Secularisation and Resacralisation:

False Alternatives for a Missionary Church

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Abstract: *In his work,* Theology and Social Theory *John Milbank proffers the alternatives of naturalising the supernatural, which he identifies with the theology of Karl Rahner and claims promotes secularisation, and supernaturalising the natural which he identifies with the theology of Henri de Lubac with a political goal of a restored Christendom; these two options of a secularism which excludes the divine from the social order and a resacralisation which seeks to restore the sacred alliance between Church and state present false alternatives. This paper considers the alternatives of sacralisation and secularisation through the lens of the grace-nature debate and what Pope Francis calls the "missionary option." The distinct ecclesial styles of Popes Benedict XVI and Francis will be drawn upon to illustrate the position developed.*

***Key Words*:** Secularisation, secularism, resacralisation, Pope Francis, Pope Benedict XVI, grace, nature, mission

Theological discussions over the significance of secularisation, and its more aggressive ideological counterpart, secularism, have been going on for some decades. Harvey Cox's seminal work, *A Secular City*, sought to highlight the positive opportunities for the churches made available in the secular landscape of urban living.[1] Peter Berger brought to bear sociological insights into the process of secularisation and its impact on religious life.[2] Most recently Charles Taylor's magisterial work, *A Secular Age*, has spelt out the historical process leading up to and underlying our present secularity.[3] Taylor's carefully delineated philosophical, sociological, and cultural narrative deconstructs various simplistic accounts of the emergence of secularisation, while focussing our attention on the oversights present in those simplistic accounts, for example, the high levels of religious observance in USA co-existing with a constitutionally enforced separation of church and state. [4]

Of particular concern for the Catholic Church has been the rapid decline in religious practice and cultural influence in Europe, once the heart of Christendom. Countries once considered Catholic strongholds, Belgium, France, Italy, and Ireland, are now adopting social and legal changes which directly challenge Church positions on questions of divorce,

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[1] Harvey Gallagher Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, 25th Anniversary ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1990).

[2] Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London,: Faber, 1969).

[3] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2007).

[4] Ibid. 2.

abortion, same sex marriage, and euthanasia. Europe as a whole struggled to find a place in its constitution to acknowledge its rich Christian heritage, while its classical humanist tradition could be identified and lauded. Faced with this decline in practice and influence Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI launched a program of re-evangelization directed not to the previously missionary regions of Africa and Asia, but into the heartland of Europe itself, seeking to reinvigorate Catholicism in its historic strongholds.

It is clear that a major aspect of the strategy of re-evangelization under John Paul II and Benedict XVI has been the strong assertion of a distinctive Catholic identity, one which re-asserts its liturgical and religious-cultural aspects, such as forms of piety and religious observance, in the face of the desacralizing power of secularity. Benedict in particular placed a strong emphasis on the role of the liturgy, lifting restrictions on the use of the Latin mass and returning on occasion to the pre-Vatican II practice of facing the altar while celebrating the mass. At least in English speaking countries these moves were accompanied by the introduction of a new translation of the mass which sought to resacralize liturgical language, adding an aesthetic dimension that had supposedly been lost in the translation post-Vatican II. Paralleling the theme of the film *Field of Dreams* ("if you build it, they will come"), a key strategy of the new evangelization was to attract people to the Church through the beauty of its liturgical celebrations. At the same time, however, there was debate over the notion of the "smaller, purer Church", a more devout, more religiously intense, more loyal band who would carry the Church into the future.[5]

Outside of first world countries such as Europe and the US, the picture of Catholicism is very different. Numbers are growing and the main "opponent" so to speak, are not secularism or atheism but Pentecostals and Evangelicals siphoning off Catholics into their burgeoning communities. Religion is far from being on the wane in the two-thirds world of the South. The election of a new pope from the global south, Pope Francis, has brought a different vision for the future of the Church, one less tied to European forms and culture, less constrained liturgically, and more engaged with social issues around poverty and injustice. These issues, deemed peripheral by those opposed to secularisation, are now back into central focus for a new pontificate. Francis is committed to a Church that goes out to the margins, that does not wait for the world to come to it, but reaches out to the world with the Gospel message. The undoubted impact of the new papacy is evidence of a Church constantly able to renew and revitalise itself through a focus on its Gospel mission.

