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NARRATIVE, CONTEXT, AND CONVERSION:  
AN APPLICATION OF PAUL RICOEUR'S THEORY OF NARRATIVE  
TO THE NEW CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION  
IN THE POSTCONCILIAR UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Ian Paul Murphy

May 2013

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Ian P. Murphy

2013

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By

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## ABSTRACT

NARRATIVE, CONTEXT, AND CONVERSION:  
AN APPLICATION OF PAUL RICOEUR'S THEORY OF NARRATIVE  
TO THE NEW CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION  
IN THE POSTCONCILIAR UNITED STATES

By

Ian Paul Murphy

May 2013

Dissertation supervised by Gerald M. Boodoo, Ph.D.

The New Evangelism, a term popularized by Paul VI and a primary concern of John Paul II, articulates the Catholic Church's reply to the appeal of the Council Fathers for renewed gospel proclamation in the modern age. Theology observes copious permutations of the New Evangelism, and these competing narratives cover a variety of perspectives. My project explores the question of the New Evangelism's meaning within United States Catholicism amidst its various interpretations by applying Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative to this multiplicity of configurations. Ricoeur's theory actually anticipated the contemporary situation: as new interpretations challenged sedimentation, multiple reconfigurations of the Church's call to proclaim were the inevitable result, in light of story's power upon human imagination. In the reciprocal dialectic between historical consciousness and

personal identity, story informs each and is informed by each—an epistemological circle which allows for multiple reconfigurations when narratives engage imagination. My application of Ricoeur’s theory will indicate that theology is not about the New Evangelism so much as it is about New Evangelisms, and that the Church may embrace a breathing room for multiple voices without losing herself to the vacuum of relativism nor to the suffocation of autocracy.

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my older brother Sean Murphy. Without his support, this work would never have reached its completion. “Frodo wouldn’t have gotten far without Sam.”

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	vi
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
By Happy Accident.....	1
The Problematic under Investigation.....	3
Project Overview.....	6
<b>CHAPTER ONE: NARRATIVE</b>	
<b>The Circle of Narrative and Temporality</b>	
Paul Ricoeur’s Use of Narrative Theory in Theology.....	8
The Significance of Meanings for Paul Ricoeur.....	13
Entering Narrative through Time.....	15
Entering Time through Narrative.....	22
Addressing the Circularity of Ricoeur’s Theory.....	29
Ricoeur’s Theory Emerges amidst its Circularity.....	33
<b>History as Narrative</b>	
The Narrative Character of History.....	35
The Productive Human Imagination.....	40
History and Time.....	41
Ricoeur’s Theory Distinct from Narrative Histories.....	44
Ricoeur’s Theory and Epistemology.....	48
<b>The Narrative Character of History and Historical Truth Claims</b>	
History’s Ability to Reconfigure Temporality.....	55
History and Fiction.....	59
Context and Subjectivity.....	64
<b>The Inexhaustibility of Competing Narratives</b>	
The Horizon of Expectation and the Space of Experience.....	67
Sedimentation and Innovation.....	73
The Status of the Historical Event.....	78
Critical Voices.....	83
Conclusion.....	89



## CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT

### Introduction

An Opening Caveat .....	94
Cognizant of Circularity.....	97
A Coexistence of Contextualizations .....	99
The Context of Focus.....	105
The Distinctiveness of Modernity in the United States.....	107
A Coexistence of Historical Trajectories.....	108

### Catholicism Encounters the New Nation

United States Catholics in the First Years of Independence.....	114
Early Advocates of Parish Democracy.....	116
Multiplicity Revisited.....	119
From Democracy to Romanization among White Catholics.....	121
Historical Reasons as the Causal Links of Emplotment.....	124
Theological Concerns Regarding Democracy in the Parish.....	125
Anti-Catholic Nativism.....	128
National Parishes Replace Geographical Parishes.....	132
Synopsis.....	136

### The Recurring Question of Compatibility

An Ongoing Tension between Two Paradigms.....	138
Voices for Adaptation.....	141
Emplotted Components of the Americanist Story.....	144
The Call for Reconfiguration.....	147
Countercultural Voices.....	149
Emplotted Components of the Traditionalist Story.....	151
Debate between Competing Narratives.....	155
Forces of Sedimentation.....	157

### Catholic Evangelization Emerges from the United States Context

A Thriving Immigrant Parish.....	160
Americanization Programs in the United States Church.....	163
A Resurgence of Anti-Catholic Nativism.....	167
Development of the Catholic Social Gospel.....	172
A Catholic Intellectual Renaissance in the United States.....	176
Critical Engagement with Modern Society.....	179
The Gospel Addresses the Context.....	184
The Recurrence of Innovation and Sedimentation.....	187
Rapid Developments.....	190

### Synthesis and Summary of Contextualization

Context Produces the New Evangelization.....	192
A Pattern of Sedimentation and Innovation.....	193
Observing Dialectic Reciprocity in the Context.....	196
From Contextualization to Evangelization.....	198

## CHAPTER THREE: CONVERSION

### Introduction

Synopsis of Narrative .....	201
Synopsis of Context.....	203
Synopsis of Conversion.....	205

### The New Catholic Evangelization

Theology of the New Evangelism.....	208
History of the New Evangelism.....	216
The New Evangelization Today.....	221
The Productive Human Imagination at Work.....	223

### The New Evangelism in the Postconciliar United States

A Complex of Multiple Contexts.....	226
The American Experience of Modernity.....	228
Specifications for Modern Evangelization from Vatican II.....	230
The Social Gospel Incorporates the Council's Specifications.....	232
The Challenge of Peace.....	234
Economic Justice for All.....	236
Summary of Peace and Economic Efforts.....	237
Multiplicity in Gender Reform.....	239
The Narrative of Women's Ordination.....	243
The Church Reconfigures in Response to the Innovation.....	248
Democracy in the Parish.....	250
Religious Freedom.....	251
Dolan's Presentation of Ethical Dilemmas.....	254
Avoiding Binary Oppositions.....	256
A Multifaceted Gospel Witness in the United States.....	258

### Explosion of Narrative Permutations

A New Event in Thinking.....	260
A Tradition of Multiplicity.....	261
The Contemporary Milieu.....	262
Globalization.....	265
The Compression of Time.....	268
Localization.....	269
An Expanded Epistemology.....	271
The New Evangelism is not Reducible to its Agencies.....	274
Numerous New Evangelism Agencies in the United States.....	277
Isaiah Ministries.....	282
SINE.....	288
Cultivation Ministries.....	293

<b>The Call for an Openness to Narrative Reconfiguration</b>	
The Recent Synod’s Resistance to Multiplicity.....	299
Ricoeur’s Warrants for Openness.....	302
Extended Reflection on the Exodus Story.....	304
General Theological Reflections in Support of Openness.....	307
Specific Reflection on Divine Revelation.....	309
Development of the Doctrine of Divine Revelation.....	312
Doctrinal Development elsewhere in the Tradition.....	317
Development of Doctrine on the New Evangelization .....	318
Openness to Reconfiguration Bears Witness to Faith.....	320
The Sense of the Faithful.....	321

**CONCLUSION**

Hope for Openness.....	326
The Problematic of Christology.....	327
The Problematic of Ecclesiology.....	329
Seeking Space within which to Wrestle.....	330
Return to Divine Revelation.....	333
Problems with Revelation as a Theological Parameter.....	336
The Chief Agent of the New Evangelism.....	339

<b>WORKS CITED.....</b>	<b>342</b>
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## INTRODUCTION

BY HAPPY ACCIDENT

Pope Benedict XVI announced at the close of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod Bishops that the new Catholic evangelization would comprise the theme of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. This assembly occurred recently, from October 7<sup>th</sup> to October 28<sup>th</sup> 2012.<sup>1</sup> A year earlier, the pope had announced in his apostolic letter *Porta Fidei*, published on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the celebration of a *Year of Faith*—the initiation of which coincided with the recent synod.<sup>2</sup> The official inauguration of this year-long emphasis for the Catholic Church worldwide took place on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, in commemoration of two significant centenaries: the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of Vatican II and the twentieth anniversary of the publication of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Both celebrations were observed at this recent synod on the new evangelism.<sup>3</sup> The Church is presently in the Year of Faith, and the deliberations of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly are currently under review. As the topic of the bishops' assembly, and coinciding with the Year of Faith, the new evangelization is now a primary focus for the Catholic Church globally.

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<sup>1</sup>Synod of Bishops of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *Instrumentum Laboris: The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* (Vatican City, 2012): no. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei (The Door of Faith)*, (Vatican City, 2011): no. 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.* See also *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 2.

The topic of the new Catholic evangelization was chosen by the present writer as the topic for this dissertation two years earlier, prior to any knowledge of the Year of Faith, and prior to any knowledge of the recent synod on the new Catholic evangelization. Whether one holds to coincidence, providence, or some peculiar combination of the two, the current project comes at an optimal moment in Church history. Undoubtedly, the bishops' current working document on the new evangelism as well as the Year of Faith will both catalyze from this point forward theological conversation that illuminates this topic of special emphasis. But to publish a dissertation that engages this subject while the Year of Faith is underway and while the recent synod's work is still under review is a timely opportunity to make a unique scholarly contribution to an area of theology that is receiving particular focus presently.

This dissertation highlights the recent synod's insight in developing the theology of the new evangelism beyond the work of Vatican II, Paul VI, and John Paul II. This current project also offers some critical engagement with the synod's work as well; the goal of which is not to merely deconstruct aspects of the dedicated and appreciated work of the bishops, but rather to recommend potential correctives that may advance a topic that the present writer is passionate about in his own spirituality. Finally, this dissertation showcases the particular United States experience of the new Catholic evangelism, locating its genesis prior to the Second Vatican Council. The present writer's humble and hopeful desire seeks to capitalize on the timing of this dissertation—its findings, its own openness to criticism, and its frontiers for ongoing investigation—with a substantive contribution to the current study, and with the facilitation of further conversation.

## THE PROBLEMATIC UNDER INVESTIGATION

Any academic discussion of the history of Christian thought should move beyond the naive notion that history constitutes *what happened* in the past, since understandings and interpretations of *what happened* differ depending upon the perspective, agenda, and ideological lenses of various historians. Rather, it behooves the systematic theologian to analyze history in its temporal, social, and geographical dimensions, as time intersects with geographical and social space. Accordingly, this project seeks to advance its inquiry into the question of what sorts of temporal configurations allow theology to situate historical realities. Since temporal, geographical, and social spaces take into account the interpretive elements of psychology and culture, historical events are never exhaustible.<sup>4</sup> On the contrary, the permutations are so vast that there are always other voices or pieces to the collage that allow us to reinterpret history all over again. The present work is not stating that facts do not matter, nor even that definite claims are beyond the academy's reach. Rather, this project affirms that both what people understand and how they came to understand it can and ought to be continually renewed.

The dualistic and linear presentations of history rife in Western thought can easily ossify. When fixation occurs, society incurs the danger of losing the value of the continual respiration of unheard voices into theology. Lest Catholicism's theological systems become hermeneutically sealed, the Church must cultivate the configuration and reconfiguration of historical narratives to advance reorientation and renewal. When one

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<sup>4</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (University of Chicago Press, 1984), 208.

particular interpretation of a story sediments and solidifies as the privileged or exclusive perspective, not only are entire groups marginalized, but those who adhere to the fossilized version eventually find it lifeless and begin the search for renewal again. In other words, theological discussions must recognize the ebb and the flow of the historical tides. Reality does not present itself in pure form; instead, reality is mediated to persons through languages, experiences, sensory perceptions, and through other people's interpretations. It is not so much that a new incident gives rise to the possibility of a new perspective, but that the construal of events leads to reconfigurations of the narrative with fresh interpretations.<sup>5</sup> In particular, focusing its historical scope upon the United States, this dissertation identifies the numerous versions of the new Catholic evangelization as illustrative of this narrative phenomenon.

In response to contemporary issues surrounding modernity, the Second Vatican Council advocated a renewal in the Church's proclamation of the gospel. The Great Commission that Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18–20 necessitates an effective proclamation that truly gains disciples of Christ from every culture. But the same issues that led to the council itself created unique challenges for Catholic evangelism to remain effective in a pluralistic climate. For the Church to maintain a universal, prophetic voice in the modern age, she needed to increase her ability to present the gospel in changing contexts. The *new evangelism*, a term popularized by Paul VI and a primary concern of John Paul II, articulates the Catholic Church's reply to the appeal of the Council Fathers for renewed gospel proclamation. Described by Paul VI, as attempting *to make the*

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<sup>5</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood, (London: Routledge, 1991): 20–33.

*Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the gospel to the people of the twentieth century*, the new Catholic evangelization is now the mission of a new generation of Catholics.<sup>6</sup>

The various shapes that this initiative has taken in the postconciliar context are numerous. Countless permutations were formed, are still forming, and will continue to form. For some, the new evangelism means expanding the Church's parameters to include progressive ideologies. For others, the new evangelization is a cry to safeguard the Church against this very phenomenon, in the interest of preserving the deposit of faith. For some, conversion means opening up to the idea of married priests. For others, conversion means insisting that people who vote pro-choice are not Catholic. For some, the Church needs more ecumenical bridge-building and unity with Protestants as well as increased interreligious dialogue. For others, the Church needs new translations of the Scripture built around a Sacramental hermeneutic that interprets Scripture in light of the Catholic liturgy.

Consequently, theology observes copious interpretations of the new evangelism that cover a variety of perspectives. The task of the theologian might seem hopeless to navigate through and analyze this information in meaningful ways amidst such a diversity of approaches, emphases, contexts, competing narratives, and impacts. The permutations that the new evangelization has taken are not only varied in their multiplicity of expressions, but at points contradictory between mutually exclusive interpretations. Beyond diversity, one might see this situation as a modern-day Babel. To avoid a

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<sup>6</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi (On the Evangelization of the Modern World)*, (Vatican City, 1975): no. 2.



maddening cacophony, this project pursues the benefits of a theological methodology that can make more rather than less sense of this vast body of information.

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Thus, this dissertation looks at the question of the new evangelism's meaning within United States Catholicism amidst its various interpretations. The project will apply Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative to this multiplicity of configurations to better organize and analyze an otherwise unmethodical plurality of voices. The project will investigate a transformed epistemology that challenged the ossified view that neo-Scholasticism represents the only correct way to construe the call to evangelize. Ricoeur's theory actually anticipated the contemporary situation: as new interpretations challenged sedimentation, multiple reconfigurations of the Church's call to proclamation were the inevitable result, in light of story's power upon human imagination. In exploring the intersection of narrative with the productive imagination, this project holds that theology is not about the new evangelism so much as it is about *new evangelisms*. This project maintains the authenticity of numerous versions of interpretation such that Jesus the social worker, Jesus the liberator, Jesus the Messiah, and so on, may coexist as mutually authentic, with no singular narrative being exclusively normative.

In its application of Ricoeur's theory of narrative to evangelization, this overall project understands the multiple interpretations of the new Catholic evangelization as a constellation of inexhaustible, competing narratives. The current work endorses a renewal in the Church's understanding of the new evangelism by calling for reconfiguration: the Church ought to embrace the coexistence of competing narratives as itself essential to evangelism, and each individual interpretation ought to remain open to hearing the others,

and open to its own reconfiguration, reflexively. Ricoeur's thought, as developed in his trilogy entitled *Time and Narrative*, facilitates the present approach to the new evangelization by presenting history as limitless stories continually mediated out of contexts.

For Ricoeur, the narrative character of history intersects with historical consciousness and personal identity, as story informs each and is informed by each. It is this reciprocal dialectic that generates endless innovations out of the productive imagination; consequently, an application of Ricoeur's method clarifies the explosion of permutations that the Church is observing with regard to the new evangelization. A thorough account of Ricoeur's narrative theory, especially from the first and third volumes of *Time and Narrative*, thus constitutes the content of the initial chapter and grounds the overall project. Ultimately, this dissertation will establish the narrative dynamic between historical sedimentation and innovation and apply it to the theology of the new Catholic evangelism—for it is this very epistemological circle that allows for multiple reconfigurations whenever human imagination engages in the cognitive process of emplotment.

## CHAPTER ONE: NARRATIVE

### The Circle of Narrative and Temporality

#### PAUL RICOEUR'S USE OF NARRATIVE THEORY IN THEOLOGY

At the most fundamental level, the use of narrative theory in systematic theology developed in response to problematic issues of propositional theology surrounding the doctrine of divine revelation.<sup>1</sup> The tendency to view revelation as a deposit is evident in Catholic tradition as well as the majority of mainstream Protestantism throughout the modern era.<sup>2</sup> In other words, most of Christianity since the Reformation, through the modern era and into postmodernity, understood God's self-disclosure as a deposit of propositional truth statements into the containers of the Biblical books, or into the containers of individual ministers. A Christian's sense of identity depended upon to what extent the individual assented to the doctrinal assertions. The Church understood revelation in a didactic sense as educating oneself regarding the dogmatic propositions that God revealed to humanity. Discussions of the truth as revealed by God centered upon the propositions, and how the propositions correspond to external reality.<sup>3</sup>

This propositional portrayal of revelation violates the reality of God's self-disclosure: that God communicates truth through story. Edward Oakes describes this feature as *the most important* contribution of narrative:

Narrative no longer makes revelation seem like a surprising, heteronymous deposit that landed on the human scene more or less literally out of the blue: when revelation is interpreted as a form of narrative, it is then more easily seen as simply

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<sup>1</sup>Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 8–19.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 15–34.

<sup>3</sup>Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 20–33.

a more intense and clarifying narrative, one that structures and gives meaning to all the other narrative lines that make up a human life.<sup>4</sup>

Of all the benefits of narrative theory, its primary contribution is that it hinders a faulty understanding of the Christian revelation as a sudden deposit of propositions upon humanity.

Likewise, Gabriel Fackre explains:

Revelation, therefore, is narrative-specific, the story of the triune God's self-disclosure, the gift of the knowledge of God given in the history of God with human beings to human beings. The doctrine of revelation explores why we turn where we do to know who God is and what God does among us from creation to consummation. As such, the narrative of revelation is about, and coordinate with, the narrative of reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>

By embedding revelation within the story of God's relationship with humanity throughout the unfolding of salvation history, the use of narrative theory in theology attempts to rescue theological discourse from the propositional deposit that is so far removed from the Scriptural God who communicates through story.

Postmodernism challenges claims to grand, sweeping meta-narratives that apply universally to everyone. Ricoeur's theory does not center upon demanding assent to the grand narrative. Rather, it appreciates the unique contours of each individual's personal autobiographical journey.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, narrative theory recognizes the role that story has played in shaping Christian identity. When propositional theology pulls truth claims out of the story, it neglects the role that the story itself played. For instance, the Exodus story became the centralizing event that defined Israel as the people of God. As the ancient

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<sup>4</sup>Edward T. Oakes, "Apologetics and the Pathos of Narrative Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 72/1 (January, 1992): 37–8.

<sup>5</sup>Fackre, *Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation*, 15.

<sup>6</sup>Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 20–33.

Israelites remembered the story, they simultaneously *re-membered* their covenant community, and *re-membered* their individual identity which was entirely shaped by the narrative. In remembering the Exodus event, the believer became a part of the story: the descendant of Abraham, the recipient of the promised inheritance, a previous captive now set free, and called to respond to God and others in love and obedience.

Moreover, narrative theory recognizes that the structure of the human consciousness is inextricably rooted in story. Paul Lauritzen explains that since “the structure of human consciousness is necessarily narrative,” theologians must let go of the need to argue and reason about religious concepts prior to addressing the practical implications of the story.<sup>7</sup> The story comes first, followed by its implications—polemical speculation over doctrine, which propositionalists and existentialists have estranged from the original narrative from which the doctrine derived, becomes irrelevant.

