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Introduction

Seekers and Dwellers: Plurality and Wholeness in a Time of Secularity

PHILIP J. ROSSI

The disjunction between “seekers” – “who wish to realize in their life new, more personally authentic, ways of being Christian and Catholic – and “dwellers” – “who feel that in the Church all is already clear, well defined and simply to be followed assiduously”¹ – served as the initial focus of discussion when the contributors to this volume first gathered at Marquette University in the fall of 2012. Our conversations soon made evident that, even as this disjunction offered a starting point for addressing the more encompassing question posed by Charles Taylor – “How does the Church speak to (as well as listen to) the world?” – it also provided coordinates for a grid upon which this disjunction intersected with key elements of the other three disjunctions (between authority and experience, between natural law and historicity, and between singular and plural spiritualities) Taylor articulated as interlaced into that more encompassing question.

In consequence, while the disjunction between seekers and dwellers provided the initial frame of reference for the development of these essays, the lines of analysis and argument in the essays then moved along differing, but nonetheless complementary trajectories. One trajectory offered opportunities for a significant engagement with the other disjunctions, while another allowed for probing in greater detail the conceptual and phenomenological contours of the “seekers-dwellers” disjunction in order to test – and in some cases to contest – the comprehensiveness, adequacy, and/or the nature of the contrast it depicts. As a result, while some essays have continued to employ this and the other three disjunctions as a relatively settled conceptual grid, others have treated them as a provisional heuristic frame of reference for a variety of analytic and interpretive strategies for engaging the dynamics of belief and unbelief in the cultures of modernity and its

¹ George F. McLean, “Introduction: Disjunctions in the 21st Century,” *Church and People: Disjunctions in a Secular Age*, Christian Philosophical Studies I, eds. Charles Taylor, José Casanova and George F. McLean (Washington, DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy), 2012, p. 1.

aftermath. From out of these strategies, these essays now encompass a number of proposals for rendering what started out as “disjunctions” into at least partially “conjunctive” modalities upon the terrain of secularity. The result is the articulation of range of possibilities for a transformative healing of these disjunctions so that what have all too often been perceived as sources of tension and division may be constructively discerned as invitations to engage the world in all its complexity and ambiguity as the locus in which God’s grace is operative all the way down.

Predicaments of Seeking: Fullness, Meaning, and Identity

The two essays in the first section, “Predicaments of Seeking: Fullness, Meaning, and Identity” probe the adequacy of the disjunction that Taylor makes between seekers and dwellers by proposing perspectives on the phenomena of “seeking” that are drawn from two sets of thinkers within the Anglo-American philosophical tradition.

David McPherson, in “Seeking Re-Enchantment,” explores “the predicament of the spiritual seeker today” by providing an account of the goal of that search in terms of the “normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life” that Taylor designates as “fullness.” McPherson articulates the predicament of the seeker in terms of the “disenchantment of the world,” which he takes to involve “a threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning.” Put in terms of Taylor’s account of a moral phenomenology of “strong evaluative experiences,” McPherson articulates the predicament of the modern spiritual seeker as “a condition in which a person seeks after a believable strong evaluative framework – in which he or she can achieve ‘fullness’ – against the threat of a total loss of strong evaluative meaning.” He engages two non-theistic responses to this predicament that have been articulated by Anglo-American philosophers, the quietist position espoused by John McDowell, and the “non-theistic cosmic teleological views” that have been put forth by Mary Midgley and Thomas Nagel. McPherson argues that neither is adequate in comparison to a theistic response of the personalist kind advocated by Taylor for which a “telos of communion” forms a central component of human fullness. McPherson thus argues that, in contrast both to McDowell’s quietism and Midgley’s and Nagel’s non-theistic cosmic

teleology, “theism provides a purposeful framework by which we can identify our natural tendencies towards interpersonal communion as part of what is ‘noblest and best’ about us and thus to be cultivated as part of a normatively higher, more worthwhile, more meaningful mode of life.”