The two contrasting approaches form a symbolic framing of the issues of secularisation and sacralisation. This article will explore the theological and ecclesiological dimension of the tensions between the two approaches, through a consideration of the grace-nature debate (theological) and the dialectic between mission and identity in the Church (ecclesiological). I shall then return to framing the issue around the different orientations of Benedict and Francis.

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[5] There is some debate over whether Ratzinger/Benedict ever used the phrase "smaller, purer church" and if he did (in some sense) whether it was an empirical observation or a strategic goal. See the blog discussion by Joseph Komonchak: https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/smaller-purer-church. It appears to be been an attitude attributed to him by both supporters and detractors alike. However, he has spoken of Christians as constituting a "creative minority" in secular society. See Joseph Ratzinger, "Europe: Its Spiritual Foundation: Yesterday, Today and in the Future" available at http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=6317&repos=1&subrepos=&searchid=292730 [Both accessed 20 April 2016].

THE THEOLOGICAL ISSUE

In his flawed study of the question of the relationship between theology and the social sciences, John Milbank begins with the provocative assertion, "Once there was no secular."[6] This assertion is meant to remind us that the whole notion of the secular is a social construct, not a natural reality, that there have been times in human history such as the Middle Ages (and prior) when the category of the secular in its modern sense would not have been recognised, and that what has been social constructed can also be deconstructed and reconstructed in different ways. Milbank proceeds with an attempt to ground the emergence of the secular as socially correlated with the emerging grace-nature distinction that gave theological legitimacy to a relatively autonomous realm of the "natural" over and against the sacred. It allowed for an increasing desacralization of society and the emergence of an aggressive secularisation culminating in the largely secular world we now experience.

Of course the recognition that the notion of the secular is a social construct, while perhaps a little disorienting initially, in the end proves very little. All social institutions and orderings too are social constructs, and we live in a social world mediated by meanings and values, though at times we forget this. The question is, does the notion of the secular as it has emerged in western society represent a more intelligent, reasonable and responsible solution to the problem of people living together in peace, justice, and mutual respect, than does the alternative? If the alternative to the emergence of the secular order is a sacralisation that terminates in theocracy or Christendom, then do we really want the value of our religious life judged by whether the trains run on time and the garbage is regularly collected?[7]

Where Milbank is correct is in identifying the basic theological question as one involving the grace-nature distinction. If I may vary Milbank's opening line, "once there was no grace-nature distinction." It arose in the Middle Ages in response to a number of theological disputes around questions of grace and freedom. What dominated the prior theological landscape was the grace-sin dialectic, so prominent in Augustine and borne of his heated polemic with Pelagius and Pelagius' follower, Julian of Enclanum.[8] Within this dialectic either one was in the realm of grace or one was in the realm of sin, though the dividing line was hidden in the mystery of divine providence. Existentially this dialectic account may be correct but it left open questions about what it means to be human, and what constitutes human nature *per se*. In which realm does it sit? This is not to say that Augustine had no conception of human nature; however it was an empirical and changing

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[6] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991). For an alternate account of the significance of this observation see Neil Ormerod, *Re-Visioning the Church: An Experiment in Systematic-Historical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), where I identify a major cultural shift from cosmologically orientated culture to a more anthropologically orientated culture taking place during the Middle Ages. The cosmological ordering of society tends not to recognise a possible non-sacred space, whereas an anthropological ordering tends to de-sacralise the natural order. See Chap 7-8.

[7] This is not as frivolous as it might sound. There are reports from Iran that people are increasingly disillusioned in their faith by the economic problems of the country. If religion presents itself as a total package for all social problems it will bear the opprobrium for social failures as well.

