figure of theology?

Marika Rose calls for the recognition of groundlessness in theology. As she argues, the core challenge in European thinking is its insistence on dividing the world into what Carl Schmitt described as "the friend" and "the enemy." As she points out, while Christianity rejected many divisions, it did that to replace them with an ultimate one—the division between Christian and non-Christian. As she argues, while European wars of religion decreased the insistence on confession as a dividing line, it has been simply replaced by another—between the whites and non-whites. Using Lacanian psychoanalysis, Rose argues that this divisive thinking is a result of the longing for wholeness and oneness, which is then turned into a socially enforceable fantasy. Thus, as she postulates, overcoming that fantasy, accepting the incomplete character of theological understanding, and introducing a non-competitive stance towards religious identities, without necessarily rejecting integrity, should be at the core of the transformation.

Boris Raehme brings an analytical perspective to the table. To propose a conceptual framework for the discussion of specifically religious disagreements, he introduces a general account of disagreement, which he understands as a doxastic attitude incompatibility. He then applies that to the discussions about religious disagreements. He argues that they cannot be simply reduced to disagreements about religiously paradigmatic issues, but have to be understood more broadly, including religiously relevant disagreements, i.e., those that engage religious worldviews, even if the underlying issues are not straightforwardly religious.

Together, these chapters speak to the variegated matrices of domination and emancipation that shape theological knowledge production and engage different sets of theoretical traditions to make sense of the resulting range of constellations of power and knowledge in the traditions of the churches. Performed in distinct theological styles, they also develop distinct options for tackling conflict, theoretically and practically: "The question of style is," after all, as Rosa Braidotti has argued, "inseparable from the making of political choices."[28] In fact, as a corpus, these chapters embody a heterogeneity of theological practices that cannot simply be subsumed under a single narrative. Looking at conflict and contestation in Christian traditions—in its inextricable entanglements with 'other(ed)' discourses—produces a range of very different theologies that resist reduction to one common denominator. In form as much as in content, then, these contributions substantiate the core argument of this book: theologies emerge from contestation such that conflict has to be recognized as a formative and constitutive dimension of (Christian) traditions. The various theological reflections that they offer in response to this insight provide, so we hope, starting points for embracing the revelatory power of conflict in our search for viable ways of understanding, and practicing, faith in the complex worlds that we inhabit.

Notes

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4. For the following passages, cf. also Gruber, Judith; 2020. "Consensus or Dissensus? Exploring the Theological Role of Conflict in a Synodal Church." *Louvain studies* 43, no. 3 (2020): 243–245.
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6. Streib, Heinz, Ralph W Hood, Barbara Keller, Rosina-Martha Csöff, and Christopher F Silver. *Deconversion: Qualitative and Quantitative Results from Cross-Cultural Research in Germany and the United States of America*. Vol. 5: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009; Streib, Heinz, Ralph W. Hood, Barbara Keller, Christopher F. Silver, Ramona Bullik, Anika Steppacher, Matthew Durham, and Sally B. Barker. *Deconversion Revisited: Biographical*

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11. Other religious traditions seem to have a richer history of theological engagement with conflict resolution, see, e.g., Mneesha Gellman and Mandi Vuinovich, "From Sulha to Salaam: Connecting local knowledge with international negotiations for lasting peace in Palestine/Israel," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.227; Sharon Lang, "Sulha Peacemaking and the Politics of Persuasion," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002), https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2002.31.3.52; Doron Pely, "Where East not always meets West: Comparing the Sulha process to Western-style mediation and arbitration," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.20028; Gerald Steinberg, "Jewish Sources on Conflict Management: Realism and Human Nature," in *Conflict and Conflict Management in Jewish Sources*, ed. Michal Roness (Tel Aviv: Bar Ilan University, 2017); Orit Kent, "Interactive Text Study: A Case of Hevruta Learning," *Journal of Jewish Education* 72, no. 3 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1080/15244110600990155; Devorah Schoenfeld, "Using Hevruta to Do and Teach Comparative Theology," in *Teaching Interreligious Encounters*, ed. Marc A. Pugliese and Alex Y. Hwang (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

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19. Omer, "Religion and the Study," 1.
20. Omer, "Religion and the Study," 7. Cf. Nancy Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019). For a practical implementation, see, e.g., the need for religious literacy expressed by OECD as necessary for contemporary Global Competence: Directorate for Education and Skills, *Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world. The OECD PISA global competence framework*, OECD (Paris, 2018). For similar considerations concerning educational policy of the Council of Europe see Sharon Todd, "Educating Beyond Cultural Diversity: Redrawing the Boundaries of a Democratic Plurality," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 30 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-010-9215-6.
21. Omer, "Religion and the Study," 2–3.
22. Omer, "Religion and the Study," 9–13. See also Adil Khan's chapter in this volume.
23. Ellen Ott Marshall, *Introduction to Christian Ethics. Conflict, Faith, and Human Life* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).
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PART I

Philosophical and Theological Foundations of Conflict, Contestation, and Community

CHAPTER 2

Theological Perspectives of Conflict, Contestation and Community Formation from an Ecumenical Angle

Annemarie C. Mayer

> The few reflections that follow are not intended to establish exactly where or how the Christian should engage in conflicts, but simply to emphasize that conflicts have a religious meaning. Even though they are located in activities apparently foreign to the religious domain, and they seem to be opposed to the union brought about by charity, differences can bring us to recognize others and thus open us to a humble but real path towards the reconciliation begun in Jesus Christ. A tacit encounter of the Lord, this recognition drives us to discover more honestly the peace which we have the audacity to profess before people who, like us, seek it, among the tensions and fears in which we, like them, participate.[1]

This statement by Michel de Certeau on the religious meaning of conflict puts the stakes for my contribution to this volume very high, proposing to argue that conflict can lead to a real encounter with the other, the stranger, the enemy—and with God, in de Certeau's words, to an "interpellation of

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God."[2] For de Certeau, conflict "provides the necessary crucible through which, by acknowledging a diversity of viewpoints, a deeper understanding of reality is possible."[3]

This latter claim we shall indeed test out by asking, firstly, why Christianity is so reluctant to acknowledge its own history of conflict and dissent—in other words, what causes the gap between aspirations and reality? Secondly, we look for lessons from the Lutheran Reformation: How have conflicts been handled and what were the outcomes? Thirdly, we delineate an alternative notion of unity and investigate one of the hermeneutical tools developed in line with it. It is a tool that incorporates dissent and difference, the so-called 'differentiated consensus' applied in ecumenical dialogues. Fourthly, we sketch the possible alternative function and theological impact of conflict and dissent and conclude by pointing to the 'third way of conflict'.

"That They All May Be One"—The Gap Between Aspirations and Reality

At first sight, it seems counterintuitive to speak about conflict and dissent in the context of ecumenical dialogue since such dialogue is usually associated with bringing about reconciliation and unity. However, conflict issues are a daily reality for ecumenism. "That they all may be one" (Jn 17:21) is a *prayer* by Jesus, not the statement of a fact. Even the New Testament reports contentious positions. Just think of the quarrel between Peter and Paul,[4] a conflict we recognize today as inevitable, yet which was nevertheless a hard and nasty one. Given the controversial stories of Jesus in the gospels,[5] one must even acknowledge with Boston New Testament scholar Richard Horsley that, "[t]he intensity and variety of conflict that runs through the gospel tradition is overwhelming. Most obvious, perhaps, is the conflict between rich and poor or between the rulers and the people".[6] These conflicts are more often than not related to the content of Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God. Nevertheless, it is a deplorable reality that Christians have rather *preached* peace and non-conflict than actually *practiced* them. Conflicts were a fact from the very beginning.

Given that conflict, contestation, and dissent are no 'extraordinary' phenomena, the question is rather why the Christian legacy of conflict is neglected or suppressed despite more than 2000 years of church history full of such conflict and contestation. Why do Christians broaden the gap between their aspirations and the actual reality? To answer this question, we must take a closer look at our standards of evaluation and ask what conflicts can actually mean in the life of a community. Is it a foregone conclusion that they are negative?

A positive appreciation of conflict as an agonal principle that fosters the life of society finds an early and actually quite amusing expression in Immanuel Kant. In his essay entitled *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* dating from 1784,[7] Kant states more or less the following. Conflict is not an amiable thing, but without it, with people leading an Arcadian philandering life, full of perfect concord, self-sufficiency, and mutual love, all talents would forever remain hidden in their germs. Human beings, gentle as the sheep they feed, would hardly give their existence any higher value than their sheep do. Conflict awakens the powers of human beings and helps them overcome their tendency to laziness. Thanks to conflict society thrives.

According to Christian standards of evaluation, however, conflict is something that should not exist. It seems like a disruption of normal life, like a disease in the social body. Conflicts are morally reprehensible. Were we but more peaceful, agreeable, and accommodating, conflicts could be avoided. Theologically, these standards of evaluation have an uncontested plausibility: peace is better than conflict; every conflict endangers unity, indeed already is the beginning and expression of lost unity. Given these ideal standards, the negative evaluation of conflict is quite understandable and it takes some effort to rethink this.

This applies all the more to conflicts in the church. Precisely in the religious realm, where people quarrel over existential questions and where often decisions of conscience confront each other, conflicts break out in a particularly harsh and irreconcilable way. It is difficult to see how this could be otherwise. Yet, Christianity is committed to a message of reconciliation and peace. Conflict and dissent appear to be un-Christian. Must, therefore, not everything be done to avoid or suppress conflict rather than to resolve it?

This view, in turn, has had a lasting influence on the attitude to conflicts and the approach to conflict resolution. The inevitability of conflicts has never been openly faced by the church. Conflicts were tabooed and relegated to the moral side-lines. The standards of evaluation just mentioned have the disastrous effect that, generally speaking, ecclesial authorities use their authority to suppress conflict for the sake of unity.

What is the default trajectory that follows after dissent and contestation? The main method applied is to personalize the conflicts. The just-described attitude to conflict and dissent, which need not be denied its well-meaning intent, has prevented more sensible methods of conflict management from being developed. A personalized conflict does not appear as an expression of conflicting factual issues but as the malice or stupidity of individuals. People are easier to tackle than factual problems. They can be morally or even canonically condemned; they can be made to obey. Such a conflict resolution works whenever, for the sake of obedience and unity, the factual problems are put aside. One does not solve them by silencing the one who voices them; but one does preserve unity—or rather a façade of unity.

Yet, what happens, if the person cannot be made to obey or silenced, perhaps precisely for reasons of conscience? What if the conflict breaks out openly and continues? Well, firstly, such a situation is embarrassing for the church and its authorities, because there should be no conflicts in the church. Secondly, it is a moral problem, because those causing the stir-up are disobedient, stubborn, quarrelsome, unwise, or unforgiving. The moralized and personalized conflict slops over into the realm of guilt and sin. Moreover, a notion of unity, which does not allow any inner contradictions, takes its toll. In a mechanism, that has been tried and tested a thousand times, the troublemakers are expelled, if they do not submit. The heretics or schismatics, as they are now called, are excommunicated. With the person, one hopes, as it were, to also get rid of the personalized conflict. Inner unity may have been preserved or restored, but the tension has migrated to the outside, and the substance of the conflict remains. It accumulates again to trigger the same mechanisms once more. In short, a 'Reformation' happens.

Lessons to Be Learned from the Lutheran Reformation and Its Aftermath

This ideal of unity and peace with its mechanisms of personalization leads with inherent inevitability to repression and division. Historically speaking, it led, for example, to what we know as the Lutheran Reformation. Then conflict was blazing up on different levels in theology, church, and state governance, as well as society at large. In the realm of theology, Luther's existential question 'How do I get a gracious God?' played a prominent role in triggering dissent in soteriology and spilled over to other areas like ecclesiology. The hierarchical and political level, in other words, the pope, the Roman curia, and the emperor, saw Luther's protest as a case of insubordination to their authority—perhaps with the sole exception of Pope Hadrian VI, who in his message to the Diet of Nuremberg in 1522 acknowledged the shortcomings of the authorities of the Catholic Church. His nuncio Francesco Chieregati spoke on behalf of the pope about "the abominations, the abuses [...] and the lies" of which the "Roman court" of the time was guilty and called them a "deep-rooted and extensive [...] sickness," extending "from the top to the members [...] Each of us must examine [their conscience] with respect to what they have fallen into and examine themselves even more rigorously than God will do on the day of His wrath."[8] On the societal level, public opinion was incited by the pamphlets of the reformers. In the course of time this resulted in physical aggression and religiously, but also economically and politically, instigated violence and warfare. In 1525, horrified by the Peasants' War, Luther wrote his piece *Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants*.[9]

The Reformation was followed, in the period between the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 and the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, by the long-term development and consolidation of diverging denominational identities. This period is usually called Counter-Reformation or Catholic Reform. As the Catholic church historian Hubert Jedin explains, "Catholic Reform is the church's remembrance of the catholic ideal of life through inner renewal, [whereas] Counter-Reformation is the self-assertion of the church in the struggle against Protestantism".[10] Paying attention to the similarities in the Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic developing identities, the German historian Ernst Walter Zeeden labeled this same period as 'confession-building'. He defined this as "the spiritual and organizational consolidation of the various Christian confessions that had been diverging since the religious split into more or less coherent ecclesiastical systems with respect to their dogma, constitution, and form of religious and moral life."[11] As an expert on comparative history, Heinz Schilling argued in favor of yet another term:

> [...] we should speak of 'Catholic confessionalisation', 'Lutheran confessionalisation', and 'Reformed or Calvinist confessionalisation'. By using lin-

> guistically parallel terminology it becomes clearer that these are three processes running parallel to each other and that the concept of confessionalisation includes an over-arching political, social, and cultural change. This stimulates the comparisons necessary for furthering knowledge. It reveals both the functional and developmental historical similarities, and the theological, spiritual, and other differences between the three varieties of confessionalisation.[12]

This issue is by no means only a question of terminology. It rather denotes a sociological, psychological, and theological development of coherent ecclesiastical systems with their own identities. Identity refers to the distinguishing characteristics of an entity. In the case of a group, it answers the question 'Who are we?' and helps to distinguish between an in-group and an out-group.[13] Different denominational identity markers were developed as boundaries during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They also served to tighten the internal bonds of the in-groups and the growth of distinct ecclesial identities. At the end of this process of confessionalization ecclesial identities based on contradicting each other had been established. Each of them had become a new delimited community. Although there were attempts at reconciliation at the time, the differences and contradictions prevailed and ecclesial unity in the West was lost.

Yet historical experience also teaches us something else, namely that despite all antagonisms and even in the divisions and beyond them, there can be something like 'unity', even where the bonds of external unity have been broken. This opens up the way to a new approach to cope with these contradictions of identities. Today's Christianity, with its hundreds of denominations and ecclesial traditions, practically all of which have arisen in conflict and are based on differences and contradictions, has nevertheless been able to develop something like a consciousness of unity beyond all separations, even where the differences are regarded as irrevocable. There is a unity and communion of those who, despite all other differences, love the same Lord, read the same Holy Scriptures, and profess the same Creed.[14] This unity is not only a beautiful dream for the future but an ecumenical reality of today, a reality, however, which has its existence in a certain awareness. It is the awareness of unity in spite of and across existing and continuing disagreements.

The Ecumenical Endeavor: Overcoming the Contradiction of Identities

This leads us in a new direction when we try to understand what unity actually means and, related to this, what conflict can mean in the life of the church. Unity no longer appears as the result of avoided conflicts and eliminated differences, but as a force that unites the conflicting parties across their differences. This idea of unity that proves itself precisely in embracing differences and enduring conflicts is actually not new. In the Christian context, it can be traced back to church fathers like Basil of Caesarea.[15] It stands in direct opposition to monolithic unity. What a monolithic notion of unity is can be illustrated by considering the word '*un*-ity.' It contains the Latin word for 'one,' *unus.* In an arithmetical understanding unity tends to allow only one thing, *one*-ness. Two-ness would already be disunity. Such a model of unity has been for quite some time (and still is in some areas) the ideal of the unity of the Catholic Church. The *ecclesia militans*, which is the church in this world, is supposed to have the unity of a disciplined army. Sociologically, this model of unity is called that of a total institution,[16] 'total' because not only external discipline is required, but also the internal discipline of conscience, thought, and opinion. Everything needs to be streamlined. Yet, as we have already seen, in Christianity this is an illusion; it always has been.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop a different way of conceiving of unity, one that does not stop at the simple number 'one', at singularity, monotony, and uniformity but understands unity as a force that brings the many together and holds them together beyond the opposites, indeed that connects the opposites with each other. The traditional term for this is: comm-*un*-ion. Communion is the way in which people know that they belong together in serving one common end, beyond all possible factual differences. Where there is communion, opposites and differences are included, not in order to suppress or hide them, but out of greater strength and freedom. There are forms of unity that only prove themselves in the case of conflict and which we, therefore, value more highly than any uncontested unity, although by default our theoretical thinking about the relationship between conflict and unity points in a different direction.

More concretely, this means that (1) a new (or rather old but forgotten) understanding of unity is necessary, that (2) the positive and creative significance of conflicts in the life of the church is to be recognized, and that (3) a changed style of dealing with differences is to be developed, which would concern both the standards of evaluation and the framework conditions for dealing with conflicts. Let us first look at the changed style of dealing with differences.

On the basis of the revised notion of unity described above, the modern ecumenical movement functions as a laboratory for devising innovative hermeneutical instruments. These instruments are designed for coping with controversy and conflict as well as for enhancing unity. Particularly the so-called 'differentiated' or 'differentiating consensus,'[17] a hermeneutical tool developed by the International Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue (since 1967) and for the first time fully fleshed out in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ)[18] in 1999, merits closer analysis as an instrument to manage conflict and to harvest from dissent. To date, this hermeneutic device has been applied in several national[19] and international[20] bilateral dialogues.

However, there are certain prerequisites that need to be in place before it can be applied: firstly, one needs to be able to distinguish between content and linguistic formulation to separate real from alleged contradictions. For, sometimes sentences that contradict each other on the linguistic level do not do so on the content level. Secondly, since doctrinal statements gain their specific meaning through the particular place which they occupy in the whole of a doctrinal system that has a certain structure, their specific place in the whole system must always be taken into account, when they are compared with propositions of other doctrinal systems. In this way, propositions that are contradictory on a surface level in many cases do not contradict each other in such a more comprehensive view.

A differentiated consensus explicitly includes differences. For one can only refer to what is common if one can distinguish between what is common and what is different. In order to integrate the differences, each differentiated consensus consists of two consensus statements. It states that "(1) full agreement has been reached in dialogue on whatever belongs to the essence of a particular statement of faith, and (2) agreement has also been reached that the remaining differences with regard to the statement of faith concerned are not only legitimate but also meaningful and do not call into question the full agreement on the essential aspect."[21] The second series of statements thus takes account of legitimate denomination-specific differentiations, which are permissible because they do not fundamentally call into question the consensus on the statement of faith. The prerequisite for the differences not endangering the consensus is that they can be related to each other in this second series of statements. This is indicated by linguistic markers within the respective series of statements, which can, for instance, be typified on the basis of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*: The statement "According to Lutheran understanding..." is marked as a continuing difference by the statement, "According to Catholic understanding, however...." Yet, the differences are not only stated but positively related to each other: on the Lutheran side, the explanation follows "when Lutherans emphasize … they do not deny…"; on the Catholic side, the explanation is "when Catholics emphasize … they do not deny…."[22] In a bilateral text, therefore, both sides must know exactly what the other side sees differently on the respective points; and above all, both partners must also agree on the assessment of the differences.

This is the task of the two churches involved. Only once both sides can say that the differences are not church-dividing, i.e., that they do not cancel out what is said in common and that what is common is sufficiently extensive, one can really speak of a differentiating consensus. In this sense, the *Joint Declaration* asserts "that a consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification exists between Lutherans and Catholics" (§ 40). Whether two theologians, who relate the two doctrinal systems to each other and weigh their differences, assess the weight of their church-dividing impact differently does not matter. It only counts whether their arguments convince those responsible for doctrine in the churches concerned—regardless of whether a special teaching office or the community of believers as a whole is charged with this task. What is needed, are acts of judgment that determine whether a differentiating consensus does or does not exist. These acts of judgment refer to the results of theological research and ecumenical dialogue, but cannot be completely derived from them. They are embedded in the context of life and encounter between the churches. The arguments for a differentiating consensus may be as good as they can be, but if the experiences people in the two churches have with each other are bad, or if fears for identity or certain interests suggest demarcations, then a consensus found in dialogue will not be confirmed. Then one has to wait until the time comes for reception and assent. Such assent is ultimately not only a question of theological arguments and experience with one another but a spiritual judgment.[23]

The method of differentiating consensus is more than just the comparison of different doctrines; most importantly, it is not indifferent to the truth claims of doctrines. If it is labeled as "a consensus despite differences that still exist," the conception is not adequately understood, because the differences which that form of consensus integrates are not confessional residues, embarrassing to come across; rather, they are differences that can be affirmed because it has been shown in the dialogues that what is common to different ecclesial traditions allows for these differences.

Neither is the method of differentiating consensus about compromise, as is often claimed. Rather, its statements are intended to express the common ground on which both dialogue partners agree. The common element, however, is not the linguistic formulation, but what it points to, i.e., "the content." This "content," however, is not a pre-linguistic entity in itself. It is not just an agreement "in principle," beyond any linguistic statement. It is precisely the problem of ecumenical consensus documents that they claim agreement "in substance," although this substance has so far always been expressed in mutually exclusive denominationally coined terminology. Thus, the point is something other than compromise, namely to show that different perspectives on "the content" actually meet "the *same* content" and that the different perspectives are not mutually exclusive, even if one can only take one perspective at a time.

Theological Interpretation of Conflict and Dissent: An Attempt

Given what has been said so far, a new understanding of conflict should replace the prevailing moralizing view. Conflict is not primarily a shameful weakness in the realm of morality—which admittedly it can be—but a creative force and a means to improve the things that have caused dissent. The creative aspect can be summarized as 'where there is life, there is tension; life exists only in opposites.' In the 1920s, Romano Guardini developed his philosophy of life as a philosophy of opposition and conflict.[24] Unfortunately, his book *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* received very little attention at the time. The claim that life itself works and operates in conflicts did not fit into the theological landscape of a monolithic church of obedience. Around one hundred years later, a revised notion of conflict should come to prevail: If conflicts are an expression of opposing, conflicting ideas, then, whenever conflicts are allowed to come to the fore, they themselves are the way to overcome them. Yet, then, the conflicting ideas, not the persons in whom they became vocal, should be investigated since these ideas provide the key to interpreting the conflict and overcoming its causes. Conflicts keep a community open to historical change, protecting it from one-sidedness. Moreover, the hallmark of a free and thriving community is conflict that is allowed and carried out, just as it is the hallmark of a humane society that it subjects the carrying out of conflict to certain rules—what the Germans call *Streitkultur*. The humanity and wisdom of a community can be assessed by its rules of conflict resolution. Here, peace and unity are not preached in a moralizing way nor are the conflicts suppressed in order to finally make the whole organism ill like unrecognized tumors do, but here they are brought into the movement of life as a tamed force.

This understanding explains why only the modern ecumenical movement as a broad attempt at 'concerted action' yielded some success, although it so far did not achieve the goal of "visible unity."[25] It is clear that somewhere there must be a nameable point, a center, and a clear basis of unity. In the church, this is faith in the one Lord and the calling to proclaim the Gospel. This should actually be enough to sustain a community oriented towards this center.

Historical experience shows, however, that the criterion for acknowledging unity is moving from the center further and further outwards to the peripheries. Faith in the Gospel becomes right thinking about the rightly understood Gospel, and out of this come thick textbooks, legal codes, administrative regulations, and ever more precise and detailed stipulations. The criterion for unity moves to the details, to the periphery. In this regard, Vatican II's notion of a "hierarchy of truths" becomes ecumenically pivotal.[26] As we have seen, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Catholic Church has been prone to judging diversity and difference rather negatively and to giving preference to an abstract, monolithic notion of unity.[27] It has been reluctant to perceive the unity of the Church in the communion of believers and in the power of cohesion sustained by them. It rather sought it in a uniformity that has been extended to the peripheries. Yet, the unity which is alive must always face the challenge of difference. It can only grow and prove itself in this confrontation. Unity can only be attained through exchange and contestation, even if this seems counterintuitive. Unity is a practice of life.

Simultaneously, the church (thus we!) needs to develop sufficiently fair and recognized rules of conflict resolution and a humane practice in treating all parties involved. And finally, despite a mentality that is prone to play up conflicts as a moral problem of individuals, we need to strive to assess them according to their factual reasons and their objective significance.

If these points can be addressed sufficiently, conflict can indeed enable a true encounter with the other and, ultimately, with God—in the way Michel de Certeau insinuated. When doing so, Christians should adopt an attitude that Pope Francis once labeled "the third way" to deal with conflict:

> Conflict cannot be ignored or concealed. It has to be faced. But if we remain trapped in conflict, we lose our perspective, our horizons shrink and reality itself begins to fall apart. In this midst of conflict, we lose our sense of the profound unity of reality. When conflict arises, some people simply look at it and go their way as if nothing happened; they wash their hands of it and get on with their lives. Others embrace it in such a way that they become its prisoners; they lose their bearings, project onto institutions their own confusion and dissatisfaction and thus make unity impossible. But there is also a third way, and it is the best way to deal with conflict. It is the willingness to face conflict head on, to resolve it and to make it a link in the chain of a new process. 'Blessed are the peacemakers!' (Matt 5:9).[28]

Notes

1. Michel de Certeau, "La loi du conflit," in *L'Étranger ou l'union dans la différence*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991), 22: "Les quelques réflexions qui suivent ne visent pas à déterminer jusqu'où et comment le chrétien doit s'engager dans les conflits, mais simplement à souligner qu'ils ont une signification religieuse. Alors même qu'elles se situent en des activités apparemment étrangères au domaine religieux, et qu'elles semblent s'opposer à l'union opérée par la charité, les divergences peuvent nous amener à reconnaître les autres et nous ouvrir par là un chemin, humble mais réel, vers la réconciliation inaugurée en Jésus-Christ. Tacite rencontre du Seigneur, cette reconnaissance nous conduit à trouver plus honnêtement la paix dont nous avons l'audace de faire profession devant des hommes qui la cherchent comme nous, au milieu des tensions et des craintes auxquelles nous participons comme eux"; transl. by Mary Kate Holman, Fordham University doctoral candidate in theology, as printed in Bradford Hinze, "The Grace of Conflict", *Theological Studies* 81, no. 1 (2020): 44.
2. De Certeau, "La loi du conflit", 28: "Lorsque le chrétien reconnait ainsi, grâce à l'irruption des autres dans sa vie, interpellation de Dieu, il trouve dans cette rencontre (qui n'exclut jamais la lutte) le commencement d'une réconciliation réelle—avec Dieu et avec les hommes".
3. Hinze, "Grace of Conflict", 45.

4. For example, Paul apparently did not respect the decisions which the so-called Apostles' Council in Jerusalem took when he allowed the Christians in Corinth to eat "from what is sacrificed to idols" (1 Cor 8 as opposed to Acts 15:29).
5. Cf. already Martin Albertz, *Die synoptischen Streitgespräche: ein Beitrag zur Formengeschichte des Urchristentums* (Berlin: Trowitzsch & Sohn, 1921), 156–157 and more recently Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: their Redaction, Form and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000). Moreover, in 2021 Christopher Landau, *A Theology of Disagreement: New Testament Ethics for Ecclesial Conflicts* (London: SCM, 2021), tries to develop a biblical "basis upon which disagreeing Christians (however reluctantly) agree as to how the issue of disagreement might be faced" (viii).
6. Richard E. Horsley, *Jesus and the Spiral of Violence: Popular Jewish Resistance in Imperial Roman Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 156.
7. Immanuel Kant, "Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht," *Berlinische Monatsschrift* (November 1784); English translation of the original 1784 article: Immanuel Kant, "Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan", *The London Magazine* 10 (1824): 387: "But for these anti-social propensities, so unamiable in themselves, which give birth to that resistance which every man meets with in his own self-interested pretensions, an Arcadian life would arise, of perfect harmony and mutual love, such as must suffocate and stifle all talents in their very germs. Men, as gentle as the sheep they fed, would communicate to their existence no higher value than belongs to mere animal life, and would leave the vacuum of creation, which exists in reference to the final purpose of man's nature as a rational nature, unfilled. Thanks, therefore, to Nature for the enmity, for the jealous spirit of envious competition, for the insatiable thirst after wealth and power! These wanting, all the admirable tendencies in man's nature would remain for ever undeveloped. Man, for his own sake as an individual, wishes for concord; but Nature knows better what is good for Man as a species; and she ordains discord. He would live in ease and passive content: but Nature wills that he shall precipitate himself out of this luxury of indolence into labours and hardships, in order that he may devise remedies against them, and thus raise himself above them by an intellectual conquest, not sink below them by an unambitious evasion."
8. This message was read by Francesco Chieregati on November 25, 1522, and printed in the official record of the proceedings *Was auff dem Reichsztag zu Nüremberg von wegen Bebstlicher heiligkeit an Keyserlicher*

Maiestat Stathalter vnd Stende Luetherischer sachen halben gelangt vnd darauff geantwort worden ist, Nürnberg: Friederich Peypus 1523.

9. Martin Luther, *Wider die räuberischen und mörderischen Rotten der Bauern* (1525), in *D. Martin Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Joachim Karl Friedrich Knaake (Weimarer Ausgabe 18) (Weimar: Böhlaus, 1908) 357–361.
10. Hubert Jedin, *Katholische Reformation oder Gegenreformation? Ein Versuch zur Klärung der Begriffe nebst einer Jubiläumsbetrachtung über das Trienter Konzil* (Luzern: Josef Stocker, 1946), 38: "Die katholische Reform ist die Selbstbesinnung der Kirche auf das katholische Lebensideal durch innere Erneuerung, die Gegenreformation ist die Selbstbehauptung der Kirche im Kampf gegen den Protestantismus." English translation John W. O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era*, (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 55.
11. Ernst W. Zeeden, *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen. Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe* (München/Wien: Oldenbourg, 1965), 9–10: "Unter Konfessionsbildung sei also verstanden: die geistige und organisatorische Verfestigung der seit der Glaubensspaltung auseinanderstrebenden christlichen Bekenntnisse zu einem halbwegs stabilen Kirchentum nach Dogma, Verfassung und religiös-sittlicher Lebensform."
12. Heinz Schilling, "Confessionalization in the Empire. Religious and Societal Change in Germany between 1555 and 1620", in *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society. Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden/New York/Cologne: Brill 1992), 209–210.
13. Cf., e.g., Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985).
14. However, already for the Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed this needs to be taken cum *grano salis*, given the *Filioque* issue.
15. Cf. Annemarie C. Mayer, "Ecclesial Communion: The Letters of St Basil the Great Revisited", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 5, no. 3 (2005): 226–241 as well as ead., "Κοινωνία on Purpose?—Ecclesiology of Communion in the Letters of St Basil the Great", in *Studia Patristica* vol. XLI. Official Proceedings of the Patristics Conference 2003, ed. by M. Edwards, F. Young, P. Parvis (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 375–382.
16. The concept is mostly associated with the work of sociologist Erving Goffman in his 1957 paper "On the Characteristics of Total Institutions"; cf. Erving Goffman, *Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) and Samuel Wallace, *Total Institutions* (Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishers, 1971).

17. For the reasons to call it a "differentiat*ing* consensus" cf. Theodor Dieter, "Zu einigen Problemen ökumenischer Hermeneutik", *Una Sancta* 70 (2015):163–170.
18. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation 1999).
19. E.g. Bilateral Working Group of the German National Bishops' Conference and the Church Leadership of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, *Communio Sanctorum: The Church as the Communion of Saints* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), nos. 86–89.
20. E.g. Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *The Apostolicity of the Church: Study Document of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity* (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2006).
21. Lothar Ullrich, "Differenzierter Konsens und Komplementarität", in Harald Wagner (ed.), *Einheit - aber wie? Zur Tragfähigkeit der ökumenischen Formel vom 'differenzierten Konsens'* (Quaestiones Disputatae 184) (Freiburg i. Br./Basel/Vienna: Herder, 2000), 112; cf. also Harding Meyer, "Zur Gestalt ökumenischer Konsense", in Wolfgang Beinert/Konrad Feiereis/Hermann-Josef Röhrig (ed.), *Unterwegs zum einen Glauben* (FS Lothar Ullrich = Erfurter theologische Studien 74) (Leipzig: Benno-Verlag, 1997), 629.
22. Cf. for this pattern of reasoning for instance JDDJ nos. 20–24 on the issue of human cooperation with divine grace.
23. To give an example: When the Second Vatican Council recognized "elements" of the Church of Christ also outside the Roman Catholic Church (cf. LG 8 and UR 3), it made such a spiritual judgement. Those elements had been there for centuries; it took a lot of theological work to understand them properly, but also many experiences of common threat and mutual support during and after the Second World War; but without the Council's courage to make that spiritual judgement, this recognition would not have happened.
24. Cf. Romano Guardini, *Der Gegensatz. Versuche zu einer Philosophie des Lebendig-Konkreten* (1925) (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald-Verlag, 3rd ed., 1985).
25. Thus the primary purpose of the WCC as an ecumenical institution is actually formulated by the *Constitution of the World Council of Churches*: "The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe"; https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/constitution-and-rules-of-the-world-council-of-churches (accessed 15/09/2022).

26. Cf. The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, *Sixth Report* (1990) Appendix B: "The Notion of 'Hierarchy of Truths': An Ecumenical Interpretation", in *Growth in Agreement* II, ed. by Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer and William G. Rusch (Geneva: WCC, 2000) 876–883; cf. also William Henn, "The Hierarchy of Truths and Christian Unity", *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 66, no. 1 (1990): 111–142.
27. Karl Lehmann, "Dissensus: Überlegungen zu einem neueren dogmenhermeneutischen Grundbegriff", in *Dogma und Glaube: Bausteine für eine theologische Erkenntnislehre*, Festschrift für Bischof Walter Kasper, ed. by Eberhard Schockenhoff and Peter Walter (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald Verlag, 1993), 69–87.
28. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), no. 227, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (accessed 15/09/2022).

CHAPTER 3

A Radical Theology of Conflict and Contestation

John D. Caputo

Thesis. In radical thinking, things are never as settled as they seem. Underneath the appearance of continuity lie ruptures and interruptions, underneath identity, difference. As Derrida once put it, "It is the idea of an identity or a self-interiority of every tradition (*the one* metaphysics, *the one* onto-theology, *the one* phenomenology, *the one* Christian revelation, *the one* history itself, *the one* history of being, *the one* epoch, *the one* tradition, self-identity in general, the one, etc.) that finds itself contested at its root (*contestée en sa racine*)."[1] To contest something at its root is not to demolish it but to show that it is *not identical with itself*, that it is internally divided, limited, multiplied, and distributed—for better or for worse, since we cannot be sure where this will lead. To contest something—here *the one* theological tradition—is what radical thinking demands, not from a perverse love of chaos and confusion, but to keep the future open.

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A Meticulous History. One effective way to deconstruct something is to write a meticulous history of how it was constructed in the first place. Then what was thought to have dropped from the sky is seen to issue from a confluence of shifting circumstances down here on earth; what was thought an essence gradually achieving existence is something accidental that could have turned out differently; and what was thought to be inevitable historical progression was in large part happenstance, fortuitous developments, creative imagination, opportunistic decisions, contingent occurrences, if not just plain violence. In the beginning, no one could see how it would turn out later on or if it would last or even that anything was beginning. Instead of seeing the beginning as the root of which the present is the mature plant, a meticulous history sees the beginning as an experiment that is continually being improvised, where the original players would hardly recognize the current product. It tells a completely different story than what was first called in German Idealism the "philosophy of history." There the "philosophy" held the flux of "history" in the firm grip of its *Begriff*, of a logic governing the unfolding of the Spirit in ever higher forms until it finally reached its *Vollendung*—usually in the philosophy faculty of the University of Berlin, Kierkegaard quipped.

A meticulous history is a *radical* history, contesting at its root the invisible hand by which history is monitored. Its only presupposition is that things do not have an essence, they have a history; they do not have a destiny but a story. Nothing was guaranteed. Whatever has come to be has a relative stability, otherwise it would not be there at all, but that implies a relative instability, and hence a revisability, a deconstructibility, a *contestability*. It is not that what has come about is without value, but that it is without necessity. For whatever has been constructed—and what has not?—can be deconstructed. To deconstruct is not to destroy but to undertake a more granular analysis which shows the deep multiplicity of something trying to pass itself off as one and the same. To deconstruct is to show the difference that inwardly disturbs the identity. To deconstruct is to de-sediment, to expose a deeper heterogeneity underlying a seeming homogeneity—in order to show not its futility but its futurity.

After Jesus, Before Christianity. Contesting "*the one* Christian revelation," as Derrida put it, is the relevant case in point of a recent book, *After Jesus, Before Christianity*, co-authored by a group of American New Testament historians, sponsored by the Westar Institute, which had previously sponsored the "Jesus Seminar."[2] The authors paint a picture of the concrete lives of the followers of Jesus after the crucifixion in the first two centuries of what later on, in the third century, came to be known as "Christianity." They seek to avoid anachronism, reading back into the past from the present, retrojecting the later history of *the one* Church, as if that was what had been originally projected. They suspend the meta-narrative according to which *the one* true faith—which had to wait until the fourth century to become clear to itself—gradually fell into place, like the pieces of a puzzle, as the Spirit wisely weeded out the deviations ("heresies"). The authors report a kaleidoscope of "Jesus peoples," not the educated elite who wrote the surviving letters, treatises and books that form the official pre-history canonized in the fourth century councils, but people who for the most part could not read or write but thrived on oral traditions. They describe a wide variety of loosely connected communities, more a mosaic than a single movement, with differing views of who Jesus was and different titles for him. They had several names for themselves, some of them a bit odd, like "the enslaved of God" or "the Perfect Day," but none of them called themselves "Christians."

They almost all identified with the house of Israel, and they had no intention of starting up a "new religion." They were trying to survive and even thrive under the rule of the Roman imperium in safe, supportive communities. There common meals were of great importance, like "supper clubs" or like church suppers today, especially given their illiteracy. They lived in a hostile world and had their own ways, imaged in terms of the "empire of God," an unlikely empire, and perhaps an ironic jab, maybe even a jest, at Rome. They did not conform to the received "gender" roles that were standard in antiquity and did not live in nuclear families but in freely chosen clusters that were not governed by biological or marital bonds. There was no "New Testament" to guide them along the way, although some versions of parts of it were available to some communities and others available to others. With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and with the explosion of archeological and anthropological research into the life and times of the first two centuries, we now know their world was far more complex and awash with many different stories than the standard narrative allows. Not only had they never heard of Augustine's Paul or Luther's Paul, they had only a sketchy knowledge of Paul himself, whom they regarded more as an emissary among the Greeks who had established several churches than as a theologian. Some communities knew of one or two of his letters, some none at all, and for a long time Paul himself was unknown to large numbers of them. That would eventually change, especially when Marcion made his mark, and after the Bar Kokhba War (132–136 CE), when the tensions with "the Jews" heated up.

They were focused on life, not learning, on *praxis*, not *doxa*, on community fellowship and support, not theological doctrine. They did not have a "satisfaction theory" of the "atonement." Under constant threat of death themselves by the empire, many of them thought of the crucifixion of Jesus as a "noble death" in the face of the tyrant (Rome), not unlike the noble death of Socrates. No one was authorized to speak on behalf of them all, to pronounce "the" meaning of "the" crucifixion, or to sort our orthodox and heterodox, and no one could if they tried, given the disparate character of these assemblies and the lack of efficient communications. There were lively debates and differences among them, as befits an oral tradition, but their exchanges were not organized under the rubric of "orthodoxy" and "heresy" because there were no such things. The word heresy (*hairesis*), if used at all, simply meant a chosen school of thought, one among many, and it did not at all carry the implication of a dangerous error that it would later bear, starting with Irenaeus and the long line of heresiarchs to follow. Orthodoxy is internally marked by and constitutively dependent upon its other. They rise and fall together.

Constantinianism and Neoplatonism. If it was the Holy Spirit who eventually brought about a unity in this multiplicity, who monitored the way "from Nazareth to Nicaea," as Geza Vermes put it,[3] it was a Holy Spirit supported by an army. As time and circumstance wore on, the Greek-speaking gentile traditions would gain the upper hand over the Jewish ones, the Fourth Gospel over the synoptics, Paul over all, until the fourth century councils were ordered by Constantine to bring order, to "define" it, to canonize it, according to the imperial rule of *the one*—"One God, one Lord, one faith, one church, one empire, one emperor." To this was joined in unholy marriage the metaphysics of *the One* (Neoplatonism). That fateful deal, summed up in the Nicene creed, a result that would have likely left the first-century Nazarene named Yeshua bar Miriam speechless and scandalized, became the gold standard of what, ever after, would be called "Christianity," *the one* Christianity, whose imperially commanded councils placed the crown of "orthodoxy" upon their own head.

The metanarrative of (*the one*) tradition goes back to the fourth century, stops, and then treats anything earlier as a *prehistory* leading up to the Councils. Under the shock and awe of the Empire, which supplied the military, and of Neoplatonism, which supplied the metaphysics, Yeshua, the Galilean healer, exorcist and prophet who announced the coming rule of God, still detectable in the synoptic gospels, was eclipsed, all but lost in the cloud of history, and along with him the polymorphic Jesus peoples of the first two centuries. Everything had changed. The background assumption of the early communities—how to live under the heel of Rome—shifted. They became the heel. The Word had become flesh—in the Empire; it became "(*the one*) Church." At that point, it was not the Empire which "converted to Christianity" but "Christianity" was created by converting to the Empire. *Pontifex maximus*, *dioecesis*, the whole imperial architecture devised by Diocletian, including the Latin language in which Jesus was condemned to death, would become the "Church" which—they had him say—he had "founded" as the superseding successor to his people, "the Jews," as if "they" were someone else. In a meticulous history, the original players would not recognize the finished product.

These conclusions, which of course can be contested, contest at its root the hoary idea of an apostolic succession in which *the one* true faith made its way from the apostles to our Apple computers. To the more realistic compromise version of the official story, that the subsequent tradition was gradually making "explicit" what was only "implicit" at the start, a meticulous history points out that it was the winners, at spearpoint, who got to decide *what* was implicit; the ones with the cannons get to set the canon. Most of the writings of the dissenters have been lost or destroyed and are known to us largely by citations from the books that were written to refute them. I wager Augustine would head the list of authors with books entitled *Contra* this or that. To be *radically* realistic—to get back to the things themselves and contest the ideology at its root—we should simply confess that "Christianity," like everything else, does not have an essence but a history, that it is not identical with itself. It emerged from the shifting tides of power, politics, and circumstance, in the language and historical framework of the times and places in which it found itself, which at first meant trying to live under the lethal threat of empire—until the historical tide turned in its favor and the shoe of imperial power was on the other foot.

Thinking Radically. As I have argued elsewhere, in radical thinking, theo*logy*, more rigorously considered, is a theo*poetics*, that is, an exercise of our apophatic imagination in the face of the mystery of our lives.[4] I say "apophatic" because we are dealing here with liminal states, the limit-points of our lives, the *Grenzsituation*, the line that divides being from nonbeing, life from death, good from evil, knowing from nonknowing. I say "imagination" because, at these limits, we can have recourse only to images, imaginative figurations, memorable stories, symbols, striking images and sayings. The apophatic imagination resonates with depths we cannot conceive in the prose of logic, depths we can only address with the poetry of our hearts. For example, the Fourth Gospel has Jesus proudly and publicly declare himself "the way, the truth, and the life," quite unlike Yeshua, the source-figure in the synoptics, who deflected attention away from himself and toward God's coming rule. But the words the Fourth Gospel puts in his mouth can serve as a motto that can be adopted by anyone, with or without Jesus. Faced with the mystery of things, there are as many *ways* and forms of *life*, whose *truth* is their *via*bility and *vita*lity, as there are times and places. *Every* theology is what Tillich called a "theology of culture," otherwise it is a just a free-floating abstraction, and every culture has a theology, otherwise it is a just a place on a map, and every theology is a theopoetics, where the prose of theology is preceded by a poetics of the local gods.

The *radical* in radical theology does not mean establishing the foundational ground on which all things rest, but exactly the opposite, contesting foundational claims at their root. It means confessing what Schelling called the radical *facticity* of things, which results in a radical *uprooted*ness. Schelling contested the Hegelian notion of the absolute *Begriff* in which being and thinking (*Denken*) become one, being rendered entirely intelligible to thinking and thinking with access to the essence of being. Against this Schelling advanced *das Unvordenkliche*, not exactly the unthinkable but the un-*pre*-thinkable, meaning that being is always already (*immer schon*) there before thinking arrives on the scene.[5] Being is the *prius*, first or prior, not thinking. Thinking's "a priori conditions of possibility" yield pride of place to the unconditional priority of being's actuality; thinking is a posteriori, literally an afterthought. The first had become last. Mediated by Kierkegaard, facticity and the unprethinkable made their way into the twentieth century, in theology through the work of Tillich and in philosophy through Jaspers and Heidegger. When the "philosophers of existence" said "existence precedes essence" they were thinking of the unprethinkable. Thinking, always and already too late, does the best it can to construe being, to build constructions that hopefully will hold up in the face of the surprises being has in store for thinking. This is not to say that thinking is to no avail but that thinking produces provisional results, with a sense of humility, of the relative poverty or weakness of its constructions, for whatever thinking has constructed can be deconstructed.

This has serious implications for understanding *authority*, particularly *theological* authority, but without jettisoning the very idea of authority. If I am ill, I want to trust the authority of a skilled physician. But in matters most ultimate, so removed and remote, lying at the limits of our understanding, there may be wisdom but there are no authorities. The very idea is epistemologically an exercise in futility and morally and psychologically an exercise in hybris. We are none of us in a position to speak with definition of what lies at the *finis*, on the border of the thinkable and unprethinkable, of knowing and nonknowing. We can experience being *in* an unencompassable whole—a sense of its majesty and *mysterium*—but we cannot step outside and view it and say just *what* it is or *why*. Here we speak in figures, signs, and symbols, drawing upon our apophatic imagination.

Facticity spells the end of authoritarian*ism*, and authoritarianism cuts both ways. Facticity cuts down both transcendentalism and supernaturalism, both the reductionism, of "pure reason" and absolutism of "special revelations," in which the faithful think they have it from God on high. This does not jettison any idea of reason but redescribes it in terms of having "good reasons" to think this rather than that. This does not jettison any idea of revelation but redescribes it. A revelation is not an inbreaking disclosure from a higher world but a striking insight into this world, into a new form of life, the way a whole world is opened up by a poem or a painting. Understood in these terms, Jesus is a theopoet whose poem is called the "kingdom of God," an inverted world in which the first are last and the outsiders are in and the poor are privileged over the rich, a veritable topsy-turvy of reversals that scandalizes the received order of things—in Greek philosophy and in the *imperium Romanum*. The rule in the kingdom of God is not imperial; it is "unconditional" but "without sovereignty" (Derrida).[6] It comes over us not with the prose of power but with the poetry of a parable, in the form of mustard seeds, not metaphysics, of the birds of the air who neither sow nor reap, not on the wings of a mighty celestial army of warrior angels. We embrace this vision at our own risk. It is not a good deal that will yield eternal rewards. If anything, it is a kind of madness (*moria*). Either way, authority has nothing to do with it.

Différance. The classical assumption that multiplicity is a preceded by unity, that difference is a modification of identity, was enshrined and emblematized in the Neoplatonic doctrine of *exitus* and *reditus*, where the many represent a "fall" from *the One* and the goal inscribed in diversity and difference is, like Plato's myth of the androgynous being, to regain its lost unity or at least to imitate it in its own imperfect way. In the radical account, where this is contested at its root, difference is the generative matrix and unity is an effect of diversity, identity a provisional result achieved by the work (or the play) of differences.

This way of thinking about identity and difference draws upon the model of linguistic difference, which is *differential* difference. This is not binary difference, which promotes the dualist categories that prevail in traditional theology and philosophy (body/soul, time/eternity, matter/spirit, male/female), and not ternary difference, which promotes dialectical and trinitarian thinking, which claims to reconcile these dualities. In linguistic difference, meaning is a differential effect produced by the discernible "space" between signifiers, like king/ring/sing, *roi/moi/loi*. In this account, a word is not a free-standing unit which gives outer material expression to an inner event of the soul; it is a signifier produced by its iterability, its repetition, inside a system in which it is differentially related with other signifiers. Meaning is an effect of the coded use of conventionally agreed-upon and intrinsically arbitrary signifiers. Derrida's earliest work was to show the way that even the ideality of an "ideal meaning" (identity) is a function of repetition (difference); it does not occupy an ideal trans-historical realm from which it enters an "empirical" language. A word is not only repeatable; it is *constituted* by repetition. In linguistic difference, repetition produces what it repeats, produces it by repeating it, in just the way the repetition of an improvisation gives it the status of the original. The copies produce the original; they do not reproduce it. This is interestingly illustrated by the history of the very word, the most famous one, which was coined to describe this process—*différance*.[7] Derrida introduced the intentional misspelling in order to say that this was not a word in the language but a non-word which points to how linguistic effects are produced. But, as Richard Rorty pointed out, this was true only the *first time* he used the word.[8] Once he spoke it or wrote it down, it became repeatable, and indeed it was repeated so often that it become one of the most famous words in twentieth-century European philosophy, enshrined in any dictionary of contemporary theory.

Conflict and Contestation. This shift to a differential framework casts notions like "conflict," "contestation," and "dissent" in a new light where they play a creative role and are no longer under suspicion. In the monist or monological scheme, the many is an inflection of *the one*, "fallen" from the univocity of the one. They are suspect characters, outsiders or outlaws, rogues or undesirables, incommensurate with the measure of all things, unreconciled to *the one* true way. The very grammar of "dissent" casts a veil of distrust over the idea, presupposing a normative sense or *sententia* from which it is departing.

But in radical thinking, to "contest" is the mark not of a perverse desire to deviate from a prior truth but of a search for truth, which proceeds by testing, contesting, and attesting, by experimenting, exploring, and improvising, in search of tentative constructions. On the radical account, unity is a temporary and provisional effect of multiplicity and an "essence" is like a field report sent back from journalists giving us a reading on present conditions. When Aristotle "defined" human beings as "rational animals" (*zoon echon logon*), he thought he was identifying an unchanging essence or species but what he was doing was giving us a progress report on the current state of evolution. Two hundred thousand years earlier no such being existed and, given the current trajectory of AI research, robotology, and information technology, it may well be that humans will not be around much longer, if and when the "post-humanists" succeed in becoming post-biological. The stabilized unity of a linguistic "meaning" or of an ontological "essence" is like a freeze-frame in a video, or a frozen waterfall, or the photographs we see of athletes or dancers snapped at a moment when their bodies are completely airborne, no more able to last than a dancer could "hold it" in mid-air so we can take a picture.

In radical thinking, it is essence which represents the fall—from movement, from life. To valorize the unity, silence, and timeless stillness of essence is to deal in death, to collect mummified forms, to content oneself with the inscriptions on tombstones instead of living beings. "Essence" and "meaning" are words that are best reserved for eulogies, words of praise we can pronounce over the late lamented when we can speak with the assurance that we will not be refuted, that the dead will not prove us wrong in the future by contradicting what we have said about them. We can pronounce *the* meaning of a word only in a dead language, when we make an inventory of every known use of the word, without fear that some rogue of a poet will come along and make this word dance to a new tune, coin a new metaphor, and confound our definitive pronouncement.

This is not an esoteric point, and radical thinking is not a purely academic exercise reserved for graduate seminars in theory. This is the concrete movement of life, the energy and ecstasy of existence, and it affects everything nearest and dearest to us.

What is the essence of democracy? It does not have an essence; it has a hope for the future, for a "democracy-to-come," and in that expression, the "to-come"—the infinitival, infinitizing force—is more important than the "democracy," which threatens to decline or relapse into an essence.[9] The to-come, taken radically, is not the foreseeable future but the coming of what we cannot see coming. The hope, the promise harbored in the word "democracy" is also a risk; it cannot be insulated from the threat that its fragile hold on reality will be broken by the disaster of a demagoguery, which, given the contingencies of history, the accidentality of time and place, in short of facticity, we can never rule out.

What is Christianity? It does not have an essence; it has a history. Well, then, what is the meaning of its history? We do not know yet. It is not over. It is not dead yet. The various declarations of its "essence" are so many still lives, freeze frames. In saying this, we are not putting words in its mouth. We are saying what it itself says, that it is a prayer for the kingdom-*to-come*, a coming kingdom which stands in judgment of every *existing* kingdom. So whenever something tries to pass itself off as *the* kingdom, *the one* kingdom, we must object, defer from this announcement, dissent, disagree, contest this proclamation—in the name of the kingdom *to-come*. This kingdom does not exist; it *insists*. The kingdom does not exist; it *calls for* existence. In this expression, the "kingdom-to-come," the "to-come" is more important than the "kingdom," and this is because when we call for the kingdom, what is being called for, what is calling, is the coming of what we cannot see coming. It may be that what is required in and by the name of Christianity will require that at some point "Christianity" will no longer be required. "Jesus" and the "kingdom" are icons of something coming, where the "second coming" will surprise everyone.

What is democracy? Justice? Christianity? Humanity? God? The list goes on and the answer is always we do not know yet. History is not over. They have not died yet. When they are good and dead, we will write their eulogy and say what contribution they have made without fear of contradiction.

The Catholic Principle. Opposite this rule of eulogy and death is the rule of life and the future, of the spirit, which gives life. Once a belief or practice is immunized against alteration, it gives up its spirit; it hardens over, seizes up, sediments, atrophies, becomes sclerotic, setting itself up over and against the to-come, which means a menace to the spirit. Contestability is a sign of life; it is life. The Catholic tradition wisely chose to invoke tradition as its very principle. The scriptures are not the foundation of the tradition, their measuring rod, but the *effect* of the tradition, a *product* of an oral tradition sustained by people who were not well born (1 Cor 1:26), not an educated elite, from which what was written down is *derived*. The *promise* contained in writing down these stories is to give them a future, to make them available for endless *re*telling, *re*petition, *re*invention, producing what they repeat. The *danger* this posed—Derrida called it the "dangerous supplement," the danger of the technology of writing, the *pharmakon*, the poison/cure—is that it would rigidify, codify, canonize a process. "The Church" avoided biblicism but only by making the opposite mistake, absolutizing itself. As Alfred Loisy said, the early Jesus people were expecting the second coming and what they got instead was the Church! After the Reformation, it became a matter of "picking your poison"—infallibility or inerrancy, a real Pope or a paper pope, notions equally hostile to tradition, spirit, life, in a word, Derrida's word, to the *event*, the coming of what we did not see coming.

In speaking of a "principle" (*principium*, *arche*) in radical theology, I do not mean a proposition, like a premise in logic or an axiom in geometry or a ruling authority, which would be precisely to prevent the event. A *principium* here is not a logical proposition but an ontological force, like the source of a river, a fountainhead, an initiating impulse, a historical impetus, an originary source of momentum. Looked at formally it is a quasi-principle, one which produces only relatively stable and provisional results, no finalized products, no fixed margins. It is a slightly anarchic *arche*, issuing in traditions in the lower case and the plural. Then, instead of *the one* tradition, it issues in the messy life of transmissions, in the plural, of letters lost in the mail, hidden layers, anonymous interventions, creative reinventions, translations, mistranslations, creative misunderstandings, strong readings, messages in a bottle, lost stories, copyist errors, palimpsests, rival editions and redactions, competing agendas, and betrayals. Tradition is the transmitting of multiple missions, omissions, emissions, transmissions, permissions, commissions, which make their way across the surface of history like water finding its own way down a hill.

A principle is an imperative which urges us forward, a call, even a prayer, which calls "come" to the future. A radical theology of tradition is a theology of the event, of the coming of what we cannot see coming, which poses the promise/threat of tradition, an openness to the future that is not without risk. The challenge for the advocates of tradition is to have the courage of their convictions, instead of paying it lip service while seeking to build up a bulwark against its unwieldy ways. In a radical theology of the event, the memories and the promises of Jesus are not modelled on the imperial ideal of *the-one*-holy-catholic-and-apostolic Church but of an *anthology*, which literally means a collection of flowers, letting many flowers bloom, of a *festival* of many poems and poets, artists, songs, and storytellers. Instead of a single star, it prefers a heavenly vault of innumerable stars which we are forced to read in order to find our way. Instead of a monad, a mosaic of multiple, different pieces whose colors play off each other to glorious effect. Instead of deciding (*hairesis*) on the monotony of essence, on the unity of a definition, on the straight rod of a canon, why not prefer a wondrous array of irregular and unpredictable variations, like the magnificent mountain formations etched over the eons? Why in heaven's name would they do such a thing? It had nothing to do with heaven and even less with Yeshua. It had to do with empire, with the very "powers and principalities" against which the "kingdom" was meant to be the protest, with which it did contest, in the name of God.

The authors of the canon, of the definitions that put an end (*finis*) to open-ended becoming, did not trust the tradition; they used it to serve their purposes. They feared the event. They did not trust the promptings of the spirit, which open us to the event. They paid lip service to the principle *ubi spiritus, ibi ecclesia*,[10] but they meant the opposite, as if the spirit has written the Church a blank check, authorizing it to speak in its name. A *formal* authority—as opposed to the *material* authority of something that can *speak for itself*—is auto-forming, self-authorizing; no one has formally authorized the founding authorities. Legend has it that Napoleon took the crown from the Pope and crowned himself the emperor. No one formally authorized the authors of the American "Declaration of Independence" to declare independence. They took a *risk* that they had the spirit on their side and that it would catch on. The later church authorized itself, putting the words "thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church" in the mouth of a pious Jew who intended no such thing. The fourth century councils had Constantine on their side, not the spirit, *ubi imperium, ibi ecclesia*, and the only risk involved was to resist Constantine. Today, "the Church," *s'il y en a*, as if there were *one* homogenous thing that answered to that name, would do well to listen to the promptings of the spirit about same-sex love, the place of women in the church, the suffering of the poor, and the plight of the planet itself.[11] The spirit is not about the hierarchy but the hieranarchy, the *populus Dei*, the multitudes, *ta me onta* (I Cor 1:28), and above all about the event, the to-come. The Spirit comes as the event. The tradition is the spirit of the event, of the to-come, of the openness of the future. Tradition transmits the hope, the prayer, that the future is always better, not because it is, but because that is what we hope and pray, that is what we mean by the spirit.

The unconditional, the undeconstructible, the incontestable. The attempt to construct a first or final authority, a locatable, identifiable, supreme authority, is idolatrous. It confuses the conditional with the unconditional, the contestable with the incontestable, the construction with the undeconstructible. It attempts to prevent the event, to escape the unyielding force of facticity, to contain the unwieldy ways of history, to build a castle of sand which tide and time will not wipe away. This is not to say that there is nothing to which radical thinking swears allegiance, nothing it holds sacred. Radical thinking is not as an exercise in antinomianism, not an anything-goes anarchy. Its protests and contests are always in the name of the *incontestable*; its negotiations with conditions are always in the name of the *unconditional*; its dealings in constructions are always in the name of the *undeconstructible*. Radical theology is a theology of the incontestable, the unconditional, the undeconstructible, which take the place of a first or final *authority*. In thinking in terms of testing, contesting, and attesting, the only thing truly *in*contestable is the unconditional, the undeconstructible *but*—and this is key—this is never a fixed and determinate thing, never anything conditioned and constructed, never an identifiable something or somebody, no matter how gloriously adorned. That does not mean that some constructions are not better than others. Justice cannot be reduced to the law, because justice, which is always calling, always to-come, is undeconstructible, and laws are constructions. But some laws are better than others. Some laws say "come" to the coming of the event, seeking to keep the future open, and some seek to close it off, to prevent the event.

The incontestable/unconditional/undeconstructible cannot be reduced to a Super-Somebody who is coming to get us at the end of time if we do not behave ourselves. It is not a straight rod against which we can measure deviations. Here, orthodoxy is a misunderstanding, as if the unconditional could be shrunk down and fitted inside propositional rectitude. The unconditional is the stuff of a kind of *Ur*-doxy, a primordial faith (*foi*, *fides*) in being-itself which exceeds any particular belief (*croyance*, *credo*) in this being or that, however "supreme" the being may be and with however many omni-attributes it is embellished. The incontestable should never be confused with something conditional and contestable, like a book or an institution, a definition or a rule. It is the beating heart of an open-ended process, an ongoing event which comes without coercion and external authority; it is not an unnamable One but omninamable multitude. It is not an infinite being but an infinitival expectation. The unconditional is a lure, the God ahead, the coming God, a call which exposes dogmatic authority as a mirage, as more a matter of pathology than a theology.

To be sure, while we seek the unconditional all we ever find is conditions. That is because conditions are the only things that exist and provide our sole access to the unconditional. But conditions never get as far as the unconditional and must never be confused with it. The unconditional is not a being whose existence which can be proven but an element or a quality in things which can be testified to or attested. It is always encountered *under* certain conditions, *iconic* conditions—like Yeshua, in whose life and death "we" (who have inherited this name) catch sight of something unconditional, attesting to something incontestable, something of unconditional worth. The unconditional does not exist apart from the conditions under which it is found but there it is the *excess in* any particular set of conditions which prevents them from closing over, from closing down.

The incontestable/unconditional/undeconstructible is not an ideal which we can foresee but not attain. It is a dream, a hope against hope, a radical prayer—for the event, for the coming of what we cannot see coming, for the kingdom-to-come, the justice-to-come, for the event that is harbored in the name (of) "God," the spark of hope set off by this name. The unconditional does not exist, not as such, but it happens. The kingdom of God does not exist, not as such, but it is *attested* to every time the hungry are fed or the stranger made welcome. The incontestable is experienced in the to-come, in the call for the coming of the kingdom, of something I know not what, which keeps the future open. The unconditional comes over us with the weak force of a call, not the strong force of an authority. The unconditional comes without sovereignty as the powerless power of a solicitation which calls upon us from on high in the face of a stranger laid low, which speaks for itself. The unconditional calls of itself, from itself, without the economy of eternal rewards or punishments, without the threat to separate the sheep from the goats, the faithful from the infidels, the orthodox from the heretics. The unconditional resonates below the radar of true beliefs and false as the groundless ground of that in which we live and move and have our being, the *prius*, the unprethinkable, being-itself—"it" does not care what you call it—which is always already there, long before the police of orthodoxy arrive on the scene searching for dissenters.

Notes

1. Jacques Derrida, *Sauf le nom* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 85; *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 71.
2. Erin Vearncombe, B. Brandon Scott, Hal Taussig, *After Jesus Before Christianity: A Historical Exploration of the First Two Centuries of Jesus Movements* (New York: HarperCollins, 2021).
3. Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
4. John D. Caputo, *Specters of God: An Anatomy of the Apophatic Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).
5. F. W. J. Schelling, *Philosophy of Revelation (1841–42) and Related Texts*, ed. and trans. Klaus Ottmann (Putnam, CN: Spring Publications: 2020), 124–45.
6. Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*, ed. and trans. *Peggy Kamuf* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 202–37.
7. See my account of *différance* with the pertinent citations in John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida*, ed. with a new Introduction (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997, 2020), 96–105.
8. Richard Rorty, "Deconstruction and Circumvention," in *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 102–103. For a commentary, see John D. Caputo, *More Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 95–101.

9. Jacques Derrida, "Politics and Friendship," in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews: 1971–2001*, trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 182.
10. Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, III, 24.
11. See John D. Caputo, "Tradition and Event: Radicalizing the Catholic Principle," in *In Search of Radical Theology: Expositions, Explorations, Exhortations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 29–44.

PART II

Conflict Field: Liturgy

CHAPTER 4

Catholic Liturgy Caught Between Polemics About Differences and Embracing Diversity

Joris Geldhof

Introduction

During roughly the last twenty years, there have been fierce debates in the bosom of the Catholic Church about the liturgy and, as such, about the identity of the Roman rite. Sometimes these debates have even been characterized as 'wars',[1] which, despite being a grotesque exaggeration, indicates the intensity of the disagreement among different groups. Briefly put, polemics were—and are—conducted between two opposing camps. On the one hand, there are the so-called traditionalists who are attached to the classical Latin Mass and have serious doubts about the success of the comprehensive liturgical reforms issued in the wake of Vatican II. They doubt that these reforms have been good, given the impressive decline in the number of believers participating in Sunday Mass, particularly in Western Europe, and given the poor ceremonial or ritual quality of many celebrations. They even hold the official Church partly responsible for the current malaise, to the extent that she herself would have encouraged an

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encompassing desacralization of the rites. On the other hand, there are the passionate defenders of the liturgical reforms, for whom a return to Latin and a celebration with the presiding minister facing east would be nothing short of an abomination. They glorify creativity in liturgy and argue that responding to the needs and spheres of life of most people is the best guarantee of living up to the ideals of the Liturgical Movement, the pastoral orientations set by the Council, and even the gospel.

On both sides, theological errors are made, both in relation to the history and tradition of liturgy and with respect to the relationship between church and culture.[2] Simply put, it comes down to the fact that an understanding of the relationship between life and liturgy is best developed not according to a binary scheme but a nuanced and diversified assessment of the dynamics and complexity of that relationship. So the question is not for or against the Latin Mass *or* for or against contemporary culture, but rather: how can different expressions of the Church's liturgy connect and respond to people's lives, what drives them, their concerns, their ideas and their commitment to charity? In my opinion, this is neither possible by doubling down on the classical Latin Mass and therefore subscribing to the whole cultural, aesthetic, spiritual and theological ethos that comes along with it,[3] nor by uncritically committing to a liturgy for which the ultimate touchstone is no other than the authenticity of personal experience as expressed in subjective preferences.

In what follows, an attempt is made to add some nuance to the debates. I argue that it is necessary to shift from an inward-looking to a mission-oriented church. Instead of continuing polemics about liturgical differences and trying to undergird them with theological theories and historical claims, it is better for the church and her liturgy to embrace diversity and to do that at different levels, not in spite of her liturgical tradition but because of it. This argument requires that, as a first step, some brief historical context is provided. As a second step, I intend to dismantle some of the conceptual binaries in which the debates about the liturgy of the Roman rite are entangled and to do some constructive proposals for the future.

A Very Short Historical Note

To understand liturgy in the 2020s, a recent historical context is needed. In the 1980s, the discussions with the followers of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre intensified, especially when the latter went so far as to ordain bishops without the approval of the highest ecclesiastical authority. Pope John Paul II promptly appointed a special commission in 1988 called *Ecclesia Dei* to ensure that contacts were maintained with Lefebvre's Pius X fraternity, despite the excommunication of some leading figures. This commission was given the additional power to see how and under which conditions the traditional Latin Mass adherents could be catered to.

When Pope Benedict XVI issued the much-discussed motu proprio *Summorum pontificum* in 2007, one of the consequences was an expansion of the work of the *Ecclesia Dei* commission. Indeed, *Summorum pontificum* marked a substantial broadening of the possibilities for celebrating the Mass according to the 1962 missal, i.e., the last typical edition of the pre-Council missal. On the one hand, the 1962 missal was based entirely on the *Missale Romanum* of 1570, promulgated under Pope Pius V, but on the other hand, it had integrated the significant reforms of the Easter Vigil and Holy Week from the 1950s.[4] Furthermore, the document spoke of an ordinary and extraordinary form or expression of one and the same rite, which corresponded to the celebration of the Eucharist according to the reformed missal—the third typical edition dates from 2000 with emendations from 2008—or that of 1962, respectively, but it at the same time underlined that the liturgical differences in no way implied doctrinal differences. What moved Benedict XVI to issue *Summorum pontificum* seems to have been a concern for the unity of the church, as is evident from the letter to the bishops which accompanied the motu proprio. Notwithstanding that intention, his decisions required clarification since many liturgists, canonists, and theologians, not to mention pastors, priests, and laypeople, found the distinction between the extraordinary and ordinary form of celebrating the liturgy at least somewhat surprising.[5]

Some of the necessary clarifications came in a subsequent document, *Universae ecclesiae*, a motu proprio again, which dates from 2011. Through this document, the possibilities of celebrating the classical, i.e., unreformed liturgy of the Roman rite, were not only perpetuated but even further expanded. For a growing conservative minority in the church, and certainly for the promoters of the so-called 'reform of the reform' movement who cherish a specific interpretation of the organic growth of the liturgy throughout the ages—implying that radical interventions to its development are unnatural and illegitimate initiatives[6]—these provisions were unequivocal statements of support for the course they believed should be taken in the liturgical field. They saw in them a confirmation of the highest authority of the church that the liturgy had been increasingly subject to decay since Vatican II, and of the opinion that the reforms of the liturgy had been of little benefit overall.

In the summer of 2021, Pope Francis dramatically and decisively scaled back the expansions of the Latin Mass which had been allowed under his predecessor. He did so again with a motu proprio, titled *Traditionis custodes*. The current pope's decisions obligate bishops to closely supervise priests who celebrate the extraordinary form of the Eucharist, and to ensure that these priests both know Latin well and have a fine pastoral sensitivity. Moreover, it is no longer possible for parish communities to systematically celebrate Sunday Mass according to the 1962 missal. Undoubtedly these arrangements and regulations have a major impact on those groups of the Catholic faithful where the extraordinary form of the Roman rite was by now firmly established. Interestingly, the pope's decisions are motivated by the same concern for the unity of the Church as his predecessor's, although their content vastly differs.

Space for Liturgy Beyond Binaries

This last observation gives food for thought about the tension between unity and diversity in the Church's life of faith and ongoing tensions between seeking consensus and being confronted with dissensus. How much diversity can one tolerate in terms of celebrating the faith? How far must the pursuit of uniformity extend before unity is at stake? And who or what determines the contours in which differences can continue to coexist without affecting a more fundamental unity? Without a doubt, liturgy is an interesting case study in this regard. For if one thing has become clear from the heated debates about the Roman rite in recent decades, it is that postulating and hardening opinions and waging the battle along sharply delineated ideological lines are fruitless. Whatever one's sympathies may be, it is much more useful—and, in fact, necessary—to approach this whole matter according to a finely tuned hermeneutic of attachment, and thus to let affective levels of our humanity play a much more emphatic role than arguments and theories in discernment processes that aim at determining how best to celebrate the liturgy of Christians today.

In what follows, four conceptual oppositions are explored. The concepts mentioned are frequently at play in debates over liturgy, either explicitly or at a more implicit level. My purpose is to demonstrate that none of these conceptual oppositions aptly captures the liturgy itself, even if the concepts themselves reveal important things about it. Strangely enough, the liturgy is often the first victim of theological, ideological and pastoral controversies, when it becomes the object of an argument or the stake of a discussion. Therefore, the conceptual clarification I intend to develop is meant to liberate the liturgy from the ideological tangles in which it is so often wrapped.

Sacred Versus Profane

The contrast between the sacred and the profane became a popular topic in the fields of the philosophy of religion and religious studies in the course of the twentieth century. Rudolf Otto famously described the category of "das Heilige" (commonly translated as the holy) as something which both attracts and infuses fear. Among the concepts he used to grasp the dynamics of that tension were Latin ones, *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum*.[7] One could interpret and understand the notion of the profane along the lines of what Otto said about the sacred, by reversing it. That, at least, is a suggestion made by the Romanian scholar of the history and anthropology of religion Mircea Eliade, who explicitly refers to Otto at the outset of his work *The Sacred and the Profane*.[8]

Accordingly, the profane is where the forces of attraction and repulsion are much less vehement than in direct confrontation with the holy or even inexistent. Furthermore, the profane is neither capable of filling the human soul with a sense of awe, as the sacred does, nor can it infuse as much anxiety as the sacred does. The profane is the space of balance, even of rational control, whereas the holy is the space where irrational laws take over and sway one back and forth. Of course, the underlying idea is that one cannot stay all the time in the immediate atmosphere of the sacred, for that would be too intense to endure. It could, moreover, threaten the safe ground on which one's existence rests. But neither can one always remain in the realm of the profane, for that would be endlessly boring.

Another way of explaining the contrast between the sacred and the profane refers to the etymology of the concepts, and to a certain spatial context. As many scholars have shown in different ways, the sacred evokes the idea of cutting off or splitting something, and thus of setting apart something. It thus upholds a separate space, where laws govern which are different from what is normal. The sacred does not really interact with the ordinary, it sets its own rules. The profane, by contrast, is an area in front of the temple where the influence of being in direct touch with the holy is no longer at play. The profane is where the sacred is not respected, it is indifferent to its bearings. So it seems that one can do there what one wants, albeit within the necessary moral constraints, of course.

When applied to the liturgy, the very idea of separation has something appealing, at least at first sight. Liturgy is the place where the rules of the ordinary are interrupted and replaced by another set of rules. It is a forum loaded with solemnity and protocol at the heart of religious gatherings. One's attitude there is primarily one of reverence and of being taken up in a special atmosphere determined by an 'otherness' the strangeness of which can only be overcome, if at all, through a long process of initiation. Light and darkness are somewhat different from what one is used to, clothes are different (one rather speaks of vestments), the language and the music are other, the social interactions are different, etc. Scholars and other people in favor of the sacredness of liturgy underline and promote this difference, argue that it is a fundamental one, and evaluate a perceived loss of the sense for this difference as a bad evolution. They also tend to think that now is the time to stay strong and not to succumb to novelty. Anything which risks damaging the liturgy's sacredness has to be resisted. Often they opine that the liturgy has fallen prey to different kinds of profanation. According to them, profane is precisely what the liturgy must not be.

The problem with framing the discussions about the present state of the liturgy along these lines is twofold. On the one hand, one has to say that those who argue in favor of the above analysis fail to take into account the honesty of the intentions of their opponents. It is generally not the case that these opponents deliberately want to harm the liturgical tradition or that they are not attached to forms of celebration and liturgical expression with true devotion and commitment. On the other hand, and more fundamentally, the liturgy itself cannot be adequately understood as somewhere on a spectrum between the opposite poles of sacred and profane. Liturgy is neither a goal nor a means of preserving (a sense of) sacredness among Christians. Liturgy even challenges certain presuppositions about sacredness and profanity, for Christians are ultimately not there to keep and watch over a cultic regime. Instead, they are called to bring God's grace to all the corners of the earth, especially to those places where that is least evident, including the most profane and least holy ones.[9]

Liberal Versus Conservative

Another conceptual opposition often heard in debates about liturgy is the one between a liberal and conservative stance. Of course, this opposition is observed to play a prominent role in many discussions of the last couple of decades, primarily political ones. The parties in the debates are divided into the center, left-wing, and right-wing positions varying in fierceness, radicalness, and stubbornness. In Roman Catholicism, the difference between a liberal and a conservative position is additionally intertwined with the so-called majority and minority groups at the Second Vatican Council. The majority position at the Council welcomed the general course of the Church and supported its attempts at aggiornamento and, or through, ressourcement. It is commonly assumed that this position was characterized by moderate liberalism, meaning that there was openness to modern achievements as well as for the sociocultural environments in which they had come into being. The minority group, however, strongly disagreed with the new evolutions in Church and society and is supposed to hold on to an overall conservative position.

As the word itself indicates, conservatism means that one strives to keep everything as it is and that one is all but keen on making changes. Attempts at renewal are met with skepticism if not thwarted. Conservatives consider themselves as guards of the tradition and have a sharp awareness about the many benefits and values of traditions. Liberals, on the other hand, have a freer basic attitude towards things of the past. If traditions hamper personal development or have other nocuous effects or negative impact, they are inclined to deviate from the tradition. In other cases, they do not hesitate to modify it or even disregard it.

Problems are likely to arise when conservatives and liberals equally claim the foundations of the reasonableness with which things are discussed. It often occurs that the different camps refuse the rationality of the visions, the ideas and the arguments of the other. Accusations of irrationality fly back and forth, failing to recognize that what is at the heart of the discussion is not the correct way of looking at reality versus a demonstrably erroneous interpretation of it, but in fact a fundamentally different attitude towards what has been given and (what has to be) passed on. What is at stake is not so much knowledge but appreciation.

Applying the above analysis to the liturgical debates in Roman Catholicism is not difficult. Disagreements abide when questions are raised about whether or not to keep, e.g., a traditional ritual, to adapt it, or to simply no longer practice it. Things get worse if in these kinds of discussions cognitive claims take center stage, for it is not the case that these discussions can be solved by maintaining over against the other that one has a more accurate knowledge. Whether that epistemological claim concerns the correct interpretation of an element from the liturgical tradition or the right access to contemporary people's minds is actually irrelevant. For in both cases, one assumes that one can have the one without the other. In other words, the conservative position, no less than the liberal one, falls into the trap of a certain exclusivism. In liturgy, it is never about a fixed traditional praxis only or about the contemporary critical consciousness detached from tradition only.

One of the greatest liturgical scholars of the twentieth century, the Benedictine monk and professor at Sant'Anselmo in Rome, Cipriano Vagaggini, had prophetically warned against two equal "enemies" of liturgy.[10] On the one hand, Vagaggini held that developments in liturgical matters run ashore if and inasmuch as the liturgy is considered as a fixed and unchangeable object which has to be preserved against all odds. On the other hand, he reacted against a mere subjective attitude towards liturgy, as if it has to be adapted in accordance with the subjective preferences of individuals or (lobby) groups. Neither an objectifying nor a subjectivist attitude aptly grasps the dynamics of the Church's liturgical life, which, according to Vagaggini, derives its vitality neither from history only nor from human interactions with it only, but from the economy of salvation and the paschal mystery as passed on through a fascinating whole of efficacious signs from generation to generation. The liturgy is not an ossified relic from the past which needs to stay identical in any circumstance. Nor is it a plaything of free choices, individual predilections, and mere opinions. In other words, it cannot be caught by the tentacles of either liberals or conservatives, even if they make so many efforts to make one believe they can.

Hierarchical Versus Democratic

A third opposition is constituted by a hierarchical versus a democratic approach. Like the previous one, this opposition has intriguing political undertones. A hierarchical approach to liturgy is associated with an autocratic model of governing, with little to no contribution from the people. Decisions about liturgy are taken without consultation and sometimes even without motivation. All of this differs from a democratic approach to liturgy. Choices pertaining to the liturgy are taken after due conversation and common reflection. Liturgy is not the sole business of a privileged class but the stake of the entire people of God. According to a democratic model, liturgy is not only *for* but also *of* all the baptized.

Underlying this opposition is a profound unease with a specific phenomenon with deep roots in the tradition of the Catholic Church, called clericalism. Clericalism refers to the clergy, a term denoting the celibate ordained men who, for centuries, have been in charge of the Church at all levels. Clerics have obtained leadership positions not only in the context of worship and the 'administration' of the sacraments—as it was called—but also in many different church-related societies, whether cultural, social, or nonprofit, and even in ecclesial tribunals with a high impact on people's lives. It goes without saying that this massive engagement of clerics in crucial functions has to be assessed against what this implies in terms of power. Fortunately, research about power in pastoral relationships has been steadily growing over the past few decades.[11]

With respect to liturgy, it matters at which level decisions are taken. It is possible that, at the local level of a parish or a religious community, decisions about liturgical celebrations are taken on the basis of common discernment and in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. That is ideally the case also at the level of diocesan and national liturgical commissions, although the truth is that, very often, it is the priests who always come out on top. Even if there must not necessarily be anything wrong with that per se, it does conform the idea that the liturgy is ultimately the clergy's business. For they are not only the warrants of the Church's hierarchy but also its very members. In practice, it turns out to be very difficult to move from a priest-centered liturgy towards a lay-centered liturgy. It is still not clear, neither in theology nor in magisterial teaching, what baptismal priesthood actually means in this context, even if there exists substantial literature about that.

Of course, at a more fundamental level than the one of a decision-making body, one could meaningfully argue that liturgy itself is not and cannot be democratic. As an organization or institution, the Church could certainly do better to implement not only democratic principles but also to embrace a more democratic spirit. But when it comes to its liturgical tradition(s), things are not so easy, for the liturgy as such can never be made the object of the will of a majority among the people or the subject of one or another voting mechanism. In a literal sense, moreover, liturgy is hierarchical indeed. It does preserve a sacramental (*hiera*) principle (*archè*) and thereby mediates the mysteries of salvation in such a way that any believer can share in them and benefit from them. This, however, is not to downplay the importance of (more) democracy in the Church; it just makes it clear that a fine discernment process is needed to determine the reach and possible outcomes of democratic procedures when it comes to liturgy.

In sum, if hierarchical means a purely top-down approach, a rigid attachment to rubrics, a refusal of honest communication, etc., it is not even corresponding to the nature of the liturgy itself. But if hierarchical is understood in a more profound theological sense, it reflects something fundamental about liturgy.

Active Versus Contemplative

A fourth and final conceptual opposition is between action and contemplation. The division here concerns the nature of the liturgy. Is liturgy itself above all action, or is it contemplation? And is it there primarily for action, or is it rather there for contemplation? Some scholars and theologians advance the idea that liturgy is the motor for Christians' doings in the world. Others think its nature is betrayed if the Church's mission agenda prevails. They ask the question of whether the liturgy should not be principally detached from any activism and remain in the spiritual area.

Behind these questions and discussions, one usually has to suspect diverging interpretations of what 'active participation' means. This renowned notion has a long history in the Liturgical Movement and played a key role in the discussions on liturgy before, during, and after Vatican II.[12] In the context of the present chapter, it is helpful to remind what the concept aimed at remedying. In the observation of many scholars and pastors, the faithful who 'went to mass' did not really 'celebrate the Eucharist' in the religious culture, which had grown in Catholicism roughly after the Council of Trent until the mid-twentieth century. They were occupied with private devotions, did not receive communion during the service, and hardly understood anything of the prayers because they were said in a language they did not speak. It dawned on the representatives of the Liturgical Movement that, because of these historical evolutions, the people were deprived of the spiritual wealth of the liturgy. And that was found to be a most regrettable and unjustifiable situation. As a consequence, many initiatives were taken to initiate the faithful in the liturgy through catechesis and other formation programs, but it was also thought that some changes to the liturgy of the mass itself were indispensable.

Most, if not all, of the changes to the Eucharistic celebration's composition were meant to activate everyone participating. But it did not mean to henceforth assign a distinctive role in the ritual performance of the Eucharist, especially not if these roles blurred the distinctions between the priest-presider and laypersons. Active participation was an invitation for everyone, within their roles in the ritual, to engage with the content of what was being celebrated. The motivation to promote it did, ultimately, not depend on pastoral considerations about how to optimize people's involvement but was profoundly theological. It is because the Eucharist, and in particular the gathering of Christians for the Eucharist on Sundays, is the heart of the life of faith as well as the consequence of one's being baptized, that every member of the Body of Christ has to have equal access to its spiritual richness.

If one looks not only at the Eucharist but also at the liturgy in general from this perspective, it follows that an artificial discussion about action version contemplation makes little sense. Reducing the Eucharist to a means for Christian action in the world or reducing it to a mere function or occasion for contemplation are both grave theological mistakes. These thought patterns fail to do justice to the complexity of the Eucharist, which is so much more than a ritual sustaining the religious identity of a particular community.

Liturgy and Diversity

What the above analysis of conceptual and ideological tensions has demonstrated, is that contemporary discussions around liturgy cannot be reduced to simplistic schemas. The debates are not about respect or disrespect for tradition,[13] about Latin or the vernacular languages, about allowing modernity or not, or about other individual topics. At a level beyond, below, or behind the polemics, the stakes of each of these discussions reveal a real difficulty of dealing with diversity.

Of course, diversity in the liturgy is multi-layered. There is diversity in terms of the places, locations, and times when liturgy is celebrated. There is a dazzling diversity of individual performances, for which there are numerous parameters and evaluation criteria. There is also a diversity of forms and shapes of the liturgy, which depends on (the details of) the scripts that are followed and their reception history. And last but not least, there is a diversity of Christian communities, their self-understanding and the ways in which they are composed. If all these instances of diversity are framed as differences, and if these differences are interpreted as problematic, it is evident that nothing but frustration and conflicts will arise. The liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, moreover, needs a certain degree of stability and sameness, if only for reasons of recognizability and accessibility.

To embrace diversity and to see its many appearances as opportunities instead of threats requires that one does not look at it from the standpoint of logic of difference. Such logic implies that one deals with a given subject matter as 'this' and thus 'not that'. In other words, the elements or poles of a distinction are essentialized and opposed to what they are not. The consequence of such an approach is division because the possibilities of seeing connection and harmony beyond individual differences is undermined. The above conceptual and ideological binaries offer accurate examples of where such a logic of division may lead to. In none of these cases the liturgy qua liturgy was understood appropriately. The liturgy was reduced to something which has to be arranged from the perspective of conflicting views. None of these views sufficiently realized that the liturgy constitutes the Body of Christ and that the being "one," "in Christ," that is thereby established is fundamentally prior to any discussion about liturgy. The disadvantage of all these views was that they operate from intellectual schemas which do not originate in a profound reflection on the essence of the liturgy.

Such a reflection would come up with a vision which does not treat liturgical differences as a problem for which a solution has to be found, let alone that this solution lies in the outcome of power games of conflicting visions and the lobby groups defending them. The liturgy in and of itself embraces diversity, both at a fundamental level and in its many concrete instances. It brings together diverse people, diverse cultures, diverse languages and language games, it is performed at very diverse occasions and for diverse reasons, and it is celebrated according to diverse scripts, styles, and customs. And in a certain way, there has never been anything wrong with it. But, admittedly, there is a great variety in the ritual quality of celebrations, as a consequence of which many outsiders, as well as insiders, no longer feel attracted to regularly attend the worship services of Catholics. Therefore, serious efforts have to be made to enhance the sensory, musical, artistic, poetic, and ceremonial qualities of liturgical celebrations. This can only be done successfully, however, if one does not argue about differences, as they are rooted in particularisms, but if instead one wholeheartedly embraces liturgical diversity, as it is rooted in Christ's universal call to holiness.