In contrast to McPherson, James South, in “Seekers and Dwellers: Some Critical Reflections on Charles Taylor’s Account of Identity” presses Taylor’s distinction between seekers and dwellers in terms of what South sees as its focus upon authenticity as a key element in identity and thus as central to a seeker’s search “for meaning in life.” After distinguishing between two kinds of seekers – those who know “the end point is a return home after years of self-imposed wanderings (those who believe again)” and those who “do not know the end point of the journey (pure seekers),” South locates Taylor’s account within the interplay between Augustine’s inwardness and Montaigne’s perspectivalism within such a human quest for identity. He then engages a number of American thinkers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Stanley Cavell, to articulate, in contrast to what he sees as Taylor’s paradigm of “seeking” as a search for one’s essential identity, an account of seeking as a “never-ending search.” The upshot of South’s discussion is to draw a contrast between “the seeker who is a philosopher, who does not know where she will end up” and the seeker as “someone who does in fact know there is The Way but cannot seem to find it from where she currently is” – a contrast which he sees placing the second kind of seeker (which South takes to be Taylor’s “seeker”) in a fundamental alignment with the dweller in that a space of “habitation” is ultimately the end point for both. For the first kind of seeker, however, the culmination of the quest seems to be not “habitation,” but rather as Cavell describes it, an “abandonment” that “the achievement of the human requires”; it is “not inhabitation and settlement but abandonment, leaving ... [in which] you can treat the others there are as those to whom the inhabitation of the world can now be left..” South’s conclusion thus opens up an important dimension of the question of how the Church can be/become kenotic: it poses the challenge of what would the Church have to become in order for it to be “that to which a philosophical seeker can abandon herself.”

Contexts for Dwelling and Seeking: The Church in the World

The essays in the second section, "Contexts for Dwelling and Seeking: The Church in the World," turn from a focus on the inner dynamics of seeking and dwelling to analyses of the larger social contexts that both provide – and, in important ways, can also take away – intelligibility for the human projects of "seeking" and "dwelling."

In "The Church and the World: A Response to Charles Taylor's View of a Contemporary Disjunction," Ed Block argues that there are larger conditions in the early twenty-first century that militate against *both* seekers and dwellers in their respective efforts to attain fullness. Chief among these conditions, in Block's analysis, are the dynamics of the twenty-first century capitalism that places value on immediate material satisfaction that anesthetizes us into the condition that the Jesuit Superior General Adolfo Nicolás has characterized as the "globalization of superficiality." Block sees this dynamic having a significant impact upon the understanding and exercise of authority, the field in which Taylor has located the second disjunction incapacitating the Church's capacity to address the world. Drawing resources from Hans-George Gadamer and Blessed John Henry Newman Block proposes the reconstruction of a "thick" account of authority in which mutual trust provides the deepest and most reliable motivation. Block further argues that the "unreflective instrumentalization of the self ... which has resulted in what Taylor describes as the "buffered" self, inhibits the ability of the individual seeker or dweller to achieve fullness, wholeness." Block concludes by suggesting that one important direction along which to enact effective resistance to the instrumentalization and anesthetization that the ambient culture has brought to bear upon seeker and dweller alike lies in the recovery and renewal of a range of individual and communal contemplative practices; such a renewal would enable us to be touched by the epiphanic and transformative nature of a lived human experience that has learned to attend to the transcendent call of the good, the true and the beautiful.

Thomas Hughson's essay, "Kenotic Ecclesiology: Context, Orientations, Secularity," suggests that the context in which Taylor has discerned his four disjunction may itself be indicative of a larger disjunction of succumbing to an "us-them" mentality in which efforts

to engage one another across any of the disjunctions become contentious struggles to make “them” conform to “our” way. Hughson sees such evidence for such a disjunction from data that indicate a division between what he terms “social Catholicism” and “conventional Catholicism” that, within the Catholic Church in the United States, affects clergy and laity alike as a difference *within* the respective places in which they stand in the life of the church. Echoing Block, Hughson offers a number of reminders that, even as the Church is rightly faithful to Vatican II’s call to engage the world as the locus in which God’s grace is deeply operative – though often challenging to discern – that engagement must also be rightfully attentive to the eschatological character of the Church’s mission: In a world not yet fully redeemed, the Church is often also called to be “out of phase” with the world. Hughson offers an overview of some of the important debates in Vatican II that re-enforce this crucial theological point and forcefully argues that “the Church has a calling to exemplify social existence transformed by the power of Christ and in light of the gospel, not to be a fawning spaniel in the lap of late capitalism sunk into liberal-democratic nationalism.” Hughson concludes with an astute analysis of how a kenotic ecclesiology needs to be rooted in a theology attentive to the immanent kenotic dynamic of the Triune God in order to create the space needed for the Church’s concrete institutional freedom to be effective in its mission to the world.