To be precise, Ricoeur’s theory of narrative does not constitute a *narrative theology*, like the narrative theologies of Hans Frei, Johannes Metz, and Stanley Hauerwas, because Ricoeur holds that all stories refer to external reality in the same way that language itself corresponds dialectically with that which the language communicates. In contrast, narrative theologies reject a corresponding reference between the story and anything external whatsoever.<sup>8</sup> Pure narrative theologies claim faith that the stories are in fact true in an objective sense, but argue that it makes no sense to talk about such truthfulness beyond praxis, since the human being can never leave the story. From this

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<sup>7</sup>Paul Lauritzen, “Is *Narrative* Really a Panacea? The Use of *Narrative* in the Work of Metz and Hauerwas,” *The Journal of Religion* 67/3 (July, 1987): 329.

<sup>8</sup>Gary Comstock, “Truth or Meaning: Ricoeur versus Frei on Biblical Narrative,” *The Journal of Religion* 66/2 (April, 1986): 130–9.

standpoint, narrative theologians develop a theology, like the way that Metz uses narrative to create a systematic Christian theology which calls for revolutionary social action in light of Jesus' identity as foot-washer and liberator of the poor and oppressed.<sup>9</sup> Ricoeur, on the other hand, does not use his narrative theory to develop a systematic theology. Ricoeur believes in a historical referent; however, the truth claims one may make about the objective referent are necessarily limited by the nature of revelation itself.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity, Ricoeur is not saying that the textual Jesus *is* the risen Christ, but rather that the stories of Jesus form a parable that reveals the universality of the Kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup>

For Ricoeur, truth claims in ordinary discourse differ drastically from those regarding revelation. The former rests on the two assertions that (1) truth is indeed objective, and (2) can thus be verified or falsified by empirical data. Ricoeur states that revelation violates both claims. Truth about God cannot be discovered, but only revealed. Consequently, faith claims cannot be assessed by empirical verification or falsification. Likewise, the Scriptural narrative presents sinful human beings in such a way that people are not sovereign, self-possessed individuals who can objectively survey such claims. Competing with the categories of analytical philosophy, Ricoeur's theory specifies that revelation, through story, describes the innovative capacities and persistent characteristics

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<sup>9</sup>Johannes Metz, *Faith in History and Society* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 213.

<sup>10</sup>Paul Ricoeur, "Manifestation and Proclamation," *Journal of the Blaisdell Institute* 12 (Winter, 1978): 13–14.

<sup>11</sup>Ricoeur, "Life in Quest of Narrative," 20–33.

of the human species. The stories, once mundane, now extraordinary, describe both the daily rhythms as well as the ultimate boundaries of specifically human existence.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, narrative theologies and the accompanying issues surrounding foundational truth are not the issue in this dissertation. Rather, the present concern regards how to interpret the new evangelism in a way that allows for expansive readings. Whereas the truth of such readings may indeed hold importance, even more important is that the readings occur. A renewed approach which ensures that any reading, true or not, remain open to reconfiguration is the real issue and, according to what this work proposes, renders self-critical readings more true than readings which deny such reconfiguration.

In summary, foundational truth is neither an issue nor concern in Ricoeur's theory and so it will likewise not be an issue or concern in the current application of his theory, for narrative does not live by "foundational truth" in the first place.<sup>13</sup> This project is not claiming that Ricoeur's theory be used to create a foundational theology. Rather, the present work holds that an application of his narrative theory provides a useful way to better understand the complexities of evangelism in today's context and, more importantly, that his theory substantiates openness as being crucial to evangelism: openness to other competing interpretations and openness to reconfigurations of one's own interpretations in light of other voices.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>David Wood, "Introduction: Interpreting Narrative," in *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991): 1–19.

<sup>13</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 3* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 157.

<sup>14</sup>To this point, see John Paul II's discussion in *Fides et Ratio* regarding the importance of critical self-examination, especially in his claim that any system that does not question is prone to foolishness.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MEANINGS FOR PAUL RICOEUR

Himself a critic of skepticism, Ricoeur appreciates René Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum* for supplying an epistemology that affirms human existence. According to Descartes' "I think therefore I am" principle, human persons are unable to deny their own existence. The act of thinking is itself a demonstration of one's own *Dasein*—to employ Heidegger's terminology from *Being and Time* describing the existence of each person.<sup>15</sup> Against the threat of all-encompassing doubt that skepticism poses, Descartes provides an epistemological model that exhibits the possibility of knowledge. But despite an appreciation for Descartes' theory of knowing, Ricoeur understands Descartes as making more than just an epistemological claim. The Cartesian model also makes a metaphysical claim that Ricoeur finds problematic, along with Marcel, Jasper, and Heidegger.<sup>16</sup>

Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* principle posits a knowing subject who is aware of something objectively known. But for Ricoeur, there is no objectivity without subjectivity; consequently, the notion of a knowing subject who objectifies about the world constitutes a notion that is naïve and undeveloped in its metaphysics.<sup>17</sup> Thinkers are not knowers who can analyze over and above themselves what is in the world from a position outside of the world. Thinkers are not human subjects who experience life from a location situated outside of their contexts of inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Such a view cannot ultimately

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<sup>15</sup>David Pellauer, *Ricoeur: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2007), 8–10.

<sup>16</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 5–7.

<sup>17</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1966), 217.

<sup>18</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), 2.



make sense of oneself, others, or the world that a person is located in and influenced by. People live and act in the world that they ponder. In an inescapable but healthy epistemological circle, knowledge *about* the world people contemplate comes to them mediated *by* the world they contemplate.<sup>19</sup> So instead of envisioning people as knowing subjects whose vantage is over, against, or even outside of earthly contexts, Ricoeur sees persons as capable and accountable agents who are contextualized by and within the very lived human experiences about which they deliberate.<sup>20</sup>

Ricoeur therefore revises Cartesian epistemology to understand *Dasein* as embodied human existence contextualized in the world. As a result, Ricoeur understands philosophical concepts not as indications of intellectual expertise as Hegel seems to suggest, but as designations of the lived experiences into which people are immersed.<sup>21</sup> Rather than discussing any alleged ideological proficiencies, Ricoeur's philosophy favors a discussion of *meanings*.<sup>22</sup> Meanings, for Ricoeur, are the structuralizing elements that direct the intelligibility of lived human experience.<sup>23</sup> Ricoeur has no interest in falling into the self-referential incoherence of skepticism—a system of thought victim to its own doubting.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 88.

<sup>20</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 90–1.

<sup>21</sup>Ricoeur, *Freedom & Nature*, 17.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 1–5.

<sup>23</sup>Ricoeur, *Freedom & Nature*, 5–6.

<sup>24</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:9–10.

Nor does he hold to any undeveloped idealism that naively understands human subjects as knowers who can objectify about reality from some distanced, unmediated perspective located outside of the lived contexts that situate them. Ricoeur avoids these simpler trajectories of throwing philosophical query into the ambiguity of doubt or into a fable about human subjects who enjoy the full possession of objective truths. He instead wants to identify and explore, amidst epistemological circularity, the meanings that allow people to make sense of their otherwise unintelligible, unthematic, and unconnected temporal experiences. Accordingly, Ricoeur investigates the circle of time and narrative as a meaningful dialectic to elucidate the lived experience of human persons situated within a variety of earthly contexts.

#### ENTERING NARRATIVE THROUGH TIME

In the eleventh Book of his *Confessions*, Augustine questions, “What, then, is time? I know well enough what it is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled.”<sup>25</sup> To help introduce his study, Ricoeur presents this quotation in the preface to the first volume of his *Time and Narrative* trilogy.<sup>26</sup> It is not Augustine’s intent to draft a narrative theory, but to speculate about ontological insufficiencies in human conceptions of cosmic time. Ricoeur then utilizes the admittedly baffled Augustine to demonstrate Ricoeur’s own view that the fearful perplexity of the temporal character of lived, human experience requires emplotment to clarify people’s

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<sup>25</sup>Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 169.

<sup>26</sup>Ricoeur cites Augustine’s quotation in *T & N*, 1:5.

time-bound occurrences—temporal experiences that, without story, would be otherwise nonsensical.

As Ricoeur says in *Figuring the Sacred*:

Without a narrative a person's life is merely a random sequence of unrelated events: birth and death are inscrutable, temporality is a terror and a burden, and suffering and loss remain mute and unintelligible.<sup>27</sup>

Augustine's wrestling with the mystery of time is Ricoeur's doorway to the claim that people can make sense of their temporal experiences only through story-making.

Obviously, people do not experience a perpetual state of infinity. Bracketing out the case of Jesus Christ, people are not eternally begotten. As opposed to any timeless experience of eternity, people are born, they live, and they die, as humanity muddies itself in time. Lived experience is temporal, but time is a puzzle; therefore, the question arises of how to make meaningful sense out of time-bound, lived human experiences.<sup>28</sup>

Like Augustine's quote illustrates, the mysteries that surface when one speculates about time confound the temporal experiences of human persons in their earthly contexts. Time baffles a person who attempts to explain it, yet our contextualized, lived human experiences are indeed temporal ones. Ricoeur answers the conundrum by asserting that the human capacity for emplotment organizes temporal experiences into a meaningful coherence. The productive imagination has the ability to rescue temporal experiences from the bewildering mysteries of time by composing a storyline out of those

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<sup>27</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>28</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:5–7.

experiences.<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur says, “I see in the plots we invent the privileged means by which we re-configure our confused, unformed, and at the limit mute temporal experience.”<sup>30</sup> Human persons make sense of their time-bound experiences by restructuring those experiences into a plotline.

As Ricoeur utilizes Book 11 of Augustine’s *Confessions* to introduce the narrative quality of temporal experience, he summarizes Augustine’s admitted bewilderment over the great mystery of time. For Augustine, the conception of time as something measured according to the movement of celestial bodies suffers from an existential deficiency. One cannot assume that the movement of the stars is immutable. Regardless their size, heavenly bodies are still objects in motion. As Augustine deliberates, the motion of any object, large or small, is subject to the dynamic possibility of change by the Creator. The stars, like people, constitute a part of creation, and answer to the Creator; therefore, their movement could in fact change.<sup>31</sup> In light of this real possibility, the movement of the stars is not an incontrovertible absolute that grounds the measurement of time. By stating this problematic and expressing his doubting regarding the measurement of time, Augustine’s rhetoric presents an *aporia* to highlight time’s mystifying nature.<sup>32</sup>

The paradox of time’s measurement transcends the problematic of celestial motion and asks the more fundamental question of whether or not there can even be time in the

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<sup>29</sup>Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago: Library of Living Philosophers, 1995), 39.

<sup>30</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:ix.

<sup>31</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 295.

<sup>32</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:7–12.

first place. As Augustine says, “In fact the only time that can be called present is an instant, if we can conceive of such, that cannot be divided even into the most minute fractions.”<sup>33</sup> He adds that “when it is present it has no duration.”<sup>34</sup> Even the notion of an instant cannot solve the mystery due to the fact that any conceived momentary point in time however small does not possess a lasting character. Since the present has no persistence, how can it be said to exist? Furthermore, the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist. The past is over, the future is not yet, and the present has no persisting duration. According to this paradox, time cannot seem to exist, yet people conceive of it and measure it nonetheless.<sup>35</sup>

As he wrestles with the mystery, Augustine suggests that one might combine a distention of the soul (*distentio animi*) with an intentionality (*intentio*) to conceive of a span of time that is absent of any celestial reference to cosmic motion, and escapes the ontological paradox regarding the existence of time.<sup>36</sup> In light of his acknowledgement that the present lacks any duration, Augustine replaces the idea of the present with the idea of the three-fold passage of time. For Augustine, the only way people possess an awareness of time and have a mind to measure it is as it is passing. The *distentio animi* is a conceptual expansion of the location of one’s soul from outside of any imagined instant having no duration and instead into the alternative concept of time’s passage. In other words, the conception of one’s soul as existing in the transition of time replaces the

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<sup>33</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 169.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid. See Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:8.

<sup>35</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:13–4.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 12.

conception of one's soul residing within the current moment. Therefore, an extended present of time's passing substitutes the notion of an instantaneous present moment.

Augustine also locates the past and the future within his extension by way of memory and expectation, respectively. Augustine understands the past as a person's memory, and he understands the future as a person's expectation. The *intentio* names Augustine's idea that people intend or mean to locate both their memories and their expectations simultaneously in the extended (*distentio*) present of time's passing. That is, people intentionally locate their memories and expectations into the passing of time. Consequently, the passage of time is three-fold, with the past, present, and future, all coexisting together in the transition of time. Augustine concludes:

It might be correct to say that there are three times, a present of past things, a present of present things, and a present of future things. Some such different times do exist in the mind, but nowhere else that I can see.<sup>37</sup>

The past and the future indeed exist, but only in the mind; accordingly, Augustine refers to the conceptual present of the past through memory as the *praeterita*, and to the present of the future through expectation as *futura*.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine thus designates time according to this notion of an extended three-fold present. He comprehends the existence of one's soul beyond an immediate instant, and extends the notion of the present to incorporate a passing of time that includes the *praeterita*, includes the present transition of time, and includes the *futura*, all at the same time. This three-fold characterization of a distended present includes a present past of memory, a present present of time's passing, and a present future of expectation, which all

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<sup>37</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 169.

<sup>38</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:10.

truly exist, but only within the human mind. From this understanding of time, a person's imagination can conceive of a time span such as a day or an hour, without referring to the movement of heavenly bodies. More importantly, one escapes the paradox of time's being by locating its existence in the human mind. In rescuing people from the *aporias* of cosmic time, Augustine had to descend his analysis into lived human time in order to make some sense of the mystery.<sup>39</sup>

But Augustine's substitute for the cosmological measurement of time in no way solves the mystery, for Augustine loses cosmic time in his own movement to lived human time. A knotted web of difficulties admittedly remains. Every claim that Augustine makes to allay his doubting questions about time leads to other questions. Augustine relocates time into the human mind in order to make some sense out of it, but he cannot ultimately understand time itself as having its own existence in reality. Out of each affirmation concerning time arises more *aporias*, or the same ones in different forms, or as Ricoeur words it: the "self-regenerating heads of the hydra of skepticism."<sup>40</sup> For Ricoeur, the chief problem regarding time that overshadows all others is that a cosmological approach to time does not reduce to a psychological approach. Augustine's collapsing of

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 16–20.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 6. Throughout Ricoeur's entire *Time and Narrative* trilogy, philosophical thought about the mystery of time never claims to solve the mystery. Emplotment may only respond to the *aporias* of time by rendering the discordance of humanity's lived, temporal experiences into a meaningful concordance. But narrative does not purport to solve the mystery; all human speculation about time remains an inconclusive pondering. See Ricoeur's discussion in *T & N*, 1:83–4, for example.

cosmic time into the human mind employs a phenomenological tool for comprehension, but does not alter the irreducibility of the one to the other.<sup>41</sup>

In the end, Augustine strains under the remaining tension, bearing the existential weight of having distended his soul out of cosmological time. In exiting the present moment and entering a conceived, extended present of time's passage, Augustine experiences life as a discordance. This discordance is illustrative of the need for a unifying pattern that can bring a victory of concordance over the discordance. According to Ricoeur's theory, emplotment is this necessary pattern of unity. It is the work of the productive human imagination to compose stories out of temporal experiences—stories that unite those contextualized experiences into a meaningful plot that makes sense out of temporality and serves as a source point from which people derive senses of personal and social identities.

For Augustine, time approximates eternity, and human wandering characterizes the fallen state of the *distentio animi*. The discordance of humanity's wandering is indicative of the rupturing of Eden's concordance, and ultimately speaks for an interior longing for a blissful eternity of permanence. But as Ricoeur explains, "...this firmness remains in the future, the time of hope. It is still in the midst of the experience of distention that the wish for permanence is uttered: 'until I am purified and melted by the fire of your love and fused into one with you.'"<sup>42</sup> For Ricoeur's purposes, Augustine's wrestling with the

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<sup>41</sup>Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 41.

<sup>42</sup>Ricoeur cites this quotation from *The Confessions* twice: *T & N*, 1:27, 30.



mystery of time demonstrates the inevitable need for emplotment to organize the otherwise discordant fragments of temporal experiences.<sup>43</sup>

Not only does Augustine's discordance call for the unifying pattern of emplotment to harmonize the otherwise dissonant experience of the *aporias* of time, but also narrative is implicit in his understanding of time. For instance, his own characterization of time combines recognition and prediction into the narration of a three-fold distention, as past and future join an unfolding present. Augustine's intent is not to draft a narrative theory for the field of philosophy, but his struggle with the paradoxical problematics associated with time inexorably leads him to narrative nonetheless. With no explicit theory of narrative, Augustine nevertheless illustrates the need for a plot to bring accord to an otherwise discordant experience of time, and he inadvertently begins to do so.<sup>44</sup> Through Augustine, Ricoeur exhibits the narrative character of temporal experience by demonstrating that people inevitably make sense out of time to the extent that they can structure temporal experiences into a plotline. People comprehend time in a narrative mode.

#### ENTERING TIME THROUGH NARRATIVE

At the same time, however, that people understand time according to the manner of a plot, people understand narratives in a temporal mode. Like Ricoeur uses Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions* to introduce the idea that people make sense of temporality by composing a story, Ricoeur subsequently, and admittedly breaking with chronological order, uses Aristotle's *Poetics* to introduce the idea that people make sense of narrative by

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<sup>43</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:30.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 83–5.

relating the elements of the story to temporal existence.<sup>45</sup> According to Aristotle, the composition of a plotline organizes events. This art form has “six constituent elements, viz. Plot, Character, Language, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody.”<sup>46</sup> Aristotle proceeds to organize these components of the art of composing a story according to a hierarchy that locates action above characters and thought. Consequently, Aristotle’s formula prioritizes imitation or representation of action in order to emplot a narrative.<sup>47</sup>

Although Aristotle predates Augustine by over half a millennia, Ricoeur’s utilization of the *Poetics* places Aristotle in dialogue with Augustine as the answer to Augustine’s discordance. Recall that Augustine’s *aporias* are illustrative of the discordant quality of the experience of time—a discordance that can only be resolved within the plotting of a story. In his exploration of the paradoxes of time, Augustine had to tear himself asunder from cosmic time and instead understand his soul as residing in a distended conception of the three-fold present in order to make any sense of his temporal experiences. As Ricoeur observes the need for a pattern of unity that can bring concordance to Augustine’s discord, *Time and Narrative* responds to this need with Aristotle’s analysis of emplotment in the *Poetics*. It is narrative that makes humanity’s discord amidst temporality into a meaningful coherence. The composition of a story facilitates a harmonization by organizing the discordant temporal experiences of a person’s life into a meaningful plot. Stated alternatively, emplotment brings concordance to humanity’s distended rupture from cosmological time. The discordance remains, of

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<sup>45</sup>Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 31.

<sup>46</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 50. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:34.

<sup>47</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:33.

course, since narrative only makes meaning out of temporal experiences—it does not resolve the paradoxes of time—but at least this discordance, once plotted, becomes a concordant one.<sup>48</sup>

At the heart of this *concordant discordance* is the wholeness provided by a plotline. For Aristotle, narrative emplotment, or *muthos* in Greek, refers to “the organization of the events” into a *holos* or wholeness.<sup>49</sup> In the *Poetics*, Aristotle describes the *holos* that emplotment provides as follows: “Now a thing is a whole if it has a beginning, a middle, and an end.”<sup>50</sup> The lack of an antecedent does not designate the beginning; rather, the beginning is characterized by an absence of any prior requirement in the sequence. Succession alone defines the middle as that which both follows something else “and has another thing following it.”<sup>51</sup> Whether ordinary or required, the end is a sequel subsequent to something prior, but with nothing after it.