[8] See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California, 1967), for an account of this bruising battle.

conception—there was human nature before the Fall, after the Fall, as graced or as reprobate.[9]

This changed with the introduction of a metaphysical notion of human nature in the work of Phillip Chancellor (c.1160–1236). He introduced "the theory of two orders, entitatively disproportionate: not only was there the familiar series of grace, faith, charity, and merit, but also nature, reason, and the natural love of God."[10] The distinction made it possible simply "(1) to discuss the nature of grace without discussing liberty, (2) to discuss the nature of liberty without discussing grace, and (3) to work out the relations between grace and liberty."[11] Lonergan refers to this development as the theorem of the supernatural.[12] By this term, he sought to indicate the theoretical nature of the development. It was not as if earlier theologians did not have a concept of the supernatural. The problem they had was distinguishing the supernatural from everything else, with the subsequent dangers of either making everything grace, or labeling that which is not grace, in particular all the actions of pagans, as sinful, a position I refer to as the grace-sin dialectic. The introduction of the notion of nature establishes the "validity of a line of reference" in relationship to the supernatural.[13] It is a theoretical construct, but nonetheless an important one to make. If one may make an analogy: just as heat and cold as felt differ from temperature as measured by a thermometer (the former taking into account humidity, wind chill etc.), so the human beings we encounter never quite align with human nature conceived as an explanatory construct. However, without a notion of temperature, one cannot do thermodynamics; similarly without a notion of human nature (as a theoretic construct) we cannot develop a proper science of theology. The full theoretic force of the distinction is evident in the work of Thomas Aquinas, particularly his *Summa Theologiae*.

What the creation of the theoretical distinction allows us to do is to speak of an order of human activity which is good in and of itself, though not of itself salvific, without reference to divine grace. Further it is a good that can be achieved, however spasmodically, even by a sinner. As Aquinas notes:

> In the state of corrupt nature he falls short of what nature makes possible, so that he cannot by his own power fulfil the whole good that pertains to his nature. Human nature is not so entirely corrupted by sin, however, as to be deprived of natural good altogether. Consequently, even in the state of corrupt nature a man can do some particular good by the power of his own nature, such as build houses. … But he cannot achieve the whole good natural to him, as if he lacked nothing.

This realm of activity is good in its own right, not by reference to some sacred order, but in terms of its proportion to a human nature thought of as naturally oriented to that good. It

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[9] As Lonergan notes, "the whole problem lies in the abstract, in human thinking: the fallacy in early thought had been an unconscious confusion of the metaphysical abstraction 'nature' with the concrete data which do not quite correspond" (Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan [Toronto: University of Toronto, 2000] 17). See also Roger Haight, *The Experience and Language of Grace* (New York: Paulist, 1979) 56: "For Augustine the concept of nature is concrete, existential and historical. For him, human nature stands for what human beings are at any given period of history."

[10] , Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom* 17

[11] *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 310.

[12] *Grace and Freedom* 17.

[13] Ibid. 17.

does not need some reference to the sacred in order to be good, but it does need such a reference in order to be salvific.

Of course the emergence of the grace-nature distinction raises further questions concerning the relationship between the good that is connatural to human nature, and achievable by it, and the supernatural good which is our ultimate destiny. In the history of theological reflection there have been some less successful attempts to give an account of this relationship, notably that of extrinsicism which posits no real relationship between them. Much of the movement call the *nouvelle théologie* was an attempt to overcome the inadequacies of this approach and it remains the case that there is no generally accepted account to resolve this issue.[14] However, if the only alternative is to relapse into a grace-sin dialectic, efforts at a resolution should continue.[15]

If we maintain the grace-nature distinction, we can acknowledge a relatively autonomous order of human activity, good in its own right, in which we can rightly engage, not part of a sacred order and hence secular in that sense. Here our use of language is important. In scholastic terms the "natural" is an order, not a realm or a sphere. The image of distinct realms or spheres implies too much, an almost physical separation. The image of an order is less susceptible to imagining; it implies an intelligible ordination to an end, not a separate or different type of activity altogether. The natural order is only relatively autonomous because it remains open to a higher, supernatural ordination which does not destroy it, but completes and perfects it. Any natural reality is open to such a completing and perfecting, as is evident in Catholic sacramentalism.

While the emergence of modern secularity is undoubtedly a complex process involving a number of factors, the ability of the Church to affirm the relative autonomy of the secular order, as found in Vatican II, does finds theological grounding in the grace-nature distinction. Bernard Mulcahy rightly notes, "An exclusively theological account of secularization is surely simplistic."[16] Nonetheless the emergence of the distinction between grace and nature does assist us in understanding the theological nature of the distinction between the sacred and the secular. The fact that once neither distinction was recognized is simply of no significance, theologically or politically.