Seekers and Dwellers: Re-Reading Experience

The two essays in the third section, “Seekers and Dwellers: Re-reading Experience” offer perspectives on two issues that the authors each argue pose particularly deep and complex challenges to the Catholic Church’s efforts to address the realities of contemporary culture. What links the challenges they each present is a reading of the experiences of seeking and dwelling from perspectives that the authors indicate have yet to be fully engaged in the Church’s reflective encounter with the contemporary world. In one case, the overlooked perspective is one shaped by embedded attitudes and practices experienced as forms of “spiritual violence” that affect what one sees as appropriate possibilities for one’s own seeking and/or of dwelling. In the second case, the other perspective is that of an alternate cosmology, one of non-duality, such as exemplified in Advaita

Vedanta, the metaphysics of Classical Hinduism. In this case, the overlooked perspective is that of a “deeply questioning spiritual realist” who is concerned not so much with a search for an authenticity identity but rather with “discerning the nature of the transcendent world and its significance for us,” and for whom the cosmology perceived as embedded in Catholic doctrine is judged inadequate.

Theresa Tobin’s essay, “Spiritual Violence, Gender, and Sexuality: Implications for Seeking and Dwelling Among Some Catholic Women and LGBT Catholics,” thus offers a descriptive and analytic account the phenomenon of “spiritual violence” as a locus in which there are crossings and re-crossings among the fissures between a number of the disjunctions that Taylor has typified. Tobin’s account focuses on “the experience of spiritual violence perpetrated ... by their own faith tradition” against many America Catholic women and LBGT Catholics in order, first, to “examine spiritualities of seeking and dwelling through the experience of spiritual violence” and then “conversely [to] explore the experience of spiritual violence through the lenses of seeking and dwelling.” Her essay thus first explores “how one’s spiritual orientation as a seeker or dweller may influence her experience of and response to spiritual violence” and then proceeds to consider “how experiences of spiritual violence may impact shifts in an individual’s spiritual orientation from dwelling to seeking.” Though her account does not extensively engage the second and third of Taylor’s disjunctions (respectively, between models of authority and between natural law and experience in matters of morality), it does point in a direction that suggests the continuing efforts to engage this issue will likely bring to light a number of important loci upon which there is deep convergence among the four disjunctions. A further important consequence that Tobin sees issuing from the experience of those who have been subject to spiritual violence is the generation of two important “sub-categories of spiritual orientation” that put together, though in different ways with different emphases, elements of the orientations both of “seeking” and of “dwelling.” She then concludes with a brief reflection of the potential impact upon the dynamics of seeking and dwelling in consequence of Pope Francis’s “call to cultivate a faith that both dwells and seeks, and especially that is capable of holding a healthy tension between dwelling and seeking.”

The second essay in this part, Alan Madry's essay "Seekers, Comparative Spiritual Narratives, and the Authority of the Church," sets forth an issue within which he sees an intersection upon which the first (seekers and dwellers), second (modes of authority), and fourth (diverse spiritualities) disjunctions all converge. Pursuing a line of argument that resonates with James South's reservations about the centrality of an "authenticity identity" for characterizing the quest of the seeker, Madry characterizes the seeker who poses the greatest challenge to Catholic authority as "a deeply questioning spiritual realist." By this he means someone who is not primarily looking for some satisfactory form of "authentic identity" but instead "for ... a more compelling and comprehensive [metaphysical and cosmological] account of the spiritual and practices that arise integrally out of that account and promise something more than a speculative reward after death for their labors." Madry thus offers a comparative account of the metaphysics and cosmology operative in Catholic theology (as he finds it represented in the *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*) in contrast to the cosmology of Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualist metaphysics of Classical Hinduism. The method he employs in this comparison is "that of cumulative case reasoning/inference to the best explanation, the method, with empirical observation and induction, of empirical science, the law, and daily life." Madry acknowledges that there is little new in the criticism he offers of the paradoxical character of Catholic teaching with respect to the doctrines of God, the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the nature and destiny of the human soul, but the burden of his argument is not to so much to offer a new perspective on Catholic seeking, but rather to indicate why some might look "beyond the Catholic tradition to other accounts of the spiritual that may well go further in satisfying the demands of epistemic rigor ... for discerning the nature of the transcendent world and its significance for us." To that end, he offers an overview of the Advaita cosmology that he sees addressing the paradoxes of the *Catechism's* cosmology; on the basis of what he proposes as metaphysical strengths of Advaita Vedanta, he concludes with the hope that an engagement with its alternate cosmology might be of benefit to seekers on two counts. It would, in the manner of the Catholic mystic Bernadette Roberts, make a "radical transformation of [the believer's] understanding of Jesus and Christ in

the spirit" possible, as well as "providing practices capable of leading the seeker to profound experiences of spiritual awakening."

From Disjunctions to Wholeness

The fourth section, "From Disjunctions to Wholeness," contains essays that, in addition to providing three perspectives – theological, pedagogical, and philosophical – from which to gain an overview of the various disjunctions as they operate within and upon the church and contemporary culture, also trace paths along which dimensions of human wholeness can be discerned in such interplay.