While Aristotle’s notions of beginning, middle, and end may seem self-evident, the wholeness they constitute portrays the invention of an order that the composer of the plot pursues to the omission of all temporal attributes. In other words, the organization of events into the beginning, middle, and end order the emplotted actions completely within the work itself. Consequently, the beginning, middle, and end comprise the ordering of the *muthos*; they are not aspects of real time. The creator of the narrative organizes the events according to the story’s time, not according to the temporality of actual events in

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<sup>48</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:42–5.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>50</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

the world.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the ordering of the work's events into beginning, middle, and end connects the episodes not just sequentially but causally as well. One episode follows after another and also because of another. Therefore, the interior figuration of the narrative is not merely chronological, it is logical. It is this causal interrelation between the ordered events within the plot itself that gives the story its logical structure, not episodic surprises from without.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the plot derives a sense of universal wholeness from the coherence within the ordering of its own events in its own time. Emplotment obtains its wholeness from the logical ordering of its internal figuration, not from an outside source. As Ricoeur words this idea, "A plot engenders such universals when the structure of its action rests on the connection internal to the action and not on external accidents."<sup>54</sup> As such, emplotment is a model of concordance that conveys the wholeness of its internal figuration to the discordance of temporality. Aristotle's *muthos* becomes for Ricoeur the antithesis of Augustine's *distentio animi*. Emplotment is a paradigm of concordance that gives wholeness to the discordance of time. The speculative *aporias* of temporality bring discord; whereas emplotment refigures discordant temporal experiences into the coherent whole of a narrative. The logical organization of events ordered within the plot supplies the concordant sense of wholeness without recourse to accidents external to the narrative form. Since outside episodes and real time are not the sources for a plot's concordant sense of wholeness, the internal cohesion of emplotment guides temporality more than

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<sup>52</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:41–2.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 38–40.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

does historical accuracy—a theme the present project will return to more specifically in a discussion about the truth claims of historical inquiry later in this first chapter.

Aristotle equates plot with the imitation of action; consequently, *muthos* requires *mimesis*, the Greek term for the creative imitation or artistic representation of life.<sup>55</sup> Although *muthos* gets translated nominally as the organization of events, Ricoeur preserves the active nature of the term when he describes the logical ordering of events with regard to emplotment. Likewise, the imitation of human action constituent of emplotted events is an active process. Imitation and representation are English nouns roughly synonymous with the Greek word *mimesis*, but the creative imitation or artistic representation of human actions is a dynamic innovation, the active nature of which should be preserved in translation.<sup>56</sup> Hence, Ricoeur advances the understanding of *mimetic* activity as the making of a creative imitation. The poet or other story-maker takes actual, discordant, temporal experiences and transposes them through the art of representation into the concordance of a plot. This dynamic innovative process produces the organization of events by emplotment. In other words, *mimetic* activity produces *muthos*.<sup>57</sup> As Aristotle says, “The imitation of action is the Plot.”<sup>58</sup> For him, narrative emplotment is the result of *mimetic* activity as the imagination relates to human action by

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>56</sup>Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 33.

<sup>57</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:33–9.

<sup>58</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:34.

imitating it.<sup>59</sup> As a result, Ricoeur understands *mimesis* as the undergirding concept that grounds all of the *Poetics*.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, Ricoeur takes this overarching notion of *mimetic* activity and expands it into the three spiraling stages of interpretive circularity that inform his own narrative theory. Ricoeur's three-stage *mimesis* is another form of the hermeneutical circle in which three repeating stages of the creative imitation of emplotment coexist in a healthy but inescapable reciprocity. This three-stage imitation of action produces a plot in the productive human imagination.<sup>61</sup> In particular, Ricoeur's model of narrative emplotment starts with *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>: a prior understanding of actuality to which people already hold and bring into interpretations.<sup>62</sup> His model proceeds to *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>: the restructuring and configuring of initial preunderstandings, as sedimented paradigms get modified.<sup>63</sup> One's prior understandings mediate interpretations of the temporal fragments that the imagination synthesizes into meaningful plots at the first stage. But all interpretive frameworks can themselves become modified through creative innovation at the second stage. These first two stages specifically relate the productive human imagination to any actions being imitated in the plot.

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<sup>59</sup>G. F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1957), 47–51.

<sup>60</sup>Hahn, *Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, 33.

<sup>61</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:52–4.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 54–64.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 64–70.

But the intention of *mimetic* activity is the organization of events (*muthos*)—something not achieved through the dynamism of the imaginative construction by itself.<sup>64</sup> The wholeness (*holos*) of this organization also requires an audience. Thus thirdly, but not terminally so, is *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>: an intersection between the world structured and restructured by the text and the real world of the reader, wherein the action actually happens, unfolding within its particular temporality.<sup>65</sup> The third *mimetic* relation between the human imagination and imitated actions thereby designates the relationship between emplotment and practice, between narratives and human encounters with narratives in temporally-bound lived experience.<sup>66</sup>

Notwithstanding the distinctive capacity of narrative to bring concordance to the discordance of temporality, this three-stage *mimetic* activity takes emplotment straight to Augustine's *aporias*, as the activities being imitated in *mimesis* occur in lived human time. In other words, Ricoeur's analysis comes full circle back to the speculative paradoxes of time because the actions that plots artistically represent are indeed temporal ones. Recalling that Aristotle's model of emplotment gives chief importance to the creative imitation of activity, Aristotle states, "The imitation of action is the Plot."<sup>67</sup> In so saying, Aristotle's analysis of the emplotment of a Tragedy—an analysis that Ricoeur extends to story-making in general—equates plot with the imitation of action.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 70–1.

<sup>66</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>67</sup>Aristotle, *Poetics*, 50. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:34.

<sup>68</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:33–4.

Human actions only occur in lived, temporal experience. The actions that storylines attempt to represent are time-bound, human activities.<sup>69</sup> Stated alternatively: “The world unfolded by every narrative work is always a temporal world.”<sup>70</sup> Ricoeur concludes that “narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.”<sup>71</sup> In other words, the imitation of temporality is precisely what makes sense of a story. Just as people come to understand time through emplotment, people simultaneously comprehend narrative in a temporal mode.<sup>72</sup>

#### ADDRESSING THE CIRCULARITY OF RICOEUR’S THEORY

Ricoeur utilizes Augustine as an entranceway into the narrative character of temporal experience; Ricoeur then employs Aristotle as a doorway into the temporal nature of a story. With Book 11 of the *Confessions*, Ricoeur illustrates that story is necessary to interpret the chronology of human lives in a meaningful way. With the *Poetics*, Ricoeur demonstrates that the imitation of temporal human action is necessary to give meaning to narratives. Ricoeur thereby establishes the circularity between time and narrative, summarizing the dialectic as follows: “time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.”<sup>73</sup> Emplotment makes the

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<sup>69</sup>Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001): 98.

<sup>70</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:3.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.



otherwise unintelligible temporal experiences of human persons meaningful by organizing those experiences into a story. In this manner, the narrative makes sense of the temporality of embodied human existence within contexts. At the same time, for stories to make any meaningful sense, they must imitate the temporality of human action. This circularity exhibits mutual support, as narrative gives meaning to time, and time gives meaning to narrative.

The hermeneutical circle of time and narrative takes different forms, as seen by the interpretive circularity of the three stages of *mimetic* activity. As a component of the hermeneutical circle of temporality and story, the three-stage *mimetic* activity of emplotment exhibits an interpretive circularity. As aforementioned, the third *mimesis* is not terminal. As Ricoeur points out, an intersection between the world of the text and the real world of the reader will reconfigure the contour of the reader's understanding. *Mimesis*<sub>3</sub> then moves to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> when received reconfigurations of the reader's understanding constitute the initial preunderstandings that the reader brings into encounters with texts. This movement occurs by way of the modifications of established paradigms—the dynamic interplay between sedimentation and innovation that designates *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>.<sup>74</sup> The hermeneutical circle of time and narrative, in all of its forms, is a manifestation of the overarching epistemological circle. In the circularity of epistemology, what we come to know is mediated by what we come to know.<sup>75</sup> As a part

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<sup>74</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>75</sup>Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 98.

of the dialectic between time and narrative, the three stages of *mimetic* activity exhibit the thread of epistemological circularity that runs throughout Ricoeur's trilogy.<sup>76</sup>

However, the circle that Ricoeur wants to convey is not a tautological one but a reciprocal dialectic in which each side informs and adds force to the other. To accomplish this task, Ricoeur intends to approach each of the two poles in the circle—the narrative character of temporal experience and the temporal features of narrative—from a position (1) distant from the other and (2) independent of the other.<sup>77</sup> First, each approach into the circle, through Augustine and through Aristotle, respectively, is far away in its analysis from the other half of the circle. Just as Augustine is in no way trying to draft a theory of narrative in the *Confessions*, nowhere in his *Poetics* does Aristotle explicitly mention temporality as a problematic of philosophical speculation.

Ricoeur addresses this absence specifically: “Indeed, the *Poetics* is silent about the relationship between poetic activity and temporal experience. As poetic activity, it does not even have any marked temporal character.”<sup>78</sup> But Ricoeur understands Aristotle's “silence on this point” as safeguarding *Time and Narrative* from presenting a mere tautology.<sup>79</sup> Ricoeur seeks to introduce the circle of time and narrative to his audience by entering into each side from a “favorable distance” away from the other side.<sup>80</sup> Augustine does not have narrative in mind in his discussion of time, while Aristotle does not have

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<sup>76</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:3.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 31–2.

<sup>78</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 31–2.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*

temporality in mind in his analysis of emplotment. Yet each one, intellectually distanced from the other half of the circle in their respective projects, is nonetheless illustrative of an inherent dependency upon the other.

Second, and more importantly, each of Ricoeur's respective approaches into the circle are independent of one another. The significance for Ricoeur's project is that, even amidst their independence of one another, each starting point (from temporality with the *Confessions* and from emplotment with the *Poetics*) inevitably highlights a characteristic dependency upon the other half of the dialectic. With Augustine, Ricoeur shows—free from Aristotle's analysis—that speculations about temporal experience necessarily demand a narrative to avoid meaningless confusion. With Aristotle, Ricoeur demonstrates—independent of Augustine—that a study of emplotment will inevitably require temporal reference to make sense of narrative. Even though each respective philosopher does not state it explicitly, and even though each respective philosopher does not have the other side of the dialectic consciously in mind, the philosopher of time will nevertheless run directly into the need for emplotment to make meaningful sense of the chronology of human experience while the philosopher of narrative, in turn, will recognize that plots must imitate temporal action in order to make any meaningful sense out of the story.<sup>81</sup> Beyond tautology, each side of the circle thereby illuminates what people might come to understand about the other.

As one form that the general epistemological circle takes, the hermeneutical circle of temporality and emplotment is inescapable, yes; but the circle of time and narrative is indeed reciprocal, as each side sheds light on the other in this manner. Ricoeur explicitly

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 54.

concerns himself with “facing the objection about a vicious circle that haunts” his entire project.<sup>82</sup> To this aim, he explains:

That the analysis is circular is indisputable. But that the circle is a vicious one can be refuted. In this regard, I would rather speak of an endless spiral that would carry the meditation past the same point a number of times, but at different altitudes.<sup>83</sup>

Elsewhere he expresses the same idea with the following statement:

This thesis is undeniably circular. But such is the case, after all, in every hermeneutical assertion... the circle of narrativity and temporality is not a vicious but a healthy circle, whose two halves mutually reinforce one another.<sup>84</sup>

By supplying two distanced, independent historical introductions to his thesis through Augustine and Aristotle, respectively, Ricoeur showcases the mutual illumination and synergistic reinforcement between the two poles as illustrative of their reciprocity.

Ricoeur concludes that one can understand the circularity as a healthy spiral that advances the analysis. The present project shall return to the specifics of this mutual reinforcement in a more detailed discussion of the second *mimetic* relation of sedimentation and innovation near the end of this chapter.

#### RICOEUR’S THEORY EMERGES AMIDST ITS CIRCULARITY

Ricoeur agrees with Aristotle against Plato that *mimesis* is not some substandard representative of a pure form. And taking the concept further than both of them, Ricoeur ascribes an especially positive and privileged role to *mimesis* as witnessed in his expansion of creative imitation into three stages. Far more than merely imitating an original action in real time, *mimetic* activity itself has its own creative capacity. The

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 72.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 3.

creative quality of the *mimetic* function is evident as the three-fold process of imitation creates meanings that the original real-world action being imitated did not project. The artistic representation itself has the ability to convey its own innovative meanings.<sup>85</sup> For example, when an autobiographer composes a narrative of her experiences during World War II, her story captures both the events of the war as well as the vantage point of the story-teller. Her story is an imitation of the real events, but the real events did not project her distinctive perspective—her story did. For Ricoeur, *mimesis* is not only the activity of creative imitation, but also the creation of new meanings. This creative capacity of *mimetic* activity lays the groundwork for Ricoeur’s derivative affirmation that historical narratives are inexhaustible.<sup>86</sup>

Whether consciously or not, people come to understand their lives according to some kind of unifying pattern. A constellation of otherwise unconnected experiences forms a meaningful picture only in the scripting of one’s story.<sup>87</sup> The narrative fragments from across an individual’s timeline comprise that individual’s sense of identity. But these events include cognizant and repressed memories, told and untold stories, conscious impressions upon the mind and unconscious ones, which by themselves all remain meaningless in the absence of any model of cohesion. Emplotment gathers these temporal fragments constitutive of individual identity and unites them together according to a narrative pattern—a connective process that recognizes an identifying picture out of the

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 25–34.

<sup>86</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:167–8.

<sup>87</sup>Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in Ricoeur*, 88.

constellation of lived human experiences. The productive imagination hereby configures and reconfigures the narratives of human lives.<sup>88</sup>

In conclusion, stories have the capacity to provide meaningful structure to the episodic components of temporality. Hence, the *Dasein* of human persons is inextricably tethered to the composition of narratives that make meaningful sense out of temporal experiences. Existence and emplotment are just as woven together as the chronology of the different time-bound experiences which form one's narrative identity. Without the scripting of one's story, the temporality of life would remain a nonsensical constellation of unthematic occurrences lacking any pattern of unity. Story functions as this unifying pattern because plots organize discordance into concordance by ascribing structure to various human experiences across time. The structural quality of the narrative function brings coherence to temporal incidence, affords identity to the individual, and by extension, conveys a sense of historical consciousness to a community.<sup>89</sup> Most importantly, the entire circle of time and narrative is illustrative of the fundamentally narrative character of lived human experience.<sup>90</sup>

### **History as Narrative**

#### THE NARRATIVE CHARACTER OF HISTORY

The present project concerns itself with the history of Catholic evangelism in the United States. Accordingly, the project opened with the question of what kinds of temporal configurations allow people to situate historical realities; the answer is emplotted

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<sup>88</sup>Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 11.

<sup>89</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:246.

<sup>90</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:31.

ones. As the previous section developed, humanity's distended and therefore discordant present is a senseless assemblage in the absence of a unifying pattern. Narratives mediate the fragmentary experiences of time by bringing meaningful coherence; Ricoeur roots his entire discussion regarding the narrative character of human history in this theory:

...temporality cannot be spoken of in the direct discourse of phenomenology, but rather requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration. The negative half of this demonstration lies in our assertion that the most exemplary attempts to express the lived experience of time in its immediacy result in the multiplication of aporias, as the instrument of analysis becomes ever more precise. It is these aporias that the poetics of narrative deals with as so many knots to be untied. In its schematic form, our working hypothesis thus amounts to taking narrative as a guardian of time, insofar as there can be no thought about time without narrated time. Whence the general title of this third volume: *Narrated Time*. We apprehended this correspondence between narrative and time for the first time in our confrontation between the Augustinian theory of time and the Aristotelian theory of the plot, which began volume 1. The whole continuation of our analyses has been one vast extrapolation from this initial correlation.<sup>91</sup>

Narratives are precisely what configure and reconfigure, through the three-stage *mimetic* activity of emplotment, people's otherwise disconnected temporal occurrences. In so doing, narrative constructions and reconstructions provide meanings to the history of lived human experiences.

The lived past is not accessible. As Augustine pointed out in his discussion of the paradoxes of time, the past no longer exists. Rather, the conceptual present of the past (*praeterita*) draws memory into a discordant, psychological sense of time's passage such that the past becomes understood as a distended present of the past.<sup>92</sup> Recalling Ricoeur's critique against the notion of pure objectivity in relation to *cogito ergo sum*, even if the

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<sup>91</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:241.

<sup>92</sup>Augustine, *Confessions*, 169.

lived past was available, it could not be accessed as pure, objective knowledge.<sup>93</sup> When any past time under review was still present, this past was just as “confused, multi-form, and unintelligible” as one’s own constellation of temporal experiences currently.<sup>94</sup>

A re-actualization of the past is an impossible undertaking not only because of the impossibility of attaining an unsullied objectivity about the past, but also because the measures that historians employ in their craft are actually part of their own epistemological capacity to begin with; that is, emplotment does not merely apply to connecting past episodes into a cohesive history, emplotment is already at work in our ability to have knowledge in the first place, by supplying a meaningful pattern of unity to temporal existence.<sup>95</sup> As such, Ricoeur refers to the “derivation of historical knowledge, beginning from narrative understanding.”<sup>96</sup> Instead of reaching some alleged pure knowledge, historical knowing intends a sense-making organization.<sup>97</sup>

Historians base their organized visions of the past upon the meanings afforded by the causal relations of emplotment. History understands the past only through the narrative relationship it establishes between the lived experiences of people from past times and contemporary historians. History’s ordering of the *muthos* brings to the past a logical internal figuration characteristic of narrative. The causal interrelation between the ordered events within the plot itself gives historical episodes their logical structure to

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<sup>93</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 5–7.

<sup>94</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:99.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>96</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.



provide meaningful coherence according to the causality aimed at by the historian.<sup>98</sup> The entire process of drafting history places historical knowledge securely in the field of narrative understanding. The historians' emplotment of causal and therefore meaning-making interrelations between otherwise unintelligible events is indicative of the fundamentally narrative nature of history.<sup>99</sup>

Historians portray this narrative quality of history by imbuing past events with causal interrelatedness. As Ricoeur states, "A list of facts without any ties between them is not a narrative. ... To explain why something happened and to describe what happened coincide. A narrative that fails to explain is less than a narrative."<sup>100</sup> In linking narrative specifically to the field of history, Ricoeur quotes Raymond Aron to explicate the details of the historian's narrative process: as Aron says, "Every historian, to explain what did happen, asks himself what might have happened."<sup>101</sup> In criticizing Hayden White for masking causal intentionality, Ricoeur commends White for at least recognizing the role of the human imagination to an extent: "I do like his statement that 'we only can know the *actual* by contrasting it with or likening it to the *imaginable*.'"<sup>102</sup> Ricoeur explains that through historical emplotment, people do not just write historical narratives, but

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 169. See also Aristotle, *Poetics*, 51.

<sup>99</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:146.

<sup>100</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:148.

<sup>101</sup>Raymond Aron, *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, 160. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:183.

<sup>102</sup>Hayden White, *Metahistory and the Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, 98. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:154. Ricoeur notes that the italics appear as White's original emphasis.

hypothetical histories alongside the actual ones. In this manner, a historian establishes the relative probability of some historical constellation or other.<sup>103</sup> Consequently, the imaginative production of any published historical narrative coincided with probability-determining hypothetical plots alongside the configurations and reconfigurations received by the historian's audience. This multiplicity of plots accentuates history's narrative character.

Historians use their imaginations to intentionally reconstruct an unreal plot along with its likely results, then compare these hypothetical consequences to the real course of events to locate the most probable causes. This causal links are intended by the historian to make history meaningful and followable—an observation illustrative of history's narrative character.<sup>104</sup> Whereas the physical sciences attempt to organize facts under laws, history attempts to integrate facts into plots. Ricoeur concludes, "Emplotment is what qualifies an event as historical: the facts only exist in and through plots wherein they take on the relative importance that the human logic of the drama imposes on them. ... A historical event is not what happens, but what can be narrated."<sup>105</sup> History does not merely describe what happened in propositional lists; rather, history describes what happened while also explaining why it happened. As the creator of a plot, the historian intends to link events together by explaining the reasons for them. This explanation through causality illuminates the narrative character of all historical inquiry.