THE ECCLESIOLOGICAL ISSUE

This discussion of the differences between the grace-sin dialectic and the grace-nature distinction plays out in quite different ecclesiological understandings of the relationship between the Church and the world. Under the influence of the grace-sin dialectic it is all too easy to conceive of the Church as falling under the sway of grace and the world as

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[14] For an excellent account of this debate and the various theological options available at the time see Stephen Duffy, *The Graced Horizon: Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic thought* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992).

[15] See for example Neil Ormerod, "The Grace–Nature Distinction and the Construction of a Systematic Theology," *Theological Studies* 75/3 (2014): 515-36; "Addendum on the Grace–Nature Distinction," *Theological Studies* 75/4 (2014): 890-98. Also Bernard Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac: Not Everything is Grace* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011); Steven Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (Bronx, NY, USA: Fordham University, 2010).

[16] Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature* 141. Mulcahy identifies other factors: effects of war, trade, legal developments, technology, science, urbanization, as well as ecclesial factors such as the Catholic Church's alliance with royal absolutism.

under the sway of sin. We can see this is the ecclesiology presented in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*: "She [the Church] is also called universal, because all who desire eternal salvation must cling to and embrace her, like those who entered the ark to escape perishing in the flood."[17] People must cling to the Church—the movement is not outwards from the Church to the world, but from the world to the Church. Indeed special emphasis is given to Noah's ark as a type for the Church. The ark is a safe haven, safe from the dangers of eternal death. We enter the Church as we enter the ark, to escape from the destruction that the world faces. Indeed the world (along with the flesh and the devil) is described in the *Catechism* as an implacable enemy.[18] This type of understanding of the Church-world relationship dominated the Church from the period of the Council of Trent until the modern era. Of course in the hands of people with the nuance of Augustine, the grace-sin/Church-world parallels never quite aligned, but in more polemic settings such subtlety is easily lost.

On the other hand, if we adopt the stance of the grace-nature distinction, the world apart from the Church cannot be dismissed simply as a world of sin and temptation. There is a genuine good there which we can affirm, and at times we may even learn from it. The Church is no longer the sole repository of wisdom. Indeed, because we conceive of the grace-nature distinction as a distinction of orders, not realms or spheres, it may even be possible to acknowledge the presence of grace outside the boundaries of the Church, in the hearts and minds of others: other Christian communities; other religious communities; and more generally, men and women of good will. This is not to deny the presence of sin and evil in the world, but such a recognition must go hand in hand with a frank acknowledgement that sin and evil are also to be found in the Church itself.[19] Of course all this and more can be found in the ecclesiological vision of Vatican II which opened to door to genuine dialogue with the world. It acknowledged the presence of grace within other Christian communities, other religions communities, and among men and women of good will, to whom the means of salvation (grace), apart from the Church, cannot be denied, while frankly acknowledging failures within the church itself.[20]

These two positions generate quite different understandings of the Church's mission or task in the world. The first position generates a conception of mission which is *centripetal*; it understands the task of the Church to be to draw all people to itself so that the Church's primary task is to be strong in its identity, to establish clear boundaries between itself and the world, and to offer a clear and attractive alternative to the ways of the world. It stresses integration over operation, identity over transformation, separation over collaboration. We can find examples of this approach in the writings of the Radical Orthodoxy movement with its romantic attachment to earlier ecclesial forms (usually medieval Christendom), an emphasis on the transcendental of beauty as an attractant for non-believers (especially through the liturgy), and an almost fideistic assertion of

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[17] *Catechism of the Council of Trent for Parish Priests*, trans. John A. McHugh and Charles J. Callan (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1943) 106.

[18] Ibid. 99.

[19] On the ways in which the actions of Christians contribute to the problem of unbelief, see *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19.

[20] On salvation outside the boundaries of the Church see *Lumen Gentium* n. 16.

Christian truth in the face of modern and post-modern forms of rationality.[21] This is joined with an attack on those in the Church who would find common cause with people and movements apart from the Church in the task of building a just and sustainable society. Those in the Church concerned with social justice, it is claimed, reduce Christianity to politics and "naturalise the supernatural." Liberation theology is often targeted in this regard.[22] In terms of an ecclesial program, the Church then has two options: either sectarian withdrawal from the secular world in order to maintain its identity unsullied by contact with the world; or to subsume the secular within itself and thus sacralise it in a return to the idealised past of Christendom.

The second position generates a conception of mission which is *centrifugal*; it understands the task of mission as moving out into the world to join in a common task of world transformation, of building up God's kingdom. This vision of the Church's mission is ably identified in the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*:

> The Kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realisation of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness. (n. 15)

In this vision, concern for the kingdom and working for its realisation transcend the boundaries of the Church; they are the "concern of everyone" because "evil in all its forms" both outside and inside the Church affect everyone, personally, culturally and socially. This focus on the kingdom rather than the Church moves the Church beyond itself and in the process the Church's identity is transformed, taking on new social and cultural forms as it engages in its mission.[23] It is also a vision that invites and even requires collaboration with those outside the Church, because the Church of itself does not claim to have the only resources to bring to bring to bear on the problem of evil. The solution requires not just the transforming power of grace, but practical insights into the concrete situation needing to be addressed, insights which can arise anywhere from anyone.[24] There are of course risks to such a mission-oriented strategy, risks that the identity of the Church may be weakened, distorted, or otherwise compromised. Certainly it is possible to identify situations and contexts where this weakening of identity may be said to have occurred. However, if the alternative is sectarian stagnation and irrelevance to those outside the Church, then the risks may be worth taking.

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[21] Apart from Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, see also: John Milbank, Graham Ward, and Edith Wyschogrod, *Theological Perspectives on God and Beauty* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2003); John Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Cascade Books, 2009); Catherine Pickstock, *After writing : on the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998).

[22] In particular see Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* 234–37.

[23] The classic example of this is the way in which the Church took on the pagan world, not retreating into a sectarian option by seeking to transform that world in a project that took centuries to achieve. In that process the Church itself was transformed in its practices and social forms. See Ormerod, *Re-visioning the Church*, particularly Chap .7 & 8 for details.

[24] One might think, for example, of the insights gained from the feminist and ecological movements in the twentieth century.

Part of the ecclesial difficulty we face, it seems to me, is that post-Trent the Counter-Reformation Church lost trust in its mission to the world, set itself over and against the world, and became increasingly sectarian in outlook. While Trent itself achieved a major transformation of the Church, this transformation became phase locked in anti-Protestant, anti-democratic, and to some extent anti-scientific mentalities.[25] This stance was in place for so long, centuries in fact, that many have assumed that this is the "normal" position for the Church to be in. It was only at Vatican II that a new vision of the Church's relationship to the world began to shift to recapture some of the energy and creativity needed to bring the Gospel message to a spiritually hungry world. It is not surprising that some within the Church found the shift so unsettling that they went into schism (the Lefebvrists). They longed for a return to Christendom, the restoration of the privileges of the Church and of the monarchy in France. They rejected the redefining of the Church's relationship to the world: to other Christian churches, to non-Christian religions and to the world in general. The means of grace were for them the sole preserve of the Church. Liturgically they sought to maintain the mass of Trent as the only valid form of the mass, rather than adopt the liturgical renewals initiated by the Council. This was a major attempt to re-sacralise the social order according to the norms of Christendom. Nonetheless any major period of transformation is going to generate anxiety over questions of identity (some of them genuine), and those anxieties emerged as the decades after Vatican II passed.

BENEDICT AND FRANCIS: CONTRASTING ORIENTATIONS

It is not difficult to align these ecclesial tensions onto the pontificates of Benedict XVI and Francis. The catchcry of the later years of the pontificate of John Paul II, strongly expounded by then Cardinal Ratzinger and continued in his papacy, was the "reform of the reform." However, this was not a reform to push the reforms of Vatican II further, but a reform to correct the supposed aberrations introduced by the Council. It was an attempt to consolidate identity, to establish boundaries, to promote integration. It is not surprising that the favoured ecclesiology of this era, claimed to be *the* ecclesiology of Vatican II, was *communio* ecclesiology.[26] The stress on unity/communion was easily used as a way of quietening dissenting voices which were seen as "breaking communion" with the whole.[27] Now, one might agree that not everything that happened post-Vatican II was right, but the effect of this stress on ecclesial identity over ecclesial mission was to turn the Church in on itself and to promote an increasingly sectarian form of Catholicism. This was evident in the papal support given to a number of lay movements and new religious orders (some of it very misguided) which stressed loyalty to the pope and asserted a strong sense of Catholic

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[25] In Ormerod, *Re-visioning the Church* 314-323, I identify five major "revolutions" that shaped the Western world after the Reformation: the scientific revolution; the industrial revolution; the philosophical revolution (the turn to subjectivity); the political revolution (democratic and republican); and the critical historical revolution. In each case the Church found itself "on the wrong side of history" and increasingly isolated from the forces shaping the modern world.

[26] As Joseph Komonchak has repeatedly pointed out, there is no one ecclesiology to be found in the documents of Vatican II. I would argue in fact that the emergence of communio ecclesiology in the 1980s as the favoured ecclesiastical approach was more an expression of anxiety over change than a proper reading of the documents. For a non communio approach to ecclesiology see my article "A (Non-Communio) Trinitarian Ecclesiology: Grounded in Grace, Lived in Faith, Hope, and Charity," *Theological Studies* 76/3 (2015): 448-67.

[27] The sacking of Bishop William Morris from the diocese of Toowoomba in Queensland is a case in point. His attempt to raise discussion on the question of ordination of married men and of women was seen as "breaking communion" with the Church. More logically this should have resulted in excommunication rather than simply removal from office.

identity.[28] Benedict provided powerful and compelling critiques of secularism and the decline of the influence of Christianity in Europe and was a strong proponent of a re-evangelisation whose emphasis was bringing people back to the Church. His liturgical reforms, re-establishing the Tridentine rite, promoting the positioning of the priest facing the altar (*ad orientam*), and the implementation of the new English translation with its decidedly more sacral language (e.g. chalice rather than cup), all moved in the direction of a return to the identity of the Church prior to Vatican II. One way or another Benedict's pontificate became a shape focus for the anxieties that arose in relation to the changes wrought by Vatican II. For many people, however, it gave the appearance of being focussed on internal matters, on identity politics, with a corresponding decline in and even disparagement of a world transforming mission of building God's kingdom.

In fact we can find such a diagnosis of the Church under Benedict in the stance of Pope Francis. In his pre-conclave speech, then Cardinal Jorje Bergoglio spoke of the dangers of a Church becoming "self-referential" and "sick." He warned of the dangers of a "theological narcissism" overtaking the Church. He referred to the Gospel image of Jesus knocking on the door wanting to enter our lives. "But think of the times when Jesus knocks from within to let himself out. The self-referential Church seeks Jesus Christ within and does not let him out":

> The Church is called to come out of herself and to go to the peripheries, not only in the geographical sense but also to go to the existential peripheries: those of the mysteries of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and of religious indifference, of thought, of all misery.[29]

Statements such as these do not arise in an ecclesial or theological vacuum. They are not a disinterested statement of timeless theological truths. They arise from an analysis of the situation of the Church and the direction it had taken in the last eight and possibly more years. For all the personal respect and deference Francis has shown to his predecessor, emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, these words read like a repudiation of the direction in which the Church had moved under his papacy.

Pope Francis has continued the same themes in homilies and talks, as well as through symbolic actions, since his election. In a recent homily reported by the *Vatican Insider*, Francis spoke of the need for the church to build bridges, not walls.

> Christians who are afraid to build bridges and prefer to build walls are Christians who are not sure of their faith, not sure of Jesus Christ. … When the Church loses this apostolic courage, she becomes a stalled Church, a tidy Church … a Church that is nice to look at, but that is without fertility, because she has lost the courage to go to the outskirts. [30]

The Church is called to be inclusive in its mission:

> I remember when as a child one would hear in Catholic families, in my family, 'No, we cannot go to their house, because they are not married in the Church, eh!'. It was as an exclusion. No, you could not go! Neither could we go to [the houses of] socialists or

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[28] For example, Opus Dei, the Neo-catechumenate, Focolare, the Legionnaires of Christ and so on.

[29] Available at http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/papa-pope-el-papa-bergoglio-23618/ [Accessed 30 April 2014].