Notes

1. Peter Jeffery, "Can Catholic Social Teaching Bring Peace to the 'Liturgy Wars'," in *Theological Studies* 75 (2014) 350–375. Jeffery notes intriguing connections with the notion of 'culture wars' and the origins of the word in journalism in early 2000s. See, e.g., a noteworthy editorial of the *National Catholic Reporter*, titled "Jarring History of the Liturgy Wars," which appeared on June 30 2006.
2. In this context it is only fair to admit that the liturgical reforms of Vatican II have not only been a success, but that there have also been failures and blind spots. For a balanced evaluation, see Kevin W. Irwin, *What We Have Done, What We Have Failed To Do: Assessing the Liturgical Reforms of Vatican II* (New York—Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2014). Other authors who have developed nuanced views on what Vatican II accomplished in terms of liturgy include Ephrem Carr, Paul De Clerck, Rita Ferrone, Winfried Haunerland, Patrick Prétot, Martin Stuflesser, etc.
3. François Cassingena-Trévedy, *Te igitur: Le missel de saint Pie V: Herméneutique et déontologie d'un attachement* (Genève: Ad Solem, 2007); Andrea Grillo, *Beyond Pius V: Conflicting Interpretations of the Liturgical Reforms* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2013).
4. Patrick Prétot, "La Réforme de la Semaine Sainte sous Pie XII (1951–1956): Enjeux d'un premier pas vers la réforme liturgique de Vatican II," in *Questions Liturgiques* 93 (2012) 196–217.
5. Benedikt Kranemann—Albert Gerhards (eds.), *Ein Ritus, Zwei Formen: Die Richtlinie Papsts Benedikt XVI. zur Liturgie* (Freiburg—Basel—Wien: Herder, 2008). Cf. also the careful analysis of Andrea Grillo, *Eucaristia: Azione rituale, forme storiche, essenza sistematica* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2019), 270–288.
6. László Dobszay, *The Bugnini Liturgy and the Reform of the Reform* (Church Music Association of America, 2003); Thomas Kocik (ed.), *The Reform of the Reform? A Liturgical Debate: Reform or Return* (Sant Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003); Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy: The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005). For critical discussions of the line of thinking represented by these writings, see Arnold Angenendt, *Liturgik und Historik: Gab es eine organische Liturgie-Entwicklung*, Questiones Disputatae vol. 189 (Freiburg—Basel—Wien: 2001), John F. Baldovin, *Reforming the Liturgy: A Response to the Critics* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2008) and Clare V. Johnson, "From Organic Growth to Liturgico-Plasticity: Reconceptualizing the Process of Liturgical Reform," in *Theological Studies* 76 (2015) 87–111.

7. Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).
8. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Orlando et al.: Harcourt Inc., 1987).
9. For a fuller elaboration of that argument, see my *Liturgy and Secularism: Beyond the Divide* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2018).
10. Cipriano Vagaggini, *Theological Dimensions of the Liturgy: A General Treatise on the Theology of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1976), 187.
11. As an example of this trend, reference can be made to Annemie Dillen (ed.), *Soft Shepherd or Almighty Pastor: Power and Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).
12. Jozef Lamberts (ed.), *The Active Participation Revisited: La participation active 100 ans après Pie XII et 40 ans après Vatican II* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).
13. Bruce T. Morrill, "The Struggle for Tradition," in E. Byron Anderson—Bruce T. Morrill (eds.), *Liturgy and the Moral Self: Humanity at Full Stretch Before God*, Essays in Honor of Don E. Saliers (Liturgical Press, 1998), 67–77.

CHAPTER 5

To Be Who We Are: A Dissenting Church: Two Proposals

Cláudio Carvalhaes

Since this book is about dissent, I want to wrestle with the very notion it has proposed. The hope to "depart from an understanding of contestation as an 'extraordinary' phenomenon in a church that is 'normally' stable and cohesive," is already very elusive. All the loaded words in quotes show that what is said might not be what it was meant. Even the word "normally" in quotes, plays with the presence and absence of normalcy, less than posing the problem, the word keeps the notion of normalcy as a fundamental part of the contestation frame. Contestation is set under the thread of extraordinary which plays both with its constant and elusive presence. However, contestation is the very reason stability and cohesiveness is in place. The notion of normalcy often means truth and contestation and that is at the very core of the building up of a cohesive unified tradition. That means that the departure from contestation as an extraordinary phenomenon serves to establish contestation as part of the main core of tradition, not to highlight the contestation historical efforts and effects, but rather to highlight normalcy by way of its negative notion.

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Dissent in Christian Churches

The Christian church is born out of dissidence. It began as an "extraordinary contestation" within the Roman Empire. Jesus himself is killed by the Empire as a dissident. It is with Constantine that Christianity loses its kernel of contestation and becomes the apparatus of the empire.[1] From then on, the struggle between contestation and normalcy ensued. Thus, the church, if we think of early Christianity, before Constantine, is a site of contestation, moving in a thousand directions with people and other traditions left aside from the normalcy of the church. So much of the history of Christianities were dismissed, destroyed, shut down. Christian ecclesiology, theology, spirituality, rituals, and so on have fundamentally been a history of contestation turned into normalcy. A history of dissent that we tried to settle under confessions, dogmas, rituals and the ecumenical movements, an endless movement towards normalcy.

From that perspective my argument is that, against normalcy, the church has always been a movement of "extraordinary contestation." The church is seen as a dissident community, a utopian community praying and toiling for a new day on behalf of those who have been destroyed, exploited, colonized, vilified. The church carries an anti-colonialist agenda despite navigating the waters of colonialism. The church, from its grassroots beginning, carries a kernel of non-conformism, a fundamental dissidence that once lost, turns the church into an institution. Although in a certain way the church had been institutionalized for a long time. One can see this even in the Pauline corpus.

Even in my tradition, proud of its motto: reformed church always being reformed, is a principle that is grounded in folding back to the Scriptures which is to go back to that contestation movement. Thus, it could also mean: dissent always, normalcy is the death of any religious movement. Paul Tillich's "Protestant Principle"[2] also runs through the same veins since it is a reformed way of going against the temptation of idolatry or the sitting of a sense of normalcy (tradition). Perhaps another way to say it is to remind us of the fact that we are bound to an illusion that the church is already a liberated and liberating community. No, we are caught into a normalcy that hides the fact that we lost not only our ability but our divine demand to be dissident. Entangled into so many forms of normalcies that prevent us from being free agents of liberation we turn everything into a normal pattern of living that is often so detached from the daily lives and suffering of the people. One reason of this detachment/distance is the way we are wrapped up into a self-enclosed theology where only the inside of the church has the proper criticism to itself.

The ecumenical movement, however, can be in different ways, a form of awakening us from this self-enclosed theological normalcy. While it can be seen as a method of absorption and consolidation into that very form of theology, it can also be a constant push towards that liberation, that freedom, that awareness, that undoing of this self-enclosed theology and mission. With the help of the ecumenical movement, the dissenting church must continue to dissent from its own practices (critica ad intra) and in relation to "the world" (critica ad extra), as our ecumenical ancestors wanted. The decolonial approaches nowadays can be a powerful continuation of these same threads.

One more thing about the dangers of normalcy: usually normal language or language of best practices side with hegemonic centers of power, their many forms of violence and imposition, be it ways of understanding what human is about their enforcement by guns, papal bulls, king's decrees. What we call universal normalcy was once local thinking from men living in their own villages and cities in Europe that were turned into universal truths by the imposed notion of normalcy destroying resistances, contestation, and defiance.

I want to wonder a bit about the relationship between Christian churches in Europe and the United States in regard to my upbringing in Brazil, Latin America. The positionality of oneself tells the social historical situation in regard to the pair normalcy/contestation. In my upbringing, Calvin's thoughts wrapped up in United States culture came to Brazil as a machine that devoured contrary positions encompassing the cultural/religious knowledge of the Gringos over the forms of knowledge in my family and village. While there was very little conversation and dialogue there was a lot of subversive contestation. Nonetheless, Protestantism was itself a contestation to the hegemonic power of Roman Catholicism. Growing up I was very embarrassed to carry the Bible in my hands for that sign was already a sign of contestation.

Within Catholicism there was popular Catholicism and afro-religions subverting the normalcies of the Catholic faith. These groups lived under endless forms of contestation even putting their lives in danger. When we compare the evangelization/colonization of the United States and Brazil, we see the mercilessness of Protestantism crushing so many forms of religious diversity while in Brazil, Afro-Religious groups could find their own place under the shadows of the Roman Catholic Church. Today, with the uprising of the most conservative Pentecostal churches and the alignment of Protestantism with them, there is very little room for contestation which is often met with violence and death. Nonetheless, contestation is everywhere as a form of keeping life alive!

I remember growing up in Brazil and learning how liberation theology challenged the status of European theology. However, in order to understand liberation theology, I had to read many white, male European theologians to understand why we were contesting their thoughts. Karl Rahner was fundamental to Leonardo Boff, Paul Tillich was extremely helpful to those of us searching for a dialogue with Brazilian culture and later I learned that Karl Barth was fundamental to James Cone and his black theology. The universality of (European) theological claims were not working. Liberation theologies were a contestation from below against the European theologies from above.

However, the universal notions and doctrinal claims about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, sin, salvation, the church, and so on were all challenged by local ways of living and thinking. Liberation theologies started to break down these universalisms and by ways of starting with experience and contesting the overarching Christian grid of dogmatic theology. Nonetheless, the contestation of liberation theologies also became somewhat normal and is now lived out in so many ways by Pope Francis.

So, for me, contestation is the norm of the theological landscape. Since the book of Acts, contestation and conflicts mark the history of the church. Nothing has been normal, if normal means an inconstant place of assertions and assumptions. So much theology from the margins, such as peasants, blacks, indigenous and women's movements are ways of discovering what was not viewed as normal in the history of the church.

Used to the crumbs of the sideways of history, thought, belief, and feeling, with occasional invitations to the center, the defiant histories of the church have actually been a fundamental aspect of the unity of the church. For there is no unity without division, no cohesiveness without defiance, no purity without mixings, and no center without margins. That has been the trap of alternative discourses of contestation.

The colonization process works in this way too. It establishes margins so that there can be a center and margins. Hierarchy is at the heart of it so one can centralize power in the hands of a class, race, and form of sexuality: white male heteropatriarchy. In this movement, it closes in what is supposed to be oneness and purity, so the catholicity of any Christian church can be sustained.

Here is the contradiction of the Christian churches with which we must wrestle. When Christianity became a religion that could not tolerate open canons, fluid forms of knowledge that gave themselves to change, it formalized ways of dealing with dissent. Dissent (and dissenters) were recognized not only as a threat to the norms and the power that was increasingly centralized but also served as a device to maintain and protect the rules: *pluribus unum*, which is also the formula for nation-states.

Well, is there an outside of this self-encompassing system? Let me propose two ways of finding a path to an *outside*. First, the dissent of interreligious dialogue and second, the dissent of the land. These two things are only embryos of a thought that needs to be further developed.

Becoming a Different Christian: The Dissent of Interreligious Dialogue

If we are to actually talk from a place of defiance, it has to be done from a place where what was inside was thrown out. Dissent is that which normalcy cannot agree, believe, think, or do. That is the place of dissent, conflicted powers and disagreement. Which might also be a place of disgust, repulsion, or abrasive contradiction to somebody's own precepts. This self-enclosing of beliefs that turns everything into a mirror of ourselves can be contested in many ways. One of the forms of contestation can be found in the Brazilian Anthropophagic thinker Oswald de Andrade who said: "Only what is not mine interests me."[3] The centrality of something or somebody else as the always unstable center is the real notion of defiance. Like offering hospitality to those I will be endangered by. Is that even possible? That would mean that the history of the church, or any colonial or decolonial Christian thinking must engage with that which cannot relate with and be shaken and transformed. For it is this impossibility that is the very outside of contestation if we are to deal with normalcy.

Let me mention a Quilombola community in Brazil called Quilombo Saco Curtume, a place that I have never been to but heard from Antonio Bispo dos Santos, one of its leaders. Quilombo Saco Curtume, like all quilombos, is a place of resistance to slavery in Brazil that exists on their own terms, their own work with the land and their own religions.

Antonio Bispo dos Santos, a black quilombola thinker from Brazil says that when Christianity arrived at his doorsteps their community welcomed it. We are polytheists, so one more would make us better. However, what they didn't expect was to see that what was once open fluid ancestral forms of knowledges, ended concealed under Christian thought. This is a trademark of several monotheist religions that live in fear and call *anathema* anything that doesn't look like them.[4]

On the other hand, Antonio Bispo dos Santos carries Jesus in the midst of his traditions, in dissented ways, ways that we might call an external form of Christianity, since it does not hold Christianity in its organizing axis. What would we do with a dissent that places Jesus as "just" one more God to be believed and praised? Would we live with this form of dissent? We might be living beyond a borderless border that I wrote about elsewhere.[5]

Thus, to get into what is not mine, I have to venture into the dangerous and mined place of interreligious dialogue to be transformed. For only a knowledge that is placed between many Christianities and other religions is what really matters. But here I am not talking about building relations between dogmas, belief systems, historical laws or ritual practices. Instead, I am looking for what cannot be placed in confluence but must live together. Would the Jewish-Christian identity struggles or Paul's sermon at the Areopagus be a hint?

It has to do with the notion of confluence, a key term for Antonio Bispo dos Santos who says that confluence is a way to relate and live together amidst differences. We all benefit from this living together; we all keep who we are but we also change and become somebody else. Like a tree who bears fruits and animals will eat it and then will pollinate its seeds elsewhere. Bispo says:

> *Confluence is the law that governs the relationship of coexistence between the elements of nature and teaches us that not everything that joins mixes, that is, nothing is the same. As such, confluence also governs the processes of mobilization stemming from the pluralist thinking of polytheistic peoples.*[6]

Thus, if I want to live with the quilombola community that is not Christian in my own terms but might also be Christian in their own terms, I will live in the aftermath of a certain form of Christianity. It is that part of Christianity which might not be mine, since it doesn't fit my set of beliefs in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, is what interests me. A part of me that developed beyond the limits of my acceptance. If I am to live in that quilombo, I will have to become a different Christian. Can I live in that dissent?

We can also say that throughout the world we see very mixed forms of Christianity with different forms of theological developments—the cultural appropriations that demand our faith and allegiance such as neo-liberalism. The problematic side, so to speak, of these developments for me would be the neo-Pentecostal forms of mixed Christianity that are mostly a mix of several sources oriented towards a neo-liberal economy and self-enclosed in codes of profit, disconnection, and deregulation of any form of life. The good side is Popular Catholicism that is already happening, in the forms of Umbanda, the presence of Christianity within the Quilombola's place as a sign of a certain kind of Christianity that is more fluid and malleable to what the people need to live more fully.

I wonder what the Christian Eucharist would be if paired with the African offerings to the Orixas. I wonder if we can realize how the notion of transubstantiation also belongs to so many indigenous religions in so many natural modes and theological valances. Or when we can see the trance/possession in Afro-Brazilian religions and in Pentecostalisms and how it carries dissonances, contestations, and similarities within these forms of dances and movements within these traditions.

What I am trying to say is this: the best way to talk about dissent is to take the notion of truth as always in relationship, as a dialectical movement. Monotheist religions tend to see truth in one place, one thinker, one community, one tradition. For non-monotheist religions, pantheist or animist religions, truth is always in between things: between the action and the rock, the spirit and the environment, the trees and the gatherings, the spirits and the bodies. If that is to be considered, then a liturgical confession would sound something like this:

Don't mess with me for I don't walk alone
I don't walk alone, I don't walk alone
I have Zumbi, Besouro, the Tupi chief, I'm Tupinambá
I have the Eres, Caboclo Boiadeiro, healing hands
Morubixabas, headdresses, rainbows
Blowguns, war bonnets, arrows and altars
The speed of light in the dark of the darkest forest
Where we have the silence, the waiting
I have Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
All shamans in my company
The little Jesus plays and sleeps in my dreams

We Have Not Landed Yet: The Dissent of the Land

The second proposal is a way of wrestling with a dissenting church by way of bringing forth the earth as the fundamental way of being in the world. Here I want to pay attention to a historical dissent, even if hidden for the most part, but which is now placing us in a situation of calamity and catastrophes. That is a dissent between the Christian theology, ecclesiology and liturgy, and the earth. We have dissented from the earth for far too long. The knowledge of the earth was present in the Christian liturgy with the alignment of Jewish festivals, but we slowly lost the knowledge of the land. And by knowledge of the earth, I mean the ways the earth organizes itself in patterns and systems and creates its own laws of living.

Surely, we also have a rich history of what we might call eco-theology: Saint Francis, Ivone Gebara, Richard Rohr, Rosemary Reuther, Wendell Berry, Thomas Berry, Sallie McFague, Catherine Keller, Nancy Cardoso, and so on. But they have been marginal theologies to compose the vast notion of theology.

One example: Mark Wallace[7] reminds us of God as an Avian God, the Holy Spirit becoming a dove. While this is a memory inscribed at the heart of the relationship of God and the earth, we have turned the dove into a metaphor and the Holy Spirit as a person of the trinity. Instead of a deep connection with the earth, Enlightenment made us so afraid of the natural world.

Thus, our Christian thinking has become a theology for humankind alone. We work from a human exceptionalism and that exceptionalism makes everything fall flat into the same ground of cement we are standing on. The human species' exceptionalism is about humanity above everything, imagining that its reasoning has grasped the truth of all and understood almost everything. Human exceptionalism is the thinking that our human species is more important than any other, the most important species. After all, God came to the world as a human being and everything has to do with humanity. There is no breath from any other species in our theological, liturgical breathing/thinking. We are becoming more and more afraid of other species. In fact, we are so afraid that we are only allowing a few species to live, like corn, soy, cattle, cats, dogs, some fruits…. The whole diversity of the earth doesn't really matter. That is why we only talk about the love of God for humans, the purpose of God for humans, the healing of God for humans.

The earth as the body of God,[8] as Sallie McFague puts it, is never to be considered. We still carry this medieval and later modernist thought that we humans are the crown of God's creation. In our hierarchical thinking, God is above everything and humans (mostly white men) come after. For secular people, "reasoning" is above it all. And then, under the human species, all the more than human, the rest of creation: animals, plants, oceans, rivers, etc.

In most of the normalcy of theology making, there is an earthless theology. This landless theology is not the struggle to fight the ownership of the land by some people and with and from those who don't have the gift to live on the land but rather, our landless theology stands as a form of defiant relationship to the earth and a continuous process of support of John Locke's notion of private property.

Another example: I just read a dissertation on liturgical theology based on symbols and architecture. In its 400 pages there was an enormous breadth of knowledge of the tradition, of space, of symbols, of church architecture. But there was not a single word on the land where the church was built. It was as if that writer was talking about a church that was hovering somewhere, a church that never landed anywhere.

In fact, as Bruno Latour says, we moderns have not landed yet,[9] We live off the land but do not relate to the land. And from that utter distance and ahistorical abstraction, we have become averse to the patterns of the land and antagonistic to other species. Our time is not the time of the land. The ways the earth offers such abundance to us are not the ways we extract everything without concern or care. Our dissent is such that we have even opposite views of the land. Even the notion of nature was a concept created by Europeans to deal with that which they had no idea how to handle.

Our dissent turned the land into a place of erasure, a place of annihilation. We have turned the earth into a monolithic category and have turned the earth from a place we belong into a place we own and search for profit. Coloniality has been the stealing of the land everywhere around the world. Capitalism has turned what was common into patented rights for individual profit. This form of ruling, of commodifying the earth, has annihilated other species and communities who carried other forms of knowledge and relations. The more we devour the earth the less diversity we have. If we think for a moment, this pattern of living has a strong parallel with Monotheistic theologies who can't deal with diversity either. In that way, Monotheistic theologies can be related to monocultures, agribusiness, and contestation as a form of keeping the diversity forms of life alive.

Thus, my quest here is to call us from the notion of center and margins or cohesiveness and dissent and issue a call to us all to move towards those places where Christianity has always been a dissent so that we can figure out what forms of life and death come out of those forms of dissent. But that would require us to be fluid and open to be contaminated with other forms of animist relations of divinities in the places we live. Also, I would like to issue a call for us all to dissent from our human, all-too-human theological discourses and start to listen to the birds, honoring the ancestry of trees, care for the waters, protect the diversity of seeds, care for the plants and the biodiversity of our biomes.

To dissent means to look for life elsewhere, a different form of feeling-thinking with the environments we live. To turn the trees as our condition to love God just as Russian Saint Nikiphoros of Chios (1750–1821) said: "Men will become poor because they will not have a love for trees.... if you don't love trees, you don't love God."[10] I would like to see the rivers be as sacramental as the baptismal font, the fields of wheats and grapes as holy as the altar. And a prayer/homily like this:

The Queen of the Sea goes hand in hand with me
Teach me the dance of the waves and sing, sing, sing for me
It is from the gold of Oshun that the armor that guards my body is made
secure my blood, my throat
The poison of evil finds no way
In my heart, Holy Mary turns on her light and shows me the way
I sink in the wind, I ride in the radius of Iansã
I turn the world, turn, turn,
I'm in the Recôncavo,
I fly among the stars, and I play by being one of them
I trace the Southern Cross, with João Menino's hands keeping the bonfire torch
I pray with the three Hail Mary's
I go beyond, I gather in the splendor of the Nebulae[11]

Conclusion

As I finish, our true abyss today is not the unity/dissent paradigm of Christian discourses. Our abyss is elsewhere, it is the abyss where our worlds end. It is at the edge of that abyss between humans and more than humans (plants, animals, rivers, rocks, oceans, and so on) that our religious crossings must be and do something else. Perhaps there, at the abyss, we can think with what Polish poet Wisława Szymborska told us in her poem *Autonomy*: "The abyss doesn't divide us. The abyss surrounds us."[12]

My wrestling with the theme of this volume has led me to argue for the importance of reclaiming dissent at the heart of religious faith, which should be lodged at the beginning of every interreligious dialogue. Both the contestation that is always a part of our faith communities as we seek to find ways to live as people in specific places, with particular narratives, a variety of neighbors, and multiple identities. But also, to accept the contributions of contestation that comes from our neighbors of other religious traditions who in their dissent may provide us with new ways of seeing ourselves and help us become somebody else. And finally, to hear the cry of the earth as a dissenting voice in our human species theologies, and the ways our practices of exploiting the riches and goodness of the earth are incompatible with the call to care for the earth as God's precious creation.

This, I believe, can only be done by Christians continuously seeking unity for the sake of the world. Becoming what we are: earth people, sharing the gospel, praying with one another, caring for God's creation under the immensity of God's freedom, which bounds us all, including the earth, tightly together. As a Protestant, I continually call for the Spirit to help us always dissent: Come Holy Spirit, Come!

Notes

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PART III

Conflict Field: Canon Law

CHAPTER 6

Dealing with Conflict and Dissent in the Roman Catholic Church. An Inventory from the Perspective of Canon Law

Bernhard Sven Anuth

Wherever people live together in communities, differences of opinion and disputes cannot be avoided. Usually, the law serves to resolve such conflicts within a community in an orderly manner and conduces to restore legal peace. Amongst people who form a community of faith, there are often conflicts about the right doctrine and its preservation or reform. It is especially those conflicts that raise the question of how a religious

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community deals with dissent, to what extent it is tolerated and perhaps even regarded as productive, or whether and, if so, at what point it fights dissent for the sake of the common conviction of faith.

The Catholic Church has differentiated legal rules and procedures on how to deal with conflicts and dissent within the communion, and it also uses legal means to try to prevent deviations that endanger the community and the faith. These canonical regulations convey the self-understanding of the Catholic Church and therefore the theology of the legislator, especially its ecclesiology. Therefore, the following remarks are not about a personal theological draft but aim to deliver realistic information on the official doctrine and applicable law of the Catholic Church.

Prevention of Conflict and Dissent …

… Through General Commitment of the Faithful

The Code of Canon Law (CIC) obliges all Catholics to always maintain communion with the church in expression and behavior (c. 209 § 1) and to fulfill their duties to the universal church and their respective particular church with "great diligence" (§ 2). According to canon law, Catholics have to "direct their efforts to lead a holy life and to promote the growth of the church as well as its ongoing sanctification" (c. 210) and "have the duty and right to work so that the divine message of salvation more and more reaches all people in every age and in every land" (c. 211). Above all, they are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church (c. 212 § 1). A breach of this legal obligation is punishable by law and extends in matters of doctrine to all teachings presented by the Church's Magisterium. It depends on the degree of the binding force of the respective doctrine which precise attitude of response is required to a declaration of the Church's Magisterium and thus is to be determined according to the special norms of canon law: In the case of definitive, which means infallible, doctrines of the Revelation, canon law requires obedience of faith as an irrevocable assent to divine authority (c. 750 § 1). Definitive doctrines, which are not themselves contained within the Revelation, but are, according to official classification, closely related to it and presented as infallible, are, although merely requested by the Church "to be firmly embraced and retained" with an obedience that is equally irrevocable (c. 750 § 2). This, for example, applies to the Church's doctrine on the impossibility of women's ordination to the priesthood, the prohibition of euthanasia, or the illegitimacy of prostitution.[1]

In the case of non-infallible doctrines of the authentic Magisterium, for example, the moral judgment on homosexuality or contraception, Catholics are obliged to a religious submission of intellect and will (cc. 752f.), meaning, to external observance and intellectual assent and appropriation of the respective doctrine.[2] An obedient silence is permissible, as the maximum deviation from non-infallible teachings of both the universal and particular church's Magisterium, and only in justified exceptional cases.[3] The purpose of this *silentium obsequiosum* is "not allowing non-consent to become apparent beyond the private sphere."[4] Any public dissent would violate the obligation to obey according to cc. 752f.[5]

Theologians and canonists have long criticized in particular the legal duty of obedience to teachings of the non-infallible universal Magisterium and its penal sanction: Some of them proclaim that the legal situation created by CIC/1983 "is more than problematic, at least in regards to the academic freedom of theology, the respect of freedom of conscience, and concerning the formation of a sensus fidelium in the Church"; canon law would do well "not to establish a legally sanctioned claim to obedience that gives the impression that obedience to the faith and orthodoxy is to be equated with consent to an abstract doctrinal system."[6] However, Pope John Paul II only once modified the CIC with regard to the Church's teaching function: In 1998, he closed a legal gap regarding the faithful's duties to obey. Since then, all Catholics are legally obliged to adhere to all infallible doctrines that are not part of the Revelation (c. 750 § 2).[7] Disobedience may be punishable by law (c. 1371 n. 1^{1998}; c. 1371 § 1^{2021}).

… Through Special Precautions for Clerics and Other Multiplicators

Since 1983, canon law even provides specific requirements for candidates for the clerical state and for lay multiplicators.

Clerics

All clerics are legally "bound by a special obligation to show reverence and obedience to the Supreme Pontiff and their own ordinary" (c. 273). When finally editing the CIC, Pope John Paul II deliberately placed this obligation at the top of the catalog of clergy duties and rights.[8] To ensure that clerics actually yield the required obedience, they should be formed accordingly through seminary education (c. 245 § 2). The diocesan bishop must convince himself of the suitability of a candidate twice during the period of formation, and once more each time ahead of the ordinations to diaconate and priesthood (cc. 1051f.). Before admission to the diaconate, each candidate must also make a profession of faith according to the formula approved by the Apostolic See (c. 833 no. 6), which signifies confessing his present "total identification with all the teachings of the Church." [9] For this purpose, the formula of the *professio fidei* was last amended in 1989, and "to complete it", the obligation to take the oath of fidelity was extended to candidates for the ordination as deacons.[10] This composition of a present confession and a promissory oath has served "like the former oath against modernism as a preventive assurance and safeguard of loyalty"[11] in the Latin Church ever since.

Any priest who later assumes the office of a pastor (*parochus*) or becomes vicar general, episcopal vicar, or judicial vicar must again take both the *professio fidei* and the oath of fidelity (c. 833 no. 5f.). All those who are appointed bishop or who are legally equal to the diocesan bishop are also obliged to take the *professio fidei* (no. 3); future bishops must also take a special oath of fidelity before taking office, in which they promise perpetual fidelity to the pope and commit, among other things, to giving an account of their conduct of office to the Apostolic See and to obediently accepting and carrying out its orders or advice.[12] Candidates for an episcopal office have previously undergone the so-called informative process by which the Apostolic Nuncio prepares their assessment of suitability by the Apostolic See (cc. 377 § 3; 378 § 2). In this procedure, which is carried out under the pontificial secret, the Apostolic Nuncio asks selected clerics and laypersons, among other things, for their assessment of the candidates' fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church, in particular to the documents of the Holy See on the priesthood, the ordination of women to the priesthood, marriage, social justice, and sexual ethics.[13] Thus, only those who can be expected to be obedient and conform to doctrine are expressly considered for the highest particular church government office of the diocesan bishop.

Teachers of Catholic Religious Education

Teachers of religious education are selected according to similar criteria: The diocesan bishop does not only have to regulate and watch over this area in general (cf. 804 § 1) but he must also ensure that all teachers of religious education within his diocese "are outstanding in correct doctrine, the witness of a Christian life and teaching skill" (c. 804 § 2). He therefore "has the right to appoint or approve teachers of religion and even to remove them or demand that they be removed if a reason of religion or morals requires it" (c. 805).

Theologians

Lecturers in Catholic theology are also subject to preventive control by the Church's authority: according to canon law, the latter must generally ensure that only those lecturers are appointed to ecclesiastical institutions of higher education who also "are outstanding in integrity of doctrine and probity of life" (c. 810 § 1; cf. c. 818). Those who teach a theological discipline also need a mandate from the competent ecclesiastical authority (c. 812). Theologians, who teach disciplines pertaining to faith or morals also have to take the *professio fidei* (c. 833 no. 7). Since 1989, they usually have to complete the *professio fidei* by taking the oath of fidelity. In addition, the "nihil obstat" of the Holy See must be obtained before each promotion to the highest category of teaching or before a permanent appointment of a lecturer.[14]

When Pope Francis revised the ecclesiastical law on higher education in 2017, he not only confirmed all these provisions but also reaffirmed the continued validity of the Instruction "on the ecclesiastical vocation of the theologian" with which the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 1990 inculcated and concretized the duty of obedience of theologians to the Magisterium (c. 218).[15] In addition, the legal obligation remains that "[i]n studying and teaching the Catholic doctrine, fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church is always to be emphasized" at Faculties of Catholic Theology and that, "especially in the basic cycle, those things are, above all, to be imparted which belong to the received patrimony of the Church". Opinions that are only probable, but not secured, and personal views of the teachers, "which come from new research are to be modestly presented [only] as such."[16]

Dealing with and Procedures for Conflicts …

In addition to the aforementioned obligations, all the faithful must always "take into account the common good of the Church, the rights of others, and their own duties toward others" (c. 223 § 1). None of the rights of the faithful in the Church, even if they are sometimes called "fundamental", are fundamental rights in the sense of state law.[17] They are always subject to the reservation that the ecclesiastical authority may direct the exercise of rights in view of the common good of the Church (c. 223 § 2).[18] If the faithful see their rights violated or threatened, they can certainly vindicate them within the Church and, if necessary, defend or enforce them by legal means (c. 221 § 1).

At the same time, every diocesan bishop is *ex officio* obliged "to promote the common discipline of the whole Church and therefore to urge the observance of all ecclesiastical laws" (c. 392 § 1). Furthermore, "he is firmly to protect the integrity and unity of the faith to be believed" (c. 386 § 2). His legal duty "to exercise vigilance so that abuses do not creep into ecclesiastical discipline", regards amongst other things "especially […] the ministry of the word" (c. 392 § 2). In the episcopal oath of fidelity, he specifically swore to be ever vigilant in that regard, before taking office.[19] If the faithful dissent from binding church guidelines in matters of doctrine or personal conduct of life, it can have specific consequences under church law, for example, non-admission to sacraments or loss of the "missio canonica". Some violations of church law or doctrine are even criminal offenses and can be prosecuted accordingly.

Against this background, different procedures are used in the Catholic Church, depending on the subject matter and constellation of the conflict, to settle a dispute, punish violations of the law through disciplinary or penal action, and to remove dissenting multiplicators from their office if necessary.

… *Between Individual Catholics*

According to canon law, all the faithful "are to strive diligently to avoid litigation among the people of God as much as possible", as long as justice is not compromised as a result, or "to resolve litigation peacefully as soon as possible" (c. 1446 § 1). However, they are also entitled to legitimately assert their rights in the Church and to defend them before the competent ecclesiastical authority according to the norm of law (c. 221 § 1). This common right of all faithful to legal protection is concretized in both Codes in the introductory provisions on procedural law: according to c. 1491, any right is in principle enforceable. The object of adjucation in the Church is both the prosecution or protection of rights of physical or juridic persons and the declaration of juridic facts.[20] An ecclesiastical court can therefore be called upon to enforce and protect subjective rights against endangerment or infringement, that is, to realize a legal claim.

The judge should "encourage and assist the parties" at the very beginning of a litigation, as well as at any other time in the trial, "to collaborate in seeking an equitable solution to the controversy," whenever he sees any prospect of success in this regard (c. 1446 § 2). If a litigation only concerns the private good of the parties and not also the common good of the Church, the judge shall also consider whether the litigation can be ended by an agreement, that is an amicable settlement of the parties, or by a judgment of arbitrators according to cc. 1713–1716 (c. 1446 § 3).[21]

Canonists therefore have long called for the Church to "give greater importance to the guaranteed subjective rights of the faithful": For wherever faithful receive appropriate attention from bishops and their tribunals, this can surely help to "overcome the current discomfort of many […that] having right(s) and getting one's right is not the same within the *communio* of the Church."[22] Unfortunately, the indication of this problem is still relevant today.

… Between Catholics and Church-Run Institutions

A special case, which is to be mentioned only briefly because it is not regulated by universal church law, is that of conflicts between Catholics as employees and Church-run institutions as employers: Although, in principle, state labor law applies to all employment relationships under private law in Germany, the right to self-determination of religious communities opens up considerable scope for shaping employment relationships: Therefore, Church-run institutions in Germany do not have to set up work councils or personnel boards, but may go their own way through so-called "Mitarbeitervertretungen." The negotiation of working conditions does not take place according to the system of collective labor agreements with possible collective action either, but in so-called "Arbeitsrechtlichen Kommissionen" filled with equal representation. According to the "Grundordnung des kirchlichen Dienstes" adopted by the German Bishops' Conference, the relationship between Church institutions and their employees is not characterized by the opposition of contentious interests but by the guiding principle of the so-called "Dienstgemeinschaft". Accordingly, all those working in the Church and its institutions, regardless of status, function, and religion, participate equally in the fulfillment of the mission.[23] Employers and employees provide a joint service; there may be different interests, but in view of the common mission of the Church, they must be reconciled as consensually as possible.

Until 2022, the principle understanding of an employment as service in the Church also resulted in the so-called "Loyalitätsobliegenheiten" for employees, which went beyond the actual work performance, but affecting the personal conduct of life. Since according to Art. 3 (3) of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany no one may be disadvantaged because of their religious beliefs and the German state must ensure a legal balance in the event of conflict regarding employment relationships in the Church. For this reason, the scope and limits of the Church's right to self-determination in the area of individual labor law are regularly reviewed by state labor courts. Up until now, German courts have generally been sympathetic to the church. Whether and to what extent this will change as a result of the case law of the Court of Justice of the European Union[24] remains to be seen.

There is a similar situation in the United States.[25] Here, church institutions can also make demands on the private lives of their employees and use Church membership as a hiring criterion. With the so-called "ministerial exception,[26]" which is being traced back to the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, religious communities in the U.S. have even more far-reaching options than in Germany when it comes to structuring church employment relationships: If a Church institution in the U.S. classifies an employee as a "minister," a complete exemption from anti-discrimination law is being established, so that state courts can no longer review a termination for any grounds of discrimination (e.g. disability, age). Whereas in the past the "ministerial exception" was merely used for clerics and professions related to annunciation, church schools are now increasingly classifying teachers as "ministers." As well as this, an overall tightening of church labor law can be currently seen in the U.S.[27]

… Between Catholics and Church Authorities …

Conflicts between Catholics and church authorities can be caused by very different issues. Depending on the concrete subject matter and the legal character of a decision by the church authority as well as the hierarchical position of the conflicting parties, canon law offers various procedural paths for conflict resolution. Formally, a fundamental distinction must be made between administrative and judicial procedures. In penal law, for example, the competent church authority is usually free to choose which of these procedures it will use to prosecute an offense (c. 1341 in connection with c. 1718 § 1). The faithful, on the other hand, may have no way of initiating a trial because, for example, administrative tribunals do not exist in the particular Churches of the Roman Catholic Church.

... After Administrative Decisions

Under the current canon law, controversies arising from an act of administrative power are not an object of trials at ordinary Church tribunals (c. 1400 § 2). Therefore, at least in their particular Churches, the faithful can only take action against an ecclesiastical administrative act by an appeal. Whoever considers himself or herself aggrieved by an administrative act (decree), must first "seek the revocation or emendation of the decree in writing from its author" (c. 1734). Only then he/she can propose the so-called "hierarchical recourse" as the only legal recourse (cc. 1732–1739)[28]: In this procedure, the respective higher church authority reviews the legally challenged decision and can freely confirm, modify, or even revoke it (c. 1739 CIC; c. 1004 CCEO). Canonists criticize this complaint procedure "since it is only rudimentarily regulated in canon law, as suboptimal and out of touch with reality."[29] They have also long criticized the lack of administrative tribunals for independent review of administrative acts in the particular Churches[30]: After Vatican II, the "Würzburg Synod" of the (arch)dioceses of Germany (1971–1975) had already enacted an order for Church administrative tribunals, which, however, never came into force.[31] Even the last overall draft during the process of revising the Code of Canon Law still intended particular church administrative tribunals, yet these canons were deleted by Pope John Paul II without any justification.[32] Therefore, there is still only one administrative tribunal in the Catholic Church: the Second Section of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature. Thus, it is an accordingly big challenge for the faithful to approach this tribunal with a complaint.[33]

... in the Area of the Church's Discipline

If Catholics fail to comply with their duty of obedience towards the sacred pastors as rulers of the Church (c. 212 § 1) or if they violate specific obligations of office or profession, this may be legally sanctioned by the competent hierarchical superior: Whoever disobeys a Church authority that lawfully commands or forbids, and persists in disobedience after being warned, shall even be punished.[34] As penalties are merely subsidiary in the Catholic Church, bishops may refrain from initiating a judicial or an administrative procedure for the imposition or the declaration of penalties if they are convinced that, through fraternal correction, rebuke, or other means, they can sufficiently repair the scandal, restore justice, and reform the offender (c. 1341).[35] Pope Francis, however, revised the Church's penal law in 2021 to make it more manageable for bishops as a regular instrument of pastoral care.[36] Thereby he concretizes, what up until now was merely the undefined threat of a "just penalty" (c. 1371 no. 2 CIC^{1983}): Henceforth, anyone "who does not obey the lawful command or prohibition of the Apostolic See or the Ordinary or Superior and, after being warned, persists in disobedience, is to be punished, according to the gravity of the case with a censure or deprivation of office or with other penalties" (c. 1371 § 1 CIC^{2021}). In this regard, it is also new that fines can be imposed on church employees as penalty by withholding all or part of their ecclesiastical remuneration (c. 1336 § 4 no. 5 CIC^{2021}).

Even below the threshold of punishability, violations of the law and disobedience to a specific directive of church authority can have consequences: The sacred pastors can, for example, deem laypersons unsuitable for church offices and duties and withdraw or not confer them. Similarly, from the perspective of church authority, laypersons can, through insufficient fidelity to the law or a lack of obedience, disqualify themselves as experts and advisors, and can therefore be dismissed from corresponding functions or committees. A Catholic "who is in the proximate occasion of committing a delict" may be warned (c. 1339 § 1). Ordinaries may also issue a rebuke (*correptio*) whenever one of the faithful causes a scandal or a grave disturbance of order by their conduct of life (c. 1339 § 2). The revised penal law further gives the Ordinary the ability "to issue a penal precept in which he sets out exactly what is to be done or avoided" if previous "warnings or corrections have been made to someone to no effect" (c. 1339 § 4 CIC^{2021}). Church employees may have to expect consequences under labor law that go as far as and include dismissals. Clerics who owe special obedience to the Pope and their respective Ordinary (c. 273) must expect disciplinary measures: Beyond correction, warning, or rebuke, the competent Ordinary may order, among other things, transfers (cc. 190f.) or removals from office (cc. 192–195). A privation from office (*privatio*), however, can under canon law only be considered as a penalty for an offense (c. 196); moreover, the maximum penalty of dismissal from the clerical state can only be imposed by the universal Church's legislator (c. 1317).

Because the obedience required by canon law from all the faithful is to be rendered as "conscious of their own responsibility" (c. 212 § 1), some canonists see "responsible disobedience" as justified: Without it, "probably many wise innovations would not have taken place"[37] in the Catholic Church. However, this should not lead to idealizing disobedience in a false sense. The aforementioned canonists argue: The responsible disobedience is performed "after thorough consideration and out of deep conviction," in order to "draw the community's attention to misguided individual regulations" and to "protect it from possible aberrations." Arbitrary disobedience, on the other hand, aims for an individual advantage and is "usually done out of convenience or hubris." Therefore, "responsible disobedience also includes the willingness to accept and bear the legal consequences of the practiced violation of the law."[38] This last remark is important as to not raise false hopes: Canon law does not recognize "responsible disobedience," so invoking it does not protect anyone from the legal consequences of his/her actions.

… in the Area of the Church's Doctrine

Even in the case of doctrinal dissent, Catholics face different legal consequences on a varying scale, depending on the specific violation and their respective position. The threats of punishment under canon law for disobedience of doctrines presented as binding by the Magisterium apply equally to all faithful. Pope Francis expressly adhered to them in his revision of penal law: Whoever denies a truth which is to be believed by divine and Catholic faith according to c. 750 § 1, or persistently doubts such a truth of faith, is a heretic and incurs the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae* (c. 751 in connection with c. 1364 § 1). As soon as the penalty has been declared, the faithful in question may no longer exercise liturgical ministries, administer or receive sacraments, exercise ecclesiastical offices, functions and ministries, and may no longer validly perform acts of ecclesiastical governance (c. 1331).

Even non-heretics are liable to incur a penalty whenever they teach a doctrine condemned by the Roman Pontiff or an ecumenical council, or obstinately reject a doctrine presented in accordance with c. 750 § 2 or c. 752, despite official warning. They had to be punished with a "just penalty" (*iusta poena*) (c. 1371 no. 1[1983]), and since December 8, 2021, they are threatened with concrete expiatory penalties, in addition to a censure and deprivation of office (c. 1365[2021]).

Catholics in Politics, Profession, and Society

Potentially punishable violations of binding doctrinal guidelines can by no means only occur in catechesis, religious education, or theological teaching but also in the everyday social or political commitments of Catholics. In 2002, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a "doctrinal note," specifically inculcated that even in these areas, Catholics are obliged to obey the Church's Magisterium. Against "ambiguities" and "questionable positions," the Congregation emphasizes: "It would be a mistake to confuse the proper autonomy exercised by Catholics in political life with the claim of a principle that prescinds from the moral and social teaching of the Church."[39] A "well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals."[40] Whenever political activity of Catholics "comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility."[41] Catholic politicians may only in exceptional cases deviate visibly from magisterial guidelines when it is a matter of avoiding greater harm, and at the same time the doctrinal obedience of the acting persons is not only ensured in regard to content but also in that it is publicly known.[42] Against this background, bishops and bishops' conferences on various occasions have called on Catholic politicians to adhere to the Church's doctrine regarding abortion legislation or have sanctioned their deviation from it.[43] Even as voters, Catholics may not vote to open the institution of marriage to same-sex couples.[44] As doctors and midwives, Catholics are not allowed to participate in abortions,[45] and as lawyers, they are not allowed to earn their money as divorce attorneys.[46] Corresponding and possible other violations of magisterial doctrine can lead to a denial of holy communion because, in the view of their bishops or pastors, a dissenter is "obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin" (c. 915).[47] Dissenting Catholics may also no longer be allowed to fulfill liturgical ministries and responsibilities, or they may be dismissed from advisory councils or ecclesiastical offices.

The same legal consequences also threaten Catholics if they violate doctrinal guidelines in their personal conduct of life; for example, when living together unmarried or in a marriage that is invalid under canon law. Laypersons employed by the Church must also expect consequences under employment law regarding all the above-mentioned violations, and clerics must reckon with the disciplinary consequences already mentioned.

Teachers of Catholic religious education and theologians can also be sanctioned as multiplicators if they teach at state schools or universities.

Teachers of Catholic Religious Education

Every diocesan bishop has the canonical obligation to dismiss teachers of religious education or to demand their dismissal from school authorities if their teaching or their way of life offends binding doctrines of the Church (c. 805).

Theologians

Those who study theology usually become multiplicators themselves and could contribute to spreading erroneous views. For this reason, the Church tries to protect students from deviations of the Church's official teachings by not allowing anyone to teach theology without an ecclesiastical mandate (c. 812). By virtue of the "nihil obstat," the Apostolic See decides on every permanent appointment of lecturers whereby the personal lifestyle is also regularly examined.[48] The fact that Catholic theology always has to be taught in fidelity to the Magisterium is not only regulated by canon law[49] but results from the self-understanding officially prescribed for all theologians: "Never forgetting that he is also a member of the People of God, the theologian must foster respect for them and be committed to offering them a teaching which in no way does harm to the doctrine of the faith."[50] Where teachers at ecclesiastical institutions of higher education no longer meet the necessary requirements, especially with regard to their orthodoxy and irreproachable conduct of life, the competent ecclesiastical authority must ensure that they are removed from office (c. 810; cf. c. 818). For the same reasons, theologians may be stripped of their mandate or "nihil obstat" and subsequently may no longer be members of Faculties of Catholic theology or teach or perform exams in theological courses at state universities.[51]

Unlike in the cases of clear violations of the Church's doctrine concerning the conduct of life, which can lead to the revocation of a mandate or the "nihil obstat," a doctrinal dissent and the corresponding violation of the duty of obedience (cc. 750 and 752f.) must first be established. This is the responsibility of the competent diocesan bishop, who is personally bound and authorized by canon law to protect the Church's doctrine of faith and morals by any means they deem appropriate (c. 386 § 2). Bishops' conferences worldwide have in many cases set up so-called committees of doctrine.[52] Without prejudice to the guardianship of the bishops in the particular Churches, the Dicastery (formerly: Congregation) for the Doctrine of the Faith has the universal ecclesiastical mandate and authority to promote and protect the doctrine of faith and morals throughout the Catholic Church.[53] That is why, in the case of dissenting theologians, the Apostolic See can also intervene at any time and start a doctrinal examination in accordance with the "Agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine" of 1997.[54]

The theologians in question will only learn about the opening of such proceedings after the internal phase of the investigation has been completed and the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has come to the preliminary judgment that a proposition is objectionable.[55] At the same time, all competent dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the respective Ordinary of the theologian are also being informed,[56] which makes, according to insiders, "the author a *persona mortua* for the authorities, even if the further proceedings end favorably for him."[57] The list of propositions considered as erroneous or dangerous, together with anonymized expert opinions and statements from the preliminary investigation are communicated to the author through the Ordinary with the request to present a written response within three months.[58] If this author's response satisfies the Dicastery, the doctrinal examination is quietly suspended without any rehabilitation. If the response does not satisfy the Dicastery, it may, for example, withdraw the "nihil obstat," obligate the author to a public self-correction, prohibit the use of objected texts in theological studies, or even impose or declare canonical penalties as far as excommunication. The doctrinal complaint is published in a final "notification" of the Dicastery in *L'Osservatore Romano*, online and later usually also in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.[59] At the latest, since the instruction "Donum Veritatis" (1990), it must have become obvious to theologians that not only a qualified, that is, organized dissent connected to a visible strategy of opposition or protest is considered sanctionable, but any public deviation from the Church's magisterial doctrine.[60]

Appraisal

The rules and procedures for dealing with conflict and dissent in the Catholic Church or for their preventive avoidance provided by canon law indicate what is important to the legislator: As early as 1983, Pope John Paul II dedicated a separate book in the CIC to the teaching function of the Church and in it affirmed the competence and jurisdiction of the

Church's Magisterium against inquiries from post-conciliar theology. He has, therefore, turned the general duty of obedience of the faithful into differentiated legal obligations, dependent on the degree of bindingness of an officially presented doctrine, and also for non-infallible doctrines. Thereby, he demanded an obedience which only allows an obedient silence as maximum deviation. The legal obligation to firmly embrace and retain infallible doctrines that stem from beyond the Revelation, which was initially missing in the CIC, was added in 1998. Since the 1970s/80s, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith often reacted quickly and consistently to dissent from theologians and condemned dissenting teachings.[61] It was only much later that the widespread laxity in dealing with sexual violence of clerics against minors had procedural consequences: It was not until 2001 that Pope John Paul II reacted to the failure of his bishops by revoking their responsibility for prosecuting sexual abuse and obliging them to report any suspicions, which are at least probable, to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.[62] After that, it took another 20 years until sexual abuse was made a criminal offense against human life, dignity, and freedom (c. 1398^{2021}); until then, despite all the criticism, it had only been a punishable violation of celibacy. Until now, no pope has responded to the demand for improved legal protection for the faithful by establishing administrative courts in the particular Churches.

The Catholic Church offers only an extremely small space for conflict and dissent: Even disputes between the faithful are to be avoided as much as possible or are to be settled quickly, in a peaceful manner. Disobedience to Church authority is punishable if necessary, and Catholics can never legally deviate from binding doctrinal guidelines. Since Pope Francis wants to give a more practical importance to penal law through its current revision, doctrinal dissent could also soon be punished more consistently than it has been the case so far. But even if the Church does not take (penal) action against disobedient Catholics, this does not mean that the deviation is officially tolerated: Church authorities can also overlook violations of law or other grievances without condoning them if they can either not be prevented anyway or for fear of even greater evil if they intervene. Such a dissimulation as actively turning a blind eye by Church authority does not put dissenters in the right and does not protect them from later intervention; however, too frequent or even regular dissimulation undermines the Church's legal order and creates "the hardly correctable impression of double moral standards and untrustworthiness"[63] inside and outside the Church.

Notes

1. For this and other examples, cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Nota doctrinalis *professionis fidei* formulam extremam enucleans," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 90 (1998): no. 11.
2. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction "Donum veritatis", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 82 (1990): no. 23–41; Norbert Lüdecke, *Die Grundnormen des katholischen Lehrrechts in den päpstlichen Gesetzbüchern und neueren Äußerungen in päpstlicher Autorität* (Würzburg: Echter, 1997), 328. On the development of this specific duty of consent, cf. for example, Justin M. Wachs, *Obsequium in the church. Sacred tradition, Second Vatican Council, 1983 Code, and sacred liturgy* (Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2014), 72–118 and 134–55.
3. For the contouring of the *silentium obsequiosum* cf. Lüdecke, *Grundnormen*, 320–32 and 485–90 and in application to theologians Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Donum veritatis", no. 31.
4. Lüdecke, *Grundnormen*, 330 (translation B.A.).
5. Cf. Eloy Tejero, [Commentary on c. 752], in *Exegetical Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*. Vol. III/1, ed. Ángel Marzoa et al. (Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2004), 42.
6. Helmuth Pree, "Die Meinungsäußerungsfreiheit als Grundrecht des Christen," in *Recht als Heilsdienst*, ed. Winfried Schulz (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 1989), 42–85, 81 (translation B.A.).
7. Cf. Pope John Paul II, Motu proprio "Ad tuendam fidem", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 90 (1998): no. 4.
8. Cf. Rüdiger Althaus, "Priesterlicher Gehorsam und Hierarchischer Rekurs—ein unüberbrückbarer Widerspruch?," *Theologie und Glaube* 103 (2013): 123.
9. Norbert Lüdecke and Georg Bier, Das römisch-katholische Kirchenrecht. Eine Einführung (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2012), 91 (translation B.A.). Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Professio fidei et iusiurandum fidelitas in suscipiendo officio in nomine Ecclesiae exercendo," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 81 (1989): 105.
10. Cf. ibid., 104.
11. Norbert Lüdecke, "Kommunikationskontrolle als Heilsdienst. Sinn, Nutzen und Ausübung der Zensur nach römisch-katholischem Selbstverständnis," *Rottenburger Jahrbuch für Kirchengeschichte* 28 (2009): 77 (translation B.A.), with reference to Umberto Betti, "Professione di fede e giuramento di fedeltà. Considerazioni dottrinali," *Notitiae* 25 (1989): 323.
12. Cf. the latin text of the episcopal oath of fidelity in force since 1987 in Georg Bier, *Die Rechtsstellung des Diözesanbischofs nach dem Codex Iuris*

Canonici von 1983 (Würzburg: Echter, 2001), 266 with commentary ibid., 265–69.

13. Cf. already ibid., 89–92.
14. Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution "Veritatis Gaudium", *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 14, 2018 (appendix): art. 27 § 2.
15. Cf. ibid., art. 26f. with reference to Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, "Donum Veritatis", no. 23–41. Cf. on this instruction the analysis of Lüdecke, *Grundnormen*, 452–97.
16. Pope Francis, "Veritatis Gaudium", art. 73.
17. Cf. with detailed evidence already Bernhard Sven Anuth, *Das Recht katholischer Laien auf Anerkennung ihrer bürgerlichen Freiheiten (c. 227 CIC/c. 402 CCEO)* (Würzburg: Echter, 2016), 32–6.
18. Cf. Jean-Pierre Schouppe, "Le droit d'opinion et la liberté de recherche dans les disciplines ecclésiastiques (cc. 212 et 218): nature et portée," *L'année canonique* 37 (1995): 158 and 162.
19. Cf. Heribert Schmitz, "'Professio fidei'und 'Iusiurandum fidelitatis'. Glaubensbekenntnis und Treueid. Wiederbelebung des Antimodernisteneides?," *Archiv für katholisches Kirchenrecht* 157 (1988): 379.
20. Cf. c. 1400 § 1 no. 1. In addition, there are criminal offenses as *obiectum iudicii*.
21. Cf. Matthias Pulte, "Konfliktlösung in der katholischen Kirche," in *Konfliktlösung im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Peter Collin (Berlin: Springer, 2021), 317–28, 321.
22. Dominicus M. Meier, "Subjektive Rechte und Rechtsschutzgarantien in der katholischen Kirche—eine Problemskizze auf dem Hintergrund eines Ehenichtigkeitsverfahrens," *De processibus matrimonialibus* 8 (2001): 298 (emphasis in original; translation B.A.).
23. Until 2022, within the "Dienstgemeinschaft" all employees also had to guided by the Catholic Church's doctrine of faith and morals and by its law. Cf. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference, ed., *Grundordnung des kirchlichen Dienstes im Rahmen kirchlicher Arbeitsverhältnisse* (Bonn: German Bishops' Conference, 2015), art. 1. This requirement has been deleted from the current version of the "Grundordnung des kirchlichen Dienstes", in Kirchliches Arbeitsrecht, ed. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (Bonn: German Bishops' Conference, 2023), 11–26.
24. Cf. e.g. Andrea Edenharter, "'Aggiornamento made in Europe'—Neujustierung des deutschen kirchlichen Arbeitsrechts durch den EuGH," in *Rechtskultur und Rechtspflege in der Kirche*, ed. Christoph Ohly et al. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2020), 817–34.
25. Cf. for an overview e.g. Carolyn Evans and Anna Hood, "Religious Autonomy and Labour Law: A Comparison of the Jurisprudence of the

United States and the European Court of Human Rights," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 1 (2012): 83–94.

26. Cf. Amy Dygert, "Reconciling the Ministerial Exception and Title VII: Clarifying the Employer's Burden for the Ministerial Exception," *Washington University Journal of Law and Policy* 58 (2019).
27. Cf. Sarah Röser, "Im Verteidigungsmodus. Kirchliches Arbeitsrecht in den USA," *Herder-Korrespondenz* 74, no. 10 (October 2020).
28. Cf. for example, G. Paolo Montini, *I ricorsi gerarchici (Cann. 1732–1739)* (Rome: G&B Press, 2020) or Aurimas Rudinskas, "The Procedure for Administrative Recourse. A Comparative Study of the Latin and Eastern Codes," *Studia Canonica* 54 (2020).
29. Pulte, "Konfliktlösung," 324 (translation B.A.).
30. On the desideratum of a particular ecclesiastical administrative jurisdiction, cf. in detail Dominicus M. Meier, *Verwaltungsgerichte für die Kirche in Deutschland? Von der gemeinsamen Synode 1975 zum Codex Iuris Canonici 1983*, (Essen: Ludgerus, 2001); Matthias Ambros, *Kontrolle kirchlichen Verwaltungshandelns. Ein Beitrag zur Diskussion um die Errichtung von Verwaltungsgerichten auf Ebene der Bischofskonferenz* (Darmstadt: WBG, 2020).
31. Cf. Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Beschluss: 'Ordnung für Schiedsstellen und Verwaltungsgerichte der Bistümer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,'" in *Gemeinsame Synode der Bistümer der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Offizielle Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Karl Lehmann (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2012), 734–63.
32. Cf. Ambros, *Kontrolle*, 34.
33. For an overview of cases decided by the Apostolic Signature as administrative tribunal, cf. William L. Daniel, ed., *Ministerium Iustitiae. Jurisprudence of the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura* (Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2011), 85–637.
34. Cf. Stephen S. Doktorczyk, *Persistent disobedience to Church authority. History, analysis and application of Canon 1371, 2°* (Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press, 2016).
35. Cf. David Deibel, "Canon 1341: Pastoral Principles Within the Penal Process," in *Towards Future Developments in Penal Law: U.S. Theory and Practice*, ed. Patricia M. Dugan (Montréal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2010), 83–115.
36. Cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution "Pascite Gregem Dei," *L'Osservarore Romano*, June 1, 2021, 2f.
37. Sabine Demel, *Handbuch Kirchenrecht. Grundbegriffe für Studium und Praxis* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, [2]2013), 234 (translation B.A.).
38. Ibid., 234f. (translation B.A.).

39. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Nota doctrinalis de christifidelium rationibus in publicis negotiis gerendis," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 96 (2004): no. 6.
40. Ibid., no. 4.
41. Ibid.
42. Cf. for example, Pope John Paul II, Encyclical "Evangelium Vitae", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995): no. 73; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Nota de contubernalibus eiusdem sexus quoad iuridica consectaria contubernii," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 96 (2004): no. 10.
43. Cf. for the reasons Raymond Leo Burke, "Canon 915: The Discipline Regarding the Denial of Holy Communion to those Obstinately Persevering in Manifest Grave Sin," *Periodica de re canonica* 96 (2007).
44. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Nota doctrinalis," no. 5 and no. 10.
45. Vgl. c. 1397 § 2[2021].
46. Cf. in detail John J. Coughlin, "Divorce and the Catholic Lawyer," *The Jurist* 61 (2001).
47. Cf. accordingly e.g. Burke, "Canon 915."
48. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Donum Veritatis," no. 8.
49. Vgl. Pope Francis, "Veritatis Gaudium," art. 73.
50. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Donum Veritatis," no. 11.
51. Cf. Heribert Schmitz and Ulrich Rhode, "Einführung," in *Katholische Theologie und kirchliches Hochschulrecht*, ed. Secretariat of the German Bishops' Conference (Bonn: German Bishops' Conference, [2]2011), 132–41.
52. For an overview on actions of such doctrinal committees cf. Bradford E. Hinze, "A Decade of Disciplining Theologians," in *When the Magisterium Intervenes. The Magisterium and Theologians in Today's Church*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 21–23.
53. The former "Congregation" is now called "Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith"; its task is to assist the Pope and the bishops in proclaiming the Gospel throughout the world and to promote and safeguard the integrity of Catholic doctrine on faith and morals, cf. Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution "Praedicate Evangelium", *L'Osservatore Romano*, March 31, 2022 (appendix): art 69.
54. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 89 (1997) and in addition, for example, Jose A. Fuentes, "Nuevo regolamento de la Congregación para la doctrina de la fe sobre el examen de las doctrinas," *Ius Canonicum* 38 (1998).
55. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Agendi ratio," art. 17.
56. Cf. ibid., art. 16.

57. Lüdecke, "Kommunikationskontrolle," 93 (translation B.A.).
58. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Agendi ratio," art. 17.
59. For a current overview, cf. the list of documents published since 1966 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which includes the notifications after doctrinal examinations published since then: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/doc_doc_index.htm.
60. Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Donum Veritatis", no. 32–41 and the analysis of Lüdecke, *Grundnormen*, 482–86.
61. Cf. for example, Paul Collins, ed., *The modern Inquisition: Seven prominent Catholics and their struggles with the Vatican* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2002).
62. Cf. Pope John Paul II, Motu proprio "Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela", *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 93 (2001).
63. Georg Bier, "Dissimulieren? Notizen zu einem Prinzip der Rechtsanwendung," in *Im Dienste der Gerechtigkeit und Einheit*, ed. Rüdiger Althaus et al. (Essen: Ludgerus, 2017), 196 (translation B.A.).

CHAPTER 7

Dissent as Deviance: Sociological Observations on Structural Conflicts in Church

Judith Hahn

Over the past century, dissent has become increasingly apparent with regard to many institutional norms of the Roman Catholic Church, including the doctrinal, moral, and legal norms that determine behavioral expectations within the church as an institution. In the legal field, dissent often manifests as deviance, behavior which opposes or undermines the ecclesiastical norms. In my contribution, I explore dissent as deviance with regard to the current social structure of the church in light of sociological considerations on anomie. To do this, I have divided my study into three steps. First, I refer briefly to the recent symptoms in the church which reveal the deterioration of institutional norms. Second, I endeavour to identify the structural reasons that might be responsible for causing this effect by studying sociological findings on deviance and anomie, foremost among them Robert Merton's strain theory. Third, I apply these

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considerations to recent phenomena in the church to gain a better understanding of why the current social structure of the church is inducing certain groups to turn to deviant behavior. I conclude by linking these sociological observations with theological thought to show how a theory of non-reception might help the church to learn from deviance and improve its structure.

Institutional Norms and Their Loss of Effectiveness

The church is exhibiting manifold symptoms of institutional decay, above all with regard to its law. Abundant laws exist, but many of them fail to impact the social reality of the church.[1] Many Catholics refuse to abide by legal prohibitions or commands they find detrimental to their local communities and their faith. In Germany, for instance, the vast majority of Catholics no longer follow the legal rule to confess their grave sins at least once a year, as commanded by canon law (see canon 989 CIC/1983). And those who do confess regularly tend to do so not because the law demands it, but because they freely choose to do so in accordance with their own spirituality. Most breaches of canon law remain unpunished. Ecclesiastical authorities tend to punish clerics solely out of necessity to avoid public outrage—such as in cases of sexual abuse of minors (see canon 1398 CIC/1983); and they usually refrain from punishing lay Catholics altogether. For instance, the legal threat towards parents who hand over their children for non-Catholic baptism or education was only recently reinstated when the legislator reformed ecclesiastical penal law in 2021 (see canon 1367 CIC/1983), but it is practically irrelevant. A growing number of Catholics are also refraining from accessing the opportunities provided to them by the law. For instance, in many local churches, the number of canonical marriages is steadily decreasing, as is the demand for marriage nullity procedures. Ecclesiastical procedural law is largely a dead letter. There are hardly any penal procedures, apart from those on sexual abuse; there are barely any civil actions; and in many countries, merely Catholics who work for the church attempt a marriage nullity procedure after their marriage has failed. In short, it is apparent that canon law is currently losing much of its relevance, at least whenever its effectiveness depends on individual decisions. Laws that structure the church with a quasi-automatism, such as its constitutional laws, are very effective. Yet laws which become effective only upon individual decisions are increasingly losing their effectiveness. Over the last couple of decades, large parts of canon law have atrophied into "law in books" and failed to be "law in action."[2] Many norms have ceased to be "living law"[3] and have become "law on paper."[4]

We can make similar observations with regard to other institutional norms of the church as well. Many doctrinal or moral norms face a similar destiny. Over the past couple of decades, they have increasingly failed to impact the social reality of the church. From *Humanae vitae* to *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*—the list of institutional norms to which many Catholics respond with tacit disapproval or outright rejection is long. Canonist Werner Böckenförde impressively illustrated the precarious stance of many institutional norms as follows,

> There is a huge gap between the demands of Rome and the praxis in the pastoral field of the church. This gap exists between the priests and the laity, between the bishop and his priests, partially also between the pope and the bishops. People say, 'Fulda is far away, Cologne is far away, Rome is even farther away.' Many clerics and lay people feel conscience-bound to refuse the demands of Rome; and many bishops tolerate this, as long as it does not appear in the newspaper and no one files a complaint about it.[5]

Structural Reasons for Ecclesiastical Anomie

There are two ways to simply dismiss this problem. The first is to blame the institutional norms, for instance, by rejecting the law in general as a suitable instrument for organizing faith communities such as the church. The second is to blame the church members and demand their return to unrestricted obedience. However, if one generally accepts that institutional norms are essential tools for providing a complex church with an order, neither of these responses is of much value. Instead, it seems well worth asking what the underlying reasons might be for the widespread lack of compliance with many institutional norms in the church.

Deviant Responses to Social Expectations

I want to suggest that we can, from a sociological point of view, actually speak of "anomie" with regard to some parts of ecclesiastical life. In saying this, I use the term "anomie" in the Durkheimian tradition as alluding to a structural phenomenon which can destroy solidarity within a group[6] or give rise to anti-social individualism.[7] Unlike many adherents of Durkheim, though, I am less interested in studying the individual side of anomie with its psychological effects on individuals, even if this strand of anomie research has resulted in a wide range of fascinating studies, some even dealing with anomie in religious contexts.[8] Instead, I use the term to describe the state of a group—a society or a community such as the church—where social structures induce individuals to deviate from institutionally accepted behavior that can result in what Robert Merton, in his famous expansion of Durkheim's thesis, called the "demoralization" of the traditional order or the "de-institutionalization"[9] of the traditional norms, "the breakdown of the norms," the group's increasing "normlessness,"[10] and "cultural chaos."[11] I follow Merton, who searched for the "social and cultural sources of deviant behaviour,"[12] insofar as he argued that a widespread nonconformity with institutional norms is not rooted in individual failure but in social structure.[13] Merton defined "social structure" as an "organized set of social relationships in which members of the society or group are variously implicated."[14] Sociologist Leo Fay in his study on anomie in a religious institute of nuns has, for instance, determined that the mission and purpose of the religious institute, the role and structure of authority in the nuns' communal life, and the nature of their communal life contribute to the social structure of the institute.[15] This structure has the function of allowing group members to pursue certain cultural goals towards which the group strives. Every group defines cultural goals that it feels are worth pursuing. And it also determines permissible procedures as the "cultural structures" of how to attain these goals with the help of institutional regulations. These structures, as Merton defines, serve as an "organized set of normative values governing behaviour which is common to members of a designated society or group."[16] Now, following Merton, both elements—the cultural goals and the cultural structures—form a coalition to establish desirable ends and permissible means of attaining these ends in a group. Both "culture goals and institutional norms, operate jointly,"[17] as Merton assumes. He observes, "Every social group invariably couples its scale of desired ends with moral or institutional regulation of permissible and required procedures for attaining these ends."[18] These regulations determine which means are commonly considered acceptable for accomplishing cultural aspirations, as Merton writes, "The choice of expedients for striving toward cultural goals is limited by institutionalized norms."[19] Compliant behavior within a group, therefore, consists of striving towards the desired ends with the help of permissible means.

However, as Merton concludes, it is less a sense of individual morality which motivates individuals to show compliant behavior and more the social forces exerted on them by the social structure. Merton notes, "The social structure acts as a barrier or as an open door to the acting out of cultural mandates."[20] This thought can be reformulated with the help of Fay's example of religious institutes to state that the mission and purpose of the institute, the role of authority in the institute, and the nature of communal life build the social structure based on which individual nuns can pursue their goal of leading a pious and fulfilling religious life by utilizing the institutional norms of the institute. It is necessary that the group members profit from compliant behavior to some degree to make their compliance probable, as Merton maintains. He holds, "The distribution of statuses through competition must be so organized that positive incentives for adherence to status obligations are provided *for every position* within the distributive order."[21] In consequence, the social structure is a precondition based on which compliance with the norms becomes either probable—or rather unlikely. Systems which fail to provide certain parts of the group with the prospect of profiting from compliance as a means to attaining the cultural goals tend to suffer from deviant behavior as a natural consequence. This is "a 'normal' response"[22] to the mismatch between cultural goals and institutional norms, as Merton proposes, "In this conception, cultural values may help to produce behaviour which is at odds with the mandates of the values themselves."[23] He defines, "aberrant behaviour may be regarded sociologically as a symptom of dissociation between culturally prescribed aspirations and socially structured avenues for realizing these aspirations."[24] As the cultural goals seem structurally unattainable with the permissible means as defined by the institutional norms, the individuals turn to alternative strategies to strive towards their cultural goals. Accordingly, widespread deviance, as Merton argues, is not a result of original sin but of structural malfunction. It is a symptom that "some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in nonconformist rather than conformist conduct."[25] He asserts, "It is the conflict between culturally accepted values and the socially structured difficulties in living up to these values which exerts pressure toward deviant behavior."[26]

Four Categories of Deviant Behavior

Merton identifies four "deviant" options for responding to social structures which obstruct the individual's striving toward the cultural goal with acceptable means: innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. In systems in which certain cultural goals are presented as absolute, individuals tend to pursue these goals at all costs—if necessary, with the help of "innovation," namely deviant means to achieve the goal. He elucidates, "It is when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain *common* success-goals *for the population at large* while the social structure rigorously restricts or completely closes access to approved modes of reaching these goals *for a considerable part of the same population*, that deviant behaviour ensues on a large scale."[27] In his studies, Merton exemplifies this with the American idolization of economic success, the willingness to sacrifice virtually anything for the goal of economic prosperity while even pushing individuals to engage in deviant behavior to attain that end. Here, the social structure of society, which does not enable all members of society to prosper by relying on legal ways of realizing the American Dream, in fact, encourages illegal behavior to achieve success. Hence, groups which cultivate a "rigidified class structure, a caste order,"[28] which prevents all group members from standing a fair chance of achieving the common goals with the use of legitimate means induce the use of illegal means. Merton explains, "Any and all devices which promise attainment of the all important goal would be permitted."[29] In this system, as Merton finds, deviant behavior is a reasonable way of responding to cultural expectations. It is therefore evident that Merton himself does not use the term "deviance" to express a moral judgement but merely to describe behavior which departs from a group's established norms, often due to rather rational reasons, as in the case of "innovative" strategies for attaining a desired end with the only means at hand. According to Merton, identifying "deviance" in a group does not necessarily put the blame on the "deviant" individual, as he reckons, "it may be the norms of the group which are at fault, not the innovator who rejects them."[30] Deviant behavior might not even be dysfunctional for the group. It simply denotes behavior which departs from conventionally recognized norms. This behavior is structurally stimulated in systems which establish an absolute cultural goal but fail to attribute all group members with access to legal or acceptable means for striving towards attaining that goal.

Merton observed, in any case, that the choice of deviant behavior as a response to social structures which obstruct the individual striving towards the cultural goal with acceptable means is individually different and is often the result of socialization. Individuals who cannot pursue common goals by using socially accepted means tend to turn to innovative behavior if they "have been imperfectly socialized so that they abandon the institutional means while retaining the success-aspiration."[31] On the contrary, those who "have fully internalized the institutional values" tend to turn to "an alternative response in which the goal is abandoned but conformity to the mores persists."[32] Merton calls this individual adaptation to the situation "ritualism." It is exercised by individuals who widely abandon the pursuance of the common goals—or scale down their aspirations to a considerable degree—and instead turn the institutional means established to attain the goals into *an end in themselves*. Instead of focusing on the cultural goals, ritualism is exclusively concerned with abiding by the norms, as Merton states, "Sheer conformity becomes a central value."[33] Due to its obsession with the established norms, ritualism fights for maximum normative stability, thereby fervently protecting institutional norms from change by preventing alternative options of behavior from becoming norms.[34] Merton maintains, "There develops a tradition-bound, sacred society characterized by neophobia."[35] He actually sees this phobic attitude to be a basic tenor of ritualist behavior, as he finds ritualism to be an angst-ridden response to structures which prevent the individual from striving towards the culture goals. Merton mentions some clichéd examples to identify ritualist behavior as fear-stricken, as attitudes living up to principles such as "'I'm not sticking *my* neck out,' 'I'm playing safe,' 'I'm satisfied with what I've got,' 'Don't aim high and you won't be disappointed.'"[36] He analyses, "The theme threaded through these attitudes is that high ambitions invite frustration and danger whereas lower aspirations produce satisfaction and security. It is a response to a situation which appears threatening and excites distrust."[37] Ritualist behavior is usually not regarded as deviant, as it is formally impeccable and therefore not considered to pose a social problem, as Merton notes, "the overt behaviour is institutionally permitted, though not culturally preferred."[38] Yet Merton adds ritualism to his typology of deviance, as it does not in fact support the group's common culture goals. It undermines a culture, even though it clothes its destabilizing action in hypercompliance.

Retreatism, on the contrary, rejects both the cultural goals and the institutional means by withdrawing from both, showing "nostalgia for the past and apathy in the present."[39] Retreatist behavior is generally not regarded as deviant due to its apathy and invisibility, but it does, in fact, oppose both the goals of a group as well as the group's means of attaining them by escaping from the group's grip. Merton deems it well worth noting that the Roman Catholic Church has actually realized there is a connection between apathy and deviance, which he derives from Catholicism rating *acedia* among the cardinal sins.[40]

Rebellion similarly rejects both the cultural goals and the institutional means of attaining them but differs from retreatism by actively fighting them with the aim of *replacing* both and instead institutionalizing new goals and new means of attaining them. Merton, therefore, finds that rebellion "refers to efforts to *change* the existing cultural and social structure rather than to accommodate efforts *within* this structure."[41]

The Anomic Potential of Deviance

For the purpose of my study, we can leave the two last-mentioned phenomena aside, even though it is most certainly possible to discover retreatist and rebellious behavior in church. There is no doubt that many church members leave the church silently and that there are some who formally stay for social reasons but disagree with the ecclesiastical cultural goals and the institutional means by responding with retreatism to these mismatches. And similarly, there are rebellious reactions to these mismatches when individuals respond to their disparate experiences in the church by attempting to overturn both the goals and the means to replace them with alternatives. However, these reactions do not usually have an "anomic" potential in the strict sense, according to Merton. Whilst retreatist and rebellious action as a full parting from the group's goals and means is certainly deviant, it may, in fact, not be considered as leading to anomie in the group because, as Merton explains, "People who adapt (or maladapt) in this fashion are, strictly speaking, *in* the society but not *of* it. Sociologically, these constitute the true aliens" and "can be included as members of the *society* … only in a fictional sense."[42]

As modes of behavior exhibited by members *of* the group, in any case, innovation and ritualism are of primary interest in studying how social structures cause a social system to stumble into an anomic state due to a mismatch between cultural goals and institutional means, as "imperfect coordination of the two leads to anomie."[43] This mismatch does not usually afflict a group from the beginning but occurs over a certain period of time, usually due to changes in the social system, as sociologist Albert Lewis Rhodes notes, "anomie may be a consequence of almost any change in the social system which upsets previously established definitions of the situation, or routines of life, or symbolic associations."[44] These shifts in social structure can cause a disjunction between the cultural and the social structure, as Merton explains, "When the cultural and the social structure are malintegrated, the first calling for behavior and attitudes which the second precludes, there is a strain toward the breakdown of the norms, toward normlessness."[45] Merton speaks of a "demoralization" and "deinstitutionalization,"[46] as "norms are robbed of their power to regulate behavior"[47] and fail to predict social behavior. If this happens, it can eventually destabilize the whole social structure. "Anomie" describes the result of this process in those cases in which it leads to a "disruption of the normative system"[48] or even "a breakdown in the cultural structure."[49]

Deviance and Anomie in Church

If we apply Merton's concept to the current situation in the Roman Catholic Church, particularly in the local churches of the northern hemisphere, we can explain why many institutional norms face deinstitutionalization, without having to blame individual misbehavior for this development. Instead, it seems expedient to study the sense in which the social structure of the church itself has contributed to bringing about this situation. It can result in anomie in parts of ecclesiastical life, as I want to suggest. This marks a departure from Durkheim's assumption that anomie is more a Protestant and less a Catholic phenomenon, which has influenced the sociological view of the Catholic Church greatly.[50]

In church, as I want to suggest, one immanent cultural goal is living a life of faith, usually in a community with other Catholics. The transcendent or final goal, as one might define, is salvation and eternal life, a goal achieved merely by those who are successful in living a pious life in the here and now. Hence, we might say that the church sets up goals which are absolute, according to Merton's definition. The institutional regulations governing permissible and required procedures for attaining these ends consist of the official doctrinal, moral, and legal norms established by the ecclesiastical magisterium and legislator to guide Catholic conduct. The aim of these is to allow the church members to accomplish a communal life of faith according to ecclesiastical doctrine and discipline and to attain their final goal. We can discover this thought in canon 794 §1

CIC/1983 in which the legislator describes the church as an institution "to which has been divinely entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach the fullness of the Christian life." Under optimal conditions, the social structure in the church would weave all Catholics into a dense net of social relationships, which would allow them to pursue a communal way of faith to live in God's grace and to pursue it with the help of the approved means, as laid down in the institutional norms. Compliance with doctrinal, moral, and legal norms would support all Catholics in accomplishing the cultural aspiration of living a life of faith worthy of salvation.

Their compliance, in any case, is only probable if we can expect it to help them accomplish their goals. There must be positive incentives for abiding with status obligations, as Merton calls it, insofar as adherence brings them closer to attaining the desired ends. Hence, it is only plausible to expect compliance with ecclesiastical norms in those cases in which the church provides Catholics with the prospect of profiting from compliance as a means of attaining a life pious in the eyes of the community and pleasing in God's eyes. In those cases in which the social structure does not render it likely that abiding by the norms achieves these aims, "deviant" behavior becomes the new normal to help Catholics attain their goals. The social structure then contributes to stimulating deviance.

Innovation in Church

Following Merton, one may assume that deviant behavior is particularly likely to occur in the church, as the church treats its cultural goals as absolute ends. Hence, whenever the social structure fails to provide Catholics with opportunities to reach these goals by having recourse to the official institutional means, it is highly probable that this will provoke deviant behavior, where either the goals or the norms begin to dominate conduct. It is therefore expectable that significant numbers of Catholics reject some or all of the institutional norms of the church in order to pursue an individual life of faith by resorting to innovative strategies. They pursue the goal of leading a Christian life but find the social structure of the church unhelpful in achieving that end. It is particularly Merton's observation on innovation in groups cultivating caste orders and rigid class systems which resonates in Catholic ears. The church operates with two classes of church members, as the law states in canon 207 §1 CIC/1983, declaring, "By divine institution, there are among the Christian faithful in the church sacred ministers who in law are also called clerics; the other members of the Christian faithful are called lay persons." The clerical class again is subdivided. Bishops and priests "receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head," whilst deacons are "empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity" (canon 1009 §3 CIC/1983). All clerics, in any case, share the capacity to "obtain offices for whose exercise the power of orders or the power of ecclesiastical governance is required" (canon 274 §1 CIC/1983). Hence, they are entitled to fill positions with which to govern the church spiritually and politically. Lays on the contrary are primarily expected to follow their pastors obediently. Pius X explained in the Encyclical *Vehementer nos*,

> that the Church is essentially an unequal society, that is, a society comprising two categories of persons, the pastors and the flock, those who occupy a rank in the different degrees of the hierarchy and the multitude of the faithful. So distinct are these categories that with the pastoral body only rests the necessary right and authority for promoting the end of the society and directing all its members towards that end; the one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the pastors.[51]

Whilst this text is a century old, not much has changed with regard to the institutional norms integrating the unequal society. Church members must "follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors … declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the church" (canon 212 §1 CIC/1983). Laypeople are incapable of being endowed with the power of orders or the power of governance. They are merely allowed to step in with the administration of some sacraments and in certain liturgical functions when clerics are missing (see 230 §3, 766, 861 §2, 910 §2, 1112 §1 CIC/1983) and can merely "cooperate" with clerics in the governance of the church (see canon 129 §2 CIC/1983). As entry to the clergy is restricted to male church members (see canon 1024 CIC/1983), women are generally excluded from entering the clerical ranks.

Hence, the church is clearly a class system. It, therefore, begs the question of whether this system is a social structure which prevents church members from pursuing the common cultural goals with the help of the established institutional norms. This would be the case if we could assume that the ecclesiastical class system bars significant numbers of its members from striving towards a life of faith with officially accepted means. I want to suggest that one can indeed find this to be the case. The institutional norms attribute merely one group, clerics, with power and priority in the church, while they marginalize groups among Catholics, such as laypeople in general and women, homosexuals, and non-binary Catholics in particular. Legal norms cement the exclusion of laypeople from governing the church, and moral norms on the nature of women, procreation, birth control, and homosexuality add stigma to certain groups within the laity. This amalgamation of institutional norms of a doctrinal, moral, and legal nature has fostered clericalism and allowed spiritual and sexual abuse to flourish in the church. It has nurtured the development of structures of oppression and violence in the church, which have actively prevented church members from pursuing a life of faith in communion with others. A church which marginalizes and stigmatizes large numbers of its members disables many of them from striving toward a flourishing life of faith and trust in God. It not only violates their social relationships with other Catholics but often serves as an obstacle in their relationship with God. Cultivating ecclesiastical class structures is therefore not merely a social issue but also pertains directly to the common cultural goals of the church. As it seems to be extremely difficult for present-day women, homosexuals, and non-binary individuals to pursue an authentic life of faith within the official normative framework of the church, it is hardly surprising that many of these church members turn to innovative approaches to pursue these aims. They leave aside the institutional norms which shun them from attaining their goals. Some groups have ordained women priests against the institutional norms, some endow laypeople with more functions than are allowed by the law, and some celebrate the sacraments by departing from the official rubrics.

Yet deviant behavior does not merely apply to groups who are typically marginalized in the church. We can also observe that many clerics tend to bend and break institutional norms which they find detrimental to the faith, be it their personal faith or that of those entrusted to their pastoral care. Many German parish priests, for instance, administer the sacraments to all who approach them, including divorced and remarried parish members, without lecturing them about the ecclesiastical doctrine of marriage or hand the communion to Protestant Christians without discussing Eucharistic doctrine with them. Over the past couple of months, increasing numbers of German priests have openly invited gay couples to receive a blessing of their union in the church. Many celebrants invite laypeople to preach in masses over which they preside. And many are increasingly taking the freedom to openly live their partnerships with their male or female partners as they come to experience a celibate lifestyle not as a path to holiness but as a burden on developing their personal and authentic Christian identity. Hence, one can find that the social structure of the church stimulates deviance among many Catholics. If these acts are responses to institutional norms that impede Catholics from living a life of faith, their deviant behavior can be regarded as a form of innovative behavior, as described by Merton.

Ritualism in Church

Whilst innovative behavior is currently widespread throughout many churches, it is also well worth noting that this most evident form of deviance has a "partner in crime," namely ritualism, which responds to the same mismatch between institutional norms and cultural goals, but employs a different strategy, namely that of turning the norms to ends in themselves. Catholics who have fully embraced and internalized the institutional norms but find them inadequate for pursuing the cultural goals within the given social structure will tend to engage in ritualist behavior, even at the price of abandoning or scaling down their attempt to lead a fulfilling spiritual life together with other members of the faith community. They might appear to be "perfect Catholics" as they strictly adhere to institutionally prescribed conduct but will eventually develop a rather bureaucratic adherence to Christian practice. Merton's considerations highlight the existence of Catholic groups which exhibit ritualist behavior by identifying as the "little flock" and protecting the institutional norms from change at all costs. A further form of ritualist behavior is exhibited by those Catholics who blame other church members for the decay of institutional norms and demand their total resubmission under the ecclesiastical order as a marker of Catholicity. Merton's secret "sacred society" and its "neophobia" is a form of identity cultivated in many smaller circles of traditional Catholicism. That traditionalism and authoritarianism are two factors which increase the likelihood of individual anomic feelings is also a result of Leo Fay's study on anomie among nuns, as he found that about 30% of the test persons who scored high on traditionalism scored high on anomie as well, while a mere 1% of non-traditionalists scored high on anomie. Close to 40% of the test persons who scored high on authoritarianism also scored high on anomie, while none of the low-authoritarian test persons revealed anomic feelings.[52] Fay also observed that these anomic feelings particularly applied to nuns “who are attached to the ideology and practices that are declining,”[53] whilst those who adhered to an ideology and practices trending upwards were affected to a significantly lesser degree. He, therefore, concluded that feelings of anomie often occur among individuals or groups which feel committed to endangered norms, while those committed to newly emerging norms tend to be less seriously affected, even if their norms are not established yet and might therefore also fail to become part of a group’s normative framework. Hence, it is plausible to assume that traditional groups within the church who currently sense that the established normative grounds are shaking tend to engage in ritualist behavior.

Merton’s observations also seem to apply to these groups in the sense that ritualist behavior is not generally regarded as *deviant* behavior. This is because ritualism is either not identified as destabilizing the culture, insofar as it is formally flawless, or is regarded as an aberrant form of behavior, albeit without constituting a source of serious social problems for the group. We should nevertheless take into account that ritualist behavior can undermine a culture, particularly as it attempts to prevent it from changing. As change and adjustment between the institutional norms and the common goals is a necessary step for systems if they want to survive, the ritualists’ formally stabilizing action in the form of hypercompliance can, in fact, lead to a collapse, as a group’s meaningless re-institutionalization of norms provokes others to question the entire system. Hence, both widespread innovation and ritualism can lead the church into anomie, causing massive deinstitutionalization and finally resulting in a breakdown of the established normative order.

Deviance and Non-Reception

We can now leave the debate at this point to acknowledge that individual spirituality without institutional strings attached as well as obsessive institutionalism which is ill-suited to serving a dynamic community of faith are both home-grown and will eventually cause the current ecclesiastical system to collapse. However, Merton indicates that there may be an alternative. He alludes to *intermediate* systems where the attaining of common goals and the observation of institutional norms are fairly balanced.[54] This is the case when both abiding by the institutional norms as well as reaching common cultural goals are coupled with “satisfaction.” As Merton states, these include “satisfactions from the achievement of the goals and satisfactions emerging directly from the institutionally canalized modes of striving to attain these ends."[55] This includes compensation for the hardship that abiding by norms sometimes involves, as Merton finds, "The occasional sacrifices involved in institutionalized conduct must be compensated by socialized rewards."[56] However, a reliable connection between goal attainment and institutional compliance is possible only because these systems allow for the constant development of its social structure. They view any growing mismatches between the common goals and the institutional norms as impulses for reforming the goals, the norms, or the social structure. The group members' conformity or nonconformity with institutional norms thus serves as an indicator signalling a need for change. The sociology of law, for instance, has a longstanding tradition of interpreting breaches of law as impulses for legal learning.[57]

What might at first sound alien to Catholic ears is less so upon closer scrutiny. Canonical legal theory, for instance, connects this finding with its theory of *receptio legis*. This theory emphasizes the necessity of a law being received by the community to which it is given as an *essential* precondition, not merely for the effectiveness of the law but as a requirement for its validity. As a law essentially requires reception to come into being and to remain in existence, non-reception, though a deviant response to the institutional command to receive a norm, is regarded as a possible expression by church members of a law's unsuitability for attaining ecclesiastical goals. In those cases where the social impact of law is completely missing, the theory of *receptio legis* consequently assumes that this law lacks an essential element for its validity. Laws which fully lack any impact on the legal community from the outset are regarded as lacking their validity from the very beginning; laws which have been observed for some time are regarded as having lost their validity when their desuetude becomes manifest.

Conclusion

It has become clear that the current institutional norms of the church have gone a long way to ensure that widespread non-reception does not become manifest. When the church gave itself the constitution of an absolute monarchy in the nineteenth century, it drastically curbed reception to become a mere process for transmitting Roman commands to the local churches. The standard model of reception became command and obedience.[58] It does not, in fact, include the option of non-obedience and tends to interpret non-obedience merely as deviance, without studying its reasons. Hence, the church at present does not draw too many practical consequences from the theoretical resource provided by *receptio legis*. This shows that the ecclesiastical authorities are rather reluctant to accept non-reception as a common instrument of the legal subjects' defense against laws which impede their pursuance of ecclesiastical goals. And it also reveals that the ecclesiastical authorities are unwilling to understand deviance as a response to home-grown structural issues, which produce a mismatch between institutional norms and ecclesiastical goals.

This is sociologically unwise, as reading Robert Merton might help to understand. But it is also theologically questionable. Over the past couple of years, many theologians have paved the way for understanding dissent on matters of faith as a possible expression of the Spirit at work in local communities, as they have started to interpret the faithful's sense of faith not merely as manifest in assent but also in dissent.[59] To these observations, I want to add the dimension of institutional norms and suggest that deviance can have that prophetic dimension too. Deviant behavior can serve as an indicator pointing at ways to reform a malfunctioning system. Merton himself saw this when he noted, "This outcome of anomie, however, may be only a prelude to the development of new norms."[60] In light of the evolving moral panic in church, some reassurance may be provided by his nonchalant observation, "As we all know, the rebel, revolutionary, nonconformist, individualist, heretic or renegade of an earlier time is often the culture hero of today."[61]

Notes

1. For an overall analysis of this loss of effectiveness, see Judith Hahn, *Foundations of a Sociology of Canon Law*, Cham, Springer Nature, 2022.
2. On this differentiation, see Roscoe Pound, "Law in Books and Law in Action," *American Law Review* 44 (1910), 12–36.
3. Eg Eugen Ehrlich, *Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law*, translated by Walter L. Moll, with an introduction by Roscoe Pound, Cambridge, MA, The Harvard University Press, 1936, 486.
4. Manfred Rehbinder, *Rechtssoziologie: Ein Studienbuch*, 8th edn, Munich, C. H. Beck, 2014, 2.
5. Werner Böckenförde, "Zur gegenwärtigen Lage in der römisch-katholischen Kirche: Kirchenrechtliche Anmerkungen," in Norbert Lüdecke, Georg Bier, eds, *Freiheit und Gerechtigkeit in der Kirche: Gedenkschrift für Werner*

Böckenförde (Forschungen zur Kirchenrechtswissenschaft 37), Würzburg, Echter, 2006, 143–158, at 147; translation by the author.

6. See Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* [1893], translated by George Simpson, 4th edn, Glencoe, IL, The Free Press, 1960, particularly at 353–373.
7. See Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* [1897], translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, edited with an introduction by George Simpson, London/New York, Routledge, 2005, particularly at 220–239.
8. For a combined approach, studying the structural and psychological factors of anomie, see, for instance, Leo Fay's examination of anomie in a US-American convent of nuns, see Leo F. Fay, "Differential Anomic Responses in a Religious Community," *Sociological Analysis* 39 (1978), 62–76.
9. Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, enlarged edn, New York, The Free Press, 1968, 190.
10. Ibid, 217.
11. Ibid, 214.
12. Ibid, 186.
13. I am grateful to Marta Bucholc for suggesting to use Merton's anomie thesis to explain the present state of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution in many regions of the northern hemisphere.
14. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 216.
15. See Fay, "Differential Anomic Responses" (see note 8), 65–67.
16. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 216.
17. Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," *American Sociological Review* 3 (1938), 672–682, at 673.
18. Ibid.
19. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 187.
20. Ibid, 216–217.
21. Ibid, 188.
22. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (see note 17), 672.
23. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 216.
24. Ibid, 188.
25. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (see note 17), 672.
26. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 245.
27. Ibid, 200.
28. Ibid.
29. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (see note 17), 673.
30. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 236.
31. Ibid, 203.
32. Ibid.

33. Ibid, 188.
34. See Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (see note 17), 673.
35. Ibid.
36. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 204.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid, 238.
39. Ibid, 243.
40. See ibid.
41. Ibid, 194 fn 13.
42. Ibid, 207.
43. Ibid, 213.
44. Albert Lewis Rhodes, "Authoritarianism and Alienation: The F-Scale and the Srole Scale as Predictors of Prejudice," *The Sociological Quarterly* 2 (1961), 193–202, at 194.
45. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 217.
46. Ibid, 190.
47. Ibid, 223.
48. Ibid, 245.
49. Ibid, 216.
50. See Durkheim, *Suicide* (see note 7), particularly 220–239; drawing on Durkheim's thesis eg Dwight G. Dean, Jon A. Reeves, "Anomie: A Comparison of a Catholic and a Protestant Sample," *Sociometry* 25 (1962), 209–212; Leslie G. Carr, William J. Hauser, "Anomie and Religiosity: An Empirical Re-Examination," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 15 (1976), 69–74.
51. Pius X, "Encyclical *Vehementer nos* on the French Law of Separation," 11 February 1906, no 8, *Acta Sanctae Sedis* 39 (1906), 3–16, at 8–9.
52. See Fay, "Differential Anomic Responses" (see note 8), 69–70.
53. Ibid, 75.
54. See Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie" (see note 17), 673–674.
55. Ibid, 674.
56. Ibid.
57. Eg Niklas Luhmann, "Positivität des Rechts als Voraussetzung einer modernen Gesellschaft," *Jahrbuch für Rechtssoziologie und Rechtstheorie* 1 (1970), 175–202, at 191.
58. Eg Ladislas M. Orsy, "The Interpreter and His Art," *The Jurist* 40 (1980), 27–56, at 42.
59. Eg Neil Ormerod, "Sensus fidei and Sociology: How Do We Find the Normative in the Empirical?," in Peter C. Phan, Bradford E. Hinze, eds, *Learning from* All *The Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the* Sensus Fidei, Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2016, 89–102, at 97–102; Peter C. Phan, "Sensus Fidelium, Dissensus Infidelium, Consensus

Omnium: An Interreligious Approach to Consensus in Doctrinal Theology," in idem, Bradford E. Hinze, eds, *Learning from* All *The Faithful: A Contemporary Theology of the* Sensus Fidei, Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2016, 213–225; Bradford E. Hinze, "The Dissent of the Faithful in the Catholic Church," *Horizons* 45 (2018), 128–132; Richard R. Gaillardetz, "Beyond Dissent: Reflections on the Possibilities of a Pastoral Magisterium in Today's Church," *Horizons* 45 (2018), 132–136; Judith Gruber, "Towards a Theology of Dissent," in Mark D. Chapman, Vladimir Latinovic, eds, *Changing the Church: Transformations of Christian Belief, Practice, and Life* (Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue), London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021, 29–36.

60. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (see note 9), 245.
61. Ibid, 237.

PART IV

Conflict Field: Gender and Sexuality

CHAPTER 8

Seeking Allies Within the Institutional Church: Reflections from South Africa on Partnership as Means to Unsettling Deadlocked Conflict?

Nadine Bowers Du Toit

Introduction

One of the means that has long been proposed with regard to addressing the deadlocked conflict with regard to issues such as gender and sexuality and race and class has been to seek allies from the seemingly oppositional group in order to facilitate social change. Social movements have also made use of this approach over the years. As a practical theologian, positionality and situatedness is always the starting point. I grew up as the child of church leaders in South Africa, who did not subscribe at all to the kind of headship submission popularized as being particular to evangelicals like ourselves—neither in our home nor within a church context, and over the past 25 years have witnessed my mother emerge as a global church

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leader. It is also important to note that perhaps the latter reason makes me uniquely positioned to reflect on the notion of gender solidarity—my father was in many ways my mother's first ministry ally and a fierce one at that. So, it strikes me as sad and perhaps even heartbreaking that the gains made by my mother's generation, which saw women ordained to the ministry, appointed as professors of theology in major universities and ordained to prominent church leadership roles, appear to be eroded in an era which has seen the re-emergence of rightest thinking and praxis in the benches and on the pulpits of local congregations. This thinking does not appear constrained to fundamentalists, although they may certainly make up the majority, in an era within which issues of race, class, and gender are becoming seemingly more oppositional—due to the re-emergence of right-wing and fundamentalist discourse.

I, therefore, seek to attempt to engage the notion of deadlocked conflict with regard to gender issues in the church and argue that what is needed is to harness—and perhaps simultaneously problematize—the notion of allyship in order to facilitate social change. This lens is also shaped by the understanding that the experiences of women in the West are not normative for all women and seeks to take a "multi-dimensional analysis of oppression," which starts with women's experiences as the departure point.[1] This chapter will begin by discussing the ways in which intersecting oppressions emerge as exemplified in praxis with particular reference to the South African context. Phiri and Nadar,[2] emphasize the point that "African women theologians must be bilingual 'speaking the language of academy and that of their communities not just linguistically, but culturally and socially'" and it is hoped that this is exactly what I will do in this chapter by beginning with storytelling. This is also in line with decolonial research methods which promote storytelling as a methodology.[3] In addition, the chapter will explore the definition of allyship and solidarity and the forms it has taken in recent years with concluding thoughts in reflection on the possibilities and complexities of the notions of partnership and solidarity.

Where God Stands—Starting from the Point of Oppression

Although I am not a Reformed theologian, my thinking has been deeply shaped—I must confess—by the Confession of Belhar, a statement which in a liberationist vein calls on the church to "stand where God stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others" (Belhar Confession, Article 4).[4] Belhar was written as a prophetic call to the racist oppression of the Apartheid South African state; however, it is no less powerful when applied to the intersecting oppression of patriarchy. For African women theologians, African women's theologies "take women's experiences as its starting point, focusing on the oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, globalization and sexism."[5] To work, therefore, from lived experiences of oppression as the starting point in this chapter is to understand where God stands and what exactly the church must witness against.

In the week that I sat down to write the keynote address on which this chapter is based, I read the following post by a current PhD student of mine who is an woman of color and ordained clergyperson.[6] It is important to observe that it is written in South Africa's Women's Month—a month in which we usually celebrate the ways in which our foremothers took on the might of the Apartheid state.

> I am not one to put church issues on Facebook, but i cannot keep silent anymore. Today i am disgusted, i am hurt, i am disappointed, i am angry, i am broken. How dare we call ourselves church, how dare we say we embody the Belhar Confession when there are still congregations/church councils that DECIDES that they won't call a female Proponent or female Reverend. How dare we call ourselves church when a female minister goes for an unsuccessful interview and the feedback is, it's because she's a female? How dare we celebrate women's month when female elders and deacons agree with such decisions? During women's month devotions i have seen and heard the beautiful, blessed women and i thought how rich our church is. But today, today i am so sad for my sisters. My sisters that's struggling in congregations, my sisters who has been deeply hurt and is still hurting, my sisters that must still come into ministry and experience this in church. God must be crying. Today i am just hurt. (Claudette Williams Facebook post 3 September 2021)

In many ways, this post sums up the frustration and challenges faced by women in ministry. It is also striking that the Belhar Confession is used here as a counterpoint to the oppression of women in her post. While in the South African context there remain many churches that do not ordain women—largely of the independent Pentecostal or evangelical persuasion—more subtle is the exclusion of female clergy and women from the mainstays of power within denominational hierarchies and the implicit message that to be appointed to a position of power and influence, one must still behave "like a man." This perspective is reinforced even by female leaders who have seemingly assimilated and internalized the systems wrought by patriarchy to such an extent that one female church leader remarked to me that she had no time for women clergy's complaints about patriarchy, they simply needed to "get on with the job." Le Roux & Bowers Du Toit[7] note that "terms like 'toxic femininity', 'formenism', and 'patriarchal bargaining' have been used when discussing this phenomenon. These terms have often been used in relation to the actions of religious women when attempting to explain their compliance with patriarchal religious structures."

Pillay[8] notes that while in the Anglican church in South Africa there have been attempts to ensure that women are well represented since they were first granted ordination three decades ago, "very little has been done in regarding transforming the dominant male ethos in ecclesial spaces." She further notes that in these ways, despite the presence of women in such ecclesial spaces, "patriarchal normativity is reinscribed through the reproduction of knowledge, which sustains skewed gender power relations amongst the clergy."[9] Thus, in institutional spaces, such as the church, a greater representation of women in the structures of such institutions will not necessarily dismantle patriarchy in all its guises if cognizance is not taken of the way in which the causes of oppression "are embedded in the unquestioned norms, habits and symbols in the assumptions underlying institutional rules."[10] In the majority of church spaces, at least in South African, LGBTQI[11] ordination remains an ongoing struggle within mainline denominations and a taboo in the rest of the churches.

It is interesting too that despite the ongoing challenges faced by women in broader society, as still evidenced by lower pay, soaring Gender Based Violence (GBV) rates and the clear correlations between gender oppression and inequality, there appears to be a re-emergence of a troubling (toxic?) masculinities discourse, which pits men against women. At a recent conference for Christian development/diaconia practitioners which I addressed, a fellow African woman noted that the men in her organization were complaining that the girl child was garnering more donor aid and attention than the boy child and that they believed this to be reverse oppression—despite the overwhelming evidence of oppressive and harmful practices with regard to the girl child on our continent and the feminization of poverty. Year after year, this underlying discourse of "reverse oppression" is sadly confirmed when I teach Gender and Development to my students. On much of our continent, "women's lives are deeply affected by religious values, norms and laws, linked to indigenous customs, which legitimate male dominance and female subordination,"[12] so it is not surprising that these views are held. They are also not unique to our context. In fact, while such views may not be overtly expressed, implicit bias in the form of toxic masculinity remains in many of our church institutions in hiring practices (as also implied in the Facebook post), the sidelining of clergywomen in leadership, and the struggle for the ordination of openly LGBTQI+ clergy in many denominations, and also continues in hidden transcripts and practices often brought to light in fascinating ways and fueled by what I believe to be a re-emergence of rightist discourse within the church. A recently ordained Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) clergy women—a church which has openly ordained women for many years—became caught in a media frenzy when she was labeled a heretic by a retired minister in her own denomination for referring to God as "she."[13] The abuse and harassment she suffered as a result were shocking—as were the views expressed by DRC members in the pews on social media. While the DRC might be aligned in many ways with the ecumenical movement and has openly repented of its Apartheid complicity as a denomination, it still serves a white constituency, who in the wake of the demise of Apartheid appear to be increasingly clinging to the security of the racist and patriarchal Apartheid past—a past which included the belief that women should be subordinate to men.

Perhaps still more explicit has been the #Churchtoo movement's exposure of sexual abuse in the church which has uncovered the depth of the sickening morass that the worldwide church finds itself complicit in.[14] In South Africa, recent media reports highlighted the case of Rev June Dolly-Major, whose alleged rapist is a fellow clergyperson. A media report noted the following:

> A year ago, the Rev June Major staged a hunger strike outside Archbishop Thabo Makgoba's home in Bishopscourt, Cape Town. The reason for her hunger strike? She wanted the church to hold her alleged rapist accountable. After six days of sleeping in a tent outside Makgoba's home, Major agreed to end the hunger strike and go home. Makgoba had agreed to Major's demands, which included an internal investigation into her rape complaint and other alleged victims of the perpetrator.[15]

The response of the church with regard to this case is perhaps not surprising when one considers the empirical research of my colleague Lisa Roux regarding the complicit role of churches in sexual violence, which found that according to the participants,

> "Churches do not take sexual violence seriously and do not apply the Bible contextually to the issue. Participants consistently spoke of the misogyny of churches and their theologies, their complicity not only in ignoring the reality and silencing those who speak out, but their own role in perpetration. According to the majority of participants, many church leaders were themselves guilty of perpetrating sexual violence. However, they remained unconfronted by the wider church leadership because these perpetrators were persons with authority."[16]

For clergy women of color, such as the Rev Williams and Rev Dolly-Major, there is also the double or intersecting burden of race and gender, which implies that we are often on the lowest rung of the privilege hierarchy. This certainly does not imply a lack of agency on the part of the incumbent or any of the stories recounted as resistance enacted by the marginalized, but it does point to the weight of transformation.

Towards Allyship, Partnership and Solidarity

Radke et al.[17] make the point that while it should not be implied that "the participation of advantaged group members is necessary for social change to be achieved … the role of advantaged group members in political movements for social change is warranted." In this respect, the authors cite white Americans' involvement in the civil rights movement and heterosexuals' involvement in the legalization of same-sex marriage as allies in these struggles. During the #FeesMustFall university-wide protests for free decolonized education in South African universities, we also saw this enacted by white students placing their bodies on the front line of pickets as police were less likely to engage them violently than they were black students. Indeed, sociologists note that "solidarity is unlikely to emerge as long as gender inequality is framed as a women's issue" and highlight the fact that "men as advocates of gender equality—particularly those in positions of public leadership and authority—signal to both men and women 'that we are all this together', making widespread engagement in collective action more likely."[18] In fact, we have viewed this emerge recently also in global movements such as #HeforShe. An empirical study undertaken by the Unit for Religion and Development Research on the role of African male faith leaders in combatting GBV indicates the efficacy and importance of targeting male faith leaders as allies in the struggle against GBV based on a mutuality which "recognizes that partnership means working together, sharing responsibility, calling forth each other's gifts and working and caring for the life of community."[19]

The role of male and cis gender allies in the struggle for gender equality then is important to reflect on in the context of deadlocked gender conflict. Joerg Rieger and Rosemarie Henkel-Rieger[20] argue openly for the notion of "deep solidarity" in the context of systemic exclusion. In their understanding:

> Deep solidarity recognizes that the system works for the few rather than for the many and that nothing will change unless more of the many come together. Deep solidarity does not mean that we are all alike or that our differences do not matter anymore, just the opposite: deep solidarity allows us to deal with our differences more constructively and put them to work for a common cause.

Although the Regiers are largely calling for solidarity within the context of labor, the notion of deep solidarity is an important one in confronting structural oppressions such as patriarchy. Indeed in my own theological faculty, during a time of deep mourning in our country over the GBV pandemic, this Facebook post by two of our male students emerged where they declared solidarity in the following way:

> In black solidarity with the women of the soil … we will never imagine how it feels to be a woman in this country but what we know if how they are feeling around is the same way we feel about prison… we are scared of prison, women are scared of present SA Nkosi sikelela izwe lethu. "(Lord be with our country)" (Ntsika Facebook post September 2019)

The notion of solidarity and allyship is not, however, without contestation, as will be further explored.

Theology as Lock or Key to Solidarity?

Such solidarity in the context of patriarchy cannot take place, however, where theology acts as a "lock" to shutting off equality of partnership and solidarity between the sexes. African womanist theologian, Isabel Phiri, in writing in the context of mission and partnership, makes the important point, for example, that the manner in which the doctrine of the Trinity has been perpetuated in certain circles as an all-male trinity has long been critiqued by feminist theologians as lending tacit support to the subordination of women to men and the "sense that the human male is normative for all experience."[21] This view has in fact found open support in fundamentalist circles, both in the United States of America and also in a particular evangelical mega church movement in my own context, which has led to a deadlock with regard to the appointment of female clergy. Of course, other womanist theologians argue positively for the notion of the social trinity[22] and this is certainly not the only problematic theological perspective amongst a range in the global church, which includes the extreme view that women do not reflect the image of God and the ways in which the so-called "6 shooter texts" have been applied to LGBTQI+ issues. The role of theological reflection is, therefore, key in beginning to unlock this conflict as that is after all where it begins; however, even the most theologically liberal amongst us could hold implicit/hidden patriarchal transcripts shaped over many years and not openly declared. African womanist theologian's argument for an action-reflection model is perhaps helpful, as it consists of "critically reflecting on traditions and culture then taking action by deconstructing and reconstructing and finding new ways of doing theology" invites communal ways of doing theology as a departure point, rather than normative perspectives as a departure point.[23] Such hermeneutical praxis may assist even those allies among us who consider themselves and their institutions beyond reproach on the issue of gender to deconstruct the ways in which hidden transcripts and harmful institutional practices and habits could be reflexively engaged through such a model for the purposes of greater solidarity.

Subjecting the church to such reflections requires a vulnerable ecclesiology:

> Vulnerability is not merely based on the vulnerable environment in which the church finds itself; rather, vulnerability is part of the essence of the

> church, since the church lives in solidarity with the vulnerable human beings and within vulnerable eco-systems. The emphasis on vulnerability invites Christians and the church to witness with greater gospel integrity to the liberating logic of the reign of God.[24]

Such a perspective seeks to turn the domination of racism, classism, and sexism on its head—in the way of God's reign—and calls for solidarity through vulnerability. In this understanding, the Body of Christ is called to be bodily present in the light of gender injustice—to put "skin in the game" so to speak.[25] This vulnerable ecclesiology does not allow for the liberal to hide but poses the question whether we are prepared to "risk becoming vulnerable as a result of our solidarity with others in their precarity?"[26] Phiri[27] makes the point that that the root of true partnership is "participation in suffering and struggle is at the heart of God's mission and God's will for the world. It is central for our understanding of the incarnation, the most glorious example of participation in suffering and struggle." Such solidarity implies risk—that those who become allies and join the struggle of gendered others on the margins will themselves experience suffering with those who are marginalized and excluded. I think young adults often better understand how solidarity is embodied. I think of the way in which one young female theological student stood openly for LGBTQI+ rights knowing that her church was not fully affirming and that she would soon face ordination in that same church. I also think of the recent dismissal of a young South African pastor in a conservative evangelical megachurch due to his stance of open support for female ordination.

One of the key aspects of the notion of deep solidarity, therefore, is that solidarity is certainly not charity, nor is it even advocacy. Advocacy certainly seeks to challenge the powers that be on behalf of others, nevertheless, the Riegers' note that it is often one sided with the privileged/advantaged group often assuming the less privileged group have no power (thereby stifling their agency) and "acting as if they had the ability to fix the problems themselves" (the savior mentality).[28] This is in line with a "donor to receiver model" often rooted in a kind of colonial and patriarchal mindset.[29] The latter caution applies to all who seek to be allies as Decolonial feminists also make the point here that even white feminist allies should be weary of speaking on behalf of women from the Global South whose struggles are additionally rooted in the intersecting oppressions of racism, cultural oppression, and colonialism. From the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians we learn that power should be shared by all[30] and it requires that theology is always done in community and within an understanding of reciprocity and solidarity.

Rieger and Henkel-Rieger argue that in the Exodus stories God herself "is not working from the outside, employing models of charity and advocacy; rather God is part of the struggle."[31] In line with my reference to the Confession of Belhar, it is to stand where God stands—to stand in fact where the stories of oppression I have told are and where the stories of marginalization and oppression lie in each your own contexts. It is also the case that women or LGBTQI+s are often accommodated or offered places at the institutional table as guests to appease politically correct notions of Christian hospitality but are not viewed as full members and still treated as guests. Russell[32] makes the important point that looking at hospitality in terms of structural injustice and the need for "partnership across barriers of difference," calls for a decolonizing of the mind. This implies that we think from the margins rather than the center and "reframe hospitality as a form of partnership with the one we call other, rather than as a form of charity or entertainment." True partnership is costly and *kenotic*, not only performative. We would do well to remember the ecumenical movement's call for Thursdays in Black "towards a world without violence against women and girls."

I find it interesting that the Riegers noted that the dominant powers are also called to conversion and repentance—in a way that doesn't push them aside but calls them to be part of a new way.[33] Perhaps a helpful start to the latter is held by Selina Palm, who argues that ecclesiologies of vulnerability must indeed go beyond merely embracing solidarity, but also requires lament and a public confessional witness to the silence and complicity of churches. This is because the church "in its institutions and ideas" is "deeply entangled in forms of hierarchical violence that are sinful." There must be a *metanoia* that recognizes our guilt and repents and laments our complicity as church as the starting point so that we can move together as "humans in imaging divinity together in life enhancing mutual relationship."[34] I would further argue that this *metanoia* is a continuing "turning away"—not a once-off event—from the ways in which patriarchy is inscribed not only on our hearts but in our institutional practices and habits.

Concluding Thoughts: Making the Circle Bigger

In Cape Town we have a rap song that says "make the circle bigger." When it comes to allyship and solidarity, for men and cisgender allies, the elephant in the room is always whether they will be welcomed in their quest to stand alongside those marginalized by patriarchy. I recently wrote that those of us that are on the margins in terms of race, class, gender only create our own tables or circles because of the ways in which we have been excluded from spaces and the hurtful things that occurred in those spaces. Our spaces, however, are not linear—there is not a door or a lock to be had in such spaces if you begin by listening to our stories, employ a vulnerable ecclesiology that understands the notion of power and patriarchy and is open to conversion, and seek self-reflexivity as persons situated within systems. Men do not need to be pitted against women, cis gender against LGTBQI. The call to solidarity is a struggle for justice for all, not just for one group. Indeed as African Women Theologians argue, our struggle is the fight for the liberation of "all men, women, children and societies."[35] It is for the flourishing of all. I end with the following untitled poem, which was written by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the founding mother of the Circle of Concerned Women African Theologians:

> A Circle expands forever
> It covers all who wish to hold hands
> And its size depends on each other
> It is a vision of solidarity It turns outwards to interact with the outside
> And inward for self-critique
> A circle expands forever It is a vision of accountability It grows as the other is moved to grow
> A circle must have a center
> But a single dot does not make a Circle
> One tree does not make a forest
> A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care.[36]

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CHAPTER 9

Conflicting Masculinities in Christianity: Experiences and Critical Reflections on Gender and Religion

Michael Schüßler

Any theology, including the academic, could be understood as situated knowledge (Donna Haraway). Indicating one's own perspective protects from exaggerated claims of objectivity: The quasi-divine "view from nowhere" is too close to the limited male gaze to be objective. Conversely, this "positioning is, therefore, the key practice in grounding knowledge" because it "implies responsibility for our enabling practices."[1]

I write as a heterosexual married man and father of two children. As a German Catholic theologian, I am confronted with, or better, I am an implicated part of the entire eurocentric, androcentric, and homophobic history of power and violence in my church, which at the same time wants to be a place of salvation and liberation, nonetheless. My academic field is Practical Theology, which means locating and reinventing Christian traditions within the experience of present life.

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This text follows three steps. After some introductory remarks about religion and masculinity, I will lay out the conceptual basics for a critical analysis of masculinity in Religion and the Church. Secondly, I undertake a case study about clerical masculinity and the Synodal Path. And in a final step, I try to deconstruct the "Global church argument" within the Catholic church, as it prohibits necessary changes in the religious gender order by instrumentalizing the Global South. My argument will be that dissent between different forms of masculinities in church and theology could be a perspective of hope because it enables the transformation of closed clerical and patriarchal images of what men should be.

Religion and Masculinity: Two Toxic Concepts for the Diversity of Living Together?

My point of view is rooted in eleven years of experience as a teacher in a Catholic School for Educators and Social Workers. By growing up, boys are confronted with the mostly implicit expectation of male dominance, strength, and superiority over other men and in contrast to women. Masculinity can therefore become a nightmare in the lives of boys and men. The bestseller "Mask off: Masculinity Redefined" by JJ Bola, a Kinshasa/Congo-born and London-raised activist, was translated into German as "Don't be a man. Why Masculinity is a Nightmare for Boys." He writes:

> "Manhood, much like masculinity, is not a fixed identity. […] It is ever changing, it is fluid, and more importantly, it is and can be anything you want it to be. However, as long as there remain rigid and stereotypical beliefs around masculinity that go unchallenged, men are often unable to subscribe to a masculinity that sits outside this status quo."[2]

A quite similar experience comes from theological scholar Herbert Anderson. He told his students that he was going to move away for his wife, a second time in a row, as she had gotten a job in another city. "In response to this announcement, a young student blurted out, 'You're a wuss.' It was a clear declaration that in his world view I did not embody hegemonic masculinity,"[3] an analytic concept I will lay out below.

Further examples of conflicting masculinities can be observed around the world. I will stick to my own German context. After the conditions of life for men and women have become much more equalized in recent decades, despite remaining inequalities, there is, at the same time, a transformation of the structures of law, values, and norms in society. This reveals a paradox of simultaneity of persistence and change.[4] From 2000 to 2010, several qualitative-empirical studies on men documented the "persistence of the image held by both sexes of men as 'strong, active, and rational' and that of women as 'sociable, emotional and erotic.'"[5] Expectations of the church's position concerning gender are also highly polarized: "31% of men and 24% of women desire the church's commitment to traditional gender relations. Again, 31% of men and 22% of women want the church's support in reshaping men's roles."[6]

Yet, minor changes in the law have sparked major debates about the symbolic and normative foundations of society. Since 2017, same-sex couples have legally been able to marry. Gays and lesbians are equal now before the law. And since 2018, it has been possible to put the category "diverse" on passports in addition to "male" and "female." Everyday experience shows how women are conquering male domains in the labor market (police, military, health care); conversely, men are expected to take over domestic tasks traditionally performed by women (household, children, care responsibilities). Violent and aggressive behavior is no longer tolerated by men or women alike but is publicly condemned.[7] A certain form of traditional masculinity, analyzed in research as hegemonic masculinity, is losing its unchallenged self-evidence. The #metoo movement is the visible symbol of these changes. However, when old ideals of masculinity "are called into doubt not only by one's own wife, but by society as a whole, the result is an increased vulnerability and, correspondingly, an increased willingness to use violence," says Susanne Kaiser in her book on the comeback of reactionary masculinity.[8] For many white men today, the phrase holds true: "Because you were used to privilege, equality feels like oppression."[9]

Critical researchers of masculinity point to the consequential problem that "criticism 'against' men could lead men to confuse the demand to […] give up privileges with discrimination, and to feel like 'victims of the victims.'"[10] This assessment that "enough is enough with equality and emancipation" has given rise to movements which want to protect men's rights and which are anti-feminist. Alongside Putin, Orbán, Trump, or Bolsonaro, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church also regularly defends the traditional family and gender model against criticism and crisis.

In the field of Christian churches, the narrative of threatened male identity correlates with a very particular paradox. On the one hand, Christianity is considered a patriarchal and male-dominated religion. The Catholic clergy is exclusively male, which was also valid in German Protestantism until recently: pastors and pastoral workers had predominantly been men.[11]

But when at the beginning of modernity religious practice was pushed back into the private sphere, "concerns arose that domestic and individual piety were 'feminizing' the church and therefore men were losing interest in church life."[12] Subsequently, Christian men's movements repeatedly attempted to counter the supposed "feminization of the life of faith" with religious remasculinization.

Linda Woodhead has explored these connections, saying: "Historically, Christianity always flourished when it supported a patriarchal gender order and its associated forms of masculinity and femininity [...]. But if the gender order begins to falter, a religion that sacralizes that order is likely to struggle as well."[13]

Today, however, gender research makes visible the price of forcefully stabilizing binary gender stereotypes—this is also true for the realm of religion and the Church. Stabilizing male identities in their dominance without gender justice, without paying attention to the diversity of masculinities and one's vulnerability, is, in JJ Bola's words, "a kind of double-edged sword, a poisonous panacea; that is to say, the same system that puts men at an advantage in society is essentially the same system that limits them; inhibits their growth and eventually leads to their break down."[14] *Recognition and normalization of diversity rather than reproduction of toxic stereotypes of masculinity is therefore the position I would like to pursue—both theologically and pastorally.* That leads to the current academic approaches in the field of Men, Masculinity, and Religion.

Critical Masculinity Studies in Religion

"Hegemonic Masculinity": The Classic Concept of Analysis

The groundbreaking approach by Raewyn Connell has inspired practice-theoretical and discourse-critical masculinity research worldwide.[15]

> "Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting."[16]

"Hegemonic masculinity" is to be understood as a non-essentialist perspective of analysis rather than a concept with stable characteristics. There is not one masculinity but a hegemonic model that excludes other masculinities.[17]

> "At any given time, one form of masculinity is culturally singled out in contrast to the others. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as that configuration of gendered practice which ensures […] the […] dominance of men as well as the subordination of women. […] Within this framework, there are […] specific gender relations of dominance and subordination among groups of men. […] Gay masculinity is the most conspicuous, but not the only form of subordinate masculinity."[18]

Not all men embody "hegemonic masculinity" in its purest form, as public figures like male actors or the Avenger heroes do. But all share the *patriarchal dividend* of this social gender structure.

> "The number of men who truly practice the hegemonic pattern rigorously and completely […] may be quite small. Nevertheless, a vast majority of men benefits from the predominance of this form of masculinity, holding a share in the *patriarchal dividend*, the general advantage of men that derives from the oppression of women (and other, 'weaker' masculinities, M.S.)."[19]

Connell recently pointed out the complicated connection between Christian religion and hegemonic masculinity. Along with Mary Daly's phrase "If God is male, then the male is God,"[20] Connell writes: "Familiar images of God rely specifically on constructions of hegemonic masculinity […]. […] Since hegemonic masculinities are based on the subordination of other masculinities, it is not surprising that patriarchal religions control the representation of masculinity."[21]

This also means, that the leading binarity of "traditional vs. modern men" is undercomplex. Especially recent post- and decolonial research suggests a different view. Connell, referring to South African psychologist Kopano Ratele, writes, "traditional views of gender are diverse and constantly renegotiated. Certainly, some traditions are patriarchal, but there are also democratic and inclusive traditions. Thus, tradition also offers resources for gender equality. We should abandon the notion that the world is made up of 'modern' and 'pre-modern' cultures."[22]

Critical Masculinity Studies in Religion and Kenotic Masculinity

Björn Krondorfer, born in Germany, works in the field of “Critical Masculinity Studies in Religion” in the United States.[23] Critical masculinity studies begin by perceiving that hegemonic masculinity determines so self-evidently the measure of what is normal, that its influence often remains invisible. Men have no gender, so a common everyday belief goes, while gender remains a women’s topic. “Masculinity, as an unmarked experience, is an absence that needs our attention, and that is true for all world religions that follow patriarchal traditions.”[24]

Masculinity consequently becomes a difficult category because according to Krondorfer, one must reckon with the “non-absence” of masculinely coded factors of influence: “Although the male body and male agency are always *in* the text (and *in* theology, *in* religious habits, *in* devotional practices, and *in* sacred institutions), they are not present as a consciously gendered experience. Non-absence signals that there is no awareness of that which is present but not consciously articulated.”[25] Forgetting and not addressing masculinities thus acts as a stabilization of conventionally dominant gender relations.

On the other hand, with thematizing men issues in a traditional way, one runs the risk of reproducing the heteronormative regime and once again ignoring women’s and queere experiences. This objection is important and guards against an overly naive perspective on the individual well-being of individual men.

Critical-reflexive masculinity studies “exhibits not only a reflective and empathic stance toward men as individual and communal beings, trying to make sense of their lives within the different demands put upon them by society and religion, but it must also engage these issues with critical sensitivity and scholarly discipline in the context of gender-unjust systems.”[26] In Pastoral Care, therefore, it can never be only about empowerment of men without at the same time honestly clarifying one’s own role and position in the lived gender relations. Otherwise, with Krondorfer, one again runs “the risk of reoccupying the gender discourse with masculine and patriarchal values.”[27] It is therefore always worth looking closely when talking about male identity, church, and religion. There is a great danger of simply stabilizing problematic stereotypes with rituals and religious narratives.

Krondorfer and Stephan Hunt summarize “critical masculinity studies in religion” in three aspects:

1. The approach understands men as people with gender identities. "With the help of gender theory, including feminist theory, men are seen within their particular gendered limitations and also their embodiments."[28]
2. The approach explores and analyzes the intersections of masculinities and religious traditions as they are handed down and lived. "What benefits, what harms are created when men remain blind to their own genderedness? What ideals, practices, and images of manliness are condoned or condemned in religious traditions?"[29]
3. The approach follows a transformative perspective that seeks to discover alternatives to patriarchal structures and hegemonic masculinities.

The problem of many religious discourses of masculinity is an essentialist foundational structure. Moreover, this does not only describe the Catholic Church but also, for example, the more esoteric mythopoetic movement found in representatives from Robert Bly to Richard Rohr. Because men are in crisis, new and powerful images of men are needed, they say. Men would have to rediscover the warrior in themselves, their wildness and the desire to compete. A kind of renewal in masculinist ways is found today by Jordan Peterson or the antifeminist Men's Rights Movement. But this again only reproduces androcentric, stereotypical patterns of a male role that defines itself in binary demarcation from the female.

Armin Kummer aptly writes about essentialist discourses of masculinity: "Defending male privileges, legitimized by myth and fairytales, contributes little to the liberation of men or human flourishing. Men won't solve their social, psychological and ultimately spiritual problems by trying to deny or reverse the collapse of an unjust gender order."[30] This is also true of the essentialist gender anthropology of the Catholic Magisterium with its polar gender complementarity. I agree with Kummer: "Rather than getting in touch with masculine archetypes, […] gender stereotypes need to be deconstructed."[31] If, on the other hand, masculinity is understood not as a fixed identity role but as the dynamics developed in practices of what those who see themselves as men do and experience in various aspects of their lives, then the narrow stereotypes open up. This means not only deconstructing aspects that devalue women but also the self-destructive potential of heroic discourses of masculinity, "the pointless self-sacrifice of millions of young men in militarized masculinity."[32] It is horrible to see how the Russian War in Ukraine follows these patterns.

Krondorfer's own attempt, therefore, argues for critical theological research on men as kenotic theology. Kenosis is the technical theological term for God's coming into the world in weakness: God becomes human, dwells in this world, and lives our human life along with all weakness and cruel vulnerability until death. "He was human like you and me," says the Philippians hymn (Phil 2:7). Men could take this voluntary self-limitation as a model, becoming aware of their privileges in order to share them and enter into a new relationship with others. "Seen in this light, a kenotic theology is an attempt not to fall prey to the seduction of developing new normative discourses about and for man (and woman). Instead, it is about leaving behind the theological paradigms in which male models hold interpretive supremacy."[33]

Why such a male-related gender perspective is quite useful for catholic theology today becomes clear when applied to the epochal rupture of clergy perpetrated sexual abuse.

Case-Study Catholic Church: Sexual Abuse, Clerical Masculinity and Synodal Path in Germany

The Catholic Magisterium acknowledges only either women or men in sharp distinction. And it normatively defines for them what true manhood and true womanhood mean according to God's plan of creation. While the sacramental leadership is reserved only for men, and authority is thus tied to a male gender identity, "the irreplaceable role of women in all aspects of family and social life involving human relationships and caring for others. Here what John Paul II has termed the *genius of women* becomes very clear. It implies first of all, that women be significantly and actively present in the family" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2004, no. 13).

While women are much praised by the Church, but not ordained,[34] young men are primarily targeted as potential priests. There is almost nothing to find in magisterial texts about ordinary men and their everyday problems.

The Catholic Church leadership thus sees itself committed to a normative gender anthropology, where on the surface equality is displayed, but underneath there is structurally inevitable discrimination: Those who do not fit themselves in the stereotypical gender containers of the church show "a confused concept of freedom in the realm of feelings and wants, or momentary desires provoked by emotional impulses and the will of the individual, as opposed to anything based on the truths of existence."[35]

This applies to gays and lesbians, trans*people and queer lifestyles, and to all who stand in solidarity with them.

The Catholic gender order is defended in such an aggressive manner because it has become a decisive core belief of catholic identity politics. "The corporative structure of the church is [...] legally a gender hierarchy."[36] "What would be discrimination in the state is valid in the church as a consequence of the magisterial gender anthropology [...]".[37] But this problematic ecclesiastical line of argument (equal dignity, but not equal rights) is also held beyond the church: "Adherents of the belief in a 'natural gender order' modernize their concept by transforming the traditional understanding of dominance of men over women into an 'equivalence of others.' That way, they are able to maintain traditional gender arrangements without appearing patriarchal or sexist, even though they still are."[38]

In fact, this is becoming less and less justifiable, both socially as well as theologically. The sexual abuse of children and the spiritual and sexualized violence against adults, especially by male clergy, deprives this constellation of its legitimacy. An important step forward in the current analysis and processing of the events of abuse lies in a systemic perspective, as implemented by the MHG-Study (2018), an interdisciplinary large-scale research project on clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse in Germany.

> "The results of the study make it clear that the abuse of minors by clerics of the Catholic Church is not only about the misconduct of individuals, but that attention must also be directed to the risk and structural characteristics specific to the Catholic Church, which enable sexual abuse of minors or make its prevention more difficult."[39]

The MHG-Study shows that the "rotten apple theory" does not apply. It is not about the pathological behavior of individuals from whom the church as an institutional space could distance itself. Rather one will have to question the conceptual identity of Catholicism itself.

This begins with a disturbing perception: empirically, abuse is a transideological phenomenon. Perpetrators exist on both the left and the right, in progressive and conservative milieus. The necessary change must come from the wounded reality, from the pain of those affected, not from ideology. Therefore, it is primarily a matter of making a professional distinction, which type of thought and culture have a preventive effect and which, conversely, possibly promote abuse, assault, and violence. For this reason, one cannot avoid the connection between sexuality and power within the Catholic Church, one cannot avoid exaggerated sacralized understandings of ministry, and one cannot avoid the clericalistic esprit de corps into which many believers are socialized as a complementary, co-clerical role. And there is no avoiding the analysis of clerical masculinity.

As Theresia Heimerl, a scholar of religious studies, puts it, the "clerical man as a different sort of man has become a trademark of Catholic Christianity."[40] But today, the question is: "Is clerical masculinity a particularly treacherous form of toxic masculinity that hides its inability to deal with new gender role models behind a hypocritical façade?"[41] There are initial attempts, as by Julie Hanlon Rubio of the Jesuit College at Berkeley, to examine "how problematic conceptions of masculinity deform the relationships of celibates just as those of non-celibates."[42] She understands clergy sexual abuse in its inseparable connection to masculinity.

Rubio, like Heimerl, points to the gendered inconsistency of clerical masculinity. Priests, as men, by definition, exclusively represent the sacred, defined as masculine, in Jesus Christ and God the Father. At the same time, however, their everyday life can be read as predominantly female as for their abstinence from sexuality, their identity as pastoral Care-Givers, and their liturgical dress. Rubio asks: "Might clergy sexual abuse be an extreme way of enacting their masculinity from spaces of perceived powerlessness and spaces of excess entitlement?"[43]

Another aspect that fosters the coverup is the often-diagnosed masculine nature of the clerical leadership as a kind of Men's Union. "Just as networks enable men in entertainment, sports, and politics to protect male power and privilege while disadvantaging their female colleagues, clerical networks protect men who abuse both minors and adults."[44] After the "breach of silence," many accounts of experiences reveal very destructive effects in the Catholic connection between religion and masculinity. Rubio and Paul J. Schutz deepen that in their 2022 published research project "Beyond bad apples." "In sum, the literature on sexual violence shows that while some individual pathologies are associated with men's use of sexual violence, sexual violence is tied to broader social norms related to masculinity, which are in turn part of the structures of patriarchal power. This suggests that any serious effort understand and eliminate sexual violence in the Church requires attention to how sex, gender, and power are embedded in ecclesial structures."[45]

The Synodal Path of the German Catholic Church is discussing such questions in four thematic forums: Power and separation of powers in the

Church, priestly existence today, women in church ministries, sexuality and partnership. In terms of canon law, this is a non-binding consultative process that acquires ecclesiastical efficacy through the self-commitment of individual bishops. Nevertheless, the work on reforms is so intensive and broad that critical observers warn of a schism in the church. From this perspective, the good of the church and its unity would still take the first place over any other experiences.

I just want to briefly call attention to a text that three queer believers have brought to the Synodal Path, addressing precisely this level of experience. Queer people as believers inside the Catholic Church experience thousands of fine pinpricks: the catechism wanting to recognize homosexual people as persons, but forbidding them sexuality, insulting their identity as "rainbow plague" or as "homo lobby," equating homosexuality with pedophilia, against all scientific knowledge, subtly devaluing their lifestyle in congregations.

> "The Catholic Church is often not only not a shelter for us, but it is a place where we must expect our dignity and our humanity to be attacked at any time. [...] It is not we who have the burden of proof. [...] It is not lesbians, gays, trans and inter persons and their ways of living and loving that are sinful, but the way our church deals with them in many places."[46]

The brave German Campaign #OutInChurch[47] in 2022 had great public impact and is about to change the normative agency of Catholic church as well. But this is not merely a European problem.

Decadence and Decay? Deconstructing the "Global Church Argument" in Gender and Religion

I follow up on Raewyn Connell's point about the importance of a global, postcolonial perspective on gender and religion today.[48] In Catholic areas of Europe, an argument that fatally connects gender, religion, and the othering of the Global South can be heard again and again. It goes like this: Criticism of the male dominance of patriarchal religion demands for Gender-Equality in all church offices and acceptance of gender and sexual diversity—they are all devalued as luxury problems of the secular, western North. The traditionally deeply religious and conservatively backward Global South would never go along with this.

This line of argument is not only found among conservative bishops and theologians but also, for example, in the analysis of the Italian sociologist Marco Marzano. His book *The Immovable Church* he insinuates that "African and Asian Catholics would certainly not like to be part of an institution, that in other parts of the world recognizes the legitimacy of homosexuality or ordains women priests."[49] In view of the Catholic Church's competition with Pentecostal churches and other religions, Marzano argues that "African Catholicism would have to become more magical, more esoteric […] it would have to emphasize precisely those features—homophobia, machismo, closeness to witchcraft—that are rather incompatible with secularization."[50]

There are binaries being constructed here that could not be more neocolonial. The Global South associates itself with homophobia and machismo, with religion and witchcraft. The Global North, on the other hand, stands for the absence of religion and hedonism, but also for freedom and the rights of quality. In any case, to prevent a schism in the global church, everything must remain the same when it comes to sexuality and gender. And the South is saddled with much of the burden of justification.

A look at recent postcolonial research, however, reveals a quite different picture. Katja Benkel has summarized the state of the debate in a study on the rigid discourse of homosexuality, using Uganda as an example. Heteronormativity and rigid sexual morality "was […] constitutive of 'whiteness' and legitimized those racist considerations of White Europeans within colonial discourse and naturalized the constellation of power inscribed therein."[51] And she adds: "The Christian mission in particular was devoted to sexual education in the face of amorality […]. It propagated the bourgeois family ideal with fixed gender roles and placed sexuality in a discourse of morality and sin."[52]

Without colonial history as a backdrop, much would remain obscure here, as the disciplining of the body and sexuality by Christian Pastoral Care, as it has been analyzed by Foucault, played a decisive role in colonialism. Rebecca Habermas, in her study of German colonial rule in the Congo, writes:

> "Also, the North German Mission, like the Steyl [missionaries], wanted to abolish the conventional division of labor that had given women a monopoly position in agriculture, since they considered female work outside the home as inappropriate."[53]

At the same time, the western ideal of masculinity was essentially shaped by military heroism, which was reinterpreted in the context of the Christian mission of the nineteenth century.

> "Henceforth, it was considered heroic to convey the Gospel message of salvation in a peaceful manner. Such an understanding of masculine heroism was directly linked to the imperialist project, which saw itself as a pacification and civilization project, that sought to save the 'barbarian' and 'pagan' populations by spreading Christian values. Missionaries were the new heroes."[54]

The aim here is not to romanticize precolonial African traditions, which probably were not fundamentally more peaceful or less patriarchal. But researchers like Marc Epprecht show "how religions in the past explained and accommodated the fact of sexual diversity in spite of the general commandment toward heterosexual marriage and reproduction."[55] Unlike the current polarizations on gender issues following "The homosexuality-is-un-African Myth," Epprecht suggests, "Africans had many words, symbols and myths to explain and categorize such diversity, or simply to turn a blind eye to it."[56] And he summarizes: "Many stereotypes of 'African Sexuality' are not only deeply misleading but also imply serious harms for public health, social justice and economic development,"[57] be it the oversexualization of nonwhite bodies, the catholic image of conservative religious believers, the victimization of female bodies or the neocolonial need of white men salvation.[58]

But patriarchal misogyny[59] and masculinist populism can't be outsourced neither in the Muslim World nor in the Global South.[60] As the comeback and persistence of reactionary masculinity in the West shows, any neocolonial Othering must fail here. It is about global lines of conflicts in intersecting Gender, Race, and Religion, but these present themselves in new and different ways, depending on regional context and political dynamics.[61]

Therefore, calling the commitment to gender justice and against patriarchal dominance and violence in church and society an eurocentric luxury problem seems quite cynical. Especially in the countries of the South, patriarchal attitudes propagating male dominance and tolerating male violence has existential effects on the life and body of women, children, and non-hegemonic men. Just think of the African discussions around HIV or gender-based violence.[62] But the necessary global solidarity is complicated because in each case concrete situations and circumstances must be considered, while colonial und orientalized stereotypes are still powerful.

However, churches and religious communities could strengthen those images of masculinity and gender that loosen the normative expectations of "the man" and "the woman," that give space to the diversity of life instead of adding a few more bars to the cages of stereotypical behavioral expectations with reference to God.[63] This dispute runs obviously right across the globe and right through the worldwide Catholic Church.[64] The Indian Catholic Theologian Kochurani Abraham, for example, writes about the new ecumenical Indian Christian Women's Movement (ICWM), which is "the emergence of new synodal practices from below."[65] Even as India makes progress in gender justice, "the regressive traditions which persist in the grab of religion continue to have a say on Indian women's psyche."[66] But the movement "has enabled Christian women to join hands with prophetic courage for addressing justice concerns in the Churches and in society."[67] Therefore, Abraham makes the contradictions and gendered power relations in church and society visible with a sharpness that is even more critical and progressive than what is discussed on the Synodal Path in Germany.

> "For synodality to become the way of being Church, it is imperative to bridge the clergy-'laity' divide. […] While religious power is vested in the hands of the clergy and the majority of the baptized remain 'lay people', the path of synodality is starting on a wrong premise that could impede the aspiration of becoming a synodal Church."[68]

The church's leadership personnel must be chosen in democratic ways "irrespective of their gender or sexual orientation," where "persons imbued with wisdom of the Spirit and the necessary leadership qualities are elected from the community of all the faithful and they will be accountable to the community for the responsibilities they shoulder."[69]

The worldwide awareness on intersectionality and here especially on the relationship between gender, race, and spiritual power in churches and religions makes it possible to see and deconstruct essentialist male dominance claims, even if they are beautifully and charmingly packaged in everyday life. Kochurani Abraham tells the story of an encounter with a Catholic theology professor in India.

> "He spoke gloriously about women's empowerment and asserted that it should begin in the family. In his opinion, women and men are like two wheels of a car that should move together to sustain the growth and wellbeing of the family. However, when he was asked as to who made decisions in his family, he replied without a second thought that the car needs a driver and God has entrusted him with that responsibility since he was the 'head' of the family. Further, he substantiated his position by citing many biblical texts that supported his argument about his 'divinely ordained' role as the head."[70]

This colleague internalized the Catholic gender dispositive that women and men had equal dignity but not equal rights. Based on this, Abraham develops a biting critique in the dispute over synodality. It is not enough to listen to everyone and let everyone speak, but to then leave the software of the operating system unchanged. Her question is, "who then is supposed to 'listen,' please. Even if Francis' remarks on synodality declare everyone in the church to be the subject and thus the listener, calling the church 'a single communal subject,' the ecclesial system will continue to exist as it does now, with men at the helm and women and laity as the wheels, as long as the responsibility of listening remains in the hands of the male clerical hierarchy."[71]

Conflicting Masculinities as a Sign of Hope

Moving toward a more just and inclusive world will not be possible without transforming hegemonic masculinities. However, according to Herbert Anderson, "the challenge to fashion a new and more inclusive theological framework for masculinities is both essential and daunting."[72]

This stems from the fact that the field is characterized by polarization, but also diversity. Anderson points to the search for solutions to change men's destructive behavior in the HIV crisis in sub-Saharan Africa.

> "They agreed that patriarchy was the problem: They did not agree on the solution. Conservative African churches favoured reforming masculinity within a patriarchal framework (preserving notions like male headship and male responsibility), while African feminist theologians insisted on transforming masculinity beyond patriarchy."[73]

We have encountered this divide a few times before, for example, in the German men's studies: one half expects improvement from stabilizing traditional gender roles, the other half from overcoming them. In a new professional orientation framework for boys' and men's work, which is also important in church pastoral work, it says:

> "The worldwide spread of the term 'toxic masculinity' makes it clear: Criticism of masculinity can no longer be regarded as a marginal phenomenon. However, the insisting forces are at least as numerous as those men who are looking for new and alternative ways of life."[74]

In this sense, conflicting masculinities in church and theology could be a perspective of hope for transformation of toxic masculinity within Christianity. It documents that hegemonic masculinity no longer goes unchallenged—not even within the Catholic Church.

Notes

1. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–599, 587.
2. JJ Bola, *Mask off. Masculinity Redefined* (London: Pluto Press, 2019), 11.
3. Herbert Anderson, "A Theology for Reimagining Masculinities," *Concilium* 56, no. 2 (2020): 25–36, 28.
4. Cf. Markus Theunert and Matthias Luterbach, ‚*Mann sein …!?‘ Geschlechterreflektiert mit Jungen, Männern und Vätern arbeiten. Ein Orientierungsrahmen für Fachleute* (Weinheim Basel: Beltz Juventa, 2021), 42.
5. Rainer Volz, "Männliche Identitäten heute: Ergebnisse aus den ökumenischen Männerstudien," in *Gender, Religion, Bildung. Beiträge zu einer Religionspädagogik der Vielfalt*, eds. Annebelle Pithan et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 244–259, 252.
6. Volz, "Männliche Identitäten," 253.
7. Cf. Susanne Kaiser, *Politische Männlichkeit: Wie Incels, Fundamentalisten und Autoritäre für das Patriarchat mobilmachen* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2020), 106.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 38.
10. Theunert and Luterbach, *Mann sein*, 51.
11. Cf. Christoph Morgenthaler and David Kuratle, *Männerseelsorge: Impulse für eine gendersensible Beratungspraxis* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015), 258.
12. Björn Krondorfer, "Kritisch-theologische Männerforschung," *Lebendige Seelsorge* 66 (2015), 130–135, 130.

13. Linda Woodhead, *Geschlecht, Macht und religiöser Wandel in westlichen Gesellschaften* (Freiburg i. Br.—Basel—Wien: Herder, 2018), 76.
14. Bola, *Mask off*, 9.
15. See Daniel Gerster and Michael Krüggeler, eds., *God's Own Gender? Masculinities in World Religions* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2018).
16. Robert (Raewyn) W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," *Gender and society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–859, 836, https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639.
17. "[T]he combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities," which is "a pattern of hegemony, not a pattern of simple domination based on force" (ibid., 846) is crucial. With Gramsci, hegemony means a form of contested cultural dominance that does not require violence, or only symbolically visible violence, for its reproduction because individuals consider this dominance to be completely normal and justified.
18. Robert (Raewyn) W. Connell, *Der gemachte Mann: Konstruktion und Krise von Männlichkeiten* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, [3]2006), 98, 99, 101.
19. Connell, *Der gemachte Mann*, 100.
20. Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).
21. Raewyn Connell, "Männer, Männlichkeit, Gott: Kann die Sozialwissenschaft das theologische Problem klären helfen?," *Concilium* 56, no. 2 (2020): 105–115, 113.
22. Connell, "Männer," 110. See also Heidemarie Winkel and Angelika Poferl, eds., *Multiple Gender Cultures, Sociology, and Plural Modernities. Re-Reading Social Constructions of Gender across the Globe in a Decolonial Perspective* (London—New York: Routledge, 2021).
23. This approach seeks to "address the impact of gender and sexuality on religious belief and practice. … In most religions, religious norms and men's experiences can hardly be distinguished from one another, which is why men are largely beneficiaries of religiously sanctioned hierarchies. It is the task of 'men's studies in religion' to make gender consciousness fruitful for the interpretation and analysis of the connections between 'religion' and 'man.'" (Krondorfer and Culbertson, as cited in Björn Krondorfer), "Theologische Horizonte des Mann-Seins. Gedankenanstöße," in *Gender, Religion, Bildung. Beiträge zu einer Religionspädagogik der Vielfalt*, eds. Annebelle Pithan et al. (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2009), 229–235, 231.
24. Björn Krondorfer, "God's Hinder Parts and Masculinity's Troubled Fragmentations: Trajectories of Critical Men Studies in Religion" (2017), 5, https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/religion_und_moderne/preprints/crm_working_paper_14_krondorfer_neu.pdf. (reprinted in: Daniel Gerster and Michael Krüggeler, ed., "God's Own Gender? Masculinities in World Religions" (Würzburg: Ergon, 2018)).

25. Ibid., 5–6.
26. Ibid., 7.
27. Krondorfer, "Theologische Horizonte," 232.
28. Björn Krondorfer and Stephen Hunt, "Introduction: Religion and Masculinities—Continuities and Changes," *Religion and Gender* 2, no. 2 (2012): 194–206, 200.
29. Krondorfer and Hunt, "Introduction," 200.
30. Armin Kummer, "Reforming pastoral care: Masculinity, male pathologies, and gender-specific pastoral care," in *Reforming practical theology: The politics of body and space*, eds. Auli Vähäkangas et al. (Tübingen: 2019, online: https://doi.org/10.25785/iapt.cs.v1i0.74), 29–36, 34.
31. Ibid., 34–35.
32. Ibid., 33.
33. Krondorfer, "Theologische Horizonte," 233.
34. A phrase often used by the canon law scholar Norbert Lüdecke/Bonn.
35. Congregation for the catholic education, "'Male and female he created them': Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education" (2019), no. 19, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_20190202_maschio-e-femmina_en.pdf.
36. Bernhard Sven Anuth, "Gottes Plan für Frau und Mann: Beobachtungen zur lehramtlichen Geschlechteranthropologie," in *Gender studieren. Lernprozess in Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Margit Eckholt (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2017), 171–188, 172.
37. Anuth, "Gottes Plan," 172.
38. Theunert and Luterbach, *Mann sein*, 84.
39. Harald Dreßing et al., "Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen durch katholische Priester, Diakone und männliche Ordensangehörige im Bereich der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz. Projektbericht, Mannheim—Heidelberg—Gießen" (kurz: MHG-Studie) (2018), 15, https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf.
40. Teresia Heimerl, "Essentially Different Men? Varieties of Clerical Masculinity," *Concilium* 56, no. 2 (2020): 109–117, 114.
41. Heimerl, "Essentially Different," 115.
42. Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Masculinity and Sexual Abuse in the Church," *Concilium* 56, no. 2 (2020): 118–127, 119.
43. Ibid., 122.
44. Ibid., 124.
45. Julie Hanlon Rubio and Paul J. Schutz, "*Beyond 'Bad Apples'. Understanding Clergy Perpetrated Sexual Abuse as a Structural Problem & Cultivating Strategies for Change*," Santa Clara 2022, 14, https://www.

scu.edu/media/ignatian-center/bannan/Beyond-Bad-Apples-8-2-FINAL.pdf.

46. Mirjam Gräve et al., *Die Bringschuld umkehren: Perspektiven queerer Menschen auf die Themen des Synodalen Wegs* (2021, not published), 4–5.
47. https://outinchurch.de/.
48. Cf. Connell, "Männer," 110–111.
49. Marco Marzano, *Die unbewegliche Kirche: Franziskus und die verhinderte Revolution* (Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2019), 121.
50. Marzano, *unbewegliche Kirche*, 122.
51. Katja Benkel, "'Homosexuality is un-African': Eine Analyse der Homosexualitätsdebatte in ugandischen Printmedien," *Arbeitspapiere des Instituts für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien* 156 (2014), 11, https://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/files/2019/07/AP_156.pdf.
52. Benkel, "Homosexuality," 12.
53. Rebekka Habermas, *Skandal in Togo: Ein Kapitel deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2016), 181.
54. Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie: Eine kritische Einführung* (Bielefeld: Transcript, ^{2}2015), 63. See also Habermas, "Skandal in Togo," 184–185, 191.
55. Marc Epprecht, *Sexuality and social justice in Afrika: Rethinking homophobia and forgoing resistance* (London—New York: Zed Books, 2013), 108.
56. Epprecht, *Sexuality*, 108.
57. Marc Epprecht, "Gender and Sexuality," in *Critical terms for the study of Africa*, ed. Gaurav Desai and Adeline Masquelier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 127–144, 131.
58. Cf. Judith Gruber's postcolonial deconstruction of Religion, Gender and Race, analyzing Theo van Gogh's short video "submission" (2004), Judith Gruber, "Can Women in Interreligious Dialogue Speak? Production of In/Visibility at the Intersection of Religion, Gender and Race," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 36, no. 1 (2020): 51–69, 59.
59. Cf. Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
60. Cf. Susan Abraham, "Masculinist Populism and Toxic Christianity in the United States," *Concilium* 55, no. 2 (2019): 61–72.
61. Cf. on the example of feminism in Pakistan Ina Kerner, "Provinzialismus und Semi-Intersektionalität: Fallstricke des Feminismus in postkolonialen Zeiten," *Feministische Studien* 38, no. 1 (2020): 76–93.
62. See Elisabet le Roux and Nadine Bowers-Du Toit, "Men and women in partnership: Mobilizing faith communities to address gender-based violence," *Diaconia* 8 (2017): 23–37.

63. Religions, churches, and the reference to God are not harmless and not always inherently good just because they claim God as something good. The influence of church-represented and religiously validated orientations to patriarchal masculinity and cultural place-making for women and sexual minorities should not be underestimated. The dispute over the cultural interpretive sovereignty of religious life orientations on the subject of masculinity is a highly political arena of social conflict.
64. Cf. Ute Leimgruber, ed., *Catholic Women: Menschen aus aller Welt für eine gerechtere Kirche* (Würzburg: Echter, 2021).
65. Kochurani Abraham, "Synodality: Critical Questions and Gender Concerns from Asia," *Concilium* 57, no. 2 (2021): 37–46, 42.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., 43.
68. Ibid., 38.
69. Ibid., 42.
70. Ibid., 40–41.
71. Ibid.
72. Anderson, "Reimagining Masculinities," 29.
73. Anderson, "Reimagining Masculinities," 29.
74. Theunert and Luterbach, *Mann sein*, 50–51.

PART V

Conflict Field: Race/Postcolonial Constellations

CHAPTER 10

The Muslim Ban: The Racialization of Religion and Soteriological Privilege

Mara Brecht

On December 7, 2015, then-presidential candidate announced, i n his characteristically bombastic style: "Donald J. Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States…" Trump paused as the crowd cheered. He went on, "...until our country's representatives can figure out what the hell is going on." The crowd cheered more. "We have no choice," he continued in a lamenting tone, "we have no choice."

Trump made good on his promise on January 27, 2017, when as president he issued Executive Order 13769: officially, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States; unofficially: the Muslim Ban. Its stated purpose is "to protect the American people from terrorist attacks by foreign nationals admitted to the United States."[1]

Not all Americans met the Muslim Ban with the rousing enthusiasm displayed by Trump's 2015 audience. Quite to the contrary, the order sparked protests around the United States (US), as well as legal action in the courts that aimed to stop the ban.[2]

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The climate for Muslims in the United States cannot be characterized as warm or receptive. Report by the non-partisan research group, the Pew Charitable Trust, finds that Muslims face ongoing challenges in American society.

Pew religious climate studies (2014, 2017, and 2019) find that Muslims are perceived as having the coolest reception of any religious group. Other Pew surveys confirm that many Americans believe Islam encourages violence. Another Pew study of Muslim experience in the US. finds that they report facing discrimination, and—according to at least one study—such experiences increased in Trump years.

At the same time, the US Muslim population is growing. In 2007, Muslims accounted for just under 1% (0.8%) of the total American population. Statistical models estimate that Muslims constituted just over 1% (1.1%) of the total American population by 2020.[3] Pew cites a study on US houses of worship that estimates that the number of mosques has doubled in the last 20 years, now counting approximately 2800.[4]

Islam's growth in America is perhaps unsurprising given its global status as the fastest growing religious group in the world.[5] Still, many Americans know little about Islam and even fewer personally know a Muslim.[6] There is a notable incongruence here: Muslims are growing, both in population and symbolic presence. At the same time Muslims are subject to ongoing, even increasing, negativity and discrimination.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) began fighting the Muslim Ban within hours of Trump signing it, first suing the Trump administration for violating the First Amendment of the US Constitution. The ACLU argued that prohibiting Muslims from entering and settling in the US prevents the free exercise of Islam.

The ACLU's challenge was temporarily successful, resulting in injunctions and court stays that forced the Trump administration to reissue the ban over the course of the following year and a half.[7] In a speech lauding the ACLU's early work against the first Muslim Ban, an ACLU representative stated, "The unconstitutional ban violates American values and has taken a great toll on innocent individuals."[8]

I'm interested both in the logic of the Muslim Ban, as well as the rhetoric opposing it. My aim in this essay is to consider what both sides of this coin tell us about the perceived relationship between race and religion, and what the relevance is for Christian theology.

The Racialization of Religion: *What* It Is

The racialization of religion, theorized by social science researcher Khyati Joshi, will inform my exploration. The racialization of religion, Joshi writes, is multifaceted. It has "multiple processes, involves multiple agents, and results in multiple outcomes."[9] One version of the racialization of religion is when a religious group is "constructed in the social imagination" as a racial group. Another version is when an ethnic group is identified with a particular religion.[10] In both versions, Joshi explains, religion "becomes a proxy for race."[11]

When a religion is racialized, observable features of human bodies become linked to or associated with religion, such that an individual's "race" creates a presumption of religious identity.[12] The racialization of religion leverages a set of assumptions about race more broadly, namely that phenotypical features tell us something about the biological and moral "essence" of a person.[13] In other words, outer characteristics (such as the shape of someone's eyes or the texture of a person's hair) are linked to—and apparently reveal something about—the inner properties of a person. Those biological characteristics, through a perversion of the transitive property, then, ostensibly tell us about their religion and vice versa.

Philosopher Kwame Appiah characterizes this approach to race, wherein we assign people to racial groups according to phenotypical features, as the "folk theory of race," the theoretical paradigm that "dominates" the social imagination of Westerners.[14] It includes the idea that races are passed through birth: a person "gets" their race from their biological parents. It also includes assumptions about deep-set qualities and characteristics that belong to—and to a certain extent define—racial groups. In this way, the folk theory of race is an essentializing paradigm.

The racialization of religion builds on and extends this essentializing paradigm of race such that religious identity is attached, along with intrinsic characteristics, to phenotypical features.[15] To be a brown-skinned person with certain facial features is to be Muslim. To be Muslim is to be brown-skinned and have certain facial features. And this racialized religious identity is also value-laden, imbued with suppositions about what it means to occupy this position.

Besides having a spurious scientific basis, a core problem with the folk theory of race is, as Appiah points out, in that it extends the meaning of racial characteristics "far beyond the superficial."[16] The shape of person's nose, for example, places them in a certain racial group, and it also affords them a certain moral constitution (or lack thereof). Consider, just as one example, housing segregation in America. Historian Richard Rothstein documents the practices of red-lining, where throughout the twentieth century black people were excluded from public housing projects, subjected to exclusionary zoning, and denied by banks for home loans. Together, governmental and private action prevented African Americans from setting down roots, ensuring the homogenous racial composition of white neighborhoods and ultimately limiting the opportunity for black individuals and families to grow wealth.[17] What were these practices built on? Long-standing problematic assumptions about the moral substance and credibility of black and white people. To have dark-brown skin is to be African American and to be of dubious moral character—incapable of owning a home. To have pale skin is to be white and it is also to be trustworthy—deserving of a safe place. Values and suppositions about racial groups are already written into the categories by the time we inherit and use them, and the very fabric of our social order (e.g., where people live and whether they own homes) feedback those racial meanings in the practices of everyday life.

Let's return to Trump's so-called Muslim Ban. EO13769 suspended visa and immigration benefits to persons from seven predominantly Muslim nations (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen). The ACLU contested the Muslim Ban on the grounds that it violated the non-establishment clause of the US Constitution. What the ACLU couldn't stand for—or at least what they had a legal argument against—was barring *Muslims* from entry: that the executive order went against the deep-set American value of religious tolerance. But the wider effect of the order was that it had the potential to bar more than Muslims, it had the potential to bar dark-skinned Middle Easterners and North Africans, regardless of religious membership, from entry into the US. If a phenotype-"folk" approach to religion is used, then a person's appearance becomes proof enough and any protestations otherwise can be dismissed as dissimulation. We can see how, in the logic of the Muslim Ban, religion becomes a proxy for race and race becomes a proxy for inherent—and inherited—morality.

One tragic effect of this kind of conflation was demonstrated repeatedly by acts of violence against Sikhs following September 11, 2001. In a number of examples, American vigilantes took Islam (or rather, a certain interpretation of Islam) to be signaled by a certain way of looking (a brown skin man donning a turban), and persecuted, assaulted, and even killed "Muslims" in the name of American patriotism.[18]

Racialization of religion creates odd apologies for violence, such as saying the "wrong" people were targeted for abuse—rather than condemning the violence full-stop. Racialization also disables differentiation within an ethnic group, as in "Why shouldn't *Christian* Iraqis be allowed to immigrate?"

The Muslim Ban exemplifies how the process of racialization renders presumed Muslims visibly identifiable on the basis of "permanent" phenotypical features. Muslims, in this way of thinking, are always "other," and for that reason to be excluded. Just as the associations of racializing religion functions to exclude, it also "serves to include and make superior another group—White Christians."[19] Here emerges another outcome of the racialization of religion: religious hegemony and specifically Christian hegemony, which Joshi argues is its deepest problem instead.[20]

The story of Christian predominance in the US is nothing new, as just a few examples illustrate.[21] American federal holidays and most public-school calendars align primarily with Western Christian liturgical calendars. The Christian Sabbath of Sunday anchors the start of the business week. By tradition, public officials swear the oath of office on a Christian Bible. We can see in these few examples how Christianity formatively shapes, in the language of Joshi, the "norms, rituals, and language" of American culture, as well as its "institutional rules and rewards."[22]

At one level, Christian hegemony is the outcome of America's sociopolitical history. Christians have historically had a numerical advantage. Historically, they have occupied politically powerful positions, and so have been the decision-makers and power-brokers in American society.[23] But America's Christian past is not the only mechanism that accounts for Christianity's dominance in our present. For example, contemporary anti-abortion activists in the US appeal to narrowly construed Christian understandings about the beginning of human life and these strategies move legislation forward. Even when not speaking in the name of Christianity, American lawmakers and leaders enact rules and practices that ensure Christianity as cultural anchor.

Warren Blumenfeld thus frames Christian hegemony as a form of imperialism. In this rendering, Christianity is not just a group that takes up the most space, but also a force that actively expands its reach. In the same vein of thought, Lewis Z. Schlosser explores Christian hegemony in relation to the concept of Christian privilege. He gives some examples, narrated in the first-person voice: "I can be sure that when told about the history of civilization, I am shown people of my religion who made it what it is" and "I do not need to worry about the ramifications of disclosing my religious identity to others."

Just as many whites don't think of themselves as having a race, Schlosser explains, nor do Christians think of the US as an oppressive place.[24] His linkage reveals how the cultural environment grants Christians advantages of which they also tend to be unaware. Christian hegemony reigns precisely for being informally and quietly instituted and privilege communicates Christianity as socially normative. Its "particular beliefs, values, and perspectives" are established as dominant. At the same time, other (subordinate) religious groups are both constructed according to stereotypes[25] and rendered invisible.[26] Christianity thus capitalizes on the racialization of religions.

The Racialization of Religion: *Why* Does It Occur?

I have theorized there is a knot tied between the racialization of religion, on the one hand, and Christian privilege and Christian hegemony, on the other. Now I address a prior question: Why do we form inseparable associations between religions and racial groups in the first place?

The answer to this question, I propose, requires a deeper dive into the folk theory of race and the philosophical conceptualization it relies upon. Philosopher Robert Bernasconi traces "race" to Immanuel Kant and the seventeenth century.[27] Race's broad, stated purpose was to divide and classify the people of the world. Its unstated, and far more powerful purpose, was to legitimize racist practices that were already in place.[28] Categorizing people—and treating them better or worse in the social sphere based on their category—was by no means new or unique to the seventeenth century, as Bernasconi readily admits. What was new was that this way of classifying people had a supposedly biological foundation.[29]

Kant was keenly attentive to the debates and controversies burgeoning among natural historians of his day. Karl Linnaeus and George-Leclerq Buffon developed competing systems for divvying up the natural world. [30] Kant drew on these classificatory contributions, and extended them to the human social realm to divvy up human beings.

To understand his contribution to the theory of race, we need to appreciate the basic premise of his moral philosophy. In broadest terms, Kant the moral philosopher aimed to identify the "fixed, permanent, and enduring structures" on which people could ground their moral actions.[31] Kant's signature theory—the categorical imperative—attempts just this: a code for human choice and behavior that is always and everywhere true, an ethical North Star.

Kant the natural systematician was interested in system of classification that likewise relied on a fixed, permanent, and enduring foundation. For Kant, the essence of any human group cannot be based on that which shifts and changes, such as culture and customs, but instead must be based on that which is unchangeable and fixed—a biologically given qualities, such as skin color or facial features. Linnaeus provided inspiration. Where Linnaeus looked to the existence of mammaries to divide mammals from birds, Kant looked to the physical characteristic of skin color—which he saw to be fixed, permanent, and enduring, to divide and classify people into groups.

Just as *laying an egg* is the external evidence of what most deeply connects a turkey to a pigeon to an ostrich (the essence of being a bird), likewise skin color in Kant's accounting was the external evidence of deeper connective tissue among people belonging to a particular skin-color group. Those who share the trait of dark skin mutually bear the essence of dark-skinned people. Kant's racial essentialism is biologically rooted, also ensuring a permanence to the division of races.[32]

The so-called Summer of Racial Reckoning (2020) brought about a shift in American conversation on race. Even while not all Americans agree that it's dehumanizing to essentialize racial groups, or that white privilege is destructive, or that racism is alive and well, the very concepts of racial hierarchies, essentialism, and privilege are now very much "on the table" in ordinary conversation among everyday people. While the popular conversation on race has exposed many of the ways racism has flourished and flowered in the US, I also maintain that scholars—and Christian theologians in particular—have more work to do attending to the root system that extends far and wide under our soil. Until we face the issue of bodies and the identities conferred by bodies, racism's root system will continue to grow.

There are counterarguments to be made to such a claim. It's possible to argue that races are purely socially constructed and have nothing—*really*—to do with bodies. Such a perspective informs the imperative to be "colorblind." Even if race is socially constructed, there is still a collective unconscious practice of seeing race—bequeathed to us by Kant—that is at work (likely even for those who profess to "not" see it!). Our folk ways of thinking and talking about race, our practices of noticing skin color, Bernasconi notes, are residues of earlier thought-patterns that carry forward certain values.[33] We cannot evacuate ourselves of such a lineage by fiat.

It's also possible to say that the problem lies not so much with grouping people together according to shared features, as with arranging those groups hierarchically. Kant explicitly arranged racial groups into a hierarchy, in which white skin color was the ideal that expressed a higher rational character.[34] Dark skin, he claimed, revealed a limited capacity for rational attainment. On this scale, non-white people were "superior or inferior to the degree that they approximate whiteness."[35]

For Kant, race is purposive.[36] The fact that there is something that distinguishes white people from black people (namely, skin color) *must be* meaningful, it *must have* a broader purpose. If skin color didn't have a purpose or a meaning, it wouldn't be there. Our practice of seeing skin color carries with it this easy slippage between quality and purpose and, again, this cannot be excised just by fiat.

To fully appreciate our "folk" ideas about race, we need to turn not only to its roots in Kant but also to Christian theology and colonialism. Willie James Jennings has been on the forefront of exposing the role Christian theology plays in the development of race, and the racializing practices of the West, and his work is generative for this essay.[37] The colonial period was pivotal, Jennings argues, for the development of race thinking. It also decisively shifted the course of Christian theology.

In the colonial age, Europeans left their homes to claim and occupy territory.[38] They forcefully removed Indigenous people from their land, and captured and sold Africans to support their endeavors in the "new" colonies. Colonial acts of displacement and dehumanization demanded a rationale, a conceptual structure to uphold and legitimate them. Christian theology, Jennings argues, met the demand, and—along the way—set itself on a new course.[39]

"Europeans," Jennings writes, "enacted racial agency as a theologically articulated way of understanding their bodies in relation to new spaces and new peoples and their new power over those spaces and peoples."[40] Jennings perceives a shift that happens with respect to how Europeans express their self-understanding. Physical features of the human body, rather than physical features of the land, came to be important for how people understand identity.[41] Rather than knowing oneself primarily in relation to a place (in today's parlance, "I am from Pennsylvania"), Christians in the colonial moment and after thought about their identity in terms of their body ("I am white").

The human body, rather than land, became the giver of identity. Kant's system of classification illustrates this perfectly: what was defining of groups of people were embodied features. In this paradigm, the white body—from which the European, Christian way of being sprung, took on special significance, forming a standard for all other bodies. While Kant associates whiteness with higher form of rationality, Jennings notes that, in the colonial Christian accounting of bodies, whiteness went beyond even this, taking on theological significance.[42] Jennings writes that whiteness came to represent a "true moment of creation." It was white people, who were also Christian, who had the power to create, to define, and breathe life into the non-white people they enslaved and displaced. The key act for Jennings is conversion. Conversion offered "a new reality for black flesh."[43]

Blacks were defined by being the furthest removed from salvation and therefore also the most in need of white evangelizing action.[44] Skin color thus helped white colonizing Christian to discern the "salvific possibilities" of the people they encounter.[45] And we can see how Kant's presumably biological framework both buttresses and "naturalizes" these kind of discernments. Racial being was placed on "a trajectory toward an endless becoming organized around white bodies."[46] By converting to Christianity, non-white converts *became* more like white Christians. They nudged their way up the racial scale in the direction of white, even if their skin remained (and would always remain) dark.

Racialization and Underracialization

While Kant may have been interested in classifying humans by skin color as a matter of intellectual curiosity, Christians in the colonial period classified humans by skin color to give purpose to their very *raison d'être* in the new world. Even the exploitative and money-making endeavors of mercantilists was overlaid with a veneer of evangelism. Jennings calls blackness the "fundamental tool" of the white conceptual frame: White people "needed" non-white people to convert. As Jennings' study reveals, religion and race were created together, and aided the work of Christian missionaries.

For this reason, the concept of racialization of religion, as I introduced it at the outset of this chapter, is misleading in its suggestion that there is a moment when "race" and "religion" exist separately from each other.

Race and religion are bound together, always mutually implicated. And they are bound together *because of* Christian theology. The relationship between the racialization of religion and Christianity is not coincidental, but mutually interlocking.

Like the magician who uses his left hand to pull the audience's attention while his right hand sets to work planting a coin behind an ear, the racialization of religion—the collapsing together of a racial group with a religious one—distracts from another, much less obvious activity: what I will call the *under*racialization of religion. Where Sikhs and Muslims are overtly racialized, as the Muslim Ban shows, Christians are *under*racialized.

Speaking about the contemporary US context, Joshi asserts, "Christianity has also been 'racialized,' in this case as White, with non-Christian religions and non-believers constructed in opposition to Christianity—to Whiteness."[47] Strictly speaking, Joshi is quite right that white (Eastern Euro-American white) tends to create the presumption of Christian identity, or—maybe more accurately—the presumption of a historic or familial Christian identity. Beginning in the colonial period, "white" serves as an archetype for Christian, and in this way Christianity *is* racialized like other religions.

And yet, at the same time, white people are not seen to be *bound to* any religious community, least of all Christianity, in the way that dark-skinned people are. Whites are free to explore and shop around religiously, to be "spiritual but not religious," to convert and sample other religious traditions, to be *not* Christian. Consider the Muslim Ban example as a point of contrast: in an attempt to have the ban stand up in federal court, Trump changed the language of his original promise (to bar *Muslims* from entry) to encompass a wider scope (to bar *anyone* from seven predominately Muslim countries from entering the US). People from those places—with those facial features and that skin tone—were not *supposed* to be anything but Muslim so by banning people from those countries, Trump's revised Muslim Ban was not defanged of bigotry but rather taken to a darker conclusion.

What accounts for the ready association between white and Christian, on the one hand, and, on the other, the freedom whites enjoy to move across religious boundaries? In part—I submit—it comes from the notion that religion *in its ideal form* is something freely chosen and which can be swapped at will (an issue I will return to at the conclusion of this chapter). In part—I submit further—it comes from the history of whiteness as a history of apparent lack. Here it is helpful to draw on "*under*racialization." Due to underracialization, Christians have not sufficiently examined their history as white and, as at the same time, whites have not sufficiently considered the role Christianity has played in how "white" is constituted. Both race (white) and religion (Christianity)—I claim—have been underracialized.

Sociologist Ruth Frankenberg's landmark qualitative study of whiteness explores white as race-less—or underracialized—category.[48] Her project is useful for thinking through underracialization. Frankenberg observes, from her extensive interviews with white women about their racial identity, a curious pattern in the way they talk about their race, namely, as nonexistent. White people, Frankenberg posits, don't think of themselves as having a race. Instead, whiteness is framed as a neutral or empty category. Race, ethnicity, and culture are things that *other* people have. Being race-less themselves, white people take on the role of "the non-defined definers of other people."[49]

Whiteness is a historical identity formation, meaning that the white women Frankenberg interviewed, just for example, were not "born" seeing themselves as without a race.[50] Being race-less is not "natural" to whiteness, but is a quality built into it over time and maintained through the continual enactment. Frankenberg's white women learned to view themselves as they did by adopting foregoing and ambient practices of other white people. While whiteness is not, as philosopher of race Charles Mills notes, "synchronously uniform nor diachronically static" there are features of it that seem to be largely consistent through time and across subgroups.[51] One key feature is that whites occupy the position of what scholar of race George Yancy calls the "master signifier." White is the "positive term" or "transcendental norm" against which all-that-is-non-white is defined.[52]

This account of whiteness—as the learned position of undefined definer—coheres with the narrative traced out by Jennings regarding the colonial project of Christian mission. White Christian settlers perceived the color of the Indigenous people they displaced and the African people they enslaved, but not their own. Skin color correlated to a kind of soteriological status. While "white" may not have been translated theologically to mean "saved," "black" *did* translate to "heathen" and "in need of salvation." And this is precisely the point. White Christians do not *need* to be named as the saving missionaries. They already are. Their soteriological status (saved) is implied by the fact of their work to "save" non-Christians (who are non-white), and marked by their white skin.

George Yancy argues that white people are "implicated in a complex network of racist power relationships" in which they are both "its beneficiaries" and "co-contributors," even if unwitting as such.[53] I take Yancy's statement a step further, or perhaps in a new direction, toward the role of Christian theology. The network of racist power relationships is rendered even more complex when we tug on the theological thread. I argue that, in the post-colony—literally, in the world that follows from colonialism, white skin carries a presumption of salvation, of having Christian soteriological certainty, which affords those who bear it both a kind of flexibility with regard to religious belonging, identity, and practice and a remit to connect "other" people to certain religious identities. I call this presumption, which underlies whiteness, soteriological privilege.

Soteriological privilege is related to, but distinct from Christian privilege. Christian privilege is structural and social: "it permeates our institutions, influences public discourse, and impacts attitudes toward other religious groups and nonbelievers."[54] It places Christians in positions of normativity and comfortability. Soteriological privilege is, in the most plain meaning of the word, metaphysical. It goes beyond the concrete, physical world. Where Christian privilege is an assumption about *what goes* and *who's who* in the social world of reality, soteriological privilege is an assumption about *what goes* and *who's in* in the world beyond this one. Soteriological privilege is the ultimate security, or—better, soteriological privilege is security about one's ultimate place.

The most important aspect of soteriological privilege is that there is a *final* significance to being white that doesn't have to be—and hardly ever is—spoken to be known. Even for whites who are not Christian and for whites who actively reject a narrative of saved-damned or a paradigm of an afterlife, my claim is that soteriological privilege is at work. Because "to be saved" (and therefore in a position of recognizing and naming "others") is encoded into the structure of whiteness.[55]

To use a technological metaphor: If white skin is the hardware, and white privilege is the software, then soteriological privilege is the code that writes that software. Just as one can't be white without having white privilege, one can't be white without having soteriological privilege. (Privilege is something afforded to a person by the surroundings and social interaction, not by one's voluntary choice.) That soteriological privilege is foundational for whiteness and white privilege is one key dimension of my hypothesis.[56] It affords us an explanation for exactly why whiteness carries so much power and privilege, and just how deeply that power and privilege run. The concept is useful because it protects against easy resolutions to white privilege, such as the expectation that privilege will diminish over time or with population gains among historically minority racialized groups.

Soteriological Privilege and the Christian Community

My principal interest in developing the idea of soteriological privilege, however, is not to theorize about its significance *ad extra*, but rather for the work it potentially accomplishes *ad intra*. That is, I develop this concept primarily to wrestle with values and practices internal to Christian traditions and exercised by Christian communities. Joshi claimed that the racialization of religion is the key to religious hegemony. We must extend Joshi's claim: the racialization of religion is also the key to white hegemony, a hegemony that can only be dismantled if Christian superiority—*as a theological value not just a social practice*—is taken into account.

Let me put one example on the table for critical consideration, Paul's Letter to the Galatians, and the famous handful of lines that Christians cite as evidence of Christianity's universalism. After taking the Galatians to task for revisiting debates on circumcision, Paul writes,

> As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:27–29)

Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. Christ welcomes all. And such social divisions are abolished in Christ. With baptism, Paul seems to be saying, we let go of the bodily identities that previously bound us.[57]

But why read the value of *detaching* from bodily identity into Paul's letter? Or, why assume that Paul presents Christians as a group who *stand outside of* racial belonging?

Scholar of early Christianity Denise Kimber Buell rereads early Christian texts with the explicit assumption that concepts of race and ethnicity *are* at work in them.[58] Buell's work allows us to see how, when Paul wrote Galatians, he relied on ethnic reasoning, and in fact used religious belonging as a domain to produce—rather than escape from—a notion of race.[59] In other words, racial identity is assumed by Paul. Christians are not transformed to having no race at all, they are transformed instead to a new people (a new racial group) altogether. This is what Paul means when he writes "you are Abraham's offspring." Christians are a fleshly people alongside other fleshly peoples.

Soteriological privilege denigrates fleshiness. It encourages a mode of thinking that purports to prioritize "voluntary" identities over "given" ones. By voluntary identities I mean those that are detached from the body, that are arrived at through deliberation or acts of will, for example, by sampling various religious practices from across traditions. Given-identities are those that arise from or are connected to the body. Paul doesn't bestow Christians today with this mode of thinking in his Letter to the Galatians, but Paul can be read (and has been read!) as saying that which is voluntarily chosen is superior to that which is given. Christians, in this reading, *choose* their way out of flesh.

We as Christians can—and ought to—challenge our interpretative practices by critically asking about how we arrange the values of voluntary/given. Am I reading a theological source in such a way that prioritizes what is voluntary over what is given? Do I find myself believing that God prefers those aspects of myself that I have "earned" versus aspects of me that I was born with? These questions may seem far afield from the matter I began this essay with—how a de facto Christian population relates to Muslims—but there is a long, linking chain connecting fleshliness to how we view voluntary versus chosen identities to interreligious interaction.

When boiled down, the racialization of religions and simultaneous underracialization of whiteness and Christianity are both about fleshliness, and how different groups are assumed to orient to bodies.[60] In the inherited paradigm—issuing forth from both Kant and colonial Christianity, "others" (including non-Christian people of faith and people of color) are bound to the flesh of their bodies. The bodies of people of color confer "culture." The bodies of people of color confer also religious belonging. Whites and Christians, by contrast, are seen to be somehow detached from their fleshliness. White is a non-category. Christians *choose* their religious identity through an active, voluntary profession of faith.

To reflect deeply on questions about how Christians relate to other religions—including how we approach religious belonging, interreligious interaction, and the question of salvation for non-Christians—must also be to reflect deeply on how we orient to our own fleshliness. Seemingly abstract theological questions on the diversity of religions and the wideness of God's grace are, in the end, not abstract at all, but rather embedded in how we look at and live through the very flesh of our bodies.

Notes

1. "Executive Order of 13769 of January 27, 2017, Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," *Department of Homeland Security* (2017), https://www.dhs.gov/publication/executive-orders-13769-and-13780.
2. Immigration History, "Muslim Travel Ban" (2019), https://immigrationhistory.org/item/muslim-travel-ban/.
3. Pew Research Center, September 1, 2021, "Muslims are a Growing Presence in US, But Still Face Negative Views from Public," https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/.
4. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, "American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving," 2020, https://www.ispu.org/report-1-mosque-survey-2020/.
5. Pew Research Center, April 5, 2017, "The Changing Global Religious Landscape," https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/.
6. Pew Research Center, "Muslims are a Growing Presence in US."
7. Ultimately the US Supreme Court upheld the third version of the ban, which removed Iraq and added Venezuela and North Korea to the list. As the ACLU points out, these additional bans are not actually meaningful, since the Venezuela ban applies only to government officials and their families and the North Korea ban affects an extremely small number of people (American Civil Liberties Union, "Timeline of the Muslim Ban," https://www.aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban).
8. ACLU, "Timeline of the Muslim Ban."
9. Khyati Y. Joshi, "The Racialization of Religion in the United States," in *Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States*, eds. Warren J. Blumenfeld, Khyati Y. Joshi, and Ellen E. Fairchild (Boston: Brill, 2009), 38.
10. Ibid., 37.

11. Ibid., 46.
12. Ibid., 37.
13. Ibid., 38.
14. Kwame Appiah, "How to Decide if Races Exist," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 106 (2006): 365.
15. Joshi, "Racialization," 41.
16. Appiah, "How to Decide," 367.
17. See Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2019).
18. Shashwat Dave, "A Critical Look at the FBI's Decision to Formally Start Tracking Hate Crimes against Sikhs, Arabs, and Hindus by the Year 2015," *Rutgers Race & the Law Review* 16:2 (2015): 263–288. Dave's article surveys statistical data of reports of hate crimes against Sikhs, Arabs, and Hindus, and critically discuss the FBI's interaction with these crimes.
19. Joshi, "Racialization," 45.
20. Joshi, "Racialization," 43.
21. See Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990) for a study of the ascendancy of Christianity from America's settling to the mid-nineteenth century.
22. Joshi, "Racialization," 45.
23. Lewis Z. Schlosser, "Christian Privilege: Breaking a Sacred Taboo," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 31 (2003): 46.
24. Schlosser, "Christian Privilege," 47.
25. Warren J. Blumenfeld, "Christian Privilege in the United States: An Overview," in *Investigating Christian Privilege and Religious Oppression in the United States* (eds) Warren J. Blumenfeld, Khyati Y. Joshi, and Ellen E. Fairchild (Boston: Brill, 2009), 12.
26. Schlosser, "Christian Privilege," 44.
27. Robert Bernasconi, "Who Invented the Concept of Race? Kant's Role in the Enlightenment Construction of Race" in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 12.
28. Ibid., 11.
29. Ibid., 13.
30. See Phillip R. Sloan, "The Buffon-Linnaeus Controversy," *Isis* 67, no. 3 (1976): 356–375.
31. Bernasconi, "Concept of Race," 22; Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology," in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 108.
32. Bernasconi, "Concept of Race," 28.
33. Bernasconi, "Concept of Race," 29.

34. Eze, "Color of Reason," 121.
35. Eze, "Color of Reason," 118.
36. Bernasconi, "Concept of Race," 26.
37. Willie James Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
38. Following Jennings, I refer to "Europeans" as an undifferentiated group and do not attend to variations between the enslaving systems in the Spanish and Portuguese (Catholic) colonies and Dutch, French, and Anglo (Protestant) colonies. It is outside the scope of this essay to take up these matters, but it is a site of future work! Significant studies include Ann Twinam, *Purchasing Whiteness* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015) and Katharine Gerbner, *Conversion and Race in the Protestant and Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
39. Jennings, *Imagination*, 22.
40. Ibid., 58.
41. Ibid., 49, 58.
42. Ibid., 61.
43. Ibid., 27.
44. Ibid., 275.
45. Ibid., 35.
46. Ibid., 61.
47. Joshi, "Racialization," 40.
48. Another way toward understanding the construction of whiteness as a "race-less" group is through case studies. American historians document how various groups of Western European immigrants "became" white. Italian, Irish, Greeks, and Russian immigrants did not arrive in American as "white," but instead strategically "gained" whiteness, while at the same time "losing" their ethnicity, through strategic political action within shifting social and historical circumstances. See, for example, Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998); David Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univeristy Press, 1999), Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
49. Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 197.
50. Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Phenomenology of White Identity," in *Race as Phenomena: Between Phenomenology and Philosophy of Race*, ed. Emily S. Lee (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 176.

51. Charles W. Mills, "Revisionist Ontologies: Theorizing White Supremacy," *Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998), 97–118. Mills 1998, 101.
52. George Yancy, "Looking at Whiteness: Tarrying with the Embedded and Opaque White Racist Self," *Look, A White!* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2012), 164.
53. Yancy, "Looking at Whiteness," 164.
54. Meeta Mehrotra, Stephanie Zemba, and Kristi Hoffman, "Students' Attitudes toward Interfaith Relationships: The Impact of Parents, Religiosity, and Christian Privilege," *Journal of College and Character* 22, no. 1 (2021): 32.
55. My audience might rightly wonder: What does salvation mean in this framing? What does it mean, concretely, to operate with the idea that one is saved? These are critically important questions, but unfortunately, they are outside the scope of this essay. I hope our conference conversation can help me gain headway in developing answers to these questions, and in thinking through the fullness of their significance.
56. Yancy writes that it's not enough to say that whiteness is insidious, we must be prepared to show *how* whiteness is insidious. I take Yancy's charge as my point of departure: Just *how* insidious is whiteness? How does Christian theology enable its insidiousness? (Yancy, "Looking at Whiteness," 160).
57. David G. Horrell helpfully sketches twentieth-century trajectories in biblical studies of Gal 3:28, revealing both shifts in perspective as well as persistent themes, specifically the tendency to characterize Paul's vision for unity as a hopeful inspiring vision for the future, which is set against the divisiveness of the (Jewish) past, "Paul, Inclusion, and Whiteness: Particularizing Interpretation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40, no. 2 (2017): 123–147.
58. Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press 2005), 12.
59. Buell, "New Race," 21.
60. Denise Buell shows how race in the ancient world was a "double-sided discourse." Religion was used both to make race a fixed category, and to make it a fluid category, depending on the interest of the author (Buell, "New Race," 49). There is also a double-sided (or perhaps, triple-sided) aspect of contemporary conversations on race: In the case of racialization of religion, religion is proxy for race. In the case of the underracialization of Christianity, religion and race both collapsed together (Christian tends to presumes white identity) and also help completely apart (as in the claim, "anyone can be Christian").

CHAPTER 11

The Secularism Paradox of Interreligious Relations and International Relations

Adil Hussain Khan

Introduction

A great deal has been made about the role of what is often classified as 'religion' in international relations,[1] but few have considered the role of what is often classified as 'politics' in interreligious relations. This inversion provides a basis for the comparison of how interreligious relations relates to international relations within the secular binary of politics and religion in a postcolonial world. Given that both international relations and interreligious relations now constitute separate fields of study at universities, I believe that it is worth juxtaposing them in terms of the expectations and the roles that they play outside the academy. The dominant claim in public discourse is that both interreligious relations and international relations are treated as peace-building strategies in the contemporary world, where each uniquely provides a means of furthering conflict resolution and social cohesion in turbulent situations.[2] Looking critically

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at these concepts might seem counterintuitive at first, since most would not likely ever deem it possible to have enough peace-building strategies, even if such an analysis determines them to be less than ideal. Nonetheless, I believe that this comparison is worthwhile, since the process reveals how the underlying assumptions of social order and conflict in a secular age make it difficult for either of these approaches to accomplish the types of lasting results that they claim to provide when used as directed.

The secular frame is central to both interreligious relations and international relations, because each has its own independent connections to the secularization thesis, which we shall explore further below. One of the foundational claims of the grand narrative of secularism is that secularization served as means of establishing peace following extended periods of conflict among European rulers. This is traced back to 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia provided a resolution to the post-Reformation wars of religion, as they are often called, in reference to the end of most notably the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) and the Eighty Years War (1568–1648).[3] The outcomes of the Peace of Westphalia are said to have furnished a redistribution of European power structures by allowing warring parties to form new alliances that allegedly reduced the importance of religious affiliations. This narrative jointly establishes a foundation for both secular governance—by creating a politics that was supposedly detached from religion—and Christian ecumenism—by allowing religious affiliations to be privatized and hence separated from the political powers of the state. Today, this is commonly referred to as the separation of church and state, and it represents a formulation of boundaries that has provided a basis for the modern separation of religion and politics. The re-articulation of the separation of church and state, as religion and politics, has long since been extended well beyond the ecumenism of European Christianity in the postcolonial world.[4]

If we view the separation of politics and religion in terms of identity formation, it allows a person to maintain separate political and religious affiliations, where political identity is regarded as independent of a depoliticized religious identity, despite their intersectional coexistence in individuals. This may sound more intuitive when we consider the notion of today's secular, multicultural, nation-states, as opposed to early modern Europe when nations were regarded as more homogenous, but not yet separable from localized imperial or princely states. Part of the complexity here is that the impetus for the nation-state is itself traced back to the emergence of secularism, when the connection between the nation and the state was being elaborated and formalized during the same period. Within this context, a nation was considered distinguishable from other nations and was conceptually similar to notions such as ethnicity or race (among various races), as associated with an indigenous community of people with localized geographic affiliations. It is not clear to me how conceptions of a nation displaced or overlapped with tribes, whether previously or at present, but these concepts did not necessarily imply or entail statehood.[5]

The secularization narrative became more complicated with imperial expansions, diversification, and increased prospects of travel, which allowed the idea of the nation-state to be expanded beyond mono-national states into multinational ones, especially under imperial rule. This is different from the contemporary world, where it likely feels normal and natural to associate a particular nation-state with a citizenry comprised of an amalgam of different peoples with distinctive ethnic backgrounds, all of whom lay claim to the same national identity. This is also why this construction is typically referred to as a multicultural nation-state.[6]

The Secularism Paradox

There is a paradox that results when we connect the claims that justify the narrative of the progression of the nation-state to the narrative of secularism. The question arises of why there was ever a need for the development of both international relations and interreligious relations in the first place, if indeed secularism's implementation in the modern nation-state was supposed to be enough to ensure peace and stability by separating religious identity from political identity among diverse populations. Surely secularism's realization in the modern nation-state ought to have been enough to eliminate violent conflict based on religion.[7] It seems to me, however, that if we accept the foundational premise of secularism, then one would expect that the separation of church and state (or perhaps religion and politics), which is purported to have taken place across the Western world, should have been enough to prevent further conflict, as is claimed was achieved by Westphalia. Moreover, if the rise of secularism had all but ended religious violence, then it should have rendered interreligious relations all but irrelevant, certainly within a particular nation-state at least. Similarly, in looking beyond a particular nation-state, international relations ought to have remained limited to political conflicts with other secular nation-states, which had seemingly been disconnected from religion. It is clear, however, that neither of these has been the case. This paradox further suggests that the secularism narrative is more problematic than it seems. Otherwise, the logical conclusions that follow from the paradox are that: (1) secularism apparently did not prevent political conflicts between nations, which has led to the rise of international relations, or perhaps (2) that secularism did not prevent religious conflicts between religions, which has led to the rise of interreligious relations, where these conclusions are not mutually exclusive.

It is clear that much of this type of analysis depends on what is meant by religion and politics in specific situations. One would likely require the rather narrow definitions rooted in the post-Reformation European context to attempt to justify the premise that religion can be separated from politics. William Cavanaugh has argued convincingly in his book, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, that it is not possible to distinguish religious violence from political violence.[8] To do so overlooks the means by which modern nation-states define and redefine religion in ways that regard it as being prone to violence, which results in a process that also serves to protect secular politics from being viewed in the same light.[9] This highlights the ambiguity and arbitrariness of identifying religion or politics outside of the early modern discourse on secularism. In this discourse, secularism is presumed to be the intervention that ended religious violence by depoliticizing religion in order to separate the religious from the political. Had this actually happened, however, then there should never have been a need for the rise of interreligious relations, at least within secular nation-states, since secularism itself should have served as the solution to eliminate, or greatly reduce, religious violence. Similarly, international relations ought to have remained focused entirely on political conflicts and political violence.

As Elizabeth Shakman Hurd has noted, the category of religion in international relations has been used by some to explain whatever politics cannot.[10] This is different from the simple matter of religion entering international relations when secular nation-states relate to non-secular ones. These types of paradoxes point to the inconsistencies that arise when comparing international relations with interreligious relations in light of the foundational claims of secularism. I consider this sufficient to justify further comparison.

The Comparison

If we focus momentarily on methodology, then interreligious relations and international relations both seek to provide variant forms of conflict resolution through similar, if not the same, methods, including dialogues, negotiations, and diplomacy. This means that the difference between the two is not one of methodology, but of ideology, jurisdiction, and spheres of influence. The classification of an international relation as opposed to an interreligious one is dependent on the differences between the categories of nation and religion, where the nation is presumed in secular nation-states to be fundamentally political and unaffiliated with a national religion. This, in part, is why religious nationalism presents such a problem for contemporary political theorists, irrespective of where in the world it takes place.[11] The two categories of religion and politics (by which I mean secular politics) were never intended to have been conflated after secularization. This makes it appear as though both concepts of religion and nation were refined at around the same time in the colonial period as a means of classifying others based on secularism's ideological distinction between the religious and the political.[12] Since then, the question of state sovereignty over religion has been regarded as a universal truth among secular states, but only when religions are presumed to be organized with similar bureaucracies, which is not always appropriate.

If we look at the sites of functionality in interreligious relations in comparison to international relations, interreligious relations typically functions domestically, within the existing borders of the nation-state, whereas international relations typically functions outside of it. This, however, is not always the case and a number of counterexamples potentially exist. For example, we may consider when in 2016 Pope Francis, head of the Vatican, met with Hassan Rouhani, then president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.[13] One can ask whether this was an international relation or an interreligious relation. Given that neither country claims to be secular, the point remains in problematizing the classifications, since both international relations and interreligious relations lay claim to the ability of functioning beyond secular domains, despite the lack of secularization. One could also point to other historic examples of domestic separatist movements that happen to identify with different religions, such as in the case of the Sudanese civil wars, prior to the formation of South Sudan in 2011.[14] This is another case in which the ambiguities surrounding the claims of religious conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, including

Christians, are problematic. My point here is that secularization is neither a prerequisite for international relations nor interreligious relations to take place. The parties involved in these relationships may easily represent transnational interests that an ordinary nonspecialist observer might identify as both religious and political.

When carried out successfully, the assumption is that both interreligious relations and international relations allow conflicting parties to arrive at a moral consensus. Each relevant party is considered a rational actor who can dialogue with the other in order to resolve disputes, arrive at a consensus, and avoid violent conflict in the process. The construction of the resulting framework depends rather heavily on Enlightenment ideals that reinforce the implicit assumptions of liberalism. These assumptions lay the foundations for promoting pluralism in the world, even though it may no longer be appropriate to do so, considering that the context for this type of pluralism was modelled on the Christianity of post-Reformation Europe. The pluralist foundation in this framework also excludes the varieties of exclusivists of any religious tradition who view liberal ideals with a sense of skepticism, both within and beyond Christianity. This may be illustrated by the reluctance of Western countries to negotiate with groups like the Taliban, whether internationally or interreligiously. In either case, the presumption (as well as the justification) is that the relation cannot take place without previously adopting liberal ideals. This means that without a prior commitment to liberalism, these types of relations never take place, since international relations and interreligious relations inherently serve to promote liberalism among the parties involved in virtue of mere participation in the process. The participation in liberalism here inherently reproduces itself.

The very idea of pursuing relations between religious or national constituencies depends on their formulation within a bureaucratized hierarchical structure that is capable of being managed by representatives. The presence of a bureaucratized hierarchy makes it possible for individuals to speak on behalf of their constituencies, which presents a problem for interreligious relations, since religious hierarchies in non-Christian traditions are not often organized in this way. The problem of representation presumes that one can clearly define the constituencies in question and then proceed with both the internal authority to represent them and the external authority to be taken seriously by outsiders.

This mirrors the problems of identity in that identities are not singular and monolithic. Although the nation-state might appear to have achieved greater bureaucratic certainty than the world religions, both international relations and interreligious relations continue to struggle to manage effectively those that they exclude. This could be expressed by a state's refusal to deal with nonstate actors, such as a government's refusal to negotiate with those that they classify as 'terrorists', or to address the needs of refugees, or to take seriously the challenges posed by stateless peoples or separatists.[15] In interreligious relations this is apparent in the frequent exclusion of voices that fall outside the world religions paradigm, such as the Baha'i, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, or even those considered to be a part of Indigenous traditions. This exclusion not only provides an indication of the underlying assumptions about how the categories of religion and nation are constituted, but also provides an indication of what these categories are expected to provide for a public sphere.[16] To put this simply, there is a power dynamic at play in terms of what is being represented and what is left out of interreligious and international relationships, even when things appear to be working as planned. This allows existing norms to predetermine whichever relations are considered legitimate.

The Redescription

This leads one to question what is actually taking place in contrast to what insiders claim is taking place. Within a nation-state, interreligious relations serves as a nation-building exercise for members of the multicultural state by promoting liberal ideals, as opposed to conservative ones, which might not necessarily share in secularism's claim of separating religion from politics.[17] This ensures that non-Christian minorities in particular are provided with a local context and real-life examples of what depoliticized religion is supposed to look like within a pluralist society. Outside a nation-state, international relations seeks to preserve the global liberal order established under colonialism, by testing the margins of liberal influence and authority among rival nation-states whose immersion in a state of conflict stems from competition for power and control, whether over resources, ideology, or sovereignty. Although this also represents liberal ideals, it is framed in universals, such as human rights, universal needs, international (or global) development, threats to global security, self-determination, democratic values, and so forth. This makes it easy to jump between individual groupings and universals, such as the presumed correlation between individual rights and human rights, national development and global development, national security and global security, and so forth. This framework markedly shapes the type of moral consensus that can ultimately be achieved by carefully limiting whose morality gets to be counted as legitimate through its alignment and acceptance with preexisting liberal universals. This is carried out by the establishment of international norms that are purported to have been accepted by the international community with international support from international institutions (such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, etc.). This infers that the establishment of a global or universalized standard must be met, which further reinforces the limitations on the prospects of the represented constituencies in question.

The contrast is more apparent when one looks beyond the pluralist ideal of liberalism.[18] Interreligious relations can no better accommodate exclusivists than international relations can accommodate nationalists, whether religious, ethnic, racial, or linguistic. The ideologies of interreligious relations and international relations are constructed in a way that they are intrinsically underpinned by pluralism, but since their narratives are presented within a framework of universalized liberal values their limitations and particularities are lost. There is a sense of irony here in that the terms nationalists and nationalism have so frequently come to be used in the pejorative in contemporary politics, whether as markers of bigotry or forms of anticolonial extremism. It is no longer the case that terms such as patriotism and nationalism can be considered synonymous.

This draws attention to the relationship between liberal values and secularism, since personal freedoms as they were conceived by Enlightenment thinkers were largely premised on the separation of church and state. For those who want international relations and interreligious relations to thrive beyond the West, one must consider the extent to which liberal values can exist independent of secularism. It is important to remember that it was the freedom from tyranny, both political and religious, that provided a basis for reimagining a liberal civilization. In this respect, I would agree with Peter van der Veer, who has argued that:

> The modern state depends in liberal theory on the formation of a civil society, consisting of free but civilized subjects, as well as on the formation of a public sphere for the conduct of rational debate. In that theory the notions of freedom and rationality are defined in terms of secularity.[19]

For much of the world, the connection between the modern civilizing process and secularism's unique attempt at compartmentalizing and then synthesizing religious and national identity was made possible as a result of colonialism. The colonial connection to the creation and expansion of modern civilization extended beyond the economic mission of commerce and into the Christian mission of character building, which imparted the value of leading a decent Christian life. For colonial missionaries who may outwardly have been focused on formal conversion, the inward transformation of becoming a principled, upright, and moral individual was as indicative of being civilized as it was of being a good Christian.

Timothy Fitzgerald has suggested that the extent of the relationship between civilization and religion—or perhaps, more appropriately, civilization and Christianity—in the colonial context might be greater than one would suspect. Indeed, he has questioned whether the two can be distinguished at all.[20] Fitzgerald argues that the "discourses on civility and barbarity overlap with those on Religion (understood as Christian Truth) and superstition, and rationality and irrationality." He goes on to suggest that these dichotomies become important aspects of how Christian identity has been constructed.[21] This type of construction subsequently implicates the state, since in order for colonized peoples to become civilized, and hence groomed for Christian teaching, they needed to be instructed through a process that was controlled and managed by a civilized government.[22] In this way, civilization, education, and governance become entangled within secularism's religion and politics, as well as with each other.

To be civilized meant that non-Christians and non-Europeans needed to demonstrate the type of rational restraint and diplomacy championed by liberal education. This was embodied in the foundations of each program of study, including rhetoric and dialogue, which cut across the disciplines of the broader liberal arts curriculum. This importantly had already happened before they became prominent features of the established methodologies in both international relations and interreligious relations. The newly disciplined culture of dialogue was intended to elevate previous disputes beyond a less civilized debate. Even today, civil servants and diplomats participating in international relations are intended to discuss disagreements coolly and calmly in a way that presents observers with disinterested accounts of self-interests. Similarly, in interreligious relations, interreligious dialogue is ideologically intended to supersede interreligious debate, which has since become associated with efforts of proselytization. This is because the exclusivity of proselytization is regarded as problematic in societies aspiring to meet pluralist ideals.

The discourse in both cases takes place in the public sphere, which makes it open and accessible to observers. This opens up each dialogue to scrutiny, and perhaps even moral judgment, when audience expectations are not met. It also provides a performative display for onlookers to view. For example, within this context it may be worth noting just how much attention was garnered by the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. This was deliberately staged with great effort and planning to ensure the creation of a spectacle, as opposed to interpersonal dialogues or discussions, which could easily have taken place privately among participating members, irrespective of the legitimacy of participants as representatives. The format influenced public discourse about the religious Other that was already primed by the expectations established by the marketing of the event. John Burris has argued that, "instead of shattering illusions about the nature of the intercultural world, the Parliament [of the World's Religions] appeared as a reflection of them."[23] By taking place in public instead of private, there was greater social pressure to regulate and enforce established norms, which fulfilled liberal expectations of carrying out a civilized dialogue about religion.

In interreligious relations, the expectations for a successful dialogue can only be met when the religions of dialogue partners have been sufficiently depoliticized, and hence distanced from devolving into proselytization debates. Likewise, in international relations, one's politics cannot be perceived as a reflection of one's religion, such as would be the case if a desired moral consensus was justified exclusively by particular religious perspectives, as opposed to liberalism's universals. The advocacy that is voiced by participants for certain positions must be tempered within the restraints of the discourse on secularism, where religion is presumed to be separable from politics and politics from religion. This provides an explanation of why religious politics and political religion do not fit well in either international relations or in interreligious relations. It does not, however, provide an explanation for why the widespread adoption in public discourse of depoliticized religion and secular politics has been perceived as such a struggle outside the West.

Religious Politics and Political Religion

The perception in public discourse of the deficiencies, or perhaps failure, of secular politics outside the West should not be taken to mean that there is a clear means of distinguishing between the secular state and the non-secular state.[24] I am referring instead to common perceptions about whichever states are furthest from the secular ideal. The emphasis on location alone might make it worth asking why the most familiar examples of the non-secular state are located outside the West. Some of the most recognizable examples today are those affiliated with Muslim majority populations, especially when one can establish direct ties to political Islam. Perhaps an argument could be made for the Vatican, but its role as a state is somewhat limited in comparison to others. Aside from these examples, there is a perception of greater ambiguity in differentiating between the secular and non-secular state, including states with questionable ties to secularism, alternative models of governance, or popular movements that support a return to traditional values, which in reality persist across nearly every major world religion. These include but are not limited to liberation theology, Israeli Zionism, Indian Hindutva, Tibetan independence, Sikh calls for Khalistan, and other less influential movements that seek to preserve, for example, Confucian moral values in contemporary China or Shinto traditions in post-Meiji Japan.[25] When taken together, these examples comparatively make the secular ideal of modern Europe seem rather isolated, if not exclusive of non-Western countries, representing those, often from the postcolonial world, with historic majorities of non-Christian populations.

It is possible that this isolation is not the result of non-Westerners who have not yet learned from Europeans how to secularize (or perhaps modernize as the case may be), but rather because the notion of separating politics from religion represents a uniquely European Christian response to uniquely European Christian problems that arose in the post-Reformation era. The attempt to universalize secularism beyond the rather specific problems that it attempted to address in seventeenth-century Europe has produced inconsistencies that do not translate well outside of European Christian norms. This is not to suggest that secularism works well within a European or historically Christian context, but only to say that the contradictions are more easily overlooked, since their historic acculturation has rendered them normative.[26] For these examples, I would include the overwhelming influence of Christian norms in the political discourse of Western democratic societies, as well as more formal associations with Christianity of historically national religions, such as those in Scandinavian countries.[27] We could also include the dual nature of the British monarch's role as the head of the Church of England and the head of state, both of which are roles typically qualified as being symbolic. My point here is not that the symbolic nature of the roles ought to be disputed or somehow discredited, but that this type of symbolism nonetheless remains context-specific within a particular discursive power relationship that has imbued each particular symbol with its meaning. This also means that this type of symbolism does not share in the same normative interpretive meaning outside this discourse. In these particular cases, the discursive power relationship created a symbolism unique to European Christianity, which is why it is so easy for non-Westerners to view secularism inside the West as being as much of a failure as it appears to Westerners assessing secularism outside the West. This suggests to me that the success of secularism's ability to separate church and state inside the West is questionable.

Rather than Westphalia, the state of contemporary nationalism in the current world order represents most immediately the transition from a colonial to a postcolonial world. The postcolonial world was conceived as nationalist and premised on the proliferation of nation-states. This system replaced the previous imperial structures of colonialism and was intended to ensure the social stability professed by the secularization thesis by preventing the outbreak of war in previously colonized lands following the withdrawal of colonial powers. This did not work, in part, because the imposition of new national identities that were premised on the separation of religion and politics could only ever be illustrated meaningfully through European-Christian examples and Enlightenment ideals. This is not to say that formerly colonized peoples did not try to make nation-building projects work with regionally specific formulations. From pan-Arabism to pan-Africanism, the postcolonial formations of nationalism highlight the incongruence, and perhaps failure, of attempting to impose secularism in non-Christian societies that lack the context, structures, and assumptions for interpreting its preexisting discourse as intended. This only draws further attention to the extent to which the separation of church and state was ever taking place within European Christian contexts at all.

Conclusion

In literature on international relations theory, there are now numerous examples of scholars who are attempting to account for religion in international relations.[28] The very idea of this is problematic, if not contradictory, since international relations was conceived as a relationship between nation-states that had already transcended the religious due to the secular divide of politics and religion. Religion was simply never supposed to be part of international relations theory. It might instead be more helpful in terms of analysis to incorporate international relations and interreligious relations into secularism theory, and then perhaps secularism theory into Christianity. The split between international relations and interreligious relations represents secularism's division between religion and politics. All of this depends on being legitimized by the Christianity of the post-Reformation wars of religion that took place in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe. This means that this context can only ever share a forced affinity with non-Christian and non-European traditions.

When tracing international relations and interreligious relations back through similar origin narratives of post-Reformation Europe, it is noteworthy how each share in the same structure of secularism's promise. This promise of secularism was to deliver peace through the separation of religion and politics, where each domain could be managed and negotiated independent of the other. This provided an impetus for the separate discourses that gradually evolved into those on international relations and interreligious relations, once national and religious identities had both become formalized and normalized as universal categories. This also means that international relations and interreligious relations share the same underlying structure, reflecting opposite ends of secularism's binary of politics and religions. The resulting construction allows them to share in a common grammar of secularism while providing seemingly different spheres of influence and management through similar, if not the same, methodologies, goals, and values, as if they are different sides of the same coin, as opposed to the different coins that many presume them to be. This is why the modern concepts of politics and religion were co-constructed within national identity and within the same context of secularization at the same time period. This eventually enabled the idea of the nation-state to develop with ethnic, geographic, and culturally specific criteria.

The most noteworthy aspect of this analysis does not necessarily revolve around the limited success of secularism in the postcolonial world, since all peoples will likely continue to attempt to develop better social systems than those that came before them, while hopefully learning from their pasts. The problem, however, is that the secularism paradox remains. If secularism had managed to prevent violence, we would never have needed interreligious relations nor international relations to address religion. As Talal Asad has argued,

> "[I]f the secularization thesis seems increasingly implausible to some of us this is not simply because religion is now playing a vibrant part in the modern world of nations. In a sense what many would anachronistically call "religion" was *always* involved in the world of power. If the secularization thesis no longer carries the conviction it once did, this is because the categories of "politics" and "religion" turn out to implicate each other more profoundly than we thought, a discovery that has accompanied our growing understanding of the powers of the modern nation-state. The concept of the secular cannot do without the idea of religion."[29]

The implications of Asad's suggestion regarding the entanglement of religion and politics are consequential for the assumptions we make when framing questions of their relevance. The powers of the nation-state are tied to assumptions of the autonomy of individuals that are framed in terms of political and religious difference. For this difference to be managed appropriately, and for violent conflict to be averted, international relations and interreligious relations present liberal universalism as the solution. By this, I mean to say that for each to work correctly, one must adopt the universals and ideologies of liberalism. This expectation has created a problem for a postcolonial world, where the emphasis has been placed on whether Christian-minority nations are capable of adopting the secular model to their regionally specific religious contexts. The more important question, however, might be why this adoption should ever take place, when adopting a secular worldview is intrinsically rooted in a universalism that presumes the norms of post-Reformation European Christianity. Perhaps instead we can ask whether this is even appropriate.

Notes

1. See Jack Snyder (ed.), *Religion and International Relations Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); see also Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion in Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 1998); see also Scott M. Thomas, *The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Relations: The Struggle for the Soul of the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
2. See R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000); see also Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (Nov 2001): 685–704; see also Abu Bakarr Bah,

ed., *International Security and Peacebuilding: Africa, the Middle East, and Europe* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2017); see also Martin Klatt and Birte Wassenberg, eds., *Secondary Foreign Policy in Local International Relations: Peace-building and Reconciliation in Border Regions* (London: Routledge, 2018).

3. Stéphane Beaulac, *The Power of Language in the Making of International Law: The Word Sovereignty in Bodin and Vattel and the Myth of Westphalia* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 83–86; Gordon A. Christenson, "Liberty of the Exercise of Religion in the Peace of Westphalia," *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems* 21, no. 3 (Jan 2013): 740–742; see also Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* 55, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 251–287.
4. See Steven K. Green, *Separating Church and State: A History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); see also Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 101–105.
5. For more on classical conceptions of nations, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); for issues with Gellner's theory of nationalism, see Siniŝa Maleŝević and Mark Haugaard, *Ernest Gellner and Contemporary Social Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
6. See William E. Connolly, "Pluralism, Multiculturalism and the Nation-State: Rethinking the Connections," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1, no. 1 (1996): 53–73.
7. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?: Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
8. William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 15–17, 124.
9. Cavanaugh, *Religious Violence*, 16, 101.
10. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *The Politics of Secularism in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 4.
11. See Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War?*
12. See the discussion in Timothy Fitzgerald, *Religion and Politics in International Relations: The Modern Myth* (London: Continuum, 2011), 85.
13. See Greg Botelho, "Pope Francis, Iranian President meet face-to-face at the Vatican," *CNN*, Jan 26, 2016, www.cnn.com/2016/01/26/world/pope-iran-rouhani/index.html; see also "Pope Francis Calls on Iran to Promote Middle East Peace," *Al Jazeera*, January 26, 2016, www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/1/26/pope-francis-calls-on-iran-to-promote-middle-east-peace, Note how the Al Jazeera coverage emphasizes the role of peace building.

14. Noah Salomon, "Religion after the State: Secular Soteriologies at the Birth of South Sudan," *Journal of Law and Religion*, 29, no. 3 (Oct 2014): 447–469; Christopher Tounsel, *Chosen Peoples: Christianity and Political Imagination in South Sudan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).
15. See Jane Anna Gordon, *Statelessness and Contemporary Enslavement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); see also Tendayi Bloom, Katherine Tonkiss, and Phillip Cole, eds., *Understanding Statelessness* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); see also Damien Kingsbury, *Separatism and the State* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021).
16. See Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
17. Adil Hussain Khan, "Theorizing Interreligious Relations," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *forthcoming*.
18. See Cécile Laborde, *Liberalism's Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017).
19. Peter van der Veer, "The Moral State: Religion, Nation, and Empire in Victorian Britain and British India," in *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, eds. Peter van der Veer and Hartmut Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 39.
20. Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 137.
21. Ibid., 113. Fitzgerald's capitalizations of Religion and Truth seem relevant here.
22. Ibid., 136, where his discussion of Parry is particularly interesting here; see also J. H. Parry, *The Spanish Theory of Empire in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1940), 37.
23. John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions 1851–1893* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 123.
24. See Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
25. See Qin Pang, *State-Society Relations and Confucian Revivalism in Contemporary China* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); see also Helen Hardacre, *Shintō and the State, 1868–1988* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).
26. Craig Martin, *Masking Hegemony: A Genealogy of Liberalism, Religion and the Private Sphere* (London: Routledge, 2010).

27. Timothy Samuel Shah and Daniel Philpott, "The Fall and Rise of Religion in International Relations: History and Theory," in *Religion and International Relations Theory*, ed. Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 26.
28. The most famous of these is arguably Samuel Huntington in his Clash of Civilizations, see Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49.
29. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 200. The italics appear in the original.

PART VI

Constructing a Theology/ Ecclesiology of Dissent

CHAPTER 12

Love Your Enemy: Theology, Identity and Antagonism

Marika Rose

In the beginning, God created the world. According to classical Christian theology, God did not need to create the world. God was not bored or lonely. God did not have anything to learn, or any undeveloped capacities that could take shape along with God's formation of the earth. God did not need anything that God did not already possess within Godself. God was not changed by the act of creation, was not diminished, nor enhanced, nor otherwise altered. The answer that Christians have traditionally given to the question, 'why did God create the world?' is essentially, because God chose to do so—which is to say, for no reason at all. God created not by necessity but out of freedom, a freedom which would have been no less real had God chosen not to create.

Sometimes, as the philosopher Giorgio Agamben points out, theologians would prefer to avoid the question of God's free act of creation rather than struggle too much with how to make sense out of this answer. In response to the question, 'What was God doing before He made heaven

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and earth? … Why did he not continue to do nothing forever as He did before', Augustine "mentions the ironic reply that in truth betrays incredible embarrassment: 'He was getting hell ready for people who pry too deep'. Eleven centuries later, as a testimony to the persistence of the problem, Luther takes it up again in the following form: 'He sat in the forest, cutting rods to beat those who ask impertinent questions.'"[1] For all their ironic tone, however, neither Luther nor Augustine was joking: for both, the fate of those who refused to simply accept that God could do whatever God wanted, for whatever reason God chose so to do was eternal punishment in hell.

It is interesting—and, curiously, little remarked upon—that the classical theological assertion of the absolute contingency of creation—its needlessness, its freedom, and its inexplicability—is that this divine act of creation, of dividing between light and dark, earth and sea, male and female 'just because' is precisely paralleled by the inexplicable moment of decision which constituted the fall of Satan and introduced sin, evil, and death into the world. Why did Lucifer reject God? There was neither need nor reason for Lucifer to do so. God was already offering everything that Lucifer could possibly desire or need. In fact, Lucifer was created with desires and capacities that could only be perfectly satisfied or expressed within the proper ordering of the universe that God had made. The classical solution to the problem of Satan's fall is the doctrine of evil as privation—an inexplicable lack or absence of goodness that cannot be explained or justified. Yet this lack that brings evil into the world is structurally homologous to the excess by which God creates the world: a break in the circle of cause and effect, an inexplicable, unjustifiable moment of decision. God made the world because God made the world; Satan rejected God because Satan rejected God. Both are 'without a why.'

This structural homology occurs because both the problem of creation and the problem of evil are problems of freedom.[2] If we—or God—are to be truly free, then the decisions we make cannot be reduced to our reasons for making them. If I decide to eat an apple solely because I am hungry and there is an apple in my kitchen, then this decision is not truly free. If my eating of an apple is necessitated by the twin facts of my hunger and the presence of an apple in my kitchen then this outcome is inevitable, predictable, determined. To be free there must be something in excess of the mere calculation of pros and cons, something more than the mechanical unfolding of cause and effect such that even given every fact about me, my hunger, and the apple in my kitchen it is still possible that I might decide to do something else instead.

One name for this freedom is sovereignty. For the Nazi jurist and political theologian Carl Schmitt, the essence of sovereignty is this inexplicable, unjustifiable decision to act in excess of law and reason. Someone has to be the first to make a law and someone has decide when the law is to be suspended. For Schmitt, too, the function of this sovereign power is political, which for Schmitt means that it has essentially to do with the division of human beings into friends and enemies.

For Schmitt this distinction into friends and enemies is specifically not a moral distinctio. "The political enemy", he writes, "need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor … but he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger."[3] This understanding of sovereignty is deeply Calvinist insofar as it relies on a logic of double predestination. The sovereign decides on the division of the world into friend and enemy on the basis of nothing but that decision. Enemies are not enemies because of good or bad things they have done, and even their rebellious actions may still prove to be useful within the sovereign's providential, economic management of the world. Where Schmitt diverges from Calvin is in his affirmation of the proper legitimacy of more than one site of sovereignty. In seeking to separate the political from the ethical Schmitt is attempting, in part, to stave off the possibility of the absolute desire for annihilation which can result from the attempt to conflate the political division between friend and enemy with the moral judgment between good and evil. Schmitt's example of the disasters that may follow from this conflation is the endless violence unleashed in the twentieth century by wars in the name of absolute moral principles such as 'democracy', 'human rights' and 'freedom'. But we can also see in the background the wars that erupted across Europe in the wake of the Reformation, and which played a central role in the eventual separation of church and state (such as it is) and, crucially, the transition from the absolute and single sovereignty of medieval Christian empire to the multiple sovereignties of the modern European system of nation-states.

For all that Europeans like to extol the virtues of religious tolerance, however, it is difficult to argue that the settlement that emerged in the wake of the wars of religion was any less violent than what preceded it. What changed was not so much the violence of medieval sovereign power as its locus. Peace emerged between European nations precisely as the genocidal violence of colonialism and racial chattel slavery began. The distinction between friend and enemy came to be drawn less centrally at the line that distinguished Christians from non-Christians than at the line that distinguished white from non-white, persons from non-persons, and civilized from savage. This inability to tell the difference between the lessening of violence and its movement from one place in the social order to another is perhaps one way we can make sense of Schmitt's alliance with fascism; in which, as Adam Kotsko puts it, "desperation to stave off the worst at any cost turned out to be the path toward the very worst."[4]

The structure of this sovereign decision to draw a line between friend and enemy goes back—at least—to the very origins of Christianity: to the border between orthodoxy and heresy which, as Daniel Boyarin argues, brought Christianity into being. For Boyarin, Paul's claim that "there is neither male nor female, Jew nor Greek, slave nor free"—so appealing to those of us who desire a form of Christianity that overcomes unjust social divisions—announces not the end of division but the supersession of multiple existing divisions by one single division: the division between Christian and non-Christian. Christianity, Boyarin argues, brought into being not just a new religion but a new understanding of religion as such. To become a Christian was to be transformed, to gain a new kind of identity that was not just an expression of where you were born, the language you spoke, or the networks of family and culture to which you belonged. To become a Christian was to convert into a new community defined not by language, ritual, culture, history, ethnicity, but by belief: by faith in Jesus Christ. In this way, the difference between orthodoxy (right belief) and heresy (wrong belief) came to take a central place in the construction of Christianity. If Christianity was defined by the difference between right belief and wrong belief, then the distinction between believing rightly and believing wrongly was not the distinction between being a good Christian or a bad Christian, but the difference between Christians and non-Christians; the difference between those who belonged to the new people of God begun in Jesus and those who did not, the distinction between those who were friends, sons, and slaves of God, and those who were not; the distinction between friends and enemies.[5]

This fundamental distinction which brings Christianity into being as such is, according to Denise Kimber Buell, at the heart of early Christian universalism and the "ethnic reasoning" which accompanied it. Early Christian universalism, Buell argues, consisted of three core claims: that everyone could become a Christian; that everyone should become a Christian; and that "Christianity" was one thing, "a unified set of beliefs and practices."[6] Christian universalism relies both on the fantasy of its own wholeness—the illusory image of Christianity itself as simple and complete, unfractured by dissent—and on the fantasy of a world made whole by bringing everyone into Christianity so that the distinction between the inside and the outside of Christianity disappears. It is the desire for wholeness as it gives rise to these three components of universalism which brings forth the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy which is so important to Boyarin. It is this distinction in turn which ultimately undergirds the distinction between friend and enemy which for Schmitt is the essence of the political. A Christianity which sees itself as one thing into which everyone can and should be brought is a Christianity which cannot reckon with the possibility or the reality of internal disagreement and dissent, and which cannot see the failure to convert as an indication of anything other than an indication of corruption. It is this fantasy of wholeness, of oneness, which has tended to make Christianity so dangerous to both internal dissenters and external others, and which has rendered it so unable to reckon with the conflicts, disagreements and inconsistencies that run throughout its institutions, texts, and practices.

As I have argued elsewhere, it is also this fantasy of wholeness that suggests the usefulness of psychoanalysis for understanding Christianity and thinking about how we might relate differently to these fractures, inconsistencies and multiplicities that make up its actually existing history.[7] For Lacan, the psychoanalytic homologue of the problem of creation—how multiplicity emerges from unity—is the birth of the subject. The central problematic of Lacanian psychoanalysis is the question of how we might let go of the fantasy of oneness and wholeness in order to come to terms with the fact of our own incompleteness—the fractures that divide us from ourselves and from those around us even as they bring us into being. In contrast to classical theology, Lacan insists on the homology of creation and fall. We can never return to the Eden of perfect union from which we were eternally cast out by the cutting of the umbilical cord. To return to oneness would be to die—to cease to exist—because it is only by difference that we exist at all. To undo the separation of light from darkness, earth from land, day from night would be to unmake us.[8]

We want to be one. We think that oneness is necessarily implied by core Christian doctrines, if we are speaking theologically; or we long for the oneness whose lack seems to lie at the heart of our dissatisfactions, if we are speaking psychoanalytically. But we are not one. Christians disagree with one another; non-Christians refuse to convert into Christianity; our hearts are restless and we cannot find the happy ending promised to us by romantic comedies; or, worse, we get the happy ending only to find that it does not satisfy us. For Lacan, we have four options for reckoning with this incompleteness and inconsistency, four ways that we can explain and relate to these imperfections and conflicts: the master's discourse, the university discourse, the hysteric's discourse and the analyst's discourse. I will briefly run through these in turn, with an eye to how we might see them as different ways for Christians to relate to the reality of dissent and disagreement, before returning to the problem of politics.

The Master's discourse is the discourse of unquestionable authority; the discourse of strong leaders and traditional values. It says that the solution to what ails us is a reaffirmation of authority (biblical, encyclical, or political), and a return to hierarchies of race, gender, class, or church governance. It tends to see dissent as a threat, and to use whatever means are necessary to silence and exclude dissenters, even as the lack of space for difference and disagreement intensifies the pleasures of transgression, producing the forms of hypocrisy that are so familiar now as to be clichés—the charismatic church leader who preaches marriage whilst carrying on affairs; the politician who rails against gay marriage whilst paying for male escorts; or the pious priest who abuses his parishioners. For Lacan, what is crucial here is to understand the role that *enjoyment* plays in sustaining this discourse. What keeps people attached to a model so obviously built on repression and hypocrisy are the pleasures of hating those who are excluded by this discourse's legalistic order and the transgressive pleasures of breaking the law.

The second of Lacan's four discourses is the University discourse, which says that the solution to our conflicts—the way to resolve our disagreements—is simply to produce more knowledge. If we just write another report, create another policy or procedure, conduct more research, run more training sessions, track more data, or add another layer of paperwork then we will arrive at a resolution. This is the discourse of bureaucracy, of 'equality and diversity' committees, and of 'post–political' pragmatic government. It functions both to evade the real questions and conflicts that characterize institutions and also to disempower and deflate any attempts to confront these real problems by ensuring that people are kept so bored and alienated by endless busy-work that they become cynical and disengaged.

The next of Lacan's discourse is the hysteric's discourse, the discourse of protest, of complaint. For Lacan, this is where real change, real confrontation with conflict, can begin. But there is a danger: we can get stuck here. The hysteric's discourse can function not as a way to confront conflict and antagonism in order to transform them, but as a way to reaffirm our own sense of goodness within a world that is built on violence. Protest, resistance and critique are often addressed to power, and can function to uphold power precisely by this address. To write a letter to a member of parliament, to criticize the gendered language of an official theological document, to join a union, can be ways not to struggle for the end of a world built on violence but to make ourselves feel better about our participation in this world, or to demand that the world be slightly improved so that we can continue to affirm its legitimacy. The hysteric's discourse can function not to challenge the violent, hypocritical discourse of the Master but to uphold it. Responding to the demands of protestors can function not to undermine the violent rule of the Master but to reinvigorate it. To demand the jubilee forgiveness of some part of the debts owed by the Global South to the Global North can function to legitimate the creditors, who seem generous even as they continue to extract wealth from those nations. To critique the racist or patriarchal theology of the church can function to relegitimize a racist and patriarchal church by teaching it how to speak differently even as its structures of power remain substantially unchanged. The hysteric's discourse, Lacan says, continues to be invested in the fantasy of wholeness, the idea that we can arrive at a place where difference and disagreement are left behind. Only if we can move beyond the hysteric's discourse can we continue the difficult, precarious work of working through the conflicts and disagreements that the hysteric's discourse identifies.

This brings us to the analyst's discourse. For Lacan, the attempt to relate to ourselves and those around us according to the analyst's discourse is the work of love. Here we embark upon the difficult and painstaking task of letting go of the fantasy of wholeness, of completion, and facing up instead to the incompleteness and imperfection that characterize the people and the institutions we belong to. One aspect of this work is letting go of the desire for something or someone else to play the role of making us whole and completing us so that we become able to allow those around us to exist in their own right, rather than simply as resources for making us happy and meeting our needs. Another aspect is letting go of the need for someone or something outside of us to act as the guarantee that the decisions we are making and the risks we are taking as we do so are correct. We cannot absolve ourselves of the responsibility for what we do and how we live by relying on the authority of a church, an institution, a theological position, a psychoanalyst, or a leader. We have to let go of the fantasy of perfection, and work instead to confront the complicated, messy, ambiguous and imperfect situations that we find ourselves in. This difficult work—which Slavoj Žižek describes as the work of *agape*—might be slow, precarious and painful, but it also offers the possibility of coming to know the world around us in ways that are not possible when we reduce everything to its role in our fantasy of perfection. This work of love also brings with it its own kinds of pleasures and enjoyments—the possibility of new creation, of transformation, and of life liberated from the tyrannical, impossible desire for completeness. If we can let go of our investment in the fantasy of a systematic theology in which every piece slots neatly into place; in which the world can be neatly divided into good and bad, night and day, friend and enemy, then perhaps we can begin to enjoy our conflicts, disagreements and contradictions.

To let go of the fantasy of a single, unified Christianity, however, demands also that we let go of the clear line that distinguishes Christian from not-Christian. The line of development I have traced from the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy (which Boyarin sees as central to Christianity's early constitution) to the distinction between friend and enemy (which, for Schmitt, determines contemporary politics) makes up a central strand of the historical development of actually existing Christianity. But to claim that there is no single coherent thing called Christianity is also to affirm that Christianity's possibilities cannot be exhausted by what Christianity has so far been and done in the world, or by the traditions and structures that have come to predominate in actually existing Christianity. As Daniel Colucciello Barber argues, there is a connection between the "thesis that Christianity is inconsistent from the beginning" and the thesis that "the choice between imagining oneself as either within or without Christianity is a false one."[9] This is not, for Barber, to say that there is no difference between the Christian and the non-Christian, but to refuse the configuration of this division as the division between friend of God and enemy of God. Instead, Barber argues, we might imagine "the possibility of traditions that would be able to take seriously their groundlessness—that is, to see their integrity and their groundlessness in a non-competitive manner."

What classically distinguishes God's act of creation from the generativity of the created world is precisely its groundlessness—its *ex nihilo* character. But groundless decision is not in itself sovereignty. What constitutes sovereignty is decision plus the kind of universalism that Buell locates in early Christian understandings of Christian identity: decision plus judgment, the idea that what is divided is not day from night or earth from sea but sheep from goats, Christians from non-Christians, saved from unsaved, friends from enemies. Theology according to the analyst's discourse, I am suggesting, might be theology without heresiology; theology without enemies; theology without judgment.

Here though, we run into a problem, which in Schmittian terms is the problem of the inability of liberalism to resist fascism. It is all very well to desire the abolition of the political and to refuse the division of the world into friends and enemies. But we cannot simply opt out of the political. As Schmitt puts it, liberalism's attempt to "transform the enemy into … a debating adversary" will always fail as long as the enemy refuses to accept these new terms of struggle—and a debating team will never stand much of a chance against an army.[10]

The world that Christian theology has helped to create is a world founded on political divisions—not just the national divisions that Schmitt describes but, as Thomas Lynch argues in his recent *Apocalyptic Political Theology: Hegel, Taubes and Malabou*, the antagonisms of nature, capital, gender and race.[11] Here 'antagonism' designates a specifically political division, which is organized as the division between friend and enemy, a division which works at the level of collective human identity rather than at the level of the individual. Whatever the quality of individual relationships between men and women their relations are inescapably structured by the fact that, at the level of the political, they confront one another as antagonists. We do not create *ex nihilo*. To recognize that there was nothing necessary about the production of a world along these lines, to hold that it could be made differently does not mean that we can pretend that it is other than it is.

To decide in a world whose existence precedes ours is always, inescapably, an act of refusal. The only act of creation available to Lucifer, brought into being within an economy of cause and effect, of creation and redemption, was to say no. Something like this refusal is the subject of Walter Benjamin's short essay, 'Critique of Violence', which takes as its focus the question of the relationship between the sovereign decision that founds the law, which Benjamin describes as "mythic violence"; the political violence which maintains it; and the absolute refusal of the world thus made and maintained, which for Benjamin is "divine violence".[12] The exemplary form of this divine violence, for Benjamin, is what he calls "the proletarian general strike"—not an armed uprising or revolution, not the demand for better treatment within a world founded on political violence, but an absolute refusal, "pure means", which "sets itself the sole task of destroying state power."[13] There is no positive demand made in and by this divine violence, because it does not set out to create a new political settlement, but to destroy the political as such. For Benjamin it is nonviolent not because it does not involve killing or war but because it seeks to destroy a world founded on coercion, antagonism, and sovereignty. To refuse the fantasy of wholeness, then, brings us into conflict with the world; it demands a kind of apocalyptic commitment to refusing the proper authority of the structures of violence which are brought forth by sovereignty. What this demands of us, I think, is a commitment to the abolition not of difference but of borders—those distinctions drawn up and maintained by violence which, as Schmitt argues, lie at the heart of the law and which, as Boyarin notes, have characterized Christianity's attempts to distinguish itself from those outside of it.

In the book of Genesis, the first thing we learn after Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden of Eden is the story of their sons, Cain and Abel. The narrative is a strange one. God accepts the bloody sacrifice of the shepherd, Abel, and rejects the offering of fruit from Cain, the tiller of the land. Rejected, Cain murders Abel in a rage. His punishment is to be driven from the earth, a fugitive and a wanderer—condemned, it seems, to precisely the nomadic life led by his favored brother. Terrified of losing the security of his settled agricultural life, Cain flees from the presence of the Lord only to settle down elsewhere, east of Eden. This, Schmitt writes, "is how the history of humanity begins. Thus appears the father of all things"—war.[14]

In *The Nomos of the Earth*, Schmitt writes that the earth becomes the mother of the law in three ways: because human labor brings forth from the earth just compensation for that labor; because "soil that is cleared and worked by human hands, manifests firm lines" and "definite divisions"; because "the solid ground of the earth is delineated by fences, enclosures" and "boundaries", by which "forms of ownership and … forms of power and domination, became visible."[15] Perhaps what Cain was offered was not just a curse but a blessing, the possibility of divine violence in Benjamin's sense: the capacity to begin again, create anew without the violence of property, the law, and borders; for no reason, without why, without guarantee: decision without sovereignty.

Notes

1. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Government*, trans. Lorenzo Chiesa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 161.
2. As I discuss at greater length in Marika Rose, *A Theology of Failure: Žižek Against Christian Innocence* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).
3. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 26.
4. Adam Kotsko, *Neoliberalism's Demons: On the Political Theology of Late Capital* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 28.
5. Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1–33.
6. Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race?: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 140.
7. See Rose, *Theology of Failure.*
8. Lurking in the background of Lacan's assertion is another problem which theologians have been loath to confront—the problem of what will happen to all of us once the promised redemption of all things has taken place, the problem whose proper systematic theological framing goes something like, 'Why does heaven sound so boring?' While I don't have much space to talk about this question here, it is worth briefly noting that, like the problematic structural homology between creation and fall, it is a problem that arises from Christianity's tendency to conflate difference with disunity.
9. Daniel Colucciello Barber,*On Diaspora: Christianity, Religion and Secularity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), 127.
10. Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 28.
11. Thomas Lynch, *Apocalyptic Political Theology: Hegel, Taubes and Malabou* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).
12. Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Selected Writings, Volume 11913-1926*, eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236–252.
13. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 246.
14. A letter of Schmitt's, written from prison in 1947, translated and quoted in Jean Claude Monot, "Hostility, Politics, Brotherhood: Abel and Cain as Seen by Carl Schmitt and Jacques Derrida" in Sanja Bahu and Dušan Radunović (eds), Language, Ideology, and the Human: New Interventions (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012). 95.
15. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2006), 42.

CHAPTER 13

Disagreement and Religious Relevance

Boris Rähme

In recent years, the phenomenon of religious disagreement has attracted considerable attention from philosophers working in the field of analytic epistemology, the branch of analytic philosophy that develops theories of belief, epistemic justification, and knowledge.[1] It is fair to say that the mainstream of present-day epistemological theorizing about religious disagreement is firmly cognitivist[2]: religious beliefs are taken to be beliefs *that* such and such is the case (they are taken to be *propositional* as opposed to, say, *objectual* beliefs *in* something or somebody); the contents of religious beliefs are taken to be truth-value-apt (they can be true or false); it is assumed that religious beliefs can be more or less epistemically justified or warranted (e.g., through testimony, reasoning, tradition, scripture, authority, proper cognitive functioning, or religious experience); and some philosophers would even go so far as to claim that some religious

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beliefs qualify for the honorary title of knowledge.[3] In short: just like beliefs about, say, climate change, giant squid, or life on Mars, religious beliefs can be more or less epistemically *rational*, depending on whether they are adequately justified or warranted.

This chapter will not delve into the details of the sophisticated and often technical epistemological debates that have developed around the topic of religious disagreement. Nor will it address the question of whether the cognitivist assumptions that drive much of the recent work in the field are correct. Rather, I will focus on questions that arise *prior* to the specific problems addressed by various epistemological approaches to religious disagreement, and even in advance of the debate over cognitivism regarding religious belief: What is a religious disagreement in the first place? How should we think of and conceptualize the relevant range of disagreements we intend to indicate when we use the expression 'religious disagreement'? Let us call this the delineation question.

Apart from the obvious point that philosophical debates benefit from efforts at clarifying their subject matter, there is another reason for taking the delineation question to be important. Religious *diversity* has attracted the ever-growing theoretical and empirical attention of researchers in the social sciences, for instance in the fields of politology, sociology, anthropology, and psychology of religion.[4] It is plausible to think of religious disagreement as one among the various elements that constitute the broader phenomenon of religious diversity. The latter comprises intersecting and overlapping differences between traditions and forms of community, practices, rites, habits, and, last but not least, beliefs. Given philosophers' and social scientists' interest in religious disagreement, it is legitimate to ask: Is there a useful way to connect the conceptual work on religious disagreement done by philosophers with the theoretical and empirical study of religious diversity conducted by sociologists, anthropologists, or psychologists? To anticipate, I will argue that there is. However, to bring philosophical and social science work on religious disagreement and diversity into a meaningful dialogue, what will be required is a shift of focus from the narrow notion of religious disagreement to the broader idea of what I have elsewhere called *religiously relevant disagreement*.[5]

The first section, "What Is a Disagreement?", delineates a general account of disagreement that I take to be both plausible and widely accepted in mainstream present-day epistemology. In the second section, "Disagreement About Religious Questions?", I discuss the question of how to apply the general account to the religious domain so as to arrive at a more specific notion of religious disagreement. It turns out that a straightforward answer along the lines of 'religious disagreements are disagreements about religious questions' is problematic because it overlooks a wide range of societally important disagreements which *engage* religious worldviews but cannot be described as religious disagreements in any useful way. With the aim of solving this problem, I introduce the notion of religious relevance and use it to turn the general account of disagreement, outlined in the first section, into an account of religiously relevant disagreement. The chapter closes with some reflections that speak in favor of the usefulness, or so I hope, of introducing the idea of religious relevance into debates over religious disagreement and diversity.

I will use pieces of terminology that are standard in philosophical epistemology but may be unfamiliar to readers not acquainted with the relevant literature—such as 'proposition', 'propositional attitude', 'doxastic attitude.' Before turning to the tasks set out above, some terminological and conceptual preliminaries are in order.

As for the term 'proposition', think of propositions as the semantic contents of beliefs and assertions, but also, for instance, of hopes, doubts, anxieties, or fears. Belief, doubt, hope, and fear are examples of what philosophers call 'propositional attitudes'. Propositions can be true or false. Regarding the notion of truth, no big theory is needed for the purposes of this chapter. It is true that Rome is the capital of Germany if, and only if, Rome is the capital of Germany; it is true that God is omniscient if, and only if, God is omniscient. It is true that sperm whales hunt giant squid if, and only if, sperm whales hunt giant squid. And so on and so forth. Let us return to propositional attitudes.

If Takeshi believes that squid are fish, then the content of his belief is the proposition that squid are fish. The content of Takeshi's belief is true if, and only if, squid are fish. If squid are not fish, then the content of Takeshi's belief is false and the belief itself is mistaken. It is mistaken because it can be (roughly) equated with Takeshi's accepting or endorsing the proposition that squid are fish *as true*. If what you accept or endorse as true is not so, then there is something wrong with your accepting or endorsing it as true.

Consider doubt, hope, propositional faith or fear instead: if Sara doubts, has faith, hopes or (for whatever reason) fears *that* Takeshi has passed the exam, then the propositional content of her doubt, hope, faith or fear is the proposition that Takeshi has passed the exam. The latter is true if, and only if, Takeshi has indeed passed the exam. However, unlike in the case of propositional belief, it would be clearly wrong to hold that if Takeshi has failed the exam, then Sara's doubt, hope, faith or fear is in any way mistaken. This is because by doubting, hoping, having faith or fearing that Takeshi passed the exam, Sara does not take it to be true that Takeshi passed the exam. Doubt, hope, faith and fear are non-doxastic propositional attitudes.[6]

Propositional attitudes are mental states that have semantic contents that can be expressed by declarative sentences. Philosophers working in epistemology traditionally single out the *doxastic* attitudes of belief, disbelief and suspension of belief for particular attention. However, *disbelieving* the proposition that today is Monday is then usually explained in terms of believing that today is not Monday. So, in the end, traditional epistemology tends to focus on just two doxastic attitudes: belief and suspension of belief.[7]

A final preliminary note. To achieve a certain level of generality, I sometimes use the italicized letter '*p*' as a schematic placeholder for declarative sentences, as in, for instance, 'Takeshi believes that *p*'. To obtain instances of this schematic sentence, replace '*p*' with sentences like 'Paris is the capital of France', 'God is omniscient' or 'the fossil fuel lobby is powerful'. I will also sometimes use the letter '*p*' as shorthand for noun phrases like 'the proposition that *p*' or 'the question whether *p*', as for instance in 'Sara suspends judgment regarding *p*'. To obtain instances of this schematic sentence replace '*p*' with expressions like the following: 'the proposition that Takeshi adores Berlin' or 'the question whether God is omnipresent'. Context will disambiguate between the two uses of '*p*'.

What Is a Disagreement?

The word 'disagreement' is part of everyday language. It is mainly, though not exclusively, used to refer to situations in which two or more persons hold diverging and mutually incompatible opinions regarding a given issue or question.

The simplest and most obvious kind of disagreement in this sense occurs when two persons—let us stick with Sara and Takeshi—hold opinions or beliefs whose *propositional contents* are logically incompatible with each other. Two propositional contents are logically incompatible if they cannot both be true at the same time (in traditional logic speak: if they are either contradictories or contraries).

Consider the following case: Takeshi believes that there is life on Mars. Takeshi's friend Sara believes that there is no life on Mars. In this simple case, Sara's opinion is logically incompatible with Takeshi's opinion. It is incompatible with what Takeshi believes in an *obvious* way because the content of her opinion is just the straightforward negation of—and thus contradicts—what Takeshi believes (and vice versa, of course).

Consider a slightly less obvious case of disagreement: Takeshi believes that there is life on Mars, and Sara believes that the only planet of our solar system hosting life is Earth. If we add the piece of information that Mars is a planet of our solar system and take this to be common knowledge between Sara and Takeshi, then we can certainly conclude that Sara and Takeshi are parties to a disagreement. Even though the content of Sara's belief does not straightforwardly negate what Takeshi believes, it entails the negation of what Takeshi believes together with the piece of information that Mars is a planet of our solar system.

But what if we drop the assumption that the piece of information that Mars is a planet of our solar system is shared knowledge between Sara and Takeshi and assume instead that at least one of them (for whatever reason) is ignorant of that fact? We would still be considering a case of disagreement, although at least one of Sara and Takeshi would be unaware of their being party to a disagreement about the presence of life on Mars until learning that Mars is a planet of our solar system. This highlights an important point: people can disagree (or agree, for that matter) even if they do not realize this to be the case. Whether or not persons disagree does not exclusively depend on what they believe. It also depends on what the world is like (independently of what they think the world is like), on what is true and what is not (independently of what they take to be true), and on what follows logically from what (independently of what they take to follow from what). Pushing this line of thought a little further, in a perfectly respectable sense of 'disagreement' (or 'agreement'), two persons can disagree (agree) about the question of whether there is life on Mars even when they have never met or never talked to each other. For two persons to disagree or agree over a given question, it is not even necessary that they know the other one exists.

So far, I considered two simple two-person cases of disagreement. In both cases the disagreement was due to the logical incompatibility of the belief contents involved. Let us bring in a third person, Bob. Bob has read many articles (with disparate scientific credentials) about the question of whether there is life on Mars, let alone popular science books and science fiction novels. He has mulled over the question for a long time, and he has concluded that, as far as he can tell, the reasons for thinking that there is life on Mars are on a par with the reasons for holding that there is no life on Mars. As far as Bob is concerned, then, there might be life on Mars and there might not be life on Mars. He neither believes that there is nor that there is not. He suspends judgment and belief on the question, takes an agnostic stance. Does Bob disagree with either Sara or Takeshi?

Before answering this question, let us consider a fourth character, Manfred. The question of whether there is life on Mars has never crossed his mind. Just like Bob, Manfred neither believes that there is life on Mars nor that there is not. But unlike Bob, he does not take an agnostic stance toward the question at hand—he does not take any stance at all, really, because he has never thought about the question. It seems clear that Manfred neither disagrees with Sara, nor with Takeshi or Bob. Disagreement (*dissensus*) cannot be equated with mere lack of agreement (lack of *consensus*). Of course, neither does Manfred agree with Sara, Takeshi, or Bob. Agreement cannot be equated with mere lack of disagreement. While disagreement (agreement) always involves lack of agreement (disagreement), further conditions must be fulfilled to turn an absence of agreement (disagreement) into a disagreement (agreement).

Back to Bob. Does he disagree with either Sara or Takeshi? We said that Bob suspends judgment on the question of whether there is life on Mars. He considers it an open question. So, he does not hold a belief whose propositional content simply negates what Takeshi believes or what Sara believes. Neither does he hold a belief whose propositional content *entails* the negation of what Takeshi believes or what Sara believes together with some obvious facts. Still, unlike Manfred, Bob would seem to *disagree* both with Sara and with Takeshi.

But if it is not the content, what then is it that makes Bob's suspension of judgment incompatible with Takeshi's belief and with Sara's belief? To answer this question, we must shift our attention away from belief contents and focus on the attitude component of the relevant propositional attitudes.

What makes Bob's suspension of judgment incompatible with Takeshi's belief and with Sara's belief is that Bob takes the question of whether there is life on Mars to be *open* (at least for the time being), whereas both Sara and Takeshi take the question to be settled (at least for the time being). The incompatibility we are trying to pin down regards the attitudes Takeshi, Sara and Bob respectively adopt toward the proposition that there is life on Mars. One cannot rationally consider the question of whether *p* an open question and at the same time either believe that *p* or believe that not-*p*.

There is some discussion in the epistemological literature as to whether suspension of belief (agnosticism) regarding *p* constitutes a *sui generis* cognitive attitude toward *p* or can be reduced to a *belief* attitude whose content (while neither being identical with *p* nor with not-*p*) somehow involves the proposition that *p*.[8] Setting these questions aside, for the purposes of this chapter I will adopt the view that suspension of belief can be understood along the following lines:

> A person S suspends belief regarding the question of whether *p* if, and only if, (1) S does not believe that *p*, (2) S does not believe that not-*p*, (3) S has considered the question of whether *p* in light of the relevant evidence that is available to her (if any), (4) S neither believes that *p* nor that not-*p* *because* she thinks that she has insufficient evidence for believing that *p* and insufficient evidence for believing that not-*p*.[9]

Notice that (3) and (4) leave room for the frequent case that a person considers a given question but realizes that she lacks any evidence or reason whatsoever that would allow her to answer that question and *therefore* suspends judgment. By saying 'I do not know' a person responds to a question without giving an answer to it. Often, this is what epistemic rationality requires.

We can now introduce a general notion of disagreement in terms of *doxastic attitude incompatibility*, where two persons, S1 and S2, have adopted incompatible doxastic attitudes towards *p* if, and only if, S1 cannot rationally adopt S2's attitude without abandoning her initial attitude toward *p* (and vice versa)[10]:

> Two persons, S1 and S2, disagree over the question of whether *p* if, and only if, both S1 and S2 have adopted a doxastic attitude towards *p*, and the attitude adopted by S1 is incompatible with the attitude adopted by S2.

Disagreement About Religious Questions?

The most straightforward way to adapt this general notion of doxastic-attitude disagreement to the more specific case of religious disagreement is to say that a given disagreement about *p* is of the religious variety if, and only if, the question of whether *p* is a religious question.

But what is a religious question as opposed to a nonreligious one? We can, perhaps, agree upon certain *paradigmatic* cases of religious questions. Such questions may concern the central elements of faith, doctrine, or creed in diverse religious traditions—fundamental theological questions, when theistic religions are what we are thinking of. One paradigmatically religious question is, presumably, the question of whether God exists. Another, related one, is what are God's attributes. Another one is whether Muhammad is the prophet of God. Yet another one is whether Buddha was enlightened. We might then say that religious disagreements occur when at least two persons adopt incompatible doxastic attitudes toward a paradigmatically religious proposition or question. This is in fact how many philosophers involved in contemporary debates over religious disagreement proceed.[11]

A more principled approach to distinguishing religious from nonreligious questions or propositions would start from a general definition of religion, as opposed to nonreligion, or from an account of religious worldviews, as opposed to nonreligious worldviews. As is well known, attempts at defining religion are highly controversial in philosophy and the social sciences. At the same time, a working account of 'religion' and 'religious worldview' is clearly needed to get research and debate about religious disagreement off the ground in the first place. For the purposes of this chapter, then, I take the word 'religion' to refer to sociocultural contexts composed of community bonds, practices, items of faith, beliefs, doctrines, precepts, habits, attitudes and institutions that are guided, oriented and structured by commitments to the existence of humanly relevant supernatural entities or processes. And I take a religious worldview to be the propositional part of a religion, to be somewhat more precise, the propositional *what-is-believed* part.

A major drawback of delineating the phenomenon of religious disagreement by appeal to paradigmatically religious questions or propositions is that it leads to a very narrow *topical* notion of disagreement. The resulting notion fails, for instance, to capture any case of disagreement D which is such that the disputed p is not paradigmatically religious but the relevant doxastic attitudes toward p of at least some of the parties to D are grounded in, motivated by, derived from, or justified by their religious views.[12] This is what makes the account of religious disagreement proposed by mainstream analytic epistemology hard to connect to broader theoretical and empirical research on religious diversity in the social sciences.

Consider Sara and Takeshi again.[13] Let us assume that both follow a vegetarian diet. However, they disagree over the question of whether human beings are *morally obligated* to refrain from eating meat. Think of Sara as a person who does not have a religious worldview. And think of Takeshi as someone who does have a religious worldview that he takes to command a vegetarian diet. Takeshi believes that human beings are obligated to avoid eating meat because he takes this obligation to be part of, or to follow from, his religious commitments. As opposed to Takeshi, Sara is agnostic about the question (she suspends judgment). She considered all the arguments pro and con that she is aware of, and she concluded that her total evidence (as she interprets and weighs it) neither justifies believing that humans are morally obligated to refrain from eating meat nor believing that human beings are not so obligated. Still, she follows a vegetarian diet because she is convinced that this improves her physical and mental well-being.

It would be odd to describe the disagreement between Takeshi and Sara as religious (or as a disagreement regarding a religious proposition or question). Moreover, at least one of the involved parties, but maybe even both, may want to deny that the disagreement is a religious one. At the same time, however, Sara and Takeshi clearly adopt incompatible doxastic attitudes toward a proposition which *engages* a religious worldview, that is, Takeshi's. If we want to understand Sara and Takeshi's disagreement, what to do about this constellation? What is it for a question or proposition to engage, or be relevant to, a religious worldview?

Call a proposition p religiously relevant at a time t if, and only if, p follows from a religious worldview held by some individual or group at time t, or p is logically inconsistent with a proposition q that follows from a religious worldview held by some individual or group at time t.

Notice that the notion of religious relevance, thus defined, is relativized to times. A proposition may therefore be religiously relevant at some time t but fail to be so at some other time t'. To illustrate this point: the proposition that the earth revolves around the sun was taken to be religiously relevant at the times of Galilei but, presumably, is no longer taken to be religiously relevant today. Additional relativizations to societies or societal contexts would provide us with more restricted accounts of religious relevance for different socio-historical contexts. Notice also that the notion of religious relevance goes hand-in-hand with the notion of nonreligious relevance. Many of the religiously relevant disagreements in contemporary societies are also cases of *non*-religiously relevant disagreement. To say that a given disagreement is nonreligiously relevant is not to say that it is religiously irrelevant. Often, religious relevance and nonreligious relevance complement each other. This is precisely why questions engaging some persons' religious worldviews can overlap and are sometimes identical with questions significant to others in nonreligious ways.

Using the notion of religious relevance, we can now adapt the general account of doxastic-attitude disagreement outlined at the end of the previous section so as to capture cases of disagreement like the one between Sara and Takeshi:

> Two persons, S1 and S2, are parties to a *religiously relevant* disagreement at time *t* over the question of whether *p* if, and only if,
>
> (a) both S1 and S2 have adopted a doxastic attitude toward *p* at time *t*,
> (b) the attitude adopted by S1 is incompatible with the attitude adopted by S2, and
> (c) *p* follows from (is entailed by) a religious worldview held by some individual or group at time *t*, or *p* is logically inconsistent with a proposition *q* that follows from (is entailed by) a religious worldview held by some individual or group at time *t*.

While it is inadequate to characterize Sara and Takeshi's disagreement as a religious one (because the question at issue is not a paradigmatically religious question), it would seem perfectly adequate to characterize it as a religiously relevant disagreement. Takeshi believes that humans are morally obligated to avoid eating meat, Sara suspends judgment on the question. So, condition (a) is fulfilled. Believing and suspending judgment are incompatible doxastic attitudes in the sense defined in the previous section. Condition (b), then, is fulfilled as well. Finally, that humans are morally obligated to avoid eating meat follows from Takeshi's religious worldview. So, also condition (c) is met. Notice that condition (c) does not require that, for a given disagreement D about *p* to qualify as religiously relevant, *p* or something logically incompatible with *p* has to follow from the religious worldview of one of the *parties* to D.

As it stands, however, this account of religiously relevant disagreement is both too permissive and too restrictive. As for its over-permissiveness: perhaps some individuals or groups unwittingly hold religious worldviews which contain or entail contradictions—their religious views contain or entail both *p* and not-*p*, for some *p*. According to philosophers and logicians who subscribe to classical logic, in particular to the rule of inference *ex contradictione quodlibet* (from a contradiction you can derive whatever you wish), this would have the undesirable effect that *every* proposition is religiously relevant—for instance the proposition that Takeshi's favorite basketball player is Michael Jordan or the proposition that the number of letters printed on this page is odd. The notion of religious relevance would thus be trivialized. Of course, we now have a large variety of paraconsistent logical systems at our disposal which invalidate *ex contradictione quodlibet*.[14] Perhaps the problem of over-permissiveness afflicting the proposed account of religiously relevant disagreement can be solved by adopting an adequate paraconsistent logic for analyzing religious relevance.

However, even if *ex contradictione quodlibet* is rejected or if, as a matter of contingent fact, no person or group holds a logically inconsistent religious worldview, there is the more serious objection that the logical relations of entailment and inconsistency appealed to in condition (c) are too demanding and restrictive—that they exclude too many propositions from qualifying as religiously relevant. One response would be to reformulate the definition of religious relevance in terms of what people *take* to be entailed by, or logically inconsistent with, various religious worldviews, rather than in terms of what is in fact entailed by or inconsistent with them. But this may still be too demanding as it seems to presuppose that whether a proposition or question is to count as religiously relevant depends, among other things, on whether the persons considering this question are familiar with the logical concepts of inconsistency and entailment. One might thus wish to avoid any appeal to logical relations between propositions and prefer a formulation in terms of propositions *the acceptance* of which can reasonably be considered as *required* or *demanded* or even just *suggested* by some religious worldview. Here, then, is the account of religiously relevant disagreement that I want to suggest:

> Two persons, S1 and S2, are parties to a *religiously relevant* disagreement at time *t* over the question of whether *p* if, and only if,
>
> (a) both S1 and S2 have adopted a doxastic attitude toward *p* at time *t*,
> (b) the attitude adopted by S1 is incompatible with the attitude adopted by S2, and
> (c) *the acceptance* or *rejection* of *p* can reasonably be considered as *required* or *demanded* or *suggested* by a religious worldview held by some individual or group at time *t*.

Now, what is required, demanded or suggested by various religious worldviews is itself a matter of interpretation. Indeed, there can be, and there often are, disagreements about what requirements, demands or suggestions may legitimately be derived from a religious worldview with regard to specific questions or issues. This means that the question of whether a given disagreement qualifies as religiously relevant can itself become an object of debate, controversy and negotiation. Does this observation speak against the idea of religious relevance outlined above? I do not think so. It just shows that the religious relevance of a disagreement may fail to be self-intimating or evident, that it has to be shown, demonstrated and argued for.

Before drawing some conclusions from the preceding considerations, let me briefly show how the proposed account of religiously relevant disagreement can be generalized so as to cover cases of non-doxastic "cognitive disparity,"[15] to use an expression introduced by Robert Audi. This may be of particular interest in the light of ongoing debates regarding the question of whether (religious) faith entails (religious) belief.

The account of religiously relevant disagreement outlined above is couched in terms of the incompatibility of *doxastic* propositional attitudes, paradigmatically: propositional belief. Now, several philosophers of religion have pointed out that, apart from propositional belief (belief-*that*), there are other attitudes that need to be taken into account in the philosophical analysis of religious contexts, chief among which are various kinds of *faith*.[16] Given that my topic is disagreement, I focus on propositional faith, "faith *that* something is so."[17] One objection that could be raised against my account of religiously relevant disagreement goes as follows: the account's narrow focus on the doxastic propositional attitude of belief neglects disagreements that involve propositional *faith* rather than belief. Granting that there can be disagreements in propositional faith, one way to respond would consist in, (1), making a case for the claim that propositional faith entails propositional belief, in the sense that it is impossible for a person to have faith that *p* and at the same time fail to believe that *p*, and then, (2), making a case for the claim that even if propositional faith involves more than just propositional belief, everything epistemologically important about *disagreements* in faith can be said in terms of disagreements in belief.

However, it is far from clear whether this is a viable response to the objection. Daniel Howard-Snyder, for instance, has argued—rather convincingly—for the claim that propositional faith does *not* entail propositional belief. If this is correct, then propositional faith has to be considered a non-doxastic attitude. According to Howard-Snyder, "faith that p involves *some* positive cognitive stance or other toward p, but it need not be belief that p and it need not entail belief that p."[18] I cannot pursue this issue any further here. Assuming for the sake of argument that Howard-Snyder is right, let me at least point out that the proposed account of religiously relevant disagreement can be easily modified so as to cover disagreements in non-doxastic propositional faith: substitute the word 'doxastic' in condition (a) with 'propositional' and read the expressions 'acceptance' and 'rejection' in condition (c) in terms of cognitive stances toward *p* that, though similar to belief or disbelief, respectively, fall short of belief that *p* or belief that not-*p*.

Conclusions

Restricting the notion of religious disagreement to paradigmatically religious questions has the effect of losing sight of the majority of today's socially and politically relevant disagreements that involve and engage the worldviews of diverse religious communities. Areas of discourse, topics and issues tend to overlap and intersect. Many disagreements that deserve the attention of scholars and researchers of religion concern propositions that are not at all paradigmatically religious. To grasp and understand what these disagreements are about, it is not necessary to appeal to ideas about supernatural beings or processes or purposes, but still, it is obvious that these disagreements engage religious worldviews. Such disagreements may regard questions concerning, for instance, gender roles, attire, reproductive rights, diet, sexuality, the legitimacy of specific medical treatments, areas of biomedical research, genetic engineering, social justice, or freedom of speech. These issues are clearly intertwined in complex ways, and while each of them may be relevant to the religious commitments of one or another person or community, none of them are paradigmatically religious.

One advantage of the proposed account of religiously relevant disagreement, then, is that it can do justice to the fact that disagreements engaging religious worldviews can arise about all kinds of questions that, on the face of them, have little or nothing to do with religion. The notion of religious relevance may thus be a promising point of departure for understanding how disputes, controversies and disagreements about moral, scientific, political or economic issues can involve religious worldviews in various and often nonobvious ways. It provides us—or so I hope—with a useful theoretical tool for understanding how religious discourses intersect with (often identity-related) moral, scientific, political and many other debates. Think of disagreements about abortion, migration, climate change or LGBTQI+ rights. Are they in any way intrinsically or paradigmatically religious? No. Are they religiously relevant in the sense that they engage the religious worldviews of various communities? Quite obviously so.

The notion of religious relevance and the derived notion of a religiously relevant disagreement are empirical and descriptive. They share this feature with conceptions of religious disagreement in terms of paradigmatically religious questions (after all, the question of whether a given disagreement concerns a paradigmatically religious proposition is an empirical question). However, as opposed to the former, the latter are much harder to connect in useful ways to theoretical and empirical research on religious diversity in the social sciences. This is because, at societal and political levels, differences between religious worldviews, as well as differences between religious and nonreligious worldviews, tend to surface with regard to otherwise utterly mundane questions rather than in the form of divergent commitments regarding paradigmatically religious questions that involve explicit reference to supernatural beings or processes. How precisely the notion of religious relevance may be put to work in social science research on religious diversity remains to be seen in future work. The modest goal of this chapter was to suggest ways in which conceptual work in the field of the epistemology of religious belief may be relevant to social science research on religious diversity and, conversely, ways in which societally relevant disagreements that engage the religious worldviews of communities can inform philosophical work on religious disagreement.

Notes

1. For an up-to-date overview of epistemological accounts of religious disagreement see Matthew A. Benton and Johnathan Kvanvig, eds., *Religious Disagreement and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).
2. This holds to a somewhat lesser extent for the broader field of the epistemology of religious belief.

3. For two epistemological defences of the idea of religious knowledge, which start from different religious backgrounds, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Linda Zagzebski, "Religious Knowledge and the Virtues of the Mind," in *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology*, ed. Linda Zagzebski (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 199–225.
4. Giuseppe Giordan and Enzo Pace, eds., *Religious Pluralism: Framing Religious Diversity in the Contemporary World* (Cham: Springer, 2014); Andrew Dawson, ed., *The Politics and Practice of Religious Diversity: National Contexts, Global Issues* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016); Irene Becci and Marian Burchardt, "Religion and Superdiversity: An Introduction," *New Diversities* 18, no. 1 (2016): 1–8.
5. Boris Rähme, "Religious Disagreement and Religious Relevance: A Perspective from Contemporary Philosophical Epistemology," *ET-Studies* 11, no. 1 (2020): 25–46.
6. Doubt, hope and fear clearly do not involve epistemic commitment to the truth of what is doubted, hoped or feared. Propositional faith may be somewhat different in this regard. I will briefly return to the question of whether propositional faith is doxastic or non-doxastic in section "Disagreement About Religious Questions?".
7. Jane Friedman, "Rational Agnosticism and Degrees of Belief," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, vol. 4 (eds) Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 57. Formally minded epistemologists individuate doxastic attitudes in a more fine-grained way, that is, in terms of subjective probabilities (credences). Roughly, the idea is that persons can hold a belief with greater or lesser confidence or subjective certainty, and that such degrees of confidence can be usefully mapped onto decimals in the interval [0, 1]. For the purposes of this chapter, formal approaches of this kind can be left aside. An interesting point to note is that some languages other than English, for instance Italian or German, do not even seem to contain dedicated verbs that can be used to straightforwardly translate English phrases like 'Takeshi disbelieves that *p*', as used to express that Takeshi believes that not-*p*. The most straightforward translation into German would be 'Takeshi glaubt nicht, dass *p*', but this leaves open the possibility that Takeshi does not believe that not-*p* either. The same holds for the Italian 'Takeshi non crede che *p*.' The available space does not permit me to elaborate on this point. I mention it for the sole purpose of signalling that categorisations of mental, cognitive, or doxastic states that heavily rely on the specifics of *one* natural language may be problematic. See, for instance, Robert Audi, "Belief,

Faith, and Acceptance," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 63 (2008): 87–102.

8. For overviews over the relevant literature see Jane Friedman, "Rational Agnosticism"; Jane Friedman, "Why Suspend Judging?" *Noûs* 51, no. 2 (2017): 302–326; Thomas Raleigh, "Suspending is Believing," *Synthese* 198, no.4 (2021): 2449–74; Alexandra Zinke, "Rational Suspension," *Theoria* 87, no. 5 (2021): 1050–66.
9. However, see Friedman, "Rational Agnosticism," and Raleigh, "Suspending is Believing," for some objections against this account of belief suspension. Responding to those objections would require more space than I have available here.
10. Incompatibility is a symmetric relation: S1's attitude is incompatible with S2's attitude if, and only if, S2's attitude is incompatible with S1's. Compare John MacFarlane's related account of what he calls "attitudinal non-cotenalibity" in his *Assessment Sensitivity: Relative Truth and Its Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 121–123.
11. Two examples out of many: Jennifer Lackey, "Taking Religious Disagreement Seriously," in *Religious Faith and Intellectual Virtue* (eds) Laura Frances Callahan and Timothy O'Connor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 299–316; Michael Bergmann, "Religious Disagreement and Epistemic Intuitions," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 81 (2017): 19–43.
12. In this regard, see Robert Audi's important reflections on what makes an argument a religious one in *Religious Commitment and Secular Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69–78.
13. I slightly modify an example already used in Rähme, "Religious Disagreement," 38.
14. Graham Priest, Koji Tanaka and Zach Weber, "Paraconsistent Logic", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2022 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta ed., <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/logic-paraconsistent/>.
15. Robert Audi, "Normative Disagreement as a Challenge to Moral Philosophy and Philosophical Theology," in *Challenges to Moral and Religious Belief: Disagreement and Evolution*, eds. Michael Bergmann and Patrick Kain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 62.
16. Audi, "Belief, Faith, and Acceptance," 92, for instance, claims that there are at least seven "basic fiduciary notions" and backs up this claim with the observation that there "are at least seven different faith-locutions in English alone." See note 8 for some critical remarks.
17. Audi, "Belief, Faith, and Acceptance," 92.

18. Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Does Faith Entail Belief?," *Faith and Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2016): 150; see also Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Three Arguments to Think that Faith Does *Not* Entail Belief," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 100, no. 1 (2019): 114–128, and William P. Alston, "Belief, Acceptance, and Religious Faith," in *Faith, Freedom, and Rationality: Philosophy of Religion Today*, eds. Jeff Jordan and Daniel Howard-Snyder (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), 10–27. Useful discussion regarding Christian faith can be found in Dan-Johan Sebastian Eklund, "The Cognitivist Aspect of Christian Faith and Non-doxastic Propositional Attitudes," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 60, no. 3 (2018): 386–405.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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