

The Humanism of the Incarnation: Catholic, Barthian, and Dutch Reformed *

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THIS ARTICLE TAKES THE FORM of a reflection on the idea of the “humanism of the Incarnation” in which the “participant” voices will principally be those of Martin D’Arcy, Charles Journet, Karol Wojtyła, Joseph Ratzinger, and Marc Ouellet representing the Catholic academy; Karl Barth representing himself; and Abraham Kuyper representing the Dutch Reformed tradition.

Martin D’Arcy (1888–1978) was a twentieth-century English Jesuit renowned for converting a rather large number of Oxford undergraduates, including Evelyn Waugh. D’Arcy is said to have been the inspiration for the character of Fr. Rothschild in Waugh’s novel *Vile Bodies*. Several chapters of his book *The Sense of History: Secular and Sacred* offer a mid-twentieth-century engagement with Karl Barth’s ideas on what is now called “the theology of culture.” D’Arcy in turn was influenced by an essay of Christopher Butler who was the Abbot of Downside Abbey. Butler’s article “On the Value of History” was published in the *Downside Review* in 1950, and Butler himself was following leads in the work of the Belgian Jesuit Léopold Malevez (1900–1973) whose work is known for its identification of a division between incarnational and eschatological approaches to history. For those who favor the eschatological

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approach, the emphasis is on the discontinuity between profane history and the final reign of God after the renewal of the cosmos, while for those who favor the incarnational approach, the general idea is that all good human actions prepare for the coming age beyond the consummation of the world.¹ The eschatological approach is usually identified with an emphasis on the theology of the Cross, while the incarnational approach is identified, obviously, with the theology of the Incarnation. Malevez had been influenced by a fellow Belgian theologian, Gustave Thils (1909–2000), who was a *peritus* at the Second Vatican Council and a member of the Secretariat for Christian Unity. Thils is generally remembered for his doctrinal history of the ecumenical movement, published in 1955, and for his criticism of the theology of Jean Daniélou for being too far down the eschatological end of the spectrum.²

The other Catholic voices to be mentioned are Charles Journet (1891–1975), a Swiss Cardinal associated with the journal *Nova et Vetera*; Jean Borella, a contemporary French theologian; Joseph Ratzinger, who needs no introduction; and Marc Ouellet, the Canadian who was given the shortest odds of any Cardinal entering the 2013 conclave by Paddy Power's Irish betting agency.

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), representing the Dutch Reformed tradition was the prime minister of the Netherlands from 1901 to 1905, the founder of a newspaper, a university, a political party, and a religious denomination. His most famous academic works were his *Lectures on Calvinism* delivered at Princeton Seminary in 1898. The Princeton Seminary now hosts the Abraham Kuyper Centre for Public Theology and sponsors the annual Kuyper Prize Lecture as well as publishes the *Kuyper Centre Review*. My judgment of Kuyper is that he was a kind of Calvinist Alasdair MacIntyre, that is to say, he was someone keenly interested in the relationship between theological ideas and culture and he was decidedly anti-liberal. Just as MacIntyre encourages the formation of small institutions governed by persons who all share the same

¹ This is Abbott Butler's summary of the distinction in "The Value of History," *Downside Review* 68, no. 213 (1950): 290–305, at 290–91. For the original analysis by Malevez, see Léopold Malevez, "Deux théologies catholiques de l'histoire," *Bijdragen* 10 (1949): 225–40.

² Gustave Thils, *Histoire Doctrinale du Mouvement Oecuménique* (Louvain: E. Warny, 1955).

theological framework, Kuyper is remembered as a champion of pillarization, the sociological term given to the denominational segregation of pre-World War II Dutch society.

A fellow Calvinist, though in a tradition all his own, Karl Barth (1886–1968) was, to quote Pope Pius XII, “the most important theologian since Thomas Aquinas.” Barth was invited to be an observer at the Second Vatican Council and later published a work of reflections on the documents of the Council entitled *Ad Limina Apostolorum: A Reappraisal of Vatican II*. In 1966 when he met Pope Paul VI he asked the pontiff what one might colloquially call the billion-dollar question: what does *aggiornamento* mean, accommodation to what?³

Aggiornamento was the 1960s buzzword for theological renewal, also translated as updating and mutated as accommodating. It was closely related to the postconciliar pastoral strategy known as “correlationism,” the idea that the faith needed to be correlated to the culture of the times. As the French Dominican Marie-Dominique Chenu (1895–1990) described the idea, one needed to look to the contemporary culture for *pierres d’attente*, or tooting stones, to which the faith could attach itself. This pastoral strategy was strongly associated with the postconciliar theology of the Flemish Dominican Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009), and it had a major impact on the direction of Catholic ecclesial life throughout the pontificate of Paul VI (1963–78). For many clergy educated in Catholic seminaries in the 1960s the correlationist project remains synonymous with the “spirit of the Council.”

When applied in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, correlationism came to mean accommodating the faith to the culture of modernity. Today proponents of this project (found mostly in the Netherlands and Belgium), argue that instead of correlating the faith to the culture of modernity, ecclesial leaders need to *recontextualize* the faith to the culture of postmodernity. This is because the culture of modernity and its “modern man” are now regarded as the undesirable refuse of the eighteenth century. The modern man has been variously described as a “one-dimensional man” by the Frankfurt School’s Herbert Marcuse; an *animal produ-cens et consumens* by the Czech Jesuit Joseph Zverina S.J.; a “mass man” who has “no desire for independence or originality,” the description of

³ Karl Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum* (Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1969), 20.

Germany's Romano Guardini; a "deprived and isolated emotivist," the assessment of Alasdair MacIntyre; a "micro-cosmic tragedy," the term used by the Slovakian Charter 77 anti-Communist activist Rudolf Battek; a person with a weak or fractured sense of self-identity who "doesn't know which team he is playing on," the assessment of the Czech writer and politician Vaclav Havel; a Hobbesian egoist, the label of the English philosopher John Gray; and a new type of barbarian, the conclusion of the Czech philosopher Erazim Kohak, to mention just a few of the descriptions.⁴ When one adds the Nietzschean definitions as someone with a "small soul" and "herd-like morality" and communitarian criticisms of the "rootless cosmopolitan"—a being without any historical memory, and without loyalties to any traditions—one rapidly reaches the conclusion that the depiction of anyone as a "modern" and the endorsement of the culture of modernity as the natural habitat of these neobarbaric microcosmic tragedies carries strong negative connotations. This is not only so for Catholic scholars, but for Heideggerians like Havel and members of the Frankfurt school like Marcuse. To use the language of marketing managers, modernity is toxic.

Whether one is correlating or recontextualizing, either way, it is something else that is positioning the faith, in effect, something else that is positioning Christ.⁵ One might say that if ontotheology is bad (allowing philosophy to position revelation), then zeitgeist theology is even worse. There is a huge difference between using contemporary cultural trends as a standard for the analysis of revelation and using revelation as

⁴ Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); Jozef Zverina as quoted by Rudolf Battek, "Spiritual values, independent initiatives and politics," in *The Power of the Powerless*, ed. John Keane (London: Hutchinson, 1985), 97–99; Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1957); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981); Vaclav Havel, "Politics and Conscience," *Salisbury Review* (January 1985); John Gray, *Liberalism* (London: Open University Press, 1986); Erazim Kohak, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁵ "I have argued in *The Priority of Christ* that Jesus and the doctrines and narratives surrounding him must have epistemic primacy, that is, to say, they cannot be interpreted or positioned by anything outside of themselves." Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Post-Liberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 341.

a lens through which to read and judge contemporary cultural trends. Arguably, it is these alternative ways of engaging with the spirit of the times that determine whether one is a liberal or nonliberal theologian.

All of the authors addressed in this essay share the quality of being nonliberal theologians. They are also all strongly Christocentric. The question to be posed is: what is their vision of a Christian humanism, or, to use Ratzinger's expression, the "humanism of the Incarnation"?

My macrolevel observation is that there seems to be broad agreement on two fundamental principles: first, that any humanism of the Incarnation presupposes a theology of creation and a theology of the Cross and is set within these two poles. The second principle is that, in relation to the Incarnation itself, Christology becomes the all-important point of reference. These two principles appear to apply across the various faith traditions. This means in turn that to do justice to this topic, one needs to be across the Christology of the authors surveyed, and this in turn means being across their Trinitarian theology and then applying both to their understanding of the relationship between Christ and humanity and human culture. The topic is therefore sufficiently deep to justify a doctoral-level analysis and thus what follows in this essay is merely a typical first chapter of a doctorate literature review. It is nonetheless important because if there is to be an ecumenical united front against the forces of atheism and its culture of death, then it helps to understand not only what we are all against but also, positively, what we all want to foster.

In an article on the interventions of Cardinal Josef Frings in the debates of the Second Vatican Council, Joseph Ratzinger observed that Frings was keen to emphasize one general principle:

For the Christian life in the world three revealed truths are always to be kept before us: creation, which teaches us to love the things of the world as God's work; the Incarnation, which spurs us on to dedicate to God all the things of the world; the cross and resurrection, which leads us in the imitation of Christ to sacrifice and continence with regard to the things of the world.⁶

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, "Frings's Speeches during the Second Vatican Council: Apropos of A. Muggeridge's *The Desolate City*," *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 15,

An almost identical point was made in a summary of the position of Dietrich Bonhoeffer by Jens Zimmermann, who wrote:

In Jesus Christ we believe in the God who becomes human; was crucified, and is risen. In the becoming human we recognise God's love towards God's creation, in the crucifixion God's judgement of all flesh, and in the resurrection God's purpose for a new world. Nothing could be more perverse than to tear these three apart because the whole is contained in each of them.⁷

Consistent with Frings, Ratzinger, Bonhoeffer, and Zimmermann, Abbot Christopher Butler made the point that Christian eschatology and Christian incarnationism are not mutually exclusive and that the division identified by Léopold Malevez between the two—that is, between the incarnational and eschatological approach to history—should not be a real division but rather two poles held in tension. Butler wrote:

Eschatology without Incarnation is not Christian at all, but Jewish. Incarnation without eschatology is—I know not what; Buddhism, perhaps, or Platonism. Born within the Jewish tradition and of Jewish spiritual stock, Christianity has been eschatological from the beginning . . . But its novelty was not that it simply lodged the idea of incarnation within an eschatological framework, but that it proclaimed a real, “mystical,” “sacramental” anticipation of the Last Things as the unique gift that God was bestowing on man in the Gospel—and of this real anticipation the Incarnation is the epitome and the fountainhead . . . Incarnation, for us, is eschatological, and eschatology is incarnated.⁸

The confessional difficulty here of course is found in the phrase “sacramental anticipation of the Last Things.” Not all Christian faith traditions will agree that the humanism of the Incarnation is something rooted in a sacramental ontology. This seems to be the neuralgic point

no. 1 (1988): 131–47.

⁷ Jens Zimmermann, *Incarnational Humanism: A Philosophy of Culture for the Church in the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2012), 273.

⁸ Butler, “Value of History,” 294.

of dispute between the Catholic and Protestant visions, and this has been the subject of some acute comments by Charles Journet. In his work *The Primacy of Peter*, Journet distinguished between two different concepts of Christianity: one typical of Protestant theology and one typical of Catholic theology. The first he described as the mnemonic concept, the second the ontological concept. The difference between the two is presented as a difference over the way in which the presence of Christ constitutes Christianity:

On the one hand there is the spirituality of the Incarnation, or in a broader sense the spirituality of the transfiguration of matter by the spirit. This is the Catholic form of spirituality with its doctrine of the Incarnation, the instrumental causality of the sacraments, of the New Law, the visibility of the Church, the resurrection of the flesh, the immediate creation of visible things by God himself, etc. On the other hand, we have a sort of spirituality of disincarnation, or in a broader sense a spirituality of the separation of matter and spirit.

On a more metaphysical plane we may see the opposition as one between a dogmatic view of the analogy of being, in accordance with which the divine privileges, especially divine sanctity, can be communicated analogically to creatures—as existence once was—without affecting adversely the divine transcendence, but rather manifesting it. On the other hand we have a dogmatic view of the uniqueness of being, which can only safeguard the divine transcendence by denying any possibility for the divine privileges to be communicated, especially divine sanctity: either a) to the humanity of Christ because of the fear of Monophysitism, or b) to creatures because of the fear of idolatry.⁹

According to Journet, in the Protestant account, Christ is only present in time by way of signs, tokens, and promises—which from a Catholic point of view is a kind of nostalgic return to the Old Testa-

⁹ Charles Journet, *The Primacy of Peter* (Westminster MD: Newman Press: 1954), 36–37.

ment—whereas, according to the Catholic account, Christ is really and truly present in time under the guise of signs, tokens, and promises. Journet suggests that Protestantism makes the error of considering the two natures of Christ side by side such that the human nature of Christ becomes “simply an occasion of our salvation, a mere phenomenal shell, in which the invisible God made his appearance.”¹⁰

While Journet does not distinguish between different Protestant traditions but lumps them all together and comes rather close to describing Protestant Christology as Nestorian, in another work, *The Sense of the Supernatural*, Jean Borella specifically indicted the Lutheran tradition on the charge of monothelitism in the sense that human nature becomes a pure instrument of divine nature, without autonomy. Borella wrote:

Basically, and whatever may have been his [Luther's] good intentions, [his] thesis rests on the radical incompatibility of nature and grace, or rather on the irreducible opposition and the mutual exclusion of the natural and supernatural orders, which grace comes to reconcile specifically, since this grace always flows from the unique hypostasis of Christ in which divinity has been united to humanity. Here, to the contrary, [that is, in the Lutheran tradition] supernature can only work by destroying nature . . . Into the heart of every Christian it introduces an insurmountable separation between what stems from the creature and what stems from the redemptive act . . . What disappears in this way is the “immanence of grace” of Christ the Redeemer in his creation; that is, the sacramental and ritual order, the ecclesial order, the Mystical Body, all of this sacralising of the earthly and the human cosmos which is the Incarnation prolonged, spread abroad and communicated, as the image of the first fruits of the “new heaven and the new earth.”¹¹

Although Borella was directing his comments to the Lutheran tradition, they would seem to apply equally to the theological vision of Barth. For Barth it is Christ, not the Church, who mediates the presence of God

¹⁰ Ibid., 33.

¹¹ Jean Borella, *The Sense of the Supernatural* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 154.

to the world. As Rodney Howsare expresses the point, “missing [from Barth] is the more Eastern understanding that God unites himself, in the Incarnation, to all human nature, thereby transforming the capacities of that nature. This comes out most clearly in Barth’s understanding of the Church, the liturgy and the sacraments.”¹² By reducing everything to God’s activity in Christ on behalf of the world, Barth does not give the same attention and emphasis to the role of the Church in carrying this love into the world as Catholic theologians typically do. Missing from Barth’s picture is a notion of the Church as itself a sacrament.¹³ Barth is generally believed to have held a neo-Zwinglian position on the sacraments, or at least, that is the strong impression he gives in his *Church Dogmatics* IV/4. For Barth, both baptism and the Lord’s Supper are human actions, not sacraments. Louis-Marie Chauvet argues that Barth’s Christology already bears within itself its nonsacramental theology. Chauvet remarks that there are few theologies that speak so much of events and history, and yet there are few theologies where so little takes place on the properly historical plane.¹⁴

It was perhaps for these reasons that Hans Urs von Balthasar accused Barth of reducing the order of creation to the order of grace.¹⁵ In Balthasar’s words:

If revelation is centered in Jesus Christ, there must be by definition a periphery to this center. Thus, as we say, the order of the Incarnation presupposes the order of creation, which is not identical with it. And, because the order of creation is oriented to the order of the Incarnation, it is structured in view of the Incarnation: it contains images, as it were, dispositions, which in a true sense are the presuppositions for the Incarnation.¹⁶

¹² Rodney A. Howsare, *Hans Urs von Balthasar: The Ecumenical Implications of His Theological Style* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2005), 97.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁴ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 540.

¹⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 136.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

In other words, the idea is that the grace available through Jesus Christ does not stand in contradiction to, but in line with, the grace found in nature by virtue of God's act of creation. Michael Schmaus, a professor of the theology faculty in Munich during Ratzinger's student years, expressed the general Catholic idea like this:

Man exists, not in himself, but for God. By directing himself in free decision and responsibility to God, he acts according to his ontic constitution, he acts in the way appropriate to his essence and thus comes to fulfil and perfect his being. Only when God draws him into his own triune life does man find his own deepest being; his ontic determination is a copy of God's tri-personal life. Thus man comes to discover himself in the divine Thou when God imparts himself to him supernaturally. This communication of God's happens in and through Christ. The relationship to Christ is therefore contained in the relationship of the creature to God . . . The whole of the rest of creation is meant to exist for the sake of the Incarnation of Christ. Thus the whole of creation comes to its essential fulfilment only through him.¹⁷

Ratzinger's own most extensive and unbuttoned treatment of this topic can be found in an article published in 1969 in Herbert Vorgrimler's *Commentaries on the Documents of the Second Vatican Council*. The article analyzed the treatment of human dignity in *Gaudium et spes*—the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Ratzinger's assessment of this document was largely negative. He, along with fellow German Cardinal Walter Kasper, have both suggested that the first section of the document was never properly integrated with the second. The first section offers an account of the human person as made in God's image, but it is only when one gets to paragraph 22 that the picture is complicated by the introduction of the Trinity. Ratzinger argued that the first section fostered the fiction that it is possible to construct a rational philosophical picture of man intelligible to all and on which all men of goodwill can agree, the actual Christian doctrines being added to this as a sort of crowning conclusion. This approach prompted the question of

¹⁷ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II* (Munich: Max Hueber, 1949), 70–72.

“why exactly the reasonable and perfectly free human being described in the first articles was suddenly burdened with the story of Christ.”¹⁸ Notwithstanding this criticism and Ratzinger’s description of the language used in the paragraph about human freedom as being downright Pelagian, Ratzinger nonetheless strongly praised paragraph 22, which was to become the most often quoted paragraph of all the documents of the Second Vatican Council by John Paul II. He said that in paragraph 22 the idea of Christ’s assumption of human nature is touched upon in its full ontological depth:

The human nature of all men is one; Christ’s taking to himself the one human nature of man is an event which affects every human being; consequently human nature in every human being is henceforward Christologically characterised.

Ratzinger went on to say that this outlook is important because it opens a bridge between the theology of the Incarnation and that of the Cross:

A theology of the incarnation situated too much on the level of essence, may be tempted to be satisfied with the ontological phenomenon: God’s being and man’s have been conjoined . . . But since it is made clear that man’s being is not that of a pure essence, and that he only attains his reality by his activity, it is at once evident that we cannot rest content with a purely essentialist outlook. Man’s being must therefore be examined precisely in its activities.¹⁹

Here Ratzinger is opening up what in other places he has referred to as the mediation of history in the realm of ontology. Both he and Karol Wojtyła converge in their interest in the uniqueness of human persons caused by their particular location within history. For this reason they share a mutual interest in what is called relationality, or that dimension of the human person who is determined by his or her relations with oth-

¹⁸ Ibid., 120.

¹⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” in *Commentary on the Documents of the Second Vatican Council*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), 160.

er persons, including the Persons of the Holy Trinity. In another essay on the notion of the human person published during the pontificate of John Paul II, Ratzinger was critical of the Boethian definition of the person as the individual substance of a rational nature because it neglected the whole dimension of relationality, which makes human persons not merely members of the human race but unique individual members of the human race.²⁰ Both Wojtyła and Ratzinger were driven to develop this dimension of Catholic anthropology as a response to issues thrown up by existentialist philosophy. A theology that has nothing to say about individuality is impotent against the power of nineteenth-century German Romanticism and its twentieth-century developments.

Ratzinger believes that the uniqueness of Christian culture is rooted in the Incarnation and that all of its specific characteristics disintegrate when this belief is eclipsed.²¹ The Incarnation means that the invisible God enters into the visible world so that those who are bound to matter can know him. The International Theological Commission under Ratzinger's leadership expressed the position this way:

In the last times inaugurated at Pentecost, the risen Christ, Alpha and Omega, enters into the history of peoples: from that moment, the sense of history and thus of culture is unsealed and the Holy Spirit reveals it by actualizing and communicating it to all. The Church is the sacrament of this revelation and its communication. It recenters every culture into which Christ is received, placing it in the axis of the world which is coming, and restores the union broken by the Prince of this world. Culture is thus eschatologically situated; it tends towards its completion in Christ, but it cannot be saved except by associating itself with the repudiation of evil.²²

In this paragraph one finds all the key elements of a Catholic Incarnational humanism and its associate culture: the Incarnation restores

²⁰ Joseph Ratzinger, "Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 17, no. 3 (1990): 439–54.

²¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Co-Workers of the Truth* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 18–19.

²² International Theological Commission, "Faith and Inculturation," *Origins* 18 (1989): 800–807.

the union broken by Satan at the time of the Fall, it recenters culture eschatologically—that is, with a view to the return of Christ in glory and consummation of the world—but this does not happen automatically. There needs to be a repudiation of evil and thus the potentiality of the Incarnation stands always under the shadow of the Cross. The Holy Spirit and the Church are responsible for the communication of the possibilities thrown open by the Incarnation to the world.

For the development of a more detailed Catholic Christocentric Trinitarian anthropology, one can have recourse to John Paul II's encyclicals *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), *Dives in Misericordia* (1980), and *Dominum et Vivificantem* (1986). Known as his Trinitarian triptych, each of these encyclicals addressed the issue of the human person's relationship with one of the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Included in this Trinitarian anthropology is the notion that the Incarnation opened up the possibility of participation in the very life of God. John Paul II stated this explicitly in *Dives in Misericordia* 7:4. Often this idea is expressed by the idea of the nuptial mystery. Paragraph 27 of Pope Benedict's Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* offers an extensive presentation of the links between Eucharistic theology and the nuptial mystery in the following terms:

The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage . . . “the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist” . . . By the power of the sacrament, the marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church (cf. *Eph* 5:31–32). The mutual consent that husband and wife exchange in Christ, which establishes them as a community of life and love, also has a eucharistic dimension. Indeed, in the theology of Saint Paul, conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ's love for his Church, a love culminating in the Cross, the expression of his “marriage” with humanity and at the same time the origin and heart of the Eucharist.

These themes have been amplified in the theology of Cardinal Marc Ouellet, who understands the sacrament of marriage, including the exchange of love between husband and wife, as the couple's participation in the exchange of "gifts" between the divine Persons:

God's covenant with Israel and humanity is the story of a wedding. The symbol par excellence of the biblical revelation is conjugal love. A couple stands at the beginning of salvation history and another at its conclusion: Adam and Eve set the history of humanity in motion, while the Lamb and his Bride, who descends from God in heaven, concludes the adventure of historical time. In the span of time between the initial couple and the eschatological couple, the Holy Spirit implores and summons; he prays for the final fulfillment together with the Bride whom he has called.²³

Salvation history is [thus] a spousal drama of Trinitarian revelation . . . The Father sends his Son as the Bridegroom, accompanied by the Holy Spirit, who prepares the bride for the encounter with the Bridegroom and the fulfillment of the eschatological wedding.²⁴

Prepared by the Holy Spirit since the beginning of creation, the messianic wedding is celebrated on the altar of the Cross. It is precisely there that the nuptial chamber receives the *sacrum commercium et conubium*.²⁵

Ouellet concludes that the Paschal event contains at once a Trinitarian and spousal meaning:

A Trinitarian meaning, since the resurrection seals in the economy the unity of love which was sealed by the Holy Spirit's procession in the immanent Trinity: a spousal meaning, because

²³ Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Towards a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 80.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 80–81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

this anointing confirmation seals the fecund gift of the risen one as the eschatological Bridegroom who generates his bride.²⁶

These notions of a spousal relation between Christ and the Church and of divine filiation via sacramental participation in the life and love of the Trinity are elements found in most Catholic accounts of the humanism of the Incarnation but are usually missing from Protestant accounts, and in particular are missing in Barth. In his book *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture*, Robert J. Palma speaks of Barth's "parabolic relationship between the worldly and the heavenly, the human the divine, the transitory and the eternal."²⁷ Thus, we might say, in shorthand terms, there is a tendency for Catholic theologians to describe the union between the human person and the Persons of the Holy Trinity using the idioms of nuptial mysticism, while there is a tendency for Protestants to shy away from this and adopt a more modest notion of a parabolic relationship. For Barth the eschatological Word to which Christianity looks forward relativizes all historical possibilities and achievements. Though his later theology expressed the point more gently, Barth never retracted his early claim that only a thoroughly eschatological Christianity bears any relationship to Christ.²⁸

The difference in the area of sacramental theology also means that Protestants and Catholics tend to have a different attitude to matter itself, including the human body. The Catholic cult of the saints and practice of collecting and venerating the relics of the saints is the most obvious example of this difference. Theologically, the issue is one of understanding precisely how it is that Christ unites himself to humanity. That Christ was not some kind of ontological exception, but that his Incarnation affected all postlapsarian human nature in some way, comes across strongly in John Paul II's encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*. At paragraph 50 he wrote:

²⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁷ Robert J. Palma, *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 1983), 2.

²⁸ Gary Dorrien, "The 'Postmodern' Barth? The Word of God as True Myth," *Christian Century* (April 2, 1997): 338–42.

The Incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into the unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is “flesh”: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation then, also has a cosmic significance, a cosmic dimension. The “first-born of all creation,” becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of man, which is “flesh”—and in this reality with all “flesh,” with the whole of creation.

This Catholic take on the Incarnation would seem to affect not only issues like how we treat the dead bodies of the saints but also attitudes to art and culture more generally. In a reflection on the earliest disputes within the Church about art and beauty, Ratzinger observed that “iconoclasm rests on a one-sided apophatic theology, which recognizes only the Wholly Other-ness of the God beyond all images and words, a theology that in the final analysis regards revelation as the inadequate human reflection of what is eternally imperceptible.”²⁹ He concluded that “what seems like the highest humility toward God turns into pride, allowing God no word and permitting him no real entry into history . . . matter is absolutized and thought of as completely impervious to God, as mere matter, and thus deprived of its dignity.”³⁰

This notion of the receptivity of matter to some form of divinization reaches its most dramatic expression in paragraph 11 of Pope Benedict’s Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, wherein he stated that:

The substantial conversion of bread and wine into [Christ’s] body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of “nuclear fission,” which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. *1 Cor* 15:28).

²⁹ Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2000), 124.

³⁰ Ibid.

The theology of Teilhard de Chardin—in particular the idea that as we move through history matter itself becomes more and more conformed to Christ until we reach the Noosphere, as he called it—has never received magisterial endorsement, but the fact that a significant Catholic theologian could speculate in this way is evidence of the depth of Catholic interest in the topic of what it means exactly for the world to be transfigured to a point where God will be all in all.

In addition to the different stances toward sacramental theology and the theological meaning of the first chapter of St. Paul's *Letter to the Corinthians*, Ratzinger's humanism of the Incarnation also differs from Barth's in that he believes that Mariology has something to contribute to this topic. In this context he has written:

Mariology is an essential component of a hermeneutics of salvation history. Recognition of this fact brings out the true dimensions of Christology over against a falsely understood *solus Christus* (Christ alone). Christology must speak of a Christ who is both "head *and* body," that is, who comprises the redeemed creation in its relative subsistence (*Selbstständigkeit*). But this move simultaneously enlarges our perspective beyond the history of salvation, because it counters a false understanding of God's sole agency, highlighting the reality of the creature that God calls and enables to respond to him freely. Mariology demonstrates that the doctrine of grace does not revoke creation, but is the definitive Yes to creation. In this way, Mariology guarantees the ontological independence (*Eigenständigkeit*) of creation, undergirds faith in creation, and crowns the doctrine of creation, rightly understood.³¹

The nexus between Christology and versions of Christian humanism is acknowledged in almost all the authorities who write about this topic in the work of Karl Barth, and it is the central theme of Paul Louis Metzger's work *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth*. However, there appears to be no consensus among Barth scholars about how to read Barth's

³¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Mary: The Church at the Source* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005), 31.

Christology. There has been a debate within the school about whether Barth was primarily an Alexandrian or an Antiochene. According to George Hunsinger of Princeton Theological Seminary, who wrote the chapter on Barth's Christology for the *Cambridge Companion to Barth*, Barth does have a Chalcedonian Christology, but he arrives at it by moving back and forth dialectically between the Alexandrian and Antiochene approaches.³² According to Charles T. Waldrop, however, in Barth, "Christ's human nature is so integrally taken up and assumed into God's being that its purely human existence is denied. In the final analysis, the degree of independence which the human nature has is extremely slight. It serves and attests God because God determines it to be that which serves and attests him."³³ Whatever the differences between Hunsinger and Waldrop, Metzger strongly argues that for Barth there is no capacity for the divine capacity inherent in the human constitution.³⁴ Nor if we are good Barthians should we expect to find vestiges of the Trinity within creation.³⁵ Instead Barth invented the formula *vestigia creaturae in trinitate*, which emphasizes that while creatures are unable to reflect the Trinity, the Trinity has the power to reveal itself in creatures.³⁶ The central thesis of Metzger's work is that Barth is neither a sacramentalist nor a secularist, that he is neither a Catholic nor a liberal.³⁷ As he expresses the idea:

In Barth's work the dedivinization of culture gives rise to the humanization of culture. This reality of dedivinisation enables culture to be the human, creaturely reality as it is intended by

³² George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Chalcedonian Character," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 136–37.

³³ Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (New York: Mouton, 1984), 174.

³⁴ Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 124n9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 200.

³⁶ Thomas G. Dalzell, *The Dramatic Encounter of Divine and Human Freedom in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1997), 91n2. Dalzell also cited Philip Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 53–56, on this point.

³⁷ Metzger, *Word of Christ*, 116.

God to be. And although Barth guards against the secularization of human culture by emphasising the significance of the Word for the whole of creaturely reality, not simply the sacred sphere, he is still able to give space to culture to be truly secular in light of the Word. Dedeivinisation and desecularization spell humanization, which in turn spells the celebration of authentic secularity . . . his dual emphasis on the de-devinization and de-secularization of culture enables him to mediate between Christ and culture in such a way that broader culture is given the space to be truly secular in distinct though inseparable relation to the sacred, in and through the eternal Word who became flesh.³⁸

The problem for a Catholic reading this paragraph is that it sounds precisely like it leaves the order of creation unaffected by the Incarnation, at least until the renewal of the cosmos at the end of time. For Catholics, the idea is not merely that we are saved by Christ, but that one of the fruits of redemption is the possibility of *theosis* or deification. The idea of a de-divinised culture sounds to Catholic ears a little like a de-alcoholized cocktail—something potentially intoxicating that has had the active ingredient removed.

Although Martin D'Arcy did not have the benefit of Metzger's research, he read Barth in a way that seems close to the judgment of Metzger—although he drew a different value judgment about it. D'Arcy wrote:

Barth's meaning is that the Redemption has restored the world and that there are reflections of this new glory to be found in the works of man and of civilisation. But the restoration belongs to another plane and will not be revealed until the last day. Till then it is hidden in God with Jesus Christ. The best that can be seen in the world is a reflection like the light reflected on a pool or mountain-side. Culture, he says, has its own worth and dignity, but it is "an exclusively earthly reflection of the Creation, which itself remains . . . lost and hidden from us." There is "no continuity between the analogies and the divine reality, no

³⁸ Ibid., 81

objective relation between what is signified and what really is; no transition, therefore, definable in terms of any progress, can be made between one and the other.” Such an inflexible verdict rules out any hope of relating heaven and earth, grace and nature. History can never be more than a pastime. When the last trumpet sounds, all the works of man will fade out; they have no bearing on what then is to be revealed.³⁹

Jessica de Cou reads Barth in this way when she says that far too much has been made of the theological significance of Barth’s Mozart essays. She argues that when Barth wrote about Mozart he was being playful and ironic.⁴⁰ He thoroughly enjoyed Mozart but thought that what human beings received from Mozart was something related to the good of play. It was something absolutely human, not divine. Hence Barth’s playful comment that the angels play Bach for God but when they are home having fun by themselves they play Mozart. Evidence for something like Martin D’Arcy’s reading of Barth can be found in Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, vols. 1 and 2 (§§13–24). In these paragraphs we find the great Barthian indictment of Catholic theology on the grounds that it is obsessed with the word “and”:

In all its shoots the theology which says “and” derives from one root. If you say “faith and works,” “nature and grace,” “reason and revelation,” at the appropriate place you logically and necessarily have to say “Scripture and tradition.” The “and” by which the authority of Holy Scripture is relativised in both Roman Catholicism and Neo-Protestantism is only the expression, one expression, of the fact that already the majesty of God has been relativised in His fellowship with man. And in this primary relativising both are equally remote from the Reformation decision.

³⁹ Martin D’Arcy, *The Sense of History: Secular and Sacred* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 172–73.

⁴⁰ Jessica de Cou, “Relocating Barth’s Theology of Culture: Beyond the ‘True Words’ Approach of *Church Dogmatics* IV/3,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 15, no. 2 (2012): 154–72.

Contrary to Barth, D'Arcy argued that from the Catholic point of view "nature and the supernatural action of God have been wedded together, and to divorce them is, however salutary the purpose, a desecration. The task of the Christian thinker is, therefore, to do justice to the marriage, while accepting the very different roles and even temperaments of each member."⁴¹ Specifically, D'Arcy endorses the idea of Abbot Butler that "the period between the two comings—the Incarnation and the Last Day—has a special mark like that on the doorpost of the Israelites on the night the Egyptians were smitten." The change effected by the Incarnation is a "prevenient grace, which prepares nature and dresses it for the time when all things shall be made new." Moreover, "the harvest to be reaped at the end of time is homogeneous with the historical seed, and in its growth that seed exercises its mysterious, biological alchemy on the inanimate matter wherein it has been placed."⁴² According to Butler, whom D'Arcy admired, for a Christian, the purpose of life should not be to "pass through it, get it over, and arrive, without baggage but personally safe," rather the Christian should arrive "at the final customs house" "with all that he acquires along the road" and it is precisely what he has to declare that will "determine forever his enjoyment of the fatherland."⁴³ In D'Arcy's words, "toys in themselves are of no account, but to children they are so dear that they take them to bed with them; and when we go to sleep and awake to everlasting joy the toys of this life may well be part of our transfigured humanity . . . What we do now prefigures what we shall do with complete happiness, even as the doll cherished by the child is the first love of the future mother."⁴⁴

Abbot Butler acknowledged that cultural achievements can be the products of sinful desires or as he expressed the idea, "embellishments not of the City of God but of Babylon." Nonetheless, he argued that the "potentialities which they thus not only actualise but deform are potentialities of ontological man and, as such, may participate in the 'resurrection' of grace. They and their products are therefore susceptible of supernaturalisation and can be made to subserve the reign of God."

⁴¹ D'Arcy, *Sense of History*, 173.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 182–83.

⁴³ Butler, "Value of History," 299.

⁴⁴ D'Arcy, *Sense of History*, 211.

To emphasize the point he suggested that we “do not enjoy a few stray ‘advances’ upon our eventual inheritance. It is the whole of that future inheritance that is mysteriously anticipated in grace.”⁴⁵

With reference to the scriptural roots of these distinctions, D’Arcy suggests that Catholics and Barthians have different interpretations of St. Paul’s *Letter to the Colossians* 1:20, the Father is through him [Christ] to reconcile all things in himself, and St. Paul’s *Letter to Romans* 8:20, the creature was made subject to vanity etc. D’Arcy also suggests that a certain ambiguity in the use of the word “world” and in the description of the city of man obscured the questions whether nature and the good works of man were condemned to vanity or could be brought into relation with the supernatural order.

Not only are these differences significant at the level of what we make of our cultural achievements, but much more fundamentally they are also significant for what we make of the potentialities of a Christian humanism. Several authors argue that it is Barth’s position that one cannot deduce anthropology from Christology. This however was precisely the central project of the pontificate of John Paul II, that is, the development of a Christocentric Trinitarian theological anthropology. In contrast, Philip Rosato argued that in Barth anthropology is totally conceived of as the work of the Holy Spirit: “pneumatology replaces the concept of nature, reducing the human person to a passive bystander.”⁴⁶ Rosato went so far as to assert that Barth was first and foremost a pneumatologist.⁴⁷ George Hunsinger implicitly concurs with Philip J. Rosato, S.J. Hunsinger writes:

The work of the Holy Spirit, as Barth saw it, is miraculous in operation. The Holy Spirit is seen as the sole effective agent (*solus actor efficiens*) by which communion with God is made humanly possible. In their fallen condition (*status corruptionis*), human beings cannot recover a vital connection with God. Their minds are darkened, their wills are enslaved, and the desires of their hearts are debased. Through the proclamation of the gos-

⁴⁵ Butler, “Value of History,” 298–99.

⁴⁶ Rosato, *Spirit as Lord*, 131.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

pel, however, the impossible is made possible, but only in the form of an ongoing miracle. This miracle is the operation of the Holy Spirit, not only to initiate conversion (*operatio initialis*), but also to continue it throughout the believer's life (*operatio perpetuo*). The only condition (necessary and sufficient) for new life in communion with God is the Spirit's miraculous operation in the human heart (*operatio mirabilis*). Faith in Christ, hope for the world, and consequent works of love have no other basis *in nobis* than this unceasing miracle of grace. Faith, hope and love, in other words, do not depend on regenerated capacities, infused virtues, acquired habits, or strengthened dispositions of the soul. Those who are awakened to lifelong conversion by the Spirit never cease to be sinners in themselves.⁴⁸

Barth thereby objects to all theories that imply a "systematic co-ordination of nature and grace."⁴⁹ This rules out the Thomistic idea of a material cause cooperating with a human instrumental cause, and, as stated earlier in this essay, it rules out a sacramental ontology.

In the final analysis, the distance between the Barthian and the Catholic positions is quite wide because of the fundamental differences in the areas of sacramental theology and ecclesiology and even perhaps in Trinitarian theology, where there are different understandings of the role of the Holy Spirit in the economy of salvation. Barth seems to give the Holy Spirit rather a lot more work than is normally allotted by Catholic theologians. One can only amuse oneself with the thought of what Barth would make of the nuptial mystery theology of Cardinals Marc Ouellet and Angelo Scola.

Nonetheless, it is the case that the Catholic theology of the Incarnation has to be held together with a theology of the Cross at one side and a theology of creation at the other and in this sense there is a strong affinity with Barth about the importance of the theology of the Cross. An example of what goes wrong when this end of the triptych is some-

⁴⁸ George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 183.

⁴⁹ See for example, the treatment of these issues in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, 1955).

how occluded may be found in some of the loopy appropriations of John Paul II's Wednesday audience addresses on human love. These are now popularly marketed as his theology of the body. Some commentators so emphasize the effects of the Incarnation on the redemption of human sexuality that the problem of concupiscence is completely muted. I have been told, for example, that there is a colony of hippies living somewhere in Montana and that during the summer months they have given up wearing clothes on the grounds that they are implementing John Paul II's theology of the body principles. They have allegedly been so redeemed that lust is no longer a problem. Barth and even Teilhard de Chardin would find that problematic.

Moving now from Barth, to the Dutch Reformed tradition as expressed in the thought of Abraham Kuyper, we can begin with Kuyper's most famous line that "there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry 'Mine!'"⁵⁰ This statement resonates well with Catholics. Catholics have never had a problem with the idea of Christ's sovereignty and even reserve a feast day to celebrate Christ's kingship. In 1903 Pope Pius X wrote a whole encyclical (*E supremi*) on the subject of "restoring all things in Christ." The issue between Catholics and Kuyperians is one of how this sovereignty is exercised.

Kuyper believed that Catholics were right not to buy into the Lutheran "two kingdoms" concept, but he thought that the Catholic error was one of believing that Christ's sovereignty is exercised through the Church. Instead he favored the idea that the world, so to speak, can be carved up into different social spheres such as family life and professional life, and that in each of these spheres there are particular ways of respecting the sovereignty of Christ, particular precepts to be followed, and it is individual Christians who do the following, who either honor the precepts or violate them. The basic idea of sphere sovereignty is that each sphere has its own character and each is directly under the divine rule. According to Richard Mouw, Kuyper reads Genesis 1:28—that is, the be fruitful and multiply edict—as a call to cultural activity or a "cultural mandate." Human beings are called to flourish in the kind of par-

⁵⁰ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

ticipation in created life that God intends for us. The effect of the Fall is that the modes of participation become either obedient participation or disobedient participation.

Kuyper's concept of sphere sovereignty is not synonymous with the Catholic idea of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity is a principle about decentralizing authority within spheres, it is not about the sovereignty of the spheres themselves. Nonetheless, subsidiarity is perfectly consistent with how Kuyper sees the work of individual Christians within the various spheres. Where Catholics are keen to emphasize that governments have no right to interfere with the authority of parents over the education of their children, Kuyper would agree wholeheartedly but add that the Catholic Church itself has from time to time in its history been guilty of similar incursions into spheres beyond its competence. Anyone who has ever worked for the Catholic Church would know that one of its problems is that people in ecclesial positions have a tendency to exercise authority in areas that are completely outside their competence. We need many more "dykes and dams," to use Mouw's metaphor, to make sure that people who have expertise in one field do not try to exercise it in another. There are numerous examples, but the most common are canon lawyers who try to handle public relations, and business managers who think they are bishops. In the past there were bishops who tried to use their theological authority to make judgments about scientific matters.

Kuyper died before the Second Vatican Council began, but it may be argued that his idea of sphere sovereignty, or something like it, was what the Council Fathers were driving at in paragraph 36 of *Gaudium et spes*, which states:

If by the autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must gradually be deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern men, but harmonises also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstances of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order.

This paragraph, or at least the bit about all things being endowed with their own “stability, truth, goodness, proper laws and order” is a paraphrase of statements made by both Aquinas and Augustine. It is perfectly capable of a non-self-secularizing interpretation. However, the use of the word “autonomy” has given rise to a variety of interpretations, most broadly the idea that God and the supernatural realm is one thing and the world and so called secular realm is another and that the latter exists in a state of total independence from the former. In theological parlance, a relationship of total independence is said to be an “extrinsic” relationship. There have been many popularist interpretations of this paragraph that view the relationship as extrinsic.

Cardinal Angelo Scola has recently complained of precisely this problem. He has lamented that there is a latent ambiguity around the interpretation of the principle of the autonomy of earthly affairs mentioned in paragraph 36 of *Gaudium et spes*. With reference to some of the interpretations of this paragraph, Scola suggested that it might be “right to ask if the Catholic world, called to address the great contemporary anthropological and ethical challenges, has not been co-responsible, whether by naivety, delay or lack of attention, for the current [secularist] state of things.”⁵¹ According to Scola, paragraph 36 is an acknowledgment that there is a realm of life that is the responsibility of the laity (cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem* 7). This seems to be close to Kuyper’s position. The most significant distinction would be that the Church reserves to herself the competence to make judgments about matters of faith and morals that may have an impact in some particular sphere. Here the ruling against the use of contraception would be the most obvious example. The *communio ecclesiology* of the Second Vatican Council represents a move away from a strictly juridical account of the Church, to a view that imagines the Church as a symphonic interplay of different spiritual missions, only one of which is the Petrine, the mission of ecclesial governance.

In the work of von Balthasar, which represents the most extensive articulation of *communio ecclesiology*, the Petrine mission or the offices of pope, bishop, and priest work in communion with other missions, in

⁵¹ Angelo Scola, “El Peligro de una Falsa ‘Autonomía,’” *Humanitas: Revista de Antropología y Cultura Cristianas* 66 (2012): 296–301, esp. 299.

particular, the Johannine mission, which stands for the contemplative vocation; the Pauline mission, which is one of prophetic utterance and evangelization; and the mission of St. James, which is one of defending the tradition and seeing that it is transmitted uncorrupted from one generation to the next. Kuyper was writing before the Second Vatican Council, and so the only Catholic Church he knew was one steeped in the ecclesiology of the post-Tridentine theologians and thus he cannot be criticized for not appreciating the complexity and nuances of the *communio ecclesiology*. There seems to be a strong affinity between the *communio* understanding of how laypeople mediate the grace of the Incarnation to the world and Kuyper's ideas about the activity of Christians in various social spheres. Thus Mouw makes the point that Kuyper distinguishes between the Church and the Kingdom:

The Kingdom . . . encompasses the believing community in all of its complex life of participation in a variety of spheres. Whenever followers of Christ are attempting to glorify God in one or another sphere of cultural interaction, they are engaged in Kingdom activity: a Christian art guild fathered for obedience in the sphere of the arts; a Christian farmer's group gathered for obedience in the sphere of agriculture; a Christian college or university gathered for obedience in the world of teaching and research.⁵²

Nonetheless, Kuyper was an avowed Calvinist. In his *Stone Lectures on Calvinism* he wrote:

Calvinism is rooted in a form of religion which was peculiarly its own, and from this specific religious consciousness there was developed first a peculiar theology, then a special church-order and then a given form of political and social life, for the interpretation of the moral world-order, for the relation between nature and grace, between Christianity and the world, between church and state, and finally, for art and science.⁵³

⁵² Richard J. Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 58.

⁵³ Abraham Kuyper, *The Stone Lectures on Calvinism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 9.

For Kuyper a hallmark of Calvinism is the immediate relationship between God and man. Like Barth, there is no sacramental ontology. Kuyper specifically rejected the idea of a church as a *Heilsanstalt* (institute of grace) and he thought that one advance of Calvinism was that it is much more pluralistic about matters of ecclesial governance structures than the Catholic tradition. Whereas Catholics have a tendency to look at the thousands of different Protestant church structures and shake their heads with paternal tenderness, Kuyper regarded this plurality as something to be affirmed and celebrated.

If Kuyper is right about Calvinism being a peculiar life form, or a culture in itself, then this raises the question of how it differs from Catholicism and its life form and culture. A paradox that first comes to mind when considering this question is that whereas the Protestant emphasis is on faith alone and the Catholic tradition's emphasis is on "faith and works," it is the Catholic tradition that ends up with a culture that is much more contemplative, much less work oriented. Everyone agrees that there is a Protestant work ethic, but notwithstanding the efforts of George Weigel and the late Richard John Neuhaus and the whole *First Things* journal, a Catholic work ethic is yet to socially arrive. Transposing this into Balthasar's *communio* terminology, we can say that from the Catholic point of view Calvinism represents a lopsided emphasis on the Pauline mission. There is prophetic utterance and evangelization, but there is only a very weak Petrine mission (no pope or bishops), there is no Johannine mission at all—that is, monasteries and convents for contemplatives—and only a weak Jacobite mission that is exercised through the leading scholars of the tradition. There is also no strong sense of sacramentality, no nuclear fission, no relics of saints. Sociologists have said that Calvinist cultures are bourgeois and that Catholic cultures are erotic. Their point is that Calvinists tend to be practical and efficient people, while there is an out-of-control erotic element in Catholicism. This is what produces both the Catholic saints and the Catholic nutters. It is perhaps the difference between a view of an incarnational humanism as merely parabolic contrasted with one that is nuptial.

Jeremy Begbie argues that Kuyper tended to ground culture in the created order rather than in the order of redemption.⁵⁴ In this sense he

⁵⁴ Jeremy S. Begbie, "Creation, Christ and Culture in Dutch Neo-Calvinism," in *Christ*

is much like Barth and thus a classical Calvinist. Other authors such as David van Drunen argue that, for Kuyper, Christ exercises sovereignty over the world as redeemer rather than as Creator.⁵⁵ But even if this is so, then this means that the emphasis is tipped to the theology of the Cross, not the theology of the Incarnation.

If we agree with Begbie, then we may say in summary that Kuyper puts weight on creation (which is perhaps where his openness to natural law ideas come from, though that's another essay); that Barth puts weight on the eschaton (although the weight may have become lighter as he moved from the young Barth to the mature Barth); and that Ratzinger and other Catholic theologians put weight on the Incarnation, though of course the Incarnation remains suspended between the theology of creation and the theology of the Cross.⁵⁶ Fundamentally, there are different interpretations of what St. Paul meant about restoring all things in Christ so that he may be all in all, and different interpretations of what St. Peter meant about growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Friedrich Nietzsche said that if Christians wanted him to believe in their redeemer, then they would have to start looking a lot more redeemed. If when people hear of Calvinism they think of the *Simpsons* character Ned Flanders, or if when they hear of Catholicism they think of Fr. Ted from the Irish comedy series, then there is no wonder that the world is full of Nietzscheans. The burden, from the Catholic side, is to show that a life spent participating in sacraments makes a significant difference to one's humanity. 

in Our Place: The Humanity of God in Christ for the Reconciliation of the World: Essays Presented to Professor James Torrance, ed. Daniel P. Thimell and Trevor A. Hart (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1991), 126.

⁵⁵ David van Drunen, *Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), esp. chap. 7.

⁵⁶ Peter McGregor argues that what is sometimes called Ratzinger's "preferential option for the Gospel of St. John" is because, at least in part, St. John emphasizes the identity of *Logos* and *Agape* and thereby draws together the theology of the Incarnation with the theology of the Cross. See Peter McGregor, "The Spiritual Theology of Joseph Ratzinger," PhD manuscript, Australian Catholic University, 2013.