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<sup>103</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:187.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 169. The current project returns to this particular quotation near the end of this chapter in an exploration of the status of a historical event in Ricoeur's theory of narrative.

## THE PRODUCTIVE HUMAN IMAGINATION

Ricoeur's theory observes that history is not the past, but narrative reconstructions of the past. Humanity's lived experience of time prevents people from accessing the past directly.<sup>106</sup> This identification of history as basically narrative locates history's emplotted reconstructions of the past in a mediated reference that attempts to stand for the real but inaccessible past.<sup>107</sup> In the referential dynamics of emplotment, *the past can only be reconstructed by the imagination*.<sup>108</sup> The productive human imagination synthesizes meanings out of temporal discordance.<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, the human mind endeavors to envision the events and the characters of history as the imagination produces or concretizes mental images not just in the process of historical emplotment itself, but also in the *mimetic* relations of encounters between plots and their recipients.<sup>110</sup>

Imaginative synthesis and image-building concretization therefore position the productive human imagination at the center of historical narratives over and above the events themselves.<sup>111</sup> Events get reported only indirectly by way of the human imagination which already reconstructed some meaningful coherence out of the past.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, 59.

<sup>107</sup>Mary Schaldenbrand, "Metaphoric Imagination: Kinship through Conflict," in *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles E. Reagan (Ohio University Press, 1979): 71.

<sup>108</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:82.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>110</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 167–8.

<sup>112</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:204.

Likewise, the structural paradigms of explanation are an indirect derivation from the fundamental process of emplotment that takes place in the imagination. The starting point at the most basic level is the imaginative process of emplotment. *Mimetic* activity relates the discordance of actual human actions into the concordance of a narrative.<sup>113</sup> The plot is the symbolic mediation that brings meaning to human action; it is an imitation of real actions—an imitation reconstructed by the imagination’s synthetic ability to create.<sup>114</sup>

### HISTORY AND TIME

Histories are not the past itself of events unfolded in real time. Rather, histories are the present of past things as hindsight connects temporal fragments into a meaningful sense of concordance received presently; a narrative whose reception takes place in the current passing by of time. This feature annuls temporal distance by bringing the past into the present, along with the accompanying claim that the imaginatively reenacted present of the past in the narrative reconstruction accurately resembles the real past.<sup>115</sup>

...the temporal distance separating us from the past is not a dead interval but a transmission that is generative of meaning. Before being an inert deposit, tradition is an operation that can only make sense dialectically through the exchange between the interpreted past and the interpreting present.<sup>116</sup>

Without closing the temporal distance, the truth claims of history’s imagined reconfigurations would have no satisfaction, and “the imaginary picture of the past would

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<sup>113</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>114</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:208.

<sup>115</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:221.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*

remain something other than the past.”<sup>117</sup> The meaning of history rests in *the current possession of past activity*.<sup>118</sup>

The field of history engages past, present, and future through emplotment, context, and extrapolation, respectively.<sup>119</sup> In Augustine’s present of past things, history emplots a narrative of the past. Augustine’s present of time’s passage currently in progress brings the historian’s contextualized perspective into the historical analysis. And ironically, even the future is brought into historical inquiry when Augustine’s present of future things predicts historical trajectories. This being said, the past (or the present of past things) constitutes the temporal sphere most applicable to the historian. Ricoeur connects history to temporality through history’s narrative nature in the following discussion:

...there is no history of the present, in the strictly narrative sense of that term. Such a thing could be only, an anticipation of what future historians might write about us. The symmetry between explanation and prediction, characteristic of the nomological sciences, is broken at the very level of historical statements. If such narration of the present could be written and known to us, we could in turn falsify it by doing the opposite of what it predicts. We do not know at all what future historians might write about us. Not only do we not know what events will occur, we do not know which ones will be taken as important. We would have to foresee the interests of future historians to foresee under what descriptions they will place our actions.<sup>120</sup>

With no history of the present, technically speaking, and with our absence of knowing neither what will happen nor which happenings will be deemed relevant, the tie between history and narrative is most evident in the emplotment of the past.

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:147.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

However, this emplotment of past incidence nonetheless tethers the past to the present and the future in the *distentio animi* of the historian.<sup>121</sup> Because of the probabilistic character of historical emplotment, “causal explanation incorporates into the past the unpredictability that is the mark of the future and introduces into retrospection the uncertainty of the event.”<sup>122</sup> In this imaginative operation characteristic of historical synthesis, the historian functions as a narrator who resituates all three dimensions of time into the distended present, to bring narrative concordance to discordant temporality.<sup>123</sup> By interrelating past events through an intended and meaningful causality, historians emplot the past into an internal figuration with its own sense of standing as a meaningful whole. In other words, the logical organization of past events ordered within the historical narrative provides a concordant sense of coherence without recourse to accidents external to the plot.<sup>124</sup> Historical emplotment thereby constructs and reconstructs time, since people comprehend narrative in a temporal mode.<sup>125</sup>

As a form of narrative, history necessarily showcases the circularity of time and narrative that grounds Ricoeur’s whole trilogy. As aforementioned, historical emplotment constructs and reconstructs temporality. But the time that history constructs is built upon a temporality that is already understood. Thus we observe the restructuring and

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<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Hans Kellner, “‘As Real as It Gets’: Ricoeur and Narrativity,” in *Philosophy Today* 34:3 (Fall 1990): 232–4.

<sup>124</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:41.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 92.

configuring of one's initial preunderstanding by historical texts—an observation that highlights the second stage of *mimetic* circularity, specifically. And according to the first stage of *mimetic* activity, while the historian constructs an artificial temporality when emplotting the past, he simultaneously refers back to a prior understanding of lived time in actuality—an understanding to which the historian already holds and brings into any interpretation of the past. This activity of simultaneously constructing and referring back to temporal configurations characterizes the *mimetic* circularity of emplotment which brings meaningful concordance to the discordance of temporal experiences. This *mimetic* configurational activity of emplotment is also characteristic of historical procedures; consequently, one observes in historical figurations an expression of the circle of time and narrativity.<sup>126</sup> Most importantly, this current work sees again Ricoeur's "thesis concerning the ultimately narrative character of history."<sup>127</sup>

#### RICOEUR'S THEORY DISTINCT FROM NARRATIVE HISTORIES

In defending his thesis that all human history is narrative by its very nature, Ricoeur makes clear that he is not endorsing narrative history in the methodological sense as a way of doing history that is superior to alternative ways of doing history. His theory is far broader and stronger than a mere defense of narrative history as one method among many. Ricoeur is not a narrative historian just like he is not a narrative theologian; rather, he has a theory of narrative that he uses in the fields of history and theology by virtue of the narrative character of all lived human experience. He says, "My thesis concerning the ultimately narrative character of history in no way is to be confused with a defense of

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 91.

narrative history ... it is a lost cause to bind the narrative character of history to one particular form of history, narrative history.”<sup>128</sup> To do so is a “lost cause” precisely because all history is already narrative, regardless its form.

Ironically, Ricoeur censures narrative historians. By treating their scholarly field as but one approach compared to other approaches such as positivist theories and quantitative historiographies, narrative historians commit the same error as those branches of history they oppose; that is, they deny the narrative character of all history, regardless its methodological approach.<sup>129</sup> He affirms that “history that is the least narrative in its style of writing nevertheless continues to rely on narrative understanding.”<sup>130</sup> All histories, no matter what events or epochs are purveyed, utilize the configurational mode of emplotment to grant meanings to the splintered fragments of temporal experiences.<sup>131</sup> Ricoeur says, “historians do not despair of having to work only with mutilated fragments. One makes a plot with what one knows, and a plot is by nature ‘mutilated knowledge.’”<sup>132</sup> With history, the internal figurations and continual reconfigurations of *mimetic* activity bind otherwise disjointed lists of occurrences into some coherent whole.<sup>133</sup> Therefore all history possesses a narrative quality, regardless with what style the historian writes uses to write history.

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<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>131</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 117.

<sup>132</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:170.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid.



Narrative depiction is merely one type of portrayal amidst others. In fact, narrative descriptions in history are observed to be highly problematic with regard to the paradoxes of time. Ricoeur cites a paradigmatic illustration of this difficulty: “In 1717, the author of *Rameau’s Nephew* was born.”<sup>134</sup> This narrative sentence, representative of a style employed by narrative historians, links Diderot’s birth to the publication of his famous book *Rameau’s Nephew*. The event of Diderot’s birth is redescribed in terms of Diderot’s later production of the well-known book. In the narrative sentence, the historian takes two temporal occurrences, a birth and a publication, and intentionally links these temporal fragments causally into a meaningful coherence.

However, as Ricoeur says, “No one, at that time, could utter such a sentence.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, the narrative sentence communicates a temporal paradox that opposes the kind of truth that history endeavors to convey.<sup>136</sup> Other terms such as “anticipated,” “provoked,” and “gave rise to” all retroactively realign past incidents in a manner that favors the causality that the historian intentionally supplies, while detracting from the real-world intentions of the agents involved in the reported actions themselves.<sup>137</sup> Ricoeur is careful to note that narrative sentences of this sort are not necessarily typical of narrative methodologies, but their frequency is not his point. His point is to distinguish between a narrative *style* as one method of writing history versus the narrative *character* of all history, regardless of methodology. As a style, narrativist methods of doing history have

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 146.

been rightly criticized for the causal paradoxes that this technique conveys in narrative sentences and for the weakened presentation of intended actuality in favor of the intentionality of retroactive historical causality.<sup>138</sup>

But these noted criticisms apply to a literary style, not to Ricoeur's thesis. The challenges posed by narrative descriptions in history regard historical explanation as distinct from narrative understanding.<sup>139</sup> Even those histories whose writing style adopts the most nonnarrative form possible are nonetheless dependent upon a narrative understanding for comprehension.<sup>140</sup> The problematics of explanation do not change the fact that in all history, constellations of unconnected temporal moments become meaningful when the productive human imagination brings a pattern of unity to the discordance by connecting those moments into a plot.

Embodied human existence contextualized in the world becomes meaningful according to the unifying pattern of emplotment because all disjointed experiences of temporal discordance are given concordant meaning in the manner of a narrative.<sup>141</sup> So no matter how history is explained, one already comprehends it in a narrative mode.<sup>142</sup> The critiques against narrative history as a stylistic methodology belong to the sphere of historical explanation rather than narrative understanding. Consequently, these issues applicable to narrative historians do not apply to Ricoeur's thesis. Not only does Ricoeur

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<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 147.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>141</sup>Kellner, "As Real as It Gets," 232–4.

<sup>142</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:156.

distinguish his narrative theory of understanding from narrative histories of historical explanation in order to safeguard his own thesis from the troublesome nature of narrative sentences, but by addressing this potential objection, he affirms and clarifies the narrative character of history.

## RICOEUR'S THEORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Likewise, a more serious potential objection regarding epistemology also facilitates an opportunity for Ricoeur to showcase history's narrative nature. In particular, Ricoeur observes that knowing is not restricted to historical knowledge nor to temporal acts. For instance, the logical derivation of a conclusion from a syllogism constitutes a manner of comprehension that lacks any narrative characteristics and lacks necessary recourse to a collage of lived temporal experiences.<sup>143</sup> One might appeal to Ricoeur's theory of narrative by pointing out that comprehension even of this logical sort does indeed necessarily involve a knowing agent bound by a temporal context. However, Ricoeur rejects this possible solution. He observes that such an appeal simply reiterates Kant's assertion that all experience occurs in time.<sup>144</sup> For Ricoeur, the fact that all experience, including the experience of comprehension, happens in time is insufficient by itself to defend his thesis that history is ultimately narrative in character.

The experience of knowing is a temporal one that takes place in the mind of a time-bound human agent within context, but aside from the temporality of the knower, syllogistic reasoning is capable of a level of detachment from temporality with axioms and postulates removed from lived temporal experiences. This degree of detachment is

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 159.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

enough to pose a possible difficulty for Ricoeur's theory. While the knowing agent is contextualized by a temporal existence, syllogistic reasoning nevertheless provides a clear example of a conclusion detached from the features of a narrative.<sup>145</sup> Thus, not all forms of comprehension have a narrative character. Ricoeur never reduces all philosophy to narrative, as he readily refers to the "scope of the domain where the reply of the poetics of narrative to the aporetics of time is pertinent—and the limit beyond which temporality, escaping from the grid-work of narrativity, moves once again from being a problem to being a mystery."<sup>146</sup> And if historical understanding could be viewed as one of these sorts of theoretical or categorical comprehension whose nature is not necessarily narrative, then Ricoeur's location of history necessarily and essentially within the narrative domain becomes undercut.<sup>147</sup>

The historiographies of Ricoeur's own context for example tended against narrativist writing styles in favor of a decrease in the role that chronology plays in historical writing. Historians who favor longer time spans in their analyses witness a shrinking importance for dates that coincides with the diminishing emphasis upon chronological succession. Instead of sequential history in which time and narrative are obviously apparent in the sequential story of one thing following another in a temporal order, contemporary histories moved away from such chronology in a preference to see

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid.

<sup>146</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:243.

<sup>147</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:159.

the events of history together as a totality. Ricoeur cites Louis Mink as a characteristic example of a scholar whose thesis seeks a God's-eye perspective from outside of time.<sup>148</sup>

According to Mink's view, historical comprehension becomes "an individual act of seeing-things-together."<sup>149</sup> Ricoeur explains that historical knowing is thereby viewed in such a way that "the successive moments of all time are copresent in a single perception, as of a landscape of events."<sup>150</sup> Rather than the productive human imagination employing the configurational operation of a narrative for comprehending history, an alternative configuration understands "actions and events...surveyed as it were in a single glance as bound together," according to Mink.<sup>151</sup> But for Ricoeur, the totality of seeing-things-together does not designate a "superior degree of configurational comprehension," it actually suggests the end of authentic historical understanding.<sup>152</sup>

The ambition of Mink's God's-eye perspective seeks to do away with the episodic side of emplotment in order to eliminate the sequential character of time. Accordingly, Mink attempts to strip every temporal facet from the configurational operation of grasping together. In this attempt, he ignores a temporal feature inherent in

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Louis O. Mink, "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding," in *Philosophical Analysis and History*, ed. William H. Dray (New York: Harper & Row, 1966): 184. [Also in *History and Theory* 5 (1965): 24–47.] Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:156.

<sup>150</sup>Louis O. Mink, "History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension," *New Literary History* (1970): 549. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:159–60.

<sup>151</sup>Mink, *History and Fiction*, 554. Quoted by Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:160.

<sup>152</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:160.

all historical events which is that every historical occurrence had once been *not yet*.<sup>153</sup>

Ricoeur appreciates Mink's recognition of multiple modes of comprehension as a strength of Mink's work; but in the attempt to abolish sequence for totality and in the refusal to recognize the temporal attributes of historical comprehension, Mink risks misunderstanding the particular temporality of narrative cognition.<sup>154</sup>

Just as the problems raised against narrative historical styles of writing did not pose difficulties for Ricoeur's thesis but actually made possible a discussion in support of his view, so too does the epistemological issue. While Ricoeur, in his dialogue with Mink, refers to that episodic aspect of plots that tethers narrative to some degree of temporal succession, Ricoeur does not appeal to chronology to make his case—nor does he *need to*.

The argument that in current historiography chronology recedes—and along with it the concern for dates—is a perfectly reasonable one. But the question remains open to what point the surpassing of simple chronology implies the abolition of every mode of temporality. From Augustine to Heidegger, every ontology of time tries to disentangle from purely chronological time those temporal properties founded upon succession but not reducible to either simple succession or chronology.<sup>155</sup>

Although Ricoeur observes a chronological facet to plots that Mink has a tendency to overlook, Ricoeur does not situate his theory of history as narrative within this sequential component to *muthos*. Rather, the configurational operation of historical understanding places history securely within the sphere of narrative at a fundamental level. An

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<sup>153</sup>Louis O. Mink, "Philosophical Analysis and Historical Understanding," *Review of Metaphysics* 21/4 (June 1968): 667–98.

<sup>154</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:161.

<sup>155</sup>*Ibid.*, 159.

epistemological grounding understands all history to be comprehended in a necessarily narrative configurational operation in the productive human imagination.<sup>156</sup>

Even if Mink's totality of grasping everything together absent of any chronological component could be approached more closely than ever before, history deals in the lived, temporal, and contextualized experiences of people, not just the abstract, the theoretical, and the categorical. Therefore, history will always include a set of items interrelated by emplotment. Ricoeur highlights that there are attributes of temporality that, although based upon sequence, cannot be reduced to chronological succession alone. Ricoeur notes that when historical emplotment is more quantitative and less narrative in style, it nonetheless makes sense to speak of emplotment even in the absence of a sequential emphasis between the items under inquiry.<sup>157</sup>

In other words, even without an emphasis upon sequence or chronology, history is no less emplotted.

A story, too, must be more than just an enumeration of events in serial order; it must organize them into an intelligible whole, of a sort such that we can always ask what is the "thought" of this story. In short, emplotment is the operation that draws a configuration out of a simple succession. Furthermore, emplotment brings together factors as heterogeneous as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results.<sup>158</sup>

Prior to sorting out possibilities through reflective judgments, the imaginative procedures of the historian employ the highly intellectual operation of abstraction that emplots

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<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid., 230.

<sup>158</sup>Ibid., 65.

competing narratives from a concoction of temporal causations, human purposes, and random occurrences.<sup>159</sup> As Ricoeur says elsewhere, in union with Paul Veyne:

What is more, if we define what counts as a plot broadly enough, even quantitative history reenters its orbit. There is a plot whenever history brings together a set of goals, material causes, and chance. A plot is “a very human and very unscientific mixture of material causes, ends, and chance events.” Chronological order is not essential to it.<sup>160</sup>

The set of items in any history, whether through sequence or not, take on significance when interconnected through an ordering. In this mental operation, imagination “puts its elements into a single, concrete complex of relations.”<sup>161</sup> This is the very same kind of knowing that designates the narrative operation.<sup>162</sup>

Historical hypotheses are not the telos of historical investigation. Hypotheses aid history by demarcating the field of inquiry, but the essential manner of comprehension is not scientific—it is hermeneutical.

This then involves an exploration of the probable or necessary interconnections. If the historian in his thinking can affirm that, by the modification or omission of an individual event in a complex of historical conditions, there would have followed a different series of events “in certain *historically important* respects,” then the

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., 170. Ricoeur’s citation from Veyne appears in: Paul Veyne, *Comment on écrit l’histoire*, augmented with “Foucault révolutionne l’histoire” (Paris: Seuil, 1971): 46.

<sup>161</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:159.

<sup>162</sup>Consequently, one may understand the Church’s new evangelizations as narratives not merely in the sense of a chronological sequence of happenings associated with the Church’s call. Beyond the events, every interpretation of the Church’s call to proclaim is already a narrative in that the productive human imagination, through the emplotment process, interconnects a complex of different elements into the sense-making coherence of an ordering.



historian can make a judgment of causal imputation that decides the historical significance of the event.<sup>163</sup>

By holding various historical configurations and reconfigurations in comparison and contrast to imaginative hypothetical reconstructions, the historian interprets lived human experience to determine the most probable causal links that interconnect the set of items under historical review. Even in Louis Mink's task of perceiving an overall landscape of events taken together as a whole, the historian understands the constitutive elements of the historical analysis, however broad the time span, in an interpretive act of thoughtful determination that ties those pieces together rather than viewing them as unconnected and meaningless.

The aerial point of view is not a brand of comprehension devoid of narrative attributes like syllogistic derivation. The totality of seeing-things-together does not constitute a theoretical or categorical epistemological mode as in scientific operations or proofs. Rather, because of the contemplative procedure of connecting the constitutive components of historical investigation together according to probable causal links, Mink's approach is not a methodology—it is a kind of reflective judgment.<sup>164</sup> And the veracity of these judgments is not demonstrated by the scientific method; the veracity of these judgments is conveyed by the causal ordering of the interconnected pieces of the set.<sup>165</sup> In

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<sup>163</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:184. Ricoeur's citation from Weber appears in: Max Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences," in idem, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. Edward Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1949): 166. Ricoeur notes that the italics appear as Weber's original emphasis.

<sup>164</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 118.

<sup>165</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:156.

other words, the entire context is that which provides the meanings.<sup>166</sup> As Ricoeur says, “Why are there no ‘detachable’ conclusions in a historian’s argument or work? Because the narrative as a whole is what supports these conclusions.”<sup>167</sup> Ricoeur maintains that:

...if history were to break every connection to our basic competence for following a story and to the cognitive operations constitutive of our narrative understanding, as I described them in the first part of this work, it would lose its distinctive place in the chorus of the social sciences. It would cease to be historical.<sup>168</sup>

In other words, the location of history within the narrative realm not only safeguards the ultimately narrative character of history, but it also protects within the field of history the *historical* element itself.<sup>169</sup>

### **The Narrative Character of History and Historical Truth Claims**

#### HISTORY’S ABILITY TO RECONFIGURE TEMPORALITY

Ricoeur thus maintains the fundamentally narrative character of history against the potential objections that result from blurring Ricoeur’s theory with *narrative history*, as just one problematic literary style of writing history; likewise, he upholds his thesis against the more serious problematic associated with the location of history within some epistemological category that is not essentially narrative in its nature. But the most serious possible opposition to Ricoeur’s understanding remains. He asserts that all history—whether chronological or not—is emplotted at the imaginative level of abstraction. The latent challenge to this assertion rests in the charge that the truth claims

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<sup>166</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative, Volume 2* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), 62.

<sup>167</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:156.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 230.

of historical analysis under the field of history from the *mimetic* figurations and reconfigurations operable in plot-making.

In other words, historians do more than merely apply the concordant functions of imagination to the discordance of lived experiences by ordering a meaning-making image out of the temporal constellation of earthly causes, human aims, and chance happenings. They also aim at achieving coherence between the plot constructed and actual events. To be clear, the present project already bracketed out the issue of *theological truth*, according to the transcendent nature of revelation, and according to the role of faith which seeks understanding in all Christian theology.<sup>170</sup> However, the *historical truth* that history seeks, in contrast to the narratives of literary fiction, poses potential difficulties worthy of attention. This present project proceeds to address these possible challenges. More importantly, this project will convey that history's truth venture is not a threat to the healthy inexhaustibility of narrative innovations; on the contrary, history's quest for truth is precisely what warrants the necessity of embracing a critical openness to ongoing reconfiguration.

The construction of the historical plot is the work of the a priori imagination.<sup>171</sup> But as an attempt at creating as authentic a reenactment of actual lived experiences as humanly possible, the constructions and reconstructions of historians indeed make a truth claim.

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<sup>170</sup>Mark I. Wallace, "Ricoeur, Rorty, and the Question of Revelation," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993): 241–2.

<sup>171</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:145.

Detached from the context of reenactment, the historian's imagination could be confused with that of the novelist. Unlike the novelist, however, the historian has a double task: to construct a coherent image, one that makes sense, and "to construct a picture of things as they really were and of events as they really happened."<sup>172</sup>

For all narratives, fictional and historical alike, Ricoeur's third stage of imitation places the world of the text in contact with the real world of the reader. *Mimesis*<sub>3</sub> with regard to a work of fiction emphasizes reception, as the reader assimilates the narrative, and is shaped and reshaped by its impact upon actual lived human experience. However, the third stage of *mimesis* with regard to historical narratives emphasizes reference as much as reception, as the narrative world does not merely impact the reader's world, but also intends to accurately reflect it. As Ricoeur says, "We can say, as in our sketch of *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> in volume 1, that an aesthetics of reception cannot take up the problem of communication without taking up that of reference."<sup>173</sup> With historical narratives, that reference is representative of the historian's plea for objectivity.<sup>174</sup>

Although pure objectivity is never reached, it nonetheless remains a project of historical analysis.<sup>175</sup> Ricoeur explains that the imagination's narrative configurations and reconfigurations indeed make a truth claim in history. The imitative activity of

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid. Ricoeur quotes R. G. Collingwood from his posthumous work entitled *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956): 246. This quotation originates from a series of lectures that Collingwood wrote in 1936—revised by Collingwood up to 1940 and edited by T. M. Knox in 1946. Collingwood first drafted this lecture series following his inauguration as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at Oxford.

<sup>173</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:178.

<sup>174</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:116.

<sup>175</sup>Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 188–92.

historical emplotment adds a referential component to reception in that what is received in the third stage of *mimesis* claims to refer to true events. Ricoeur defines reference as “the relationship of historical narrative to the real past.”<sup>176</sup> He clarifies this relationship of reference as one of “standing for” or “taking the place of.”<sup>177</sup> Thus reception of historical narratives runs through a mental filtration system in which people attempt to match the emplotted constructions to events in actual time. The real past thereby places constraints upon the imagination during historical emplotment.

As Ricoeur used Aristotle’s *Poetics* to convey that narratives are comprehended in a temporal mode, he showcased the self-explanatory capacity of the plot. As aforementioned, the events organized logically within the plot furnish a concordant sense of wholeness from the narrative form itself, without any recourse to accidental externalities.<sup>178</sup> Ricoeur’s discussion of the *Poetics* observed that a narrative derives its meaningful sense of concordance from the internal coherence of the temporal configuration within the plot itself, not from outside episodes, and not from actual time. Therefore, the coherence internal to the emplotted configurations and reconfigurations—not historical accuracy—directs a narrative’s sense of temporality. Ricoeur notes the resulting tension: “Indeed history’s capacity for reconfiguring time brings into play the question of truth in history.”<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:154.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:41.

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*, 92.

## HISTORY AND FICTION

This truth question distinguishes history from fictional narratives, the subject of the second volume of Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* trilogy. He readily affirms this important distinction between fictional works and histories which, though they possess a fundamentally narrative character, encompass more than fiction:

Only history can claim a reference inscribed in empirical reality, inasmuch as historical intentionality aims at events that have actually occurred. Even if the past no longer exists and if, in Augustine's expression, it can be reached only in the present of the past, that is, through the traces of the past that have become documents for the historian, still it did happen. The past event, however absent it may be from present perception, nonetheless governs the historical intentionality, conferring upon it a realistic note that literature will never equal, even if it makes a claim to be "realistic."<sup>180</sup>

Because of its attempt at an objective referent, historical explanation is indeed independent from the self-explanatory element of narrative.<sup>181</sup> Consequently, historians are doing more in their *mimetic* activity than poets are doing in theirs.<sup>182</sup> Ricoeur explains, "Unlike novels, historians' constructions do aim at being *reconstructions* of the past."<sup>183</sup> In as far as histories aim to reflect what truly occurred, they transcend narration strictly speaking. Stated alternatively, all history is narrative in character; at the same time, history supplements its narrative dimension with the added project of intending to refer to actual events as they really happened in time. This hunt for objectivity is a function autonomous from the self-explanatory aspect of plots, and in so being, this quest

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 177.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>183</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:142.

for objective truth extends historical investigation beyond its imaginative component of narrative creation.

The very same historical intentionality that occasioned an exhibition of history's narrative nature also highlights the truth-seeking feature independent of narrative self-explanation. Through narrative emplotment, the historian formulates a history out of an available collection of temporal fragments, and in so doing the historian intends a connectivity that links the discordant fragments into a meaningful image. The intended connections between fragmentary items is none other than a probable causality that intentionally links the piecemeal causes, ends, and chance events together into the imaginative concordance of a narrative.<sup>184</sup> In other words, the historian means to confer upon the items under investigation a fusion of likely causes and effects that render the plot followable.<sup>185</sup> In addition, the imagination simultaneously produces any number of alternative stories out of the same fragments to weigh the various probabilities against one another and thereby extrapolate the way events probably unfolded.<sup>186</sup>

This multiplicity of emplotments amplifies the narrative essence of history. At the same time, the historian's intention to determine the most likely course of events exhibits that distinctive feature of the search of objectivity in historical investigation. As Ricoeur explains:

...we might say of emplotment what Max Weber says of the mental construction of a different course of events: "In order to penetrate the real causal relationships, we construct unreal ones." ... It is for this reason that historians are not simply

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<sup>184</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 117.

<sup>185</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:65–7.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, 186.

narrators: they give reasons why they consider a particular factor *rather than some other* to be the sufficient cause of a given course of events. Poets also create plots that are held together by causal skeletons. But these latter are not the subject of a process of argumentation. Poets restrict themselves to producing the story and explaining by narrating.<sup>187</sup>

Like poets, historians construct a narrative. But unlike poets who explain their meanings via the narrative itself which has a self-explanatory capacity, historians move beyond that self-explanatory capacity to explain their meanings by way of a real-world referent. In addition to the reception of a work, historical explanation includes the issue of the reference of a work. Historians seek to refer as accurately as possible to the actual lived experiences under review. Beyond reception alone, the discipline of history also seeks a true reference to objective reality. This truth project draws argumentation into historical explanation, as historians not only argue with one another regarding truth claims, but also argue within themselves as the productive imagination produces narrative opponents in a competition over causality, in order to establish the most probable course of events.<sup>188</sup>

A potential criticism of Ricoeur's view rests in the possible contention that the referential concern for objectivity, in moving beyond the self-explanatory function of the plot, sunders history from the narrative domain. The observation that the truth project supplements *mimetic* activity is sufficient to overcome this possible objection. The added concern that historical plots match up with real-time referents in no way diminishes the fact that people make meaningful sense out of temporal fragments by understanding the past in a narrative mode. Moreover, this potential objection illuminates a false

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid. Ricoeur's citation from Weber appears in: Max Weber, "Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences," in idem, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. Edward Shils and Henry A. Finch (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1949):185–6.

<sup>188</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:162–3.



dichotomy between fiction and history which, although different, nevertheless maintain fundamental ties—significant connections otherwise lost in dichotomous thinking.<sup>189</sup>

History makes an inherent use of fiction in drafting unreal plots to compare and contrast against more probable plots to help intend the causal links that adhere the internal figurations of the narrative together with a meaningful sense of why events took place as they did. Simultaneously, aside from literary conventions that allow for creative inventions, fiction nonetheless seeks a vision of the world that that reflects the historical experiences of the real-world readership. This visionary projection makes the fiction meaningful and followable, constraining the fictional narrative in the same manner that reference constrains historical narrative.<sup>190</sup> In addition, the reception of fictional literature becomes part of human history.<sup>191</sup>

The restrictions that the objectivity project imposes upon historical narration do not sunder it from the narrative field; referential constraints actually tie history more closely to narrative by reflecting parallel constraints inherent to emplotting fictional storylines. A recognition of the different types of constraints—accurate references for historical narratives and believable temporal worlds for fictional narratives, respectively—is certainly important. Equally critical is a simultaneous recognition of the inherent ties that hold both history and fiction to the same meaning-making mode of

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>190</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:177.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 179.

understanding—narrative.<sup>192</sup> This dual recognition constitutes a healthy awareness of the synergistic spiral of three-stage *mimesis* characteristic of all narrative understanding. This hermeneutical circularity of mutual illumination and reinforcement constitutes a reciprocal dialectic of interpretive imitation applicable to both history and fiction, whose mutual use of one another is indicative of their shared narrative character.<sup>193</sup>

Ricoeur adds that a failure to recognize the connections between history and fiction has led to an emphasis upon evidence in history to the neglect of an emphasis upon the concerns that the historian brings to the historical narrative:

If this narrative continuity between story and history was little noticed in the past, it was because the problems posed by the epistemological break between fiction and history, or between myth and history, turned attention to the question of evidence, at the expense of the more fundamental question of what accounts for the interest of a work of history.<sup>194</sup>

The declared motivation for an emphasis upon evidence *is to defend history against skepticism and to justify its struggle for objectivity.*<sup>195</sup> But in the end, the danger is not that the plea for objectivity would sunder history from narrative; the danger is that a false dichotomy between history and fiction would fuel the Cartesian illusion of pure objectivity, and lose history's subjective and contextualized features in the process.

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<sup>192</sup>John Van Den Hengel, "Jesus between Fiction and History," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993): 146–50.

<sup>193</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:3–7.

<sup>194</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:151.

<sup>195</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

## CONTEXT AND SUBJECTIVITY

Some might understand the opening to subjectivity as the most serious of all potential problematics that Ricoeur's narrative theory raises. But for Ricoeur, subjectivity is not only inevitable, but profitable.<sup>196</sup> First, subjectivity is the inevitable result of affirming the fundamentally narrative character of all lived human experiences. Ricoeur observes that human existence is embodied human existence contextualized in the world. There is "no human experience that is not already mediated by symbolic systems and, among them, by narratives."<sup>197</sup> Or as he asks elsewhere: *in virtue of the symbolic structure of action, is there any experience that is not already the fruit of narrative activity?*<sup>198</sup> In this way, *the first mimetic relation always bears the mark of previous narratives.*<sup>199</sup> By showcasing the inescapability of the contexts from which historians abstract all narratives, *mimetic* circularity prevents any misunderstandings that history constitutes a purely objective enterprise.<sup>200</sup>

People always bring a preunderstanding into *mimesis*, whereby the human action that can be narrated "is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms. It is always already symbolically mediated."<sup>201</sup> Ricoeur notes that *a major characteristic of human*

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<sup>196</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 349.

<sup>197</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:74.

<sup>198</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>199</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:204.

<sup>201</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

*action is that it is always mediated.*<sup>202</sup> People identify temporal arrangements in actions that require emplotment; narrative then furnishes a descriptive context that renders the action meaningful.<sup>203</sup> The objective, substantial entities to which history seeks an accurate reference are in a perpetual state of embodied, mediated, and contextualized existence across time.<sup>204</sup> In the imagination, histories are always abstracted from these items, therefore “histories have no historical significance in themselves but only in reference to the continuously existing entities.”<sup>205</sup>

In addition, the reception of history in the third stage of *mimesis* mediates between the past and the present, for the reception itself is a part of human history.<sup>206</sup> In the interpretive spiral, the reception of history in *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> shapes understandings. Ricoeur explains that *the reader is constructed in and through the work.*<sup>207</sup> In *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>, these understandings are understandings that people bring into interpretations of subsequent readings of histories—as *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> moves to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in the hermeneutical spiral. Finally, the historians themselves are contextualized subjects with their own interests that they take into emplotment, and with their personal emphases that color the causal links which they intend upon the series of emplotted items.

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<sup>202</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid., 57–9.

<sup>204</sup>Patrick L. Bourgeois, “From Hermeneutics of Symbols to Interpretation of Texts,” in *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles E. Reagan (Ohio University Press, 1979): 89.

<sup>205</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:204–5.

<sup>206</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:172.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., 164.

...we have to take into consideration the historian's thought, which reconstructs a chain of events, as a way of rethinking what once was thought...the term "thought" has to be taken as having a broader extension than just rational thought. It covers the whole field of intentions and motivations.<sup>208</sup>

Histories written in a narrative style and histories that favor a quantitative method of historiography both share one thing in common: the interests of the historian. These personal interests guarantee the continuity between different styles of historical writing, which are all understood according to a narrative operation regardless of divergent literary approaches.<sup>209</sup>

Because of its essentially narrative character, history will plea for objectivity as its referential project, but history will never achieve the pure truth claims that it may only attempt to approach. History is always the history of symbolically-mediated and temporally-contextualized entities.<sup>210</sup> History is always received by persons whose existence is an embodied human existence contextualized in the world, therefore historical emplotment will always derive narrated entities from the real entities referred to.<sup>211</sup> This reception of histories shapes ongoing interpretations of histories in the endless dialectic of *mimetic* circularity. And the historians themselves are contextualized individuals who imbue their narratives with their own interests. Thus any claim to unmediated objectivity is problematic.<sup>212</sup> While some may experience a sense of

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 144–5.

<sup>209</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:95.

<sup>210</sup>Bourgeois, "From Hermeneutics of Symbols to Interpretation of Texts," 89.

<sup>211</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:204.

<sup>212</sup>Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 193.

discomfort in giving up concrete assurance about the reality of history, a recognition of the narrative character of lived experience aids in the struggle against determinism—a welcomed help for many concerned with history’s truth project.<sup>213</sup> In conclusion, all history arises out of context; hence subjectivity, whether welcomed or winced at, is unavoidable.

### **The Inexhaustibility of Competing Narratives**

#### THE HORIZON OF EXPECTATION AND THE SPACE OF EXPERIENCE

In light of this inevitable subjectivity, Ricoeur notes the parameters within which historical narratives operate. He articulates these boundaries in terms of the relationship between the *horizon of expectation* that the historian brings to emplotment and the *space of experience* to which historical plots refer.<sup>214</sup> These two stand in a dialectic tension with each other as the space of experience limits expectations, and as expectations supply the space of experience with historical intentionality. This reciprocity prevents utopian expectations that abandon history’s objective referent, and it avoids a reductionism of the past to one interpretive version.<sup>215</sup>

Their description is always inseparable from a prescription. If, therefore, we admit that there is no history that is not constituted through the experiences and the expectations of active and suffering human beings, or that our two categories taken together thematize historical time, we then imply that the tension between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience has to be preserved if there is to be any history at all.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>213</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 83.

<sup>214</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:215–6.

<sup>215</sup>Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur*, 206.

<sup>216</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:215.

These two poles of thinking about history cannot split. Their healthy coexistence safeguards history from explosion in one direction and from collapse in the other.

Cut off from the space of experience, the historical present blows up into an irresponsible infinity of fictions that stem entirely from historians' expectations with no reasonable commitment to referentiality. Cut off from the horizon of expectations, the space of experience becomes hermeneutically sealed into a lifeless, sedimented deposit of a singular interpretation that can only pretend to comprise the entirety of unmediated, uncontextualized truth—such an idea is impossible, and constitutes “a naïve notion of truth.”<sup>217</sup> History has as its double task to both connect imagined, idealistic horizons with lived, human time and to “resist narrowing our space of experience by liberating the unused potentialities of the past.”<sup>218</sup> To avoid a schism between the two poles and to preserve their valuable tension, the space of experience must always ground the horizon of expectations in the plea for objectivity. At the same time, the horizon of expectation must always open the space of experience to unattended possibilities.<sup>219</sup>

On the one hand, the narrative character of history does not equate to a hermeneutical free-for-all. Even though objective reality is never achieved because of history's contextualization, history does make a truth claim, and seeks objectivity in its referential project. In directing itself to the responsible commitment of seeking accuracy as closely as possible, historians cannot let their horizons of expectation run away from

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<sup>217</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:226.

<sup>218</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:235.

<sup>219</sup>Schaldenbrand, “Metaphoric Imagination: Kinship through Conflict,” 75.

them.<sup>220</sup> The field of history must struggle against an initial prejudice “which holds that the literature of imagination, because it always makes use of fiction, can have no hold on reality.”<sup>221</sup> No fan of skepticism, Ricoeur avoids throwing historical claims into doubt.<sup>222</sup> In his own words, “Limited skepticism is called for, but there is no reason to transform this into wholesale skepticism.”<sup>223</sup> History intends to refer to the temporal fragments of lived human experiences in a way that approaches objective reality. Although human experience is always mediated and contextualized, lived human experience actually happens in real time. We have no pure, objective access to that reality. But the concordance that historical narratives bring to temporal fragments seeks to provide meanings to actual lived experiences that truly occurred in real time.