Robert Doran, in "Invisible Missions: The Grace that Heals Disjunctions," suggests that Taylor's four disjunction operate within a larger category in which there is a "disjunction of the church from the very work of God in the contemporary world, a work that I will argue *includes, encourages, and even demands, rather than forbids or laments, a great deal of secularization.*" Doran argues that this larger category provides the horizon for the kind of discernments that are necessary for the healing of disjunctions. This horizon is constituted by "the acknowledgment of the universal presence of divine healing and elevating grace in the world through the invisible missions of Word and Spirit, divine Truth and divine Love, both inside the church and beyond the explicit contours of ecclesial membership." Working from a framework drawn from Bernard Lonergan and Thomas Aquinas, Doran argues for both a doctrinal and a theological continuity in the account his essay provides for understanding the affirmation made by Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes*, § 22) that "the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery." In particular, he emphasizes that there is need for an attentive discernment of grace as it is at work in "the dispensation whereby the evils of the human race are transformed into the greater good of a new community through the loving and non-violent response that returns good for evil." In consequence, Doran characterizes "the church's responsibility in our age" as one that requires it "to discern the presence of such participation in Trinitarian life wherever it may be found, and then to foster it and join hands with it in working for the establishment of God's reign in human affairs." Within this context Doran sees religious and spiritual plurality, the focus of Taylor's fourth disjunction, as a central theological locus for

the processes and practices that will enable the healing of all disjunctions: “The data relevant for Christian theology become all the data on the religious living of men and women at every age, in every religion, and in every culture.”

In “Disjunctions and a Jesuit Imaginary,” Daniel Hendrickson looks at the three experiments and exercises that constitute an important part of the formation of young Jesuits in terms of the role these exercises play as pedagogies for cultivating an alternative *imaginary* to the culturally pervasive “immanent frame. The first of these experiments consists in a “pedagogy of study,” founded in the reflective intellectual dynamics that inform the classical Jesuit program of studies, the *Ratio Studiorum*. Interpreting the dynamics of the *Ratio* in the light of Montaigne’s almost contemporaneous *Essays*, Hendrickson proposes that its techniques of self-examination and the dimensions of personal awareness that they cultivate serve to catalyze “the impulse to constructively engage other people and places” and to do so “with global impact.” He then indicates how a second kind of formative exercise for young Jesuits constitutes “a pedagogy of alterity” that, by focusing on a sense of otherness, “hopes to cultivate in students a pliability of their lives to the new environments – the lives, cultures, customs, and concepts – of other people.” The third pedagogy Hendrickson discuss is one that he terms “a pedagogy of grace,” which serves to “cultivate an orientation to a transcendent other, or at least invites a kind of transcendental orientation.” He then argues that these pedagogies, as “pedagogies of fullness,” can be effective in “disarming two malaises” that Taylor has diagnosed at work in the dynamic of a secular age: an array of relational disjunctions that ultimately entangle us within ourselves, and within the specific disjunctions that entrap the Church. In reference to the specific context of Jesuit and Catholic higher education, he sees the potential for these the pedagogies to open students of a secular age to a network of relationships for solidarity, healing, and wholeness. With regard to the governing Church hierarchy, the pedagogies would encourage a similar openness, particularly with respect to the two of the neuralgic disjunctions Taylor has identified in the current dynamics of the official workings of the church: first, perspectives that focus the meaning of what it means to live as a Roman Catholic principally upon a dynamic of “dwelling,” and second, in reluctance

and unwillingness to recognize spiritual experiences that are not explicitly Christic.

Finally, in “Seekers, Dwellers, and the Contingencies of Grace: Hospitality, Otherness, and the Enactment of Human Wholeness,” Philip Rossi takes the religious plurality at work in what Taylor calls “the nova effect” to serve as a central locus in which to open possibilities for the resolution of the various disjunctions in the dynamics of the cultures of secularity. He suggests that “the recognition, emergent in the aftermath of modernity, that the dynamic of plurality, which is rooted in the very relationality of human agency, is deeply consonant with a Christian account of the abundant operation of God’s grace manifest in the mysteries of Creation, the Incarnation of God’s Word, and the life giving outpouring of their Spirit.” Rossi argues that the dynamic of plurality manifest in the “nova effect” provides new and enlarged possibilities for recognizing and engaging the religious/spiritual “other” that already lies *within* the dynamics of both dwelling and seeking in the radical contingency of the world. On Rossi’s account the nova effect manifests – in ways that resonate with, yet also deeply challenge, the dynamics of the “immanent frame” of meaning constituted by secularity – the contingency and fragility of the otherness with which we all face both ourselves and one another in the workings of history and culture. An important marker of such shared contingency is found in what Taylor calls the “fragilization of belief,” which, for seeker and dweller alike, creates spaces of uncertain or occluded meaning that unsettle the closure that constitutes the buffered identity of modernity’s punctual self. Such fragilization thus brings with it the presence and the power of an “immanent otherness” that provides a sharp and stark reminder that a fundamental human project is finding ways, in the face of all the otherness we communally and individually bring with us, to dwell together in the contingencies of time with one another on the finite and fragile planet entrusted to us. Rossi thus concludes that the envisioning and the enacting of possibilities of welcoming one another – or, as George Steiner puts it, learning to be “guests of each other” and “guests of life on this crowded, polluted planet” – provides a fundamental modality in which we, seekers and dwellers alike, are all invited to be bearers of grace to one another. Such graced welcoming provides a space of possibilities enabling us to act, even as we ourselves are fractured, in ways that help one another in the work of

healing the fractures of the world. In a space of graced hospitality, it becomes possible, whether we consider ourselves seekers or dwellers, to become “guests to one another” by enacting a full welcoming of the other – and full acceptance of our being welcomed as other – in mutual recognition of the shared fragility that marks our human finitude.

Concluding Observations

Charles Taylor has noted that a secular age has made simply believing “naively” difficult if not impossible.² All belief – including those beliefs (*and* the non-beliefs) that matter most for us – has become “contestable,” requiring some manner of reflective articulation and appropriation. All of us, theists and atheists, the “nones” and the indifferent, can and will find ourselves challenged by what he terms the “fragilization” of belief.³ The essays in this volume by no means make a claim to have surveyed the whole terrain of modernity and secularity (including their “post-” forms) upon which belief and unbelief both find themselves fragilized under the cross pressures that bear upon the self-sufficiency of the immanent frame. Their individual and collective ambition has been much more modest; placed within the larger ambit of the project, “Renewing the Church in a Secular Age: Holistic Dialogue and Kenotic Vision,” they have rather sought in their analyses to touch upon a number of the particular characteristics that mark the working of secularity within some sectors of the cultural terrain of the United States and of the Catholic Church in the United States in the early twenty-first century. Among the characteristics that one or another of the other essays in the volume address as phenomena on this terrain that are significant for the work of renewing the Church are:

Emphases on instrumentalization and immediacy in all sectors of life that are fostered and exacerbated by the dynamics of a late capitalist economy;

“Us-them” mentalities that have become increasingly manifest in a variety of socio-cultural and political polarizations;

² *A Secular Age* (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 303-304, 531-532.

Deeply embedded structural biases with respect to race, gender, and economic status and the impact that these biases have on further marginalizing the already powerless;

The attraction that still draws many, however they find themselves placed on the spectrum encompassing “seekers” and “dwellers,” toward various ways of “seeing our lives as a meaningful part of a larger whole”;

The enduring persistence of various forms of aesthetic and contemplative sensibilities, old and new, even in the midst of new forms of static and interference emergent from a culture of informational immediacy and overload.

Many of these are “double-edged” in that the phenomena in which they are manifest offer both challenges and opportunities for the task of “renewing the Church in a secular age.” For instance, the dynamics of instrumentalism and of immediacy marginalize practices of discernment, contemplation, aesthetic creation and appreciation; yet they also make it possible to locate and articulate the very spaces of human meaning they would have us neglect and abandon for the sake of immediacy and instrumental value – and these may very well be precisely the human spaces that the Spirit longs to enable us to fill with an abundance of grace and life. Similarly, the increasing – and increasingly virulent – rhetoric of divisiveness in public discourse further entrenches patterns of injustice, inequality, and exclusion, as well as the persistence of violence at all levels of human culture; at the same time they offer particularly urgent opportunities to find the courage and the creative imagination to put in place practices that enact “the kenotic hospitality of God”⁴ by which, in the words of Pope Francis, we “never construct walls or borders, but [rather] piazzas and field hospitals.”⁵ It is our hope that these essays may be read as efforts to encourage venturing upon the kind of welcoming and healing tasks that Pope Francis commends.

⁴ See Philip J. Rossi, S.J., “Sojourners, Guests, and Strangers: The Church as Enactment of the Hospitality of God,” *Questions liturgiques – Liturgical Questions* 90 (2009), pp. 121-131.

⁵ Pope Francis, Speech to the Gathering of the Italian Church, Florence (November 2015), at http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/11/10/pope_francis_a_new_humanism_in_christ_jesus/1185723.

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