Secularisation and Human Identity in Christ

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Abstract

The ability of Christian discourse to give people a sense of their identity sustains the concrete church. The cultural revolt of the 1960s which suddenly weakened the power of discursive Christianity in Britain may be partially explained in terms of the deterritorializing power of capitalism. In the context of this deterritorialization the formation of self-identity becomes more difficult and strong religious identities have a new appeal. Post liberal theologians have endorsed the identity-forming power of the church. But Christian identity must still be worked out in relation to what lies beyond the borders of the church. Christians rediscover their own foundational story in the acts and deeds of others. Theological formation should involve not only an immersion in the Christian tradition but also the search for what recognisably shares in the same project that the gospel defines. The history of personalism suggests what this search might look like in practice.

Keywords

Secularisation, Identity, Church, Postliberal, Personalism

I. Secularisation and the Dynamics of Identity

Augustine preached a series of sermons in the great basilicas of Carthage to congregations who were dismayed by the sack of Rome and the questions of cultured pagan refugees. They could no longer boast of the "Christian Era." He responded by giving them a sense of identity. He told them where they belonged and to what they must be loyal. Amidst the pagans they are a distinct people. They belong to "the ancient City of God."[1]

The ability of Christian discourse to give men and women a sense of their identity sustains the concrete church. Secularisation happens

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[1] P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*. (London, 1969) 313. I am grateful to Nicholas Lash for his comments on a draft of this article.

when Christian discourse ceases to be a means by which they can construct their identities and their sense of self. Michel Foucault argued that religious discourses govern the self through a series of techniques which permit individuals to change their bodies and souls, thoughts and conduct, and so to attain happiness, purity and supernatural power. This argument informs Callum Brown's understanding of "the death of Christian Britain". He defines what constitutes Christian religiosity as a subscription to protocols of personal identity derived from Christian discourse. Protocols are rituals, customs or behaviour collectively promulgated by clergy, the media, communities, families and individuals as necessary for Christian identity. Behaviour such as going to church on a Sunday or saying grace before meals manifests subscription to these protocols. They can also be discerned in the voices of the people. From 1800 to 1960 the voices of autobiography, oral history, and speech reported by contemporaries all testify to the reflexivity of personal identities to discursive Christianity. People draw on Christian discourse to tell their own life stories. Secularisation could not happen until this discursive identity lost its power. Brown argues that it did so only in the cultural revolt of the 1960s, challenged most influentially by a reconstruction of feminine identity. He contests the conventional secularisation story of long, inevitable religious decline. He presents secularisation instead as a remarkably sudden and culturally violent event.[2]

The cultural revolt of the 1960s which suddenly weakened the power of discursive Christianity may in turn be partially explained in terms of the deterritorializing power of capitalism. Commentators on the events of May 1968 have identified a Hegelian ruse of reason. Those involved in the cultural revolt of the 1960s made history but they did not understand the history they were making. The struggle of the *enrages* and their intellectual allies against constraints upon individual freedom contributed to the disappearance of the last constraints upon the commodification of the whole social field. May 1968 was the cradle of the new bourgeois society. Regis Debray saluted the Columbuses of modernity who thought they were discovering China in Paris, when they were in fact landing in California. May 1968 was, "a gust of madness, which was only the economy giving a common-sense lesson to society, the enforced submission of the old to the new."[3]

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[2] C. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain. Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000* (London, 2001)

[3] R. Debray, *Modeste contribution aux discourse et ceremonies officielles du dixieme anniversaire* (Paris, 1978; abridged and translated in *New Left Review* 115, 1979) 12. He notes that a growing feminisation of the labour force contributed to the reconstruction of feminine identity.

Capitalism is almost co-terminous with the process of secularisation.[4] At the heart of capitalist modernity has been a process of endless enclosure,[5] "a revolution of the rich against the poor." Natural and human resources are cut off from common use. This appropriation and accumulation is also a secularisation. Capitalism seized both lands and people who had previously been considered to have identities of religious as well as merely economic significance. It is rooted in the continual disembedding of basic elements of the species' lifeworld from the matrix of social relations. The ways that the alleged commodity "labour power" is used affect the human being who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity. In Deleuze's terminology, the capitalist machine deterritorialises desire. It overruns all previous social formations and releases the flows of desire that these formations had organized and regulated. The reflexivity of personal identities to discursive Christianity is among these formations. "All that is solid melts in the air, all that is holy is profaned." Capitalism then reterritorializes desire by subjecting it to the axioms of the market.[6] The capitalist market, with its imperatives of continuous growth, attacks tradition. Capitalism places large sectors of social reproduction in the hands of markets for products and labour. Markets operate without regard to pre-established identities and forms of behaviour, which for the most part represent obstacles to the creation of unfettered exchange. Capitalist enterprise increasingly seeks to determine consumption as well as to monopolise the conditions of production. From the beginning, markets promote individualism in the sense that they stress individual rights and responsibilities. At first this mainly concerns the freedom of contract and mobility intrinsic to capitalist employment. Later, however, individualism becomes extended to the sphere of consumption, the designation of individual wants becoming basic to the continuity of the system. Market governed freedom of individual choice becomes the enveloping framework of individual self-expression. The corruption of the notion of "lifestyle", reflexively drawn into the sphere of advertising, epitomises these processes. Advertisers orient themselves to sociological classifications of consumer

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[4] L. Pellicani, *The Genetics of Capitalism and the Origins of Modernity* (New York, 1994), 163–180; J. Milbank, "Geopolitical Theology. Economy, Religion and Empire after 9/11", *wwwtheologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/Papers/Milbank_GeopliticalTheology.doc* Milbank contests the notion that the United States is free from this secularisation. 72; K. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*. (Boston, 2002) 35–44; E. McCarraher, "The Enchantments of Mammon: Notes Toward A Theological History of Capitalism" *Modern Theology* 21.3 (July 2005) 429–461, argues with reference to commodity fetishism that far from being an unambiguous agent of disenchanted secularity, capitalism might be best understood as a perverse regime of the sacred, an order of things bearing unmistakeable traces of enchantment.

[5] The Retort Collective, *Afflicted Powers. Capital And Spectacle In A New Age Of War* (London, 2005) 193.

[6] D. Bell, *Liberation Theology After The End Of History* (London, 2001) 19.

categories. To a greater or lesser degree, the construction of identity becomes translated into one of possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life.[7]

"Believing without belonging" issues from this deterritorialisation. Institutional religion is deregulated. Belief is individualized. Religious traditions increasingly serve as symbolic repositories of meaning, available for individual consumers subjectively to use and reuse in different ways.[8] British society seems polarised between the bleak utilitarian rationalism of the public realm and an increasingly exotic private paganism.

The weakening power of discursive religion contributes to a crisis of identity. In capitalist modernity the formation of self-identity becomes more difficult. Even those untroubled by anxieties about their own identity will inevitably be compelled to make choices about their appearance, relationships, beliefs and occupation. Earlier societies offered protocols of personal identity. Disembedded from these protocols, we must reflexively work out our identities for ourselves. When this project of the self is commodified by being assimilated to the consumption of arbitrarily differentiated, "personalised", mass produced goods meaning itself becomes a scarce commodity. And when the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations is juxtaposed with mass migrations in an emergent postnational order we have a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities.[9]

In this context the protocols of strong religious identity have a new appeal. Amartya Sen recognises this as the "solitarist" view. Many people identify themselves according to a single pre-eminent religious identity. Sen is bewildered by this cultivation of singularity in a world of obviously plural affiliations.[10] Violence for him issues from mere intellectual error and the imposition of singular and belligerent identities on gullible people. The best recruits of revolutionary Islam, for example, have been refugees from secular modernity who have suffered the full force of consumerism.[11] Sen's "solitarism" is better explained by Manuel Castells's concept of "resistance identity."[12] He argues that identity politics must be situated historically. Identity is

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[7]   A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford, 1991) 197.

[8]   G. Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945. Believing without Belonging* (London, 1994). D. Hervieu-Leger, *Le Pelerin et le Converti* (Paris, 1999).

[9]   A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation* (Minneapolis, 1996) chapter 1.

[10]   A. Sen, *Identity and Violence* (London, 2006), reviewed by J. Gray in *The Guardian* August 5, 2006.

[11]   The Retort Collective, *op. cit.* n.5 *supra* 180.

[12]   M. Castells, *The Information Age. Economy, Society, Culture. Volume II The Power of Identity* (Oxford, 1997) 9; 65–67. See also A. Maghnagi, *The Urban Village* (London, 2005) on 'the insurgent city'.

people's source of meaning and experience. "Legitimizing identity" is introduced by the institutions that dominate a society to extend and rationalise the established order in a civil society. This construction of identity is called into question with this order by globalization: Castells' account elucidates Brown's narrative of the diminishing reflexivity of personal identity to Christian discourse in Britain. Societies able to control their populations with a variety of managerial skills and economic adjustments do not need the legitimization of "values"; they do not need myth, religion or morality.[13] But resistance identity forms enclaves or communities where prevailing social trends are resisted on behalf of autonomous social meanings. These communities offer defensive identities that function as refuge and solidarity. Their defensive reactions become sources of meaning and identity by constructing new cultural codes out of existing historical materials. This involves the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded; the building of a defensive identity in terms of the dominant institutions and ideologies, reversing the value judgement while reinforcing the boundary. Such "resistance identities" include those offered by Islamic and American Christian fundamentalism, as well as by the "imagined communities" of nationalism, and by ethnic and territorial identities.[14] Resistance identity may be the most important form of identity-building when, robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings are in danger of perishing from the effects of social exposure. Castells classifies a third form of identity building, as "project identity," when social agents, for example feminists, on the basis of the cultural material available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and by so doing, seek the transformation of the entire social structure. In contemporary society he asserts that project identity can only develop from communal resistance. New subjects may emerge from the communes of resistance identity to construct public meaning around a project identity, but communalism may instead close the circle of its latent fundamentalism and remain within its own boundaries.

[13] B. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London, 1983) 197, cited in R. Williams *On Christian Theology* (Oxford, 2000) 34. Mary Midgley's account of the "biological Thatcherism" of scientists such as Richard Dawkins notes the way his work offers a powerful popular rhetoric which adds the apparent lustre of real science to the claim that there is no alternative to the domination of the capitalist market. The ideas of such scientists now legitimate the *status quo*. M. Midgely, *Science and Poetry* (London, 2001) 193–198; "Feast and Famine: a Conversation with Iain Boal on scarcity, catastrophe and enclosure" *http://www.commoner.org.uk/feastandfamine.htm*

[14] A case study of such a resistance identity is offered by N. Toulis, *Believing Identity: Pentecostalism and the Mediation of Jamaican Ethnicity and Gender in England* (Oxford, 1997). Cf. W. Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York, 1955); D. Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (New York, 1972); B. Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld* (New York, 1995).

II. Resistance Identity in a Diaspora Church

George Lindbeck predicts that the church must sustain the construction of something like Castells' "resistance identity" if it is to survive in a secularised society.[15] He seeks to present an ecumenical alternative to divisive, fundamentalist forms of that identity, to sustain a "Christian internationale". He too sees the weakening of traditional legitimation systems in the life of the individual and the society at large, issuing in a crisis of identity. He foresees that pluralistic secular societies will privatize religion, excluding it from the public domain. Secularisation will reduce Christian presence to small minorities, a "diaspora" church, sociologically sectarian even in traditionally Christian countries. Any such "deviant enclave" whose distinctiveness is imperilled by accommodation to secular thought and culture must ultimately become sectarian in order to preserve its identity. Having lost their mass membership, the communities of the diaspora church must strive to become a close-knit fellowship of the genuinely committed who mutually support each other in the difficult task of maintaining what in the eyes of society as a whole are increasingly strange ways of thinking and acting.

For Joseph Ratzinger too, it is precisely an age in which Christianity is quantitatively reduced that can bring this more conscious Christianity to a new vitality.[16] The first necessity is that of forming people who keep their eyes upon God. It is only through people who have been touched by God that God can return among men and women.[17]

How should the gospel be preached to this dechristianised world? Lindbeck acknowledges the "deterritorialization" of religion. He identifies the danger of reducing faith to a commodity marketed to atomistic selves who turn to religious traditions as symbolic repositories of meaning. Their self-identification will be experienced as a given rather than a gift or an achievement. It will be something sought by exploring their inner depths rather than in communally responsible

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[15] G. Lindbeck, "Ecumenism and the Future of Belief", *The Church in a Postliberal Age* (London, 2002) 92–105.

[16] J. Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth* (San Francisco, 1997) 269.

[17] J. Ratzinger cited in S. Ferrari, "Civil Religion or Intransigence: The Two Strategies", *www.chiesa* May 30 2005, 6. For Ferrari, "These are words that give voice to the conviction of the communities and movements – from Communion and Liberation to Opus Dei – that exert themselves for a strong affirmation of Christian identity, and maintain that it is useless to embark upon a policy of enervating compromises with secular and liberal society, which is caught up in a crisis which they see as irreversible. According to them, it is better to engage in open and harsh conflict with other religious and non-religious identities in Europe, fortifying oneself with one's own intact doctrinal heritage, accentuating one's own distinctiveness, and counting on the possibility that a genuine Catholicism might be able to fulfil the need for security and identity felt throughout Europe"; J.-L. Souletie, *La Crise: une chance pour la foi*. (Paris, 2002).

action in the public world. He proposes a "postliberal" way of presenting the gospel message to those who no longer understand the traditional words. Instead of translating these words into what is currently fashionable and immediately accessible this way resembles the method of ancient catechesis. Instead of redescribing the faith with alien concepts, it would seek to teach the language and practice of the religion to potential adherents. Intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating scripture into extrascriptural categories. Meaning is constituted by the uses of a specific language rather than being distinguishable from it. Intelligibility is a skill. Christians should live within the Christian text, to interpret the world in terms of the biblical story. To become religious involves becoming skilled in the language, the symbol-system of a given religion. To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its terms. Only after ancient catechumens had acquired proficiency in the alien Christian language and form of life were they deemed able intelligently and responsibly to profess the faith, to be baptised. The minorities of the diasporic church should strive to cultivate and teach their native tongue.[18]

Stanley Hauerwas's account of the church as a countercultural polis develops Lindbeck's presentation of this ecumenical "resistance identity". He seeks to endorse the identity-forming power of the church. If an identity cannot exist without an array of opposites, negatives and oppositions, Hauerwas's polemic against those he accuses of confusing liberalism with Christianity strongly defines that identity. The philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre creates the space for the theology of John Howard Yoder in his work. MacIntyre contends that implicit in every ethic is a corresponding form of community and practice. Yoder's work allows Hauerwas to maintain that the distinctive Christian ethic rests on its distinctive community and corresponding practices. For Hauerwas the church is the place where character and narrative meet. The community is shaped by the Christian story, and in turn it shapes the character of its members. It does so particularly by their performance of its story, notably in worship, but also in other distinctive practices such as peacemaking and disciplined forgiving.[19] The church for Hauerwas is a colony, an island of one culture in the middle of another. Christians are "resident aliens". The church in America must either accept this new "resistance identity" or go the way of all compromised forms of the faith.[20] But a recovery

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[18] G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, 1984) 124–135.

[19] S. Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny* (Carlisle, 1998) 11.

[20] S. Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens* (Nashville, 1989) 12; B. Harvey, *Another City. An Ecclesiological Primer for a Post-Christian World*. (Harrisburg, 1999).

of this identity might be the beginning of the end of the church's long eclipse in the west, the public emergence of the Messiah's people, the unveiling of Christ's *ekklesia*, "fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible" in the otherness of her own distinctive life "as an army with banners".[21]

Hauerwas testifies that he was also prepared for his encounter with the theology of Yoder by the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For Hauerwas, this work prefigures his own attempt to imagine a post-Constantinian church; from beginning to end it was an attempt to reclaim the visibility of the Church as the necessary condition for the proclamation of the gospel in a world that no longer privileged Christianity.[22]

III. Human Identity in Christ

But the questioning response of Rowan Williams to these accounts of resistance identity in a diaspora church also draws upon Bonhoeffer.[23] Williams is concerned that these accounts suggest an inadequate grasp of the nature of Christian believing as a set of provisional historical projects, and of the way Christian identity is worked out in relation to what lies beyond its borders. Williams agrees with Lindbeck about the need to revive and preserve a scriptural imagination to interpret the world. He is however perturbed by the territorial cast of the imagery he uses, by his talk of redescribing reality within the scriptural "framework". For Williams the way the scripturally informed imagination works is more complex. It sits less easily with the commitment of a diaspora church to the cultivation of scriptural speech and culture within its own territory. The "world of scripture" is not a clear and readily definable territory. It is an historical world in which meanings are discovered and recovered in action and encounter. Lindbeck offers only two choices to the interpreter of scripture: either redescribe reality within the scriptural framework with the postliberals, or continue to translate scripture into extrascriptural, alien concepts with the liberals. Williams refuses these alternatives. The church may find out what scripture itself is saying in her confrontations with the world. The Christian community may be enlarged in understanding and even in some sense evangelized in such encounters with those beyond the

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[21] D. Yaego, "Messiah's People: The Culture of the Church in the Midst of the Nations" *Pro Ecclesia* VI.1, 171.

[22] S. Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids, 2004) 34; M. Hollerich, "Retrieving a Neglected Critique of Church, Theology and Secularization in Weimar Germany" *Pro Ecclesia* II.3. The legal basis for the exclusive public legitimacy of the Protestant churches had vanished with the founding of the Weimar republic. With the legal and political expression of *Offentlichkeit* closed off, this left only a specifically ecclesiastical public identity.

[23] R. Williams, "The Judgement of the World", *op. cit.* n.13 *supra* 29–43.

theological mainstream. It can be like the pattern of loss and recovery of self involved in listening to a parable.[24] Listening to Nathan, David forgets himself so far as to be shocked into recognising himself. In the same way the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, for example, uses the imagery of Genesis chapter 22 to indict the failure of Christendom. The church can find out what she herself is saying, in absorbing this scriptural exegesis from its own margins. And this will be a critical self-discovery in which the church as well as the world is judged.

So for Williams the Christian claim is bound always to be something evolving and acquiring definition in the conversations of history. It is a "long revolution". It offers a direction for the historical construction of human meaning, but it does not offer to end history. Theology should equip Christians to discern what is parabolic in the world. They should be reluctant to force the language and behaviour of others into Christian categories prematurely, remembering that their understanding of these categories is still growing and changing. Williams cites Bonhoeffer's verdict on the *Kirchenkampf:* "Our church, which has been fighting in these years only for its self-preservation, as though that were an end in itself, is incapable of taking the word or reconciliation and redemption to mankind and the world. Our earlier words are bound to lose their force and cease."[25] This is not, *pace* John Robinson, a demand for better translations into modish secularity, but a recognition that the right to be heard speaking about God must be earned. The urgency of Christians to communicate the good news must sometimes be channelled into listening and waiting, and into the expansion of the Christian imagination itself into something that can cope with the seriousness of the world. Theological formation should involve an immersion in the Christian tradition as Lindbeck proposes. But it should also involve an exposure to the world that allows Christians to rediscover their own foundational story in the acts and deeds of others. They should search not for equivalent words to traditional terms but for what recognizably – however imperfectly – shares in the same project that the gospel defines. Their formation needs to be an induction into hearing as well as mediating judgement.

Williams warns that the enclaves of the diaspora church could collude with the dominant consumer pluralism and be trivialised into a lifestyle preference once more unless they make certain claims on the possibility of a global community, and act accordingly. In Castells' terms, resistance identity must also become project identity. Particular identity must seek a universal identity. Williams presents Cornelius Ernst's argument that the meaning of the world in Christ could

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[24] Bonhoeffer's attempt to provide a christological interpretation of the secular is developed in Karl Barth's treatment of "secular parables" in *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.

[25] D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London, SCM) 300.

only be articulated in a continuing search for a "total human culture, the progressive discovery of a single human identity in Christ".[26] The form of this search was quite simply any and every process of human self-definition in response to mass culture, the threat of a "totalizing" society of technological manipulation and control. "There is at least a single discernable adversary".[27] If the essence of the church is missionary, this is precisely the search and the struggle to which the church is committed.

But the opening of the faith to others that Williams proposes in turn requires a strong sense of the self of faith, which in turn is a genuine self only insofar as it is related to the world of our times beyond itself. This dialectic of selfhood and alterity is explored in Paul Ricoeur's *Oneself as Another.*[28] Ricoeur argues that the self is like an elipse with two *foci*: the abiding referent of self-same, "*idem*-identity", and those aspects of the self whose identity, "*ipse*-identity", varies with the self's success or failure in relating to the others it needs to face *ad alia et alios*, especially the relatively other to which the self is unavoidably bound. The drama of the self plays in this bi-polar dialectic of sameness and difference. Three partial and faint witnesses to the possibility of genuine, because relational, self-identity are mentioned: the body – the non-plasticity of my own mortal body to my subjective wishes; other persons – my being bound by their rights prior to my choice to respect them or not; and conscience – for example in the difference between obligation and mere good intention. The quality of self-identity is largely a function of our ability to relate to these other than subjective moments without considering them mere pendants of our subjectivity.[29] But a strong focus of identity is still needed for a genuine relation to the other. In the same way, the selfhood of the church and her critical relationality to the non-Christian world will grow together or not at all. The power of assimilation which Newman saw as a note of genuine doctrinal development can be

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[26] C. Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity?* (New York, 1999) 16 "…in modern secularist culture there are mingled together both authentic developments of the gospel, of an incarnational mode of life, and also a closing off to God that negates the gospel. The notion is that modern culture, in breaking with the structures and beliefs of Christendom, also carried certain facets of Christian life further than they were ever taken or could be taken within Christendom." C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (London, 2007).

[27] C. Ernst, *Multiple Echo* (London, 1979) 85.

[28] P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago, 1992); R. Schenk, "Officium Signa Temporum Perscrutandi. New Encounters of Gospel and Culture in the Context of the New Evangelization", a paper given at the conference *The Call to Justice. The Legacy of Gaudium et Spes 40 Years Later http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/gaudium/*

[29] R. Williams, "Beyond Liberalism" *Political Theology* 3.1 2001, 68. In relation to the work of Hauerwas, Williams expresses concern that a too robustly and uncritically narrativist appeal to Christian identity is in danger of misrecognising identity and colluding with the Balkanized identity politics of liberal America by evading the issue of admitting the other into the self, which is the only way the self can be the self at all.

superceded by self-alienation. But as Lindbeck noted as an observer, the bishops at Vatican II voted for *resourcement,* return to the sources of the church's identity, without knowing themselves how to put this into effect, with the result that they got kinds of *aggiornamento* and ecumenism that they had not intended.[30] Developed selfhood allows developed relationality.

Immersion in Christian tradition can continue to sustain a non self-alienating receptivity in the communities of the diasapora church.[31] But attention to moments when Christian identity has been defined with particular decisiveness and confidence also enhances the accounts of Christian identity offered by postliberalism, and serves the formation of others in this developed identity. In this context, personalism should be attended to as one of the most significant expressions of Christian project identity in modernity.[32] Ernst proposes the search for "a total human culture, the discovery of a single human identity in Christ as the historic process of the diverse but related processes of self-discovery going on in distinct cultures all over the globe in response to the challenge and threat of uniform technological mass-culture". The history of personalism suggests what this search might look like in practice.

Personalism was a Christian contribution to the project of an alternative modernity.[33] The editorial of the first issue of the personalist journal *Esprit* in 1932 announced this intention. It sought nothing less than a remaking of the Renaissance. Personalism imagined a resistance to the present "eschatology of the impersonal",[34] and the creation of a post-capitalist and post-secular order beyond it. It was a rallying cry, a non-conformist anti-ideology, a civilizing task. It drew upon Christian doctrine to deepen understanding of the identity

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[30] G. Lindbeck, *op. cit.* n. 15 *supra*, 17.

[31] R. Brague, *Eccentric Culture,* (South Bend, 2002), presents *romanitas* as the virtue of non self-alienating receptivity that informs the identity of Europeans.

[32] In 2005, the centenary of the birth of Emmanuel Mounier, major conferences were organized, beyond the English speaking world, in Rome, Strasbourg, Paris, Lyon, Madrid and Rio. At the end of the conference in Rome the participants sent a petition to the pope requesting the introduction of the cause of his beatification. As a student Bonhoeffer was drawn to the personalism he encountered in the work of Berdaeyev and Dostoyoevsky. He succinctly defined it as a pan-humanism necessarily and emphatically linked to Christianity. E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London, 1970) 47; J. de Gruchy, "Christian Humanism: Reclaiming a Tradition; Affirming an Identity" *http://ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections_volume8/degruchy.htm*

[33] J. Bengtsson, "Critical Study: Personalism: A Living Philosophy?" *Appraisal* 5.1 (March, 2004) 39–48; *The Worldview of Personalism* (Oxford, 2006). R. Reno rightly warns however of the danger of intellectual virtuosity eclipsing ecclesial obedience as the key to renewal; "The Radical Orthodoxy Project" *First Things* 100 (February 2000) 37–44.

[34] The title of a work by V. Belohradsky cited in V. Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (London, 1990) 165.

and absolute value of every human person.[35] It offered a pedagogy concerning communal life linked to an awakening of the person.[36] Like an insect mimicking a dead branch in order to be overlooked, a human being can become part of a devitalized, desolate world and provisionally renounce their personhood to become something that is interchangeable. The first act of personal life is an awakening in relationship and community to the consciousness of this anonymous life and a revolt against the degradation it represents.[37] One source of European personalism is the socialist, Dreyfusard and Catholic poet Charles Peguy who was killed at the battle of the Marne in 1914. He taught that the Christian mission is to "nourish the times mystically". His disciple Emmanuel Mounier, the founding editor of *Esprit,* sought to marry red France with black France, the Jacobins with the priests to create an avant-garde Christianity that would change the world. Personalists were to be revolutionaries in the name of the spirit.[38] Through Mounier the legacy of Peguy went on to inspire the Christian left and liberation theology in Latin America.[39]

Mounier's personalism belongs to a cultural and philosophical constellation that is no longer ours. As a system it may be exhausted. But it may still be of more than historical interest. In an essay published in *Esprit* on its fiftieth anniversary in January 1983 his friend Paul Ricoeur ventured the slogan: "Death to personalism; long live the person!" He concluded his essay with Mounier's own words in *What is Personalism?;* "We are witnessing . . . the first meanderings of a cyclical course where the explorations pursued to exhaustion along one path are given up only to be rediscovered farther on, enriched by this forgetting and by the discoveries for which it cleared a path."

The personalism of Mounier allowed other French Catholics to define a new public identity after the papal condemnation in 1926 of the legitimist *Action Francaise* movement which had sought to revive the old alliance of throne and altar. Against both individualists and collectivists they could define themselves as personalists. This

[35] E. Mounier, *Personalism* (Notre Dame, 1952) xx–xxii; J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (New York, 1985).

[36] G. Coq, *Emmanuel Mounier. Actes du Colloque tenu a l'UNESCO* Tome 1 (Paris, 2003); J.-F. Petit, *Penser avec Mounier* (Lyon 2000); V. Triest, *Plus est en l'homme. Le personalisme vecu comme humanisme radical* (Brussels, 2000).

[37] E. Mounier, *op.cit.* n. 35 *supra* xviii; 27.

[38] Compare C. Ernst *op. cit.* n. 27 *supra* 169; On the darker side of this revolution see the contested accounts of J. Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left 1930–1950* (Toronto, 1981); Z. Sterhell, *Neither Right Nor Left. Fascist Ideology in France* (Princeton, 1995).

[39] M. Lowy and R. Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (London, 2001) 169: On the importance of Mounier for Paolo Freire see B. Andreola, "Influence de la Pensee et du Temoignage de Mounier au Brazil", *Bulletin des Amis d' Emmanuel Mounier* 73/74 (1990) 41–45.

Catholic self-definition became more prominent during the pontificate of John Paul II. The difficult task of this identity is to preserve its values within the framework of a "qualified pluralism".[40] Ricoeur describes it as an ecumenical identity allowing for the possibility of collaboration with Christians of different denominations and also with non-Christians. This personalism can thus be conceived in Ernst's terms as the search for "a total human culture, the discovery of a single human identity in Christ".[41] Personalism is neither an amalgamation of various Christian tenets nor an eclectism of non-Christian sources. Encounter with Christianity allows ethical conscience to unfold its own possibilities. But the Christian is not necessarily always the initiator with others of the discovery of the world of the person. A non-Catholic or dechristianized form of thought may open up a realm of value which other Christian confessions have neglected or even screened. If personalism is a pedagogy the Christian is not necessarily the pedagogue of the non-Christian.[42] The problem is of integrating "identity" and "alterity" at numerous levels.[43]

Resistance identity must also become a project identity without self-alienation. The Christian must hear as well as mediate judgement as a single human identity is discovered in Christ. For Mounier the promise of this task is the discovery that "eternity penetrates the arteries of time".[44]

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[40] P. Pombeni, "The ideology of Christian Democracy" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 5.3 (2000) 289–300. Pombeni describes how Christian democrats, originally inspired by personalism, were assimilated into the mainstream of European social democracy. By contrast, the insistence of the Archbishop of Paris on the Christian identity of the Institut Catholique recently issued in the resignation of its vice-chancellor Joseph Maila. *Esprit* 6 (2006) 91–110.

[41] Mounier defines personalism in terms of "the human struggle to humanize humanity"; E. Mounier, *op. cit.* n.36 *supra* xix.

[42] P. Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher", *History and Truth* (Evanston, 1965) 133–161; 142–143.

[43] P. Ricoeur, "Reflections on a new ethos for Europe", *The Hermeneutics of Action* (London, 1996) 3–12; L. Roy describes Ernst's approach as akin to Ricoeur's; dialogic and acutely aware of the fact of difference. He takes up Ricoeur's search for "a meaning of meaning" including the meaning of what it is to be human. "Cornelius Ernst's Theological Seeds" *New Blackfriars* 85.998 (July 2004) 459–470.

[44] Mounier speaks these words as a character in a magical realist novel by his Brazilian disciple Herbert de Souza (Betinho), *A lista de Ailice* (Sao Paulo, 1996).