[30] For this and subsequent quotes in this paragraph see http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/the-vatican/detail/articolo/papa-el-papa-pope-24654/ [Accessed 30 April, 2014].

atheists. Now, thank God, people do not say such things, right? [Such an attitude] was a defence of the faith, but it was one of walls: the LORD made bridges.

He acknowledged that taking this path may lead to the Church making mistakes. But "if you make a mistake, you get up and go forward: that is the way. Those who do not walk in order not to err, make a more serious mistake."

The themes are strongly evident in Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium,* with its strong focus on the mission of the Church.[31] Francis reminds us that "The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him 'to go forth'" (EG n. 20). The mission of the Church is not fulfilled in seeking to draw people to the Church, but in going out into the world, to meet people where they are at. Indeed the Church is called to be in "a permanent state of mission" (EG n. 25). More fully:

> I dream of a "missionary option", that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. The renewal of structures demanded by pastoral conversion can only be understood in this light: as part of an effort to make them more mission-oriented, to make ordinary pastoral activity on every level more inclusive and open, to inspire in pastoral workers a constant desire to go forth and in this way to elicit a positive response from all those whom Jesus summons to friendship with himself. As John Paul II once said to the Bishops of Oceania: "All renewal in the Church must have mission as its goal if it is not to fall prey to a kind of ecclesial introversion." (EG n. 27)

Francis has a few words to say about secularisation and secularism which "tends to reduce the faith and the Church to the sphere of the private and personal" (EG n. 64), but despite this he claims:

> Catholic Church is considered a credible institution by public opinion, and trusted for her solidarity and concern for those in greatest need. Again and again, the Church has acted as a mediator in finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights, and so forth. And how much good has been done by Catholic schools and universities around the world! This is a good thing. Yet, we find it difficult to make people see that when we raise other questions less palatable to public opinion, we are doing so out of fidelity to precisely the same convictions about human dignity and the common good. (EG n. 65)

What is important here is to keep focus on the mission of the Church, to "finding solutions to problems affecting peace, social harmony, the land, the defence of life, human and civil rights, and so forth", or as John Paul II put it, to work for building up God's kingdom. As Francis states, "To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world" (EG n. 176). And finally, reflecting his Gospel optimism, "the enemy can intrude upon the kingdom and sow harm, but ultimately he is defeated by the goodness of the wheat" (EG n. 225).

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[31] Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [Accessed 30 April 2014].

CONCLUSION

When the grace-sin dialectic dominates our theological imaginations it is easy to analyse the tensions between sacralisation and secularisation as a battle between good and evil, forces of light verses forces of darkness. However, once we admit into our theological world the grace-nature distinction as constitutive of the social order, it becomes possible to acknowledge the validity of a secular order which is good of itself, not needing the sacred to make it truly worthwhile. The sacred order can then be welcomed as a gift which completes and perfects, without destroying, the underlying purposefulness and goodness of the secular order. It is somewhat ironic that some of the strongest rejections of a resacralisation of the secular order can be found in Benedict's encyclical, *Deus caritas est* (henceforth DCE) notably in its second half.[32] It is widely acknowledged that this second half was drafted by Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes on behalf of John Paul II in preparation for an encyclical on the Catholicity of Catholic charitable organisations. The encyclical makes it very clear that:

1. "[Catholic social teaching] has no intention of giving the Church power over the state."
2. "It recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life."
3. "[The Church] cannot and must not replace the state."
4. "A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church." (DCE n. 28)

Adopting a strong natural law approach, grounded in the grace-nature distinction, the encyclical reasserts the autonomy of the secular order whose norms are guided by reason, albeit assisted by grace, but still accountable to public norms of reason: "the Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the nature of every human being" (DCE n. 28). In fact this position underlies the "missionary option" promoted by Pope Francis, but it is a mission primarily of the laity in the world. Theirs is a mission within the secular order, precisely as secular, promoting the Kingdom of God through their self-sacrificing love overcoming the effects of evil in the world and promoting the common good. Their actions do not sacralise the secular order, but they do redeem it where redemption is needed and celebrate it where they find genuine good and genuine human values at work.

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[32] Available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html [Accessed 20 April 2016].