On the other hand, historians cannot narrow the space of experience. History seeks objective truth about reality, but contextualization guarantees that any claims to pure objectivity are illusory. Ricoeur goes so far as to poke some sarcastic fun against the notion of *a sovereign consciousness, transparent to itself and the master of meaning*.<sup>224</sup> In order to claim as accurate a referent as humanly possible amidst the subjectivity of contextualized historical narratives, history cannot claim any singular narrative to be the only correct version. This illusion of pure objectivity illuminates the

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<sup>220</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:215.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*, 154–5.

<sup>222</sup>Schaldenbrand, “Metaphoric Imagination: Kinship through Conflict,” 75–6.

<sup>223</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:117.

<sup>224</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:219.



misapprehension that historical mastery was ever possible to begin with. As Ricoeur explains:

The theme of mastering history thus rests on a basic misunderstanding of the other side of thinking about history, ...namely, the fact that we are affected by history and that we affect ourselves by the history we make. It is precisely this tie between historical action and a received past ... that preserves the dialectical relation between our horizon of expectation and our space of experience.<sup>225</sup>

Ironically, attempts to firmly lock any particular history to the real past in the pursuit of objectivity will, in actuality, violate history's truth project.

Ricoeur recognizes the necessary limits that contextualization and the resulting subjectivity place upon historical referentiality, insofar as a relationship of representation between the narrated past and the real past designates historical reference.<sup>226</sup> These restrictions prohibit history's narrative reference from revealing with certain lucidity the entirety of reality about what actually happened. Ricoeur asks, "What are we saying when we say that something 'really' happened?"<sup>227</sup> His answer calls historians to yield any naïve understandings of past reality to historical assessments that recognize their field's narrative dimension.<sup>228</sup>

Let me immediately say that I do not expect the dialectic of standing-for to resolve the paradox that affects the concept of a "real" past, only that it should render problematic the very concept of "reality" applied to the past.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>226</sup>Schaldenbrand, "Metaphoric Imagination: Kinship through Conflict," 71.

<sup>227</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:142.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>229</sup>Ibid.

The field of history must not only struggle against the initial prejudice that imaginative plot constructions are divorced from reality. History must also resist another initial prejudice: that “the historian’s language can be made entirely transparent.”<sup>230</sup> One can never see with perfect clarity through the historical narrative and into the actual past that it refers to.

...we must struggle against the tendency to consider the past only from the angle of what is done, unchangeable, and past. We have to reopen the past, to revivify its unaccomplished, cut-off, even slaughtered possibilities.<sup>231</sup>

Although people cannot access the pure past, history purposes to communicate its objective referent as accurately as possible. Consequently, the constraints that objectivity places on historical employment demand of historical discourse *an endless rectification*.<sup>232</sup>

The never-ending reconfiguration of history is not a threat to the objective accuracy sought after in its referential truth project. On the contrary, openness to reconfiguration safeguards history’s quest for objectivity by protecting history from the naïve idea that just one contextualized, subjective interpretation could constitute a paradigmatic, concrete absolute. Why do historians, unlike poets, engage in a process of argumentation within themselves and with each other regarding causality?

...they argue because they know that we can explain *in other ways*. They know this because, like a judge, they are in a situation of contestation and of trial, and because their plea is never finished—for the test is more conclusive for

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<sup>230</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>231</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., 154.

eliminating candidates for causality... than for crowning any particular one once and for all.<sup>233</sup>

In other words, continual reconfiguration is healthy because it safeguards history from having one version sediment into a singular inert deposit. The truth project of history turns out not to be a challenge or potential obstacle to the present project, but rather the very means by which the health of ongoing reconfiguration is affirmed. Parallel to the use of narrative theory in theology that challenged in a helpful manner the notion of revelation as a pile of propositions, the use of narrative theory in history defends the responsible search for objectivity against extinction.

In the necessary tension already established between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience, the space of experience grounds the horizon of expectation in the commitment to seek a real-world referent that stands for the actual past as closely as humanly possible. As a result, the horizon of expectation becomes open to ongoing modifications depending upon new information and new perspectives about the space of experience under historical review. Since pure objectivity is impossible, any object under review can never satisfy the expectations of the historian. Rather, the space of experience modifies the imagined historical reconstructions. Conversely, the tense dialectic also requires that the space of experience remain open to unattended potentialities according to these shifting horizons of expectation that historians bring to their analysis. Thus the space of experience becomes open to continual transformations of memories about those experiences. In this continual interplay between modified expectations and transformed memories,

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<sup>233</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:186.

this shifting process of the modification of expectations ... consists in allowing all the modifications performed to “sink” into memory, while compacting them, and in opening ourselves up to new expectations entailing new modifications.<sup>234</sup>

In this way, the reciprocal dialectic between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience is precisely what opens historical emplotment to an inexhaustible variety of imaginative productions—perpetual reconfigurations of competing narratives.<sup>235</sup>

### SEDIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

This present project has already observed that the symbolic structure of action highlighted the first *mimetic* activity with regard to the relationship between historical emplotment and its temporally-bound application in human experience, while the restructuring function of reception illumined the third stage.<sup>236</sup> In addition, *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> moves to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in the healthy hermeneutical spiral of *mimetic* circularity as the people bring the mediated structures already received at the third stage into ongoing encounters with historical configurations at the first stage. Finally, this current undertaking looks to the particular mode of this interpretive movement. Specifically, *the third mimetic relation of narrative to practice, we said, leads back to the first relation by way of the second relation.*<sup>237</sup> In other words, received narrative understandings reconfigure encounters with existing historical configurations in the reciprocal dialectic between historical sedimentation and historical innovation that designates *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>.

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<sup>234</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:168.

<sup>235</sup>*Ibid.*, 167–8.

<sup>236</sup>Bourgeois, “From Hermeneutics of Symbols to Interpretation of Texts,” 93.

<sup>237</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248. When Ricoeur says “we said” in this quotation, he is specifically referring back to his originally discussion of *mimetic* circularity in *T & N*, 1:71.

It is the innovative capacity of a narrative to alter otherwise solidified paradigms that allows structures already received to shape ongoing encounters with historical narratives. If one received type became exclusive, then the mediation between historical narratives and human encounters with those narratives would stop at reception (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>). But received typologies do not stop at reception but go on to influence encounters with historical narratives (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>). It is the interplay between sedimentation and innovation (*mimesis*<sub>2</sub>) that describes the movement from reception to the mediated interpretation of human actions, making the second stage the avenue by which the *mimetic* spiral of emplotment continues. Particular to this project, it is the innovative capacity of a narrative to disrupt sedimentation that facilitates the healthy coexistence of competing interpretations central to the presentation of the new Catholic evangelization. The second *mimetic* relation, between the productive imagination and the actions imitated into the organization of a plot, is exactly what prevents a particular interpretation of the new evangelism from sedimenting and solidifying as the single, privileged or exclusive perspective.

Specifically, historical intentionality generates the magnetic pole of sedimentation in the process of historical emplotment. The list of items constitutive of historical narratives transcends a succession of historical events. One observes instead that a discordance of temporal fragments such as earthly causes, human goals, and random occurrences are rendered meaningful when linked together by way of a causality that the historian intends upon the constellation of experiences.<sup>238</sup> Historians purposefully and painstakingly draw the most probable causal connections between the items that comprise

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<sup>238</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:170. See also: Veyne, *Comment on écrit l'histoire*, 46.

the plot; these causal connections provide meanings. Causality makes the discordance of temporality into a concordant one by intending onto the temporal fragments reasons which answer why things took place. Ricoeur explains: “To the extent that in the ordering of events the causal connection (one thing as a cause of another) prevails over pure succession (one thing after another), a universal emerges that is, as we have interpreted it, the ordering itself erected as a type.”<sup>239</sup> That is, causality provides a paradigm for interpretation. In conveying a sense of meaning to otherwise unintelligible and inaccessible temporal pieces of the past, the historian’s hermeneutical model of causality becomes received, accepted, and typical. These paradigmatic structures of historical explanation thereby resist change, even beneath the pressure of new inventions.<sup>240</sup>

The pull of this resistance stands in simultaneous tension with the second *mimetic* relation’s other pole—innovation. Since the referential dynamics of history configure narrative reconstructions of the past in the productive human imagination, the synthetic, image-building faculties of the imagination constitute the basis from which historians derive reported events and the sedimented, explanatory structures that link those events together into a narrative coherence. The events and causal paradigms of history possess only an indirect reference to the actual but unreachable past by way of a narrative. History is only the reported events and the causal paradigms *indirectly*. History is *basically* narrative, for the imagination’s emplotted reconstructions of the past are

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<sup>239</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:69.

<sup>240</sup>*Ibid.*

functionally prior; events and models arise from the emplotted figurations.<sup>241</sup> The creative capacities of the imagination are foundational, and the pole of innovation identifies *the most creative moments of poetic activity*.<sup>242</sup>

On the one hand, at the pole of sedimentation, the established explanatory paradigms provide meanings to the items of historical interest.<sup>243</sup> People receive and accept these historical structures and the meanings they convey, and these sedimented models of historical explanation thereby resist alteration. The gravitational pull of the innovation pole, on the other hand, designates the preemptive desire for life itself to be meaningful.

...the story of a life continues to be refigured by all the truthful or fictive stories a subject tells about himself or herself. This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told.<sup>244</sup>

Ricoeur holds to the narrative nature of all lived human experience as any human life is itself the story of that life.

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.<sup>245</sup>

The process of the sedimentation of historical structures thus stands in a reciprocal dialect with the correlative process of the innovation of fresh narratives. The mutual tension

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<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>243</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 117–8.

<sup>244</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:246.

<sup>245</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:75.

between these two poles results from their respective gravities, as established paradigms resist change in light of the acceptance of their reception and their capacity for explanation, and as the creative capacities of the human imagination work to produce narratives out of the experiences of human lives.

Just as important as the dynamic tension between these two magnetic poles is their mutual interdependence. At the one pole, all innovations—no matter how creative—refer to the established rules that already mediate interpreted actions and experiences. Ricoeur compares the sedimented models of historical causation to the rules of grammar for fictional narratives. As the poet's creativity answers to the structures that the rules of language establish, the historian's innovations answer to explanatory structures of referentiality that the sedimented, causal paradigms establish.

Innovation remains a form of behavior governed by rules. The labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms. But the range of solutions is vast.<sup>246</sup>

Innovation is as much a new creation as it is a breaking down of existing models; but the deformation aspect itself is directed by paradigmatic types.<sup>247</sup>

At the other pole, all sedimentation was once innovation. Historical narratives had always once been new prior to becoming an established type.<sup>248</sup> In this sense, all sedimentations were once innovations at an earlier point in time. The term *sedimentation* refers to the later stage of an earlier innovation deemed sedimented after becoming hailed

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<sup>246</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>248</sup>Ibid., 69.



as typical. Ricoeur states, “All we can ask of explanation is that it be precise and specific, not that it be exhaustive.”<sup>249</sup>

The emplotment process oscillates between servile conformity with respect to the narrative tradition and rebellion with respect to any paradigm received from that tradition. Between these two extremes lies the entire range of combinations involving sedimentation and invention.<sup>250</sup>

Historians are just as interested to explore the established structures of history and their resistance to change as they are interested to investigate the mutations of these systems.<sup>251</sup> Indeed, the variety of potential reconfigurations knows numerous trajectories, but historical emplotment refers to the actual past of real time by its innovations as much as by its sedimentations.<sup>252</sup>

#### THE STATUS OF THE HISTORICAL EVENT

For Ricoeur, an event kicks up the sedimentation of narrative paradigms with fresh innovations. But an event for Ricoeur is not a momentary happening.<sup>253</sup> Expanding the traditional treatment of historical events as occurrences that take place within a short span of time, Ricoeur defines the idea of an event more broadly as a *quasi-event*.<sup>254</sup> “For me, the event is not necessarily brief and nervous, like some sort of explosion. It is a

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<sup>249</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>250</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>252</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>253</sup>Ricoeur credits Paul Veyne’s broadened understanding of a plot as having inspired Ricoeur’s expanded notion of an event. See *T & N*, 1:208–214 for Ricoeur’s detailed discussion regarding Veyne’s influence.

<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 224–5.

variable of the plot.”<sup>255</sup> Traditionally, narrativist historians and quantitative historians alike favored the idea that an event is a sudden occurrence. Even the opponents of quantitative historiography agreed with their opposition that if their concept of event were to incorporate any explanations, then history could no longer understand an event as a unique and unrepeatable occurrence.

By logical necessity, this stubborn identification of an event with an isolated incident prevented any causal elucidation, for explanation expands a momentary happening in time into an interpretive framework.<sup>256</sup> But the problem with this traditional notion of an event is that causal links are already inherent to basic narrative mode of all historical understanding to begin with; the notion of an event, then, has to expand in order to recognize that all history is already mediated by way of emplotment.<sup>257</sup>

By *quasi-event* we signify that the extension of the notion of event, beyond short and brief time, ... The event in history corresponds to what Aristotle called a change in fortune—*metabole*—in his formal theory of emplotment. An event, once again, is not only what contributes to the unfolding of a plot but what gives it the dramatic form of a change in fortune.<sup>258</sup>

Accordingly, *all change enters the field of history as a quasi-event*.<sup>259</sup> Ricoeur clarifies, “Emplotment is what qualifies an event as historical ... a historical event is not what happens but what can be narrated, or what has already been narrated.”<sup>260</sup> This expanded

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<sup>255</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>256</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid., 128.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid., 224–5.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., 224.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid., 169–70.

definition applies to the special kind of event that concerns this present project; that is, an event that breaks up the sedimented structures of solidified paradigms with an innovative multiplicity of competing narratives.<sup>261</sup>

In particular, innovative narrative reconstructions occur out of sedimented paradigms *when a course of action surprises us, intrigues us, or leaves us perplexed.*<sup>262</sup> According to the dialectic of sedimentation and innovation, this special type of event is one that brings transformation to heretofore enduring historical legacies. Under the broadened notion of quasi-event that recognizes a narrative basis for all history, such an innovation-generating event may take the form of a new thinking process. In *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, innovative transformations are characterized *by unexploited potentialities that a new event in thinking will bring to light.*<sup>263</sup> In the current application of Ricoeur's theory to theology, a new event in thinking kicked up the sedimentation of established models of Catholic evangelization in the United States context with fresh interpretations of the call to proclaim. When an event of this sort stirs up established norms with an influx of narrative reconstructions, new life is breathed into an otherwise stagnant deposit.

In particular, this healthy process of revitalization that results from an innovation-generating event defines tradition and ultimately cultivates individual and community

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<sup>261</sup>Van Den Hengel, "Jesus between Fiction and History," 149.

<sup>262</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:155.

<sup>263</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:219.

senses of narrative identities.<sup>264</sup> First, Ricoeur identifies the interplay of sedimentation and innovation as that which forms a tradition.<sup>265</sup>

To state the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the question, “Who did this?” “Who is the agent, the author?” We first answer this question by naming someone, that is, by designating them with a proper name. But what is the basis for the permanence of this proper name? What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative. . . . Without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution.<sup>266</sup>

Furthermore, identity cannot be a substantial or formal sameness across time, following Hume and Nietzsche.<sup>267</sup> Rather, an identity, or sense of self-constancy across time, does indeed include change and mutability through the unfolding experiences of temporality.<sup>268</sup> In contrast to a substantialist illusion of identity that denies the narrative character of lived human experience, narrative identity recognizes a coherent understanding across time amidst change, since people understand temporality in the manner of a narrative to begin with.<sup>269</sup>

The innovation-generating event ultimately leads to Ricoeur’s conclusion that the epistemological circularity which haunts his entire analysis turns out to be a productive

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<sup>264</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 87–9.

<sup>265</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:68.

<sup>266</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:246.

<sup>267</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup>Pamela Anderson, “Narrative Identity and the Mythico-Poetic Imagination,” in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993): 195.

<sup>269</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:246–7.

enterprise that advances his analysis. The reciprocal dialectic between sedimentation and innovation (*mimesis*<sub>2</sub>) that constitutes tradition is *received* (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>) as the narrative identity of individuals and communities. In the third stage of *mimetic* activity—the stage of narrative reception—more than just a story is received; instead, people receive a sense of who they are.<sup>270</sup> This phenomenon indicates that the dialectic is indeed a reciprocal one, and that the circularity of time and narrative is indeed not a vicious circle, but a healthy spiral.

The third mimetic relation is defined by the narrative identity of an individual or a people, stemming from the endless rectification of a previous narrative by a subsequent one, and from the chain of refigurations that results from this. In a word, narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle.

Ricoeur offers Israel's Exodus as an example, for the historical community called the Jewish people has drawn its identity from the reception of the evolving traditions that it produced.<sup>271</sup> Regarding the notion of narrative identity, at both the individual and communities levels, Ricoeur states:

In it, we can see how the story of a life comes to be constituted through a series of rectifications applied to previous narratives, just as the history of a people, or a collectivity, or an institution proceeds from the series of corrections that new historians bring to their predecessors' descriptions and explanations, and, step by step, to the legends that preceded this genuinely historiographical work. As has been said, history always proceeds from history.<sup>272</sup>

To the extent that people close themselves to the healthy reconfiguration of existing narratives, they close themselves to the living traditions and to the narrative identities that these living traditions cultivate when received.

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<sup>270</sup>Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 11.

<sup>271</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>272</sup>*Ibid.*, 247.

## CRITICAL VOICES

The present analysis has been peppered with different scholarly voices throughout. The presentation has given priority to Ricoeur's own voice in explicating his theory of narrative; at the same time, the voices of some of his interpreters have been pulled into the project along the way, such as those of Lewis Hahn, David Pellauer, Dan Stiver, and others, who have been footnoted whenever their own works were of assistance. This appeal to the perspectives of these interpreters not only provides further illumination and understanding of Ricoeur's theory, but also protects this project from falling prey to the very problematic that it seeks to address: the hearing of just of one point of view. In addition to the aid provided by Ricoeur scholars such as Hahn, Pellauer, and Stiver, the current project has heard Ricoeur's thought in critical dialogue with other philosophers of history such as Mink, Weber, and Veyne. And the current analysis has addressed critical concerns such as Ricoeur's thesis as distinct from narrativist styles of history, the location of history within some epistemological framework whose character is not fundamentally narrative, and the concern that subjectivity might somehow threaten history's quest for as truthful a reference as possible to the past.

But the most serious criticisms have been saved for last. A thorough presentation of academic criticisms of Ricoeur's narrative theory lies outside the scope of the present analysis, which is primarily a theological application of a narrative theory—not a philosophical defense of it. But a survey of Ricoeur's critics does reveal common threads; thus, several representative voices have been selected in order to hear this

undercurrent of objections that runs through so many of Ricoeur's dialogue partners.<sup>273</sup> First, Richard Zaner believes that Ricoeur refutes himself at the epistemological level. As Zaner recounts, Ricoeur sees all action as actions interpreted through mediating symbols; absent of a narrative, all human action is just *a random sequence of unrelated events*.<sup>274</sup> But if all philosophy is itself hermeneutics—a matter of interpretation, with necessary recourse to mediating symbols—then what is Ricoeur's objective criteria, by which he warrants his own epistemological meta-claim?<sup>275</sup> Furthermore, Zaner states that *conducting inquiry*, and *stating what is necessary for that inquiry to be possible* are plainly different matters.<sup>276</sup>

To study the symbol of exile, and to study what is requisite for the study of the symbol of exile: these cannot be collapsed, any more than can reflection be collapsed into what is reflected-upon.<sup>277</sup>

For Zaner, Ricoeur fails to justify a necessary, logical framework within which analysis can take place to begin with, which leads to the conscious operation of an ever-mediated philosophy within an invisible, unconscious absolutism.

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<sup>273</sup>James F. McCue, "Response to Pamela Anderson, William Schweiker, and Fred Dallmayr," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993): 336.

<sup>274</sup>Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred*, 11.

<sup>275</sup>Richard M. Zaner, "The Adventure of Interpretation: The Reflective Wager and the Hazards of the Self," in *Studies in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. Charles E. Reagan (Ohio University Press, 1979): 33.

<sup>276</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>277</sup>*Ibid.*

Second, Hans Kellner extrapolates Ricoeur's philosophy past the theory of narrative and further into epistemology and, in so doing, locates an inherent optimism within Ricoeur's thought. Kellner explains that the circle of narrativity and temporality does indeed work the way Ricoeur elucidates, in that it turns the discordance of time into a concordance whose meaning is derived from the internal figuration of the plot itself, without recourse to external accidents from outside the narrative form. Granted, the truth project of history indeed seeks an accurate historical referent in which the narrative construction stands for the real past, but the concordance that narrative supplies gathers its meaningful coherence from within the causal links of the plot itself. This capacity of the human imagination raises the question of whether it is history that is fundamentally narrative in character, or cognition itself.

*Time and Narrative* does more or less what it says. It performs the mediations of narrativity in its own text until we finally want to ask: Is there any other way? Is narrative the very form of thought itself?<sup>278</sup>

Kellner then speculates that if nominalism, for example, is correct about the nature of human thought, then how does narrative account for naming and interpretation?

Third, Pamela Anderson also questions what rests behind Ricoeur's epistemological presuppositions. She contends that Ricoeur assumes a *mythico-poetic nucleus of meaning resting at the core of all human experience*.<sup>279</sup>

In the end I must conclude with a note of uncertainty concerning the potentially distorting and mystifying power of Ricoeur's transcendental idealist conception of the productive imagination in the narrative constitution of self-identity—an instability that is due to the exercise of the imagination.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>278</sup>Kellner, "'As Real as It Gets': Ricoeur and Narrativity," 242.

<sup>279</sup>Anderson, "Narrative Identity and the Mythico-Poetic Imagination," 196.

<sup>280</sup>*Ibid.*, 203.



She applauds Ricoeur for his affirmation and application of the Kantian conception of the productive human imagination.<sup>281</sup> According to Anderson, Ricoeur's recognition that the a priori human imagination is at work in producing meanings is healthy. But for Anderson, Ricoeur's extension of the productive imagination to narrative reconfigurations constitutive of personal identity takes his theory too far. While Zaner seeks to defend, contra Ricoeur, a more orthodox form of phenomenology especially in its approach to evidence, while Kellner looks to the problems that subjectivity poses to historical analysis, and while Anderson concerns herself with the formation of identity, all three share a commonality with each other and with other critics of Ricoeur: they all look behind the scenes of Ricoeur's philosophy and into his epistemology, in both the underlying assumptions behind it as well as its repercussions.

Without purporting any complete resolution to these contentions, they are worthy of some attention, especially since Ricoeur's narrative theory constitutes this project's application tool. Regarding Zaner's contention, the present work believes the contention to be overstated. Self-referential incoherence is an epistemological issue that remains at the forefront of Ricoeur's mind. He openly admits, never denies, and wrestles with the circularity that *haunts* his entire analysis.<sup>282</sup> Ricoeur wants to show the mutual reinforcement or reciprocity of dialectic tensions that never escape epistemological circularity. They have already shown up in a number of forms in *Time and Narrative*—from the epistemological circle of time and narrative, to the related hermeneutical circle

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<sup>281</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>282</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:60.

of three-stage *mimesis*; from the reciprocal dialectic between the horizon of expectation and the space of experience, to the reciprocal dialectic between sedimentation and innovation. Ricoeur never claims to find an absolute that solves epistemological circularity; he only seeks to advance within it.

...the Ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself, so that it can receive the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity which breaks the sterile cycle of the self's constant return to itself.<sup>283</sup>

Ricoeur answers those who, like Zaner, turn to the importance of evidence because they are troubled by circularity: he responds that philosophy itself is only a tool within epistemological circularity—a vantage that allows room not just for competing innovations, but for transcendence.

Regarding Kellner's concerns, Ricoeur does indeed exercise optimism with regard to the productive imagination, particularly in his affirmation that human experience deserves narration, especially in outcry against injustice.<sup>284</sup> Whereas Kellner is suspect of language's ability to communicate experience, Ricoeur sees the coexistence of competing narrative innovations as providing alternative visions of the world.<sup>285</sup> In dialogue with Kellner, Morny Joy asks if Ricoeur, in his optimism, reads *into narrative itself, in the guise of imagination, a hidden hand at work in all our creative efforts?*<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>283</sup>Ricoeur, *Freedom & Nature*, 14.

<sup>284</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:75.

<sup>285</sup>Kellner, "'As Real as It Gets': Ricoeur and Narrativity," 241.

<sup>286</sup>Morny Joy, "Response to Hans Kellner and Herman Rapaport," in *Meanings in Texts and Actions: Questioning Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David E. Klemm and William Schweiker (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993): 329.

But Ricoeur's optimism is not a problematic, according to Joy. Rather, Ricoeur's optimistic assumptions are nothing other than a divergent starting point in contrast to Kellner's skepticism. As Joy explains, Kellner sees *Time and Narrative as an edifice built on anxiety; in contrast, Ricoeur's treatise can be read as a work of affirmation and hope.*<sup>287</sup> Kellner himself concedes:

...narrative remains secure because it is the domain of parts and wholes, apart from the process of naming parts and interpreting wholes. Narrative, we might say, is what does *not* get lost in translation.<sup>288</sup>

Even in his speculative concerns regarding naming and interpretation, Kellner concedes that Ricoeur presents a useful theory.

Regarding Anderson's criticism, the current work concurs with the response that James McCue gives in dialogue with her. In particular, McCue agrees that Ricoeur can be accurately described as a transcendental idealist. As the present project has observed, Ricoeur's thought leaves room for the transcendent, he believes that human suffering calls for narration, and he sees tremendous value in the individual and community senses of identity that the traditions of historical narrative foster.<sup>289</sup> And according to Pellauer, Ricoeur functions comfortably within epistemological circularity precisely because Ricoeur understands a necessary transcendence beyond philosophy that allows it to function in the first place; a transcendence that by its very nature cannot be located within the philosophical capacities that it transcends; a transcendence that Ricoeur is more

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<sup>287</sup>Ibid., 326.

<sup>288</sup>Kellner, "'As Real as It Gets': Ricoeur and Narrativity," 242. The italics are Kellner's original emphasis.

<sup>289</sup>McCue, "Response to Pamela Anderson," 336.

willing than other philosophers to relate to God, as found in the Judeo-Christian revelation.<sup>290</sup> McCue recognizes this optimism in Ricoeur and states in accord with Anderson that Ricoeur can too glibly forget that self-identity, to an extent, implies Friedrich Nietzsche's notion of the will to power.<sup>291</sup> Having stated where he agrees with Anderson, McCue thinks that she overextends her criticism.

I wonder here if she does not confuse two things: an optimistic tendency that shows itself in many ways in Ricoeur's thought and the actual structure of his analysis. I grant that the tendency is there, but it seems to me that what we see here has really very little to do with Ricoeur's transcendental idealism, and could be corrected, if correction is needed, without any wholesale recasting of his thought.<sup>292</sup>

In an epistemological sense, mediated patterns of human action remain a problematic of epistemological circularity, regardless of whether or not they derive from a *mythico-poetic imagination*.

## CONCLUSION

Like the virtuous mean between vicious extremes from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, the embracing of endless reconfiguration designates the healthy target area between the explosion of utopias that would result from an unbridled horizon of expectations, on the one hand, and the deadening reductionism into a sole interpretation that would result from closing the space of experience off from creative reconstructions, on the other hand.<sup>293</sup> Embracing the dynamic process of reconfiguration protects

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<sup>290</sup>Pellauer, *Guide*, 9.

<sup>291</sup>McCue, "Response to Pamela Anderson," 336.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid.

<sup>293</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:215–6.

narratives from opening up to the vacuum of relativism that would result from unchecked innovations or wholesale skepticism. And embracing endless reconfiguration simultaneously protects narratives from collapsing into the suffocation of autocracy that would result from unchecked sedimentation or wholesale flattening to the single, absolute, and exclusive tyranny of one and only one perspective.<sup>294</sup> Ricoeur notes that *value systems have their own history*; accordingly, it is the history of the new Catholic evangelization in the United States to which this present analysis applies Ricoeur's theory of narrative.<sup>295</sup>

The present project holds, in union with Joy, that narrative can indeed provide a structure for understanding.

As I understand Ricoeur within the present philosophical climate, his dialectical mediations set a course between philosophical systems that try to define truth in watertight compartments, on the one hand, and postmodern postponements that send us off on interminable journeys, on the other. Ricoeur's self-critical hermeneutics affirms that narrative can provide a structure appropriate for understanding and discussing notions of self and experience within our world that is at once limited yet infinite.<sup>296</sup>

New innovations, as well as the deformations of paradigms that accompany them, all arrange themselves around the axis of established paradigms.<sup>297</sup> Such is the case with regard to the special history of the new Catholic evangelization, which witnesses perpetual innovations and critical challenges to established paradigms, all revolving around the multivalent tradition known as United States Catholicism. The current

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<sup>294</sup>Wallace, "Ricoeur, Rorty, and the Question of Revelation," 249.

<sup>295</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:110.

<sup>296</sup>Joy, "Response to Hans Kellner," 329.

<sup>297</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:70.

application of Ricoeur's theory to this phenomenon has the twofold benefit of (1) helping theology to better understand what is happening in the new evangelization as the inevitable result of the narrative character of human history and (2) exhorting the Church to embrace the coexistence of competing reconfigurations as healthy and necessary, because narratives open to innovation are more true than those which deny such reconfiguration.

In the final analysis, the interchange between the two poles of emplotment's second *mimetic* stage generates an inexhaustible number of possible innovations. But this inexhaustibility of competing narrative reconfigurations is not a threat to the truth that scholarship seeks. On the contrary, the innovative capacity for ongoing reconfiguration safeguards a responsible commitment to truth-seeking by protecting humanity's past from becoming a lifeless deposit with no vitality and with no power to transform people and communities. Regarding the temptation to myopia, Ricoeur warns that

danger is not far off. If everything that is old and past is equally venerable, history is again injured not only by the shortsightedness of reverence but by the mummification of a past no longer animated by the present nor inspired by it.<sup>298</sup>

Historical intentionality must *have the force to reactivate the unaccomplished possibilities of the past.*<sup>299</sup> *In the dialectic of sedimentation and innovation, a vast range of cases is opened.*<sup>300</sup> *And the range must be left open.*<sup>301</sup> Any historical text resembles

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<sup>298</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:238.

<sup>299</sup>*Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>300</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:79.

<sup>301</sup>*Ibid.*, 127.

*a musical score lending itself to different realizations.*<sup>302</sup> *We have to correct our prejudices.*<sup>303</sup> Historical structures are dynamic; the paradigms of history are not inert dumps of singular, exclusive causal models.

In light of the fundamentally narrative character of temporal, lived human experiences, any singular plot is *only one paradigm among others, which in no way exhausts the dynamics of narrative.*<sup>304</sup> Regarding historical *tradition*, Ricoeur states:

Let us understand by this term not the inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material but the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity.<sup>305</sup>

Elsewhere he says:

“the theme of a living, continuous, open history” seems to me to be the only one capable of joining together vigorous political action and the “memory” of snuffed out or repressed possibilities from the past.<sup>306</sup>

And further affirming the health of the coexistence of competing narratives, Ricoeur says:

We do not rewrite the same history, we write another history. But we can always discuss the two. History is not condemned to remain a battlefield between irreconcilable points of view. There is a place for a critical pluralism, which, if it admits more than one point of view, does not take them all as equally legitimate.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>302</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:167.

<sup>303</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:152.

<sup>304</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>305</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>306</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:219. In critical dialogue with the thought of Michel Foucault, Ricoeur quotes *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972): 14.

<sup>307</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:119.

Interestingly, Ricoeur says near the end of his trilogy that *we do rightly speak of an acceleration in historical mutations*.<sup>308</sup> This observable acceleration is symptomatic of a new event in thinking—one that has enlarged the epistemological circle through an unprecedented level of awareness that a plurality of competing narratives exists across the world. It is to this acceleration of innovations that the present project now turns in the history of Catholic evangelization in the United States.

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<sup>308</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:212.



## CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT

### Introduction

#### AN OPENING CAVEAT

The relevance of this project is twofold. Initially, the acceleration in historical mutations regarding the new evangelism is vast in scope and Ricoeur's theory of narrative offers a structuring methodology for organizing and understanding this interpretive range. More importantly, the application of Ricoeur's narrative theory to the new evangelism provides one possible way forward in an otherwise heated stalemate between orthodox and progressive camps within the Church. The former, ever-afraid of relativism, emphasizes the unique message of Christ; the latter, ever-afraid of blind obedience and the violences linked to hegemony, emphasizes openness to diversity. An application of Ricoeur's method to evangelism simultaneously appreciates both the importance of (1) a universal, prophetic voice based upon the Christian revelation, lest the uniqueness of the Christian message disappear by collapsing into cultural context alone, and the importance of (2) a contextualized theology that appreciates diversity and promotes intra and inter faith communication and dialogue, even across other religious faith claims.<sup>1</sup>

For any theology to speak in a therapeutic voice to today's world, it must attend to both its universalizing and its contextual dimensions. In order to engage in theology creatively and faithfully between the global and local situations in which it finds itself, both dimensions must be emphasized without neglecting the other, and without drawing

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Gleason, "The Crisis of Americanization," in *Catholicism in America*, eds. Philip Gleason, John Highman, and Bradford Perkins (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 153.

straw-man caricatures of the other.<sup>2</sup> As addressed in the first chapter, context is entirely relevant to this project because all narratives arise out of context. Accordingly, United States contexts—and the distinctively American story of Catholic evangelism that appears from these settings—furnish the subject matter of this second chapter. Whether by context one refers to social location, societal structure, or general culture, it always plays a critical role in framing theological articulation and appropriation. Consequently, theology must never dismiss its contextual component.

At the same time, theology dare not reduce to context only and miss its universalizing dimension. A crude form of contextualization that flattens theology to nothing more than culture loses its critical edge and reduces to a mere product of its surroundings. Martin Luther King, Jr. needed to universalize his theology and impose it upon the entire culture. Without the universalizing dimension, his prophetic word could not have applied to those who needed to hear it most. He could never have convicted, challenged, and shaken out of its complacent comfort zone a country that would otherwise have persisted in racism, had it not been for the universality of his message's reception and application.

As observed in the earlier discussion of the reciprocal dialectic between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation, openness to reconfiguration protects history's quest for objectivity from the naïve notion that a singular contextualized, subjective interpretation could sufficiently constitute an absolute, concrete paradigm of reality. A total reductionism into context leads to the sedimentation of a lifeless, singular deposit; consequently, contextualization cannot become an intellectual idol that purports

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<sup>2</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 8.

to adequately account for the history of all theology. Innovations such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s prophetic and universal outcry against injustice safeguard history from sedimentation and appreciate the Christian voice of Dr. King's theology *as Christian*, not merely as the outgrowth of his cultural context; after all, cultural context is precisely what narrative innovations are apt to challenge critically.

So not only is theology's context entirely relevant, but also its capacity for universality. On the one hand, context ensures that people hear how the word is encountered, appropriated, interpreted, and further proclaimed by those who hear it; on the other hand, universality ensures that the Church maintain her prophetic voice in the world. The Church may, according to this current project, resist the positing of a false dichotomy and instead recognize that both context and universality are critical to theology's place. Ricoeur's theory of narrative, in its recognition that interpretations take multiple configurations, allows for both the contextualizing and the universalizing dimensions of Christian proclamation to coexist.

Ultimately, this project argues for a renewal in the way the Church understands evangelism. By reconfiguring her understanding of the new evangelization to embrace the coexistence of competing narratives, the Catholic Church can move past the dichotomous and unproductive gridlock between theological conservatives and liberals. Such a project requires *both* a recognition of the importance of contextualization, which comprises the topic of this present chapter—for all narratives arise out of context, *and* a simultaneous recognition that Christian evangelization transcends context at the same time, for the Gospel has critiqued and transformed contexts for two thousand years. Accordingly, the third chapter will call for a renewed vision of evangelism that embraces a necessary

openness to reconfiguration—a call that one can understand to be this project’s universalizing, evangelistic outcry for justice. For now, the current chapter turns to context specifically, bearing in mind this caution against any reductionism into context alone.

### COGNIZANT OF CIRCULARITY

Specifically, the context of this project’s focus is United States Catholicism. The experience of the new Catholic evangelization in the United States derives from and continually develops within the United States context. The present chapter will describe this situation in detail as it showcases the historical and sociological elements that comprise this context because, as Ricoeur’s theory makes explicit, narratives arise out of the contexts from which productive human imaginations construct emplotments.<sup>3</sup> However, as this necessary description of context transitions the project from Ricoeur’s theory of narrative to the application of that theory, its inherent circularity follows. As the previous chapter observed, an epistemological circularity between time and narrative undergirds Ricoeur’s entire methodology. In the move from theory to practice, the healthy hermeneutical spiral of Ricoeur’s method becomes apparent in this project’s application of his method to the topic of contemporary evangelism.

On the theoretical side, an inherent epistemological circularity manifests itself in hermeneutical circles throughout Ricoeur’s trilogy. The reciprocal dialectics between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation and between sedimentation and innovation both illustrate this essential circular dynamic. The three stages of *mimesis* themselves form a hermeneutical circle—an interpretive circularity that bears witness to

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<sup>3</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:57–9.

the circular epistemology of Ricoeur's philosophical method, as he freely and frequently admits. From the initial engagement between Book 11 of Augustine's *Confessions* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, Ricoeur observed that people apply narrative concordance to the discordance of temporality; simultaneously, the imitation of temporality is precisely what makes sense of a story. Just as people make sense of time through emplotment, at the same time they understand stories in a temporal mode. *The whole continuation of our analyses has been one vast extrapolation from this initial correlation.*<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the essential circularity continually resurfaces as Ricoeur expounds upon his initial observation. It is not the circularity itself that Ricoeur denies. Rather, he denies that the circle is meaningless. The cycle of narrative interpretation through its three stages of *mimetic* activity is a healthy spiral, as witnessed in the productive formation of individual and social senses of identity that the hermeneutical circle of narrative interpretation cultivates.

Not surprisingly, this foundational circularity surfaces in this current project, which continues to extrapolate Ricoeur's initial, circular association between time and narrative in a theological application to the new Catholic evangelization in the United States. In particular, to understand the history of the new evangelization, the project must discuss the context. But to understand the Catholic Church in the United States, the current project must draw from histories which themselves are narratives, which themselves arose out of contexts. In other words, the present project cannot pretend to establish some uncontested, pure contextualized setting from out of which a host of different new evangelizations springs forth. The contextualization itself comes from

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<sup>4</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:241.

historical descriptions which themselves are emplotted constructions situated within contexts. The analysis is a productive one, as the ongoing explosion of new evangelizations is constitutive of identity for people and communities. But the circularity of contextualization is indeed undeniable.

### A COEXISTENCE OF CONTEXTUALIZATIONS

Just as an abundance of theological narratives of the new evangelization arise from out of the United States context, numerous historical narratives coexist of the context itself. In other words, the descriptions of the context under review are not divorced from context—these descriptions of context are themselves competing narrative constructs that arise from context, in an inescapable circularity. In particular, the first comprehensive history of United States Catholicism to emerge after 1965 was *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* by Thomas McAvoy. His work, published in 1969, centered chiefly upon the activities of Catholic clergy. McAvoy's narrative of the period was critical of infighting among American bishops, apathy among the laity, and relatively poor catechesis at the local parish level. But he applauded a united post-World War II sense of Catholic identity, noting the widespread Catholic stance against communism and the amalgamation of Catholic immigrants into the cultural mainstream. His final chapter specifically addresses currents of development during the twentieth century up to the time of the work's composition; he was clearly optimistic regarding the effects of Vatican II.<sup>5</sup>

In 1981, James Hennesey wrote the text *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States*. Similar to McAvoy's text, Hennesey

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<sup>5</sup>Thomas T. McAvoy, *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1969).

also dedicated his concluding chapter to recent twentieth-century developments, recounting the dispersal of the immigrant Church into suburban regions of the United States and the assimilation into the mainstream of society that followed. In contrast to McAvoy, however, Hennesey does not subscribe to the notion of a united post-war sense of Catholic identity. Rather than a common post-World War II narrative of Catholic ascension out of poverty and marginalization, the amalgamation into the larger United States society was an experience of fragmentation, according to Hennesey.

Focusing more on the laity than the clergy, Hennesey observes the divergent experiences of blacks, Native Americans, and Hispanics within United States Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> He describes the reality of the postconciliar United States Church as one of difference, referring to the 1960–1981 period as a time *when fissures opened wide in the church which the immigrants had built.*<sup>7</sup> In their respective treatments of United States Catholicism, McAvoy characterizes the context as exhibiting a united sense of religious identity after the Second World War, whereas Hennesey describes the same situation as one of fragmentation; their respective historical narratives differ. A multiplicity of divergent voices, rather than agreement, designates not just the new evangelization narratives but also the narratives of the contexts that produced them.

Four years after Hennesey published *American Catholics*, Jay Dolan completed the writing of his work entitled *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present*. Rather than compiling a conventional history of a religious institution, Dolan's book constitutes the work of a social historian. From the perspective

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<sup>6</sup>James J. Hennesey, *American Catholics: A History of the Roman Catholic Community in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

of Catholicism as not only an institution of religion but also as an institution of society, Dolan draws from a compilation of parish histories that the *Cushwa Center for American Catholic Studies* put together and archived at the University of Notre Dame. From this social-history perspective, Dolan observes a decrease in devotional practices that had previously marked the spiritual life of poverty-stricken Catholics prior to mainstream integration, and he notes an increase in the role of the laity in the life of the local parish.<sup>8</sup> In Dolan's presentation of the context, these lay experiences anticipated some of the Council's reforms. Similar to Hennesey, Dolan highlights the prominent contributions of influential lay women as well as those of Catholics who were not of European descent.<sup>9</sup>

In 1999, Chester Gillis added his book entitled *Roman Catholicism in America* to the growing body of academic resources.<sup>10</sup> His exploration of the encounter between Catholicism and the United States context relies heavily upon Dolan's history, with copious citations to Dolan's work.<sup>11</sup> Dolan's initial volume had taken the discussion of United States Catholicism up to 1985. Then in 2002 he published an updated history with his text *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* which echoes much of the material in his previous history, but advances the discussion into the start of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>8</sup>Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 9. Originally published in 1985.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 251–5.

<sup>10</sup>Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup>There are several in just the first 61 pages for example; see *ibid.*, 3, 52, 55–7, 59, & 61.



Dolan's voice in both of his works calls for the United States Church to adapt to its emerging modern context. Critical of the conservative voices of traditionalists, Dolan laments the *conservative swing in religion* that corresponded with the pontificate of Pope John Paul II in 1978.<sup>12</sup> In *The American Catholic Experience* Dolan says with regard to this resurgence of conservatism among United States Catholics:

Among Catholics, the most notable evidence for this was the official investigation of theologians suspected of unorthodox teaching, the attempted suppression of books, a renaissance of sexophobia with its accompanying denunciation of artificial birth control, the suspension of priests and nuns who held public office, and a reassertion of male supremacy and clerical control. Such actions have hardened the lines of division in the church. Traditional Catholics welcomed them while progressive Catholics denounced them. But the ways of the past will no longer work. A new spirit is alive in American Catholicism, and the twenty-first century belongs to it.<sup>13</sup>

His subsequent history, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, reiterates a desire for increased syncretism with the American cultural context. For instance, Dolan complains about how Catholicism's *powerful ecclesiastical machinery was put into motion to silence* the voices of theologians who called for adaptation.<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere he asks the Church in the United States to *blend* its own tradition with the democratic context; he writes, "To the degree that such blending takes place, Catholicism will become a much stronger community of faith."<sup>15</sup> Dolan's orientation to the context is that of an accommodationist. He and those who share his position want to see United States Catholicism adapt more to

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<sup>12</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 454.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 161.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 211.

the cultural context, in order to better accommodate the rapid changes that are happening in modern society.

In addition, in 2007 Leslie Tentler edited a collection of works entitled *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism since 1950 in the United States, Ireland, and Quebec*. This collection includes essays by James Davidson, R. Scott Appleby, Michele Dillon, and Gregory Baum which demonstrate the plurality of voices that encounter United States Catholicism during this period.<sup>16</sup> Also, Nancy Koester provides a *History of Christianity in the United States* that describes the context under review, especially as regards the multiplicity of voices within the United States, and the increased awareness of this multiplicity. This list of historical surveys adds Charles Morris' *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* in 1997.<sup>17</sup> As the title suggests with its reference to Catholicism as *the most powerful church in America*, Morris offers a triumphant vision of United States Catholic history. Furthermore, John McGreevy's *Catholicism and American Freedom* appeared in 2003.<sup>18</sup> His historical narrative of the context emphasizes the most elite Catholic scholarship, but talks relatively little about the majority of Catholic laity.

From Hennesey's link between Catholic history and secular history to McGreevy's focus on the top tier of Catholic scholars; from the accommodationist approach of Dolan

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<sup>16</sup>Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism since 1950 in the United States, Ireland, and Quebec* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

<sup>17</sup>Charles R. Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Times Books, 1997).

<sup>18</sup>John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003).

to the triumphalism of Morris, the range of historical narratives is vast and varied. These multiple histories could be potentially perceived as problematic to the current project, due to both the scope and the diversity of different historical voices. The descriptions of the context under review not only span multiple versions, but these descriptions differ from and occasionally disagree with one another. Although the context is allegedly the same between these various historical surveys, variations to the point of disagreements result because causality imbued through emplotment differs from one historian's imagination to the next.

But rather than being perceived as an obstacle to the present study, these competing narratives regarding the context are actually illustrative of the current work's application of Ricoeur's narrative theory to the variety of competing narratives of the new Catholic evangelization specifically. The numerous different new evangelizations, like the contexts that have given rise to them, are expressed as people's stories—competing stories, emplotted by a variety of productive human imaginations. As the context is established, the present work relies relatively heavily upon the more recent work by Dolan entitled *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* and several others such as Patrick Carey, as footnoted throughout. As Dolan's accommodationist posture toward the context will find expression in certain narratives of the new evangelization, so too will the voices of his opponents. The conservative traditionalists whom Dolan rebukes will also express themselves in certain narratives of the new evangelization. The multiplicity of divergent narratives regarding the historical context includes both traditional and progressive voices; consequently, the competing narratives of evangelization that arise out of these contexts will exhibit the same plurality.

The current work now proceeds to address the contextualization piece of the overall project, bearing in mind that Dolan's is not the only available description of the context.

### THE CONTEXT OF FOCUS

Before proceeding into the contextualization component of this overall project, an important distinction must be drawn between the milieu within which the new evangelizations develop and the context that produced the call for the new evangelization in the first place. Multiple competing narratives exist throughout the United States with regard to the appropriate rationale and implementation of contemporary Catholic evangelization. Although this multiplicity of voices continues to take a variety of shapes amidst the postconciliar situation, these competing narratives of the new evangelization in the United States did not derive from the postconciliar context. Instead, the numerous new evangelization movements in the United States after Vatican II arose out of the nation's pre-Vatican II context.

The call for a new method of Catholic evangelization was already present in the second Vatican Council. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the defining document of the new Catholic evangelization, the pope declared that the Second Vatican Council's objectives had been evangelical in nature.<sup>19</sup> Vatican II was already attending to the topic of evangelization in the modern world; therefore, the present analysis looks to the pre-Vatican II United States situation in order to investigate the context from which the American experience of the new evangelization derived. Although the second Vatican Council was indeed a fascinating, remarkable, and momentous event of change which increasingly attracts the attention of countless philosophers and theologians, it is not the

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<sup>19</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 2.

source of the new evangelization. And although the subsequent era constitutes the milieu in which different evangelistic programs are established, the new Catholic evangelization derived from out of the same modern contexts that had initially given rise to the council itself. For Ricoeur, all narrative arise out of context. Thus an application of Ricoeurian narrative theory to the new evangelization explores the pre-Vatican II context that gave rise to the narrative innovation to begin with—the chief interest of this current chapter.

If the present project restricted its analysis to the United States situation after Vatican II, then the project would not actually comprise a truly contextualized theology. A comprehensive contextualization of the new evangelization in the postconciliar United States must look both to the context that gave rise to the narrative innovations and to the milieu during which those stories continue to develop. Therefore, the current chapter examines the context of United States Catholicism prior to Vatican II, specifically as it gives rise to the United States experience of the new Catholic evangelization. The context reveals an ongoing encounter between the traditional hierarchy of authority in the Catholic Church and the democratic model of authority in the United States. This persistent dialectic produces a cycle of narrative sedimentation and innovation, in each century of United States Catholicism. It is precisely this cycle of sedimentation and innovation that gives rise to the new evangelization in the United States and characterizes its particular experience therein. The subsequent chapter of the present project will then focus entirely on the postconciliar United States context. The project thereby addresses both the context that produced multiple competing narratives of the new evangelization in the United States, and the milieu within which they continue to multiply and develop.

## THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF MODERNITY IN THE UNITED STATES

To echo Dolan's own introductory warning regarding scope, the context under present focus is United States Catholicism, not modernity generally speaking. Granted, the interaction between the Catholic Church and United States cultural contexts is to some degree an ongoing conversation between Catholicism and the modern world, and more broadly, the continuing dialogue between religion and society in general. The very term *American* is to a certain extent interchangeable with the term *modernity*. However, the United States context has forged recognizably American features and meanings out of the broad developments associated with modernity around the world. Democratic decision-making, the emphasis upon church-state separation, and the critical value placed upon individual religious liberty exemplify modern developments that bear the characteristic stamp of the United States context in particular.<sup>20</sup> No less important than the link between the overlapping themes of modernity and United States culture is the distinction between them, understanding the United States context as just one representation of the modern world—a single representation of modernity with some distinctively American characteristics and emphases.<sup>21</sup>

Every student of United States history is already aware that the Enlightenment notions of democracy and religious liberty both played particularly significant parts in the birth of the United States as a nation in 1776. America's *Declaration of Independence* and subsequent Revolution secured democratic ideals and protections of freedom into the

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<sup>20</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 8–9.

<sup>21</sup>Michelle Bertho, *The Impact of Globalization on the United States, Volume 1: Culture and Society* (Westport: Praeger, 2008), Introduction.

very fabric of the United States context from the country's conception until the present day. Beyond their importance, the ideas of democracy and freedom were foundational to United States society and therefore defining of her narrative identity. Rooted in Enlightenment thinking, the ideas of democratic government and personal religious liberty gave the age of reason a particular expression in the new colonial union. The United States is the historical milieu under focus; therefore, this understanding of democratic ideals as essential to the nation's character is necessary to appreciate the distinctiveness of the context. At the same time, scholarly inquiry remains aware that democracy and religious liberty constitute worldwide developments illustrative of modernity broadly speaking.<sup>22</sup> This awareness may encourage an imaginative extrapolation of the current project's application of narrative theory to the Church globally, but the present research restricts its scope to Catholicism in the United States specifically.

#### A COEXISTENCE OF HISTORICAL TRAJECTORIES

In order to restrict the scope of the current work, this project selects a particular historical trajectory regarding Catholicism in the United States from among a multiplicity of narratives. However, this restriction in scope involves more than highlighting the relatively heavy reliance upon the works of Dolan and some others such as Patrick Carey, as footnoted throughout. The reality of multiplicity, which remains a primary theme throughout this entire project, transcends the coexistence of contextualizations across the works of McAvoy, Hennessey, Dolan, Gillis, Morris, McGreevy, Carey, and others. In

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<sup>22</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 8–9.

particular, multiplicity extends beyond a mere coexistence of differing presentations of the context to address different historical trajectories within the same context.

The reality of multiplicity extends beyond a list of academic treatments and beyond their respective frameworks for presenting conflicts because the coexistence of competing narratives includes the narratives of those whose voices have been silenced. The stories of the marginalized, the suffering, and the silenced do not receive adequate emphasis in many historical presentations by virtue of the fact that these voices have been marginalized, and these voices cry out for the dignity of a narrative hearing. Consequently, to simply list a brief history of scholarship is insufficient by itself to warrant the approach taken in the historical analyses that follow throughout most of the remaining chapter.

Beyond the coexistence of differing historical treatments of the context are the different historical trajectories themselves—regardless of the degree to which these trajectories have received attention in mainstream scholarship. For instance, the history of black Catholics in America is notably dissimilar to the history of white male Catholics. Institutionally speaking, the initial encounter between Catholicism and the United States occurred during the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Maryland colony with the Maryland Jesuits who adopted an initial stance against slavery, but eventually participated in the practice. In March of 1634, the second Lord Baltimore Cecil Calvert founded a proprietary colony in Maryland and two years later granted around twelve thousand acres of land to the Maryland Jesuit missionaries. The Jesuits' missionary activities and pastoral services



received a substantial amount of funding from the revenue produced on the sizeable grants of land.<sup>23</sup>

Still nonparticipants in the African slave trade, the Jesuits initially employed indentured servants from England and Ireland as labor to work the estates; but eventually, they came to participate in the institution of the African slave trade. As Cyprian Davis explains

By the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits had introduced on their lands African slaves, which meant that the Jesuits would now learn firsthand the disadvantages and moral ambiguities that affected every slaveholder attempting to align conscience with slavery.<sup>24</sup>

Later the Maryland Jesuits also profited from the sale of slaves. In 1836, the general of the order, John Roothaan, gave his approval for the sale of the slaves who worked the Jesuit estates. All told, slave buyers from Louisiana purchased 272 slaves from the Jesuits in southern Maryland.<sup>25</sup> From the point of view of the slaves, the Jesuits' adaptation to the American context meant the dehumanization of people of African descent. From the perspective of the slaves' narratives, no differentiation appeared between progressive and conservative ideologies in the history of United States Catholicism. For the slaves, the narratives of *liberal* and *traditional* appeared the same with regard to their joint accommodation of the slave trade. Those whose voices had been silenced experienced orientations of adaptation to the culture and traditionalism as indistinguishable stances.

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<sup>23</sup>Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (Crossroad, 1990), 35–6.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

The historical trajectory tracing the history of black Catholics in the United States is thus a markedly different narrative than that of a white male dominant history. To further amplify the reality of multiplicity in historical trajectories within the context under review, one may also consider the experiences of Hispanic Catholics, the most rapidly expanding segment of the United States Catholic Church since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1989, the University of Notre Dame launched a project to showcase the history of Hispanic Catholics in the United States. Under Dolan's direction, the university's Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism, drafted a plan to compile this history. The project culminated in the three-volume set called the *Notre Dame History of Hispanic Catholics in the U.S.* As this work expresses, today's students of Hispanic Catholic History in the United States face both the problem of limited access to archives at churches, chanceries, and other Catholic organizations as well as a relative deficiency of academic writings concerning a host of concerns that Hispanics have faced throughout their history in the United States.<sup>26</sup> In 1960, roughly seven million Hispanics lived in the United States. This population more than tripled across the next thirty years.<sup>27</sup> The lack of scholarship and accessibility reported by the Cushwa project is disproportionate to the historical reality of the sheer number of American Catholics whose stories are those of Hispanics.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ, eds, *The Notre Dame History of Hispanic Catholics in the U. S., Vol 3—Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.: Issues and Concerns* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>27</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 8–9.

<sup>28</sup>Dolan and Deck, *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.*, 1.

One may also look to the number of feminist, womanist, and mujerista narratives of United States Catholic history to further explicate the context under review. For instance, feminists have criticized the traditional categories of nature and grace foundational to Catholic thought because these categories are too narrowly constrained by an emphasis upon biological functions—an emphasis that limits the spiritual fulfillment of women to the natural capacities for pregnancy and mothering alone.<sup>29</sup> Essentialist theologies regarding women’s nature have blurred with certain male-dominant social norms of female self-sacrifice, in which women are understood to best actualize their ideal state when they make sacrifices to satisfy the economic and sexual needs of others. Consequently, feminist, womanist, and mujerista narratives point out that traditional theological categories ought to critically address these problematics and expand to engage heretofore peripheral voices.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, Susan Abraham, Elizabeth Groppe, and Rosemary P. Carbine emphasize that *themes of embodiment take on a central role in feminist, womanist, and mujerista theological anthropologies*.<sup>31</sup> As soon as one historical trajectory illuminates the context to the neglect of other narratives, the reality of multiplicity that characterizes any context becomes reductionistic and distorted, and the truth project of history becomes undermined.

The relevance of silenced or marginalized narratives is accented by the subtle forms of racism that embed themselves into structures and systems which perpetuate the

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<sup>29</sup>Susan Abraham, Rosemary P. Carbine, ad Elizabeth T. Groppe, “Theological Anthropology Roundtable,” in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, ed. Susan Abraham and Elena Procario-Foley (Fortress Press, 2009): 67–8.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 74.

injustices and further distort historical realities. Jon Nilson exemplifies this dynamic in the following remark:

Now there is a type of racism peculiar to white Catholic theologians. It consists of ignoring, marginalizing, and dismissing that body of theological insight and challenge born of the black struggle for justice, black theology. So I have to confess that I am a racist. I am a racist insofar as I rarely read and never cited any black theologians in my own publications. I never suspected that the black churches might teach me something that would make me a better Roman Catholic ecclesiologist.<sup>32</sup>

To address a coexistence of contextualizations is therefore insufficient by itself if every treatment of the context is representative of the same historical trajectory. In order to engage multiplicity as a narrative phenomenon that both arises from and describes contexts, this current project must respectfully acknowledge the reality that these African, Hispanic, feminist, womanist, mujerista, and other discordant historical trajectories designate the context under review as much as does the trajectory of emphasis. This project must also recognize the distortion that results from emphasizing one historical trajectory to the neglect of others, the narratives of which are real, substantive, and constitutive elements of the context.

Having addressed these considerations, the current project now proceeds with a historical trajectory that is admittedly a predominantly white male history of Catholicism in the United States. To afford fair space to every historical trajectory within the context under review, the dynamic interplay between them, and the conflicting interpretations they produce, would prove an impossible undertaking. One of the issues that Ricoeur's narrative theory highlights is the inexhaustibility of narrative reconfigurations that

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<sup>32</sup>Jon Nilson, "Confessions of a White Catholic Racist Theologian," in *Interrupting White Privilege: Catholic Theologians Break the Silence*, eds., Laurie M. Cassidy and Alex Mikulich (Orbid Books, 2007): 18.

productive human imaginations emplot. The historical trajectories that designate the context under focus are themselves dynamic narrative constructions which are inexhaustible. The current project admits all of the aforementioned dangers associated with following a particular historical trajectory, but a particular trajectory has indeed been chosen nonetheless in order to restrict research parameters.

Aside from the practical consideration of narrowing the research scope within workable strictures, the warrants for the limitation to a predominantly white male Catholic history of the United States Church are twofold. First, the current project adopts this limitation upon the grounds of particularity. The present writer is a white male Catholic, whose own heritage includes great grandparents who were Irish Catholic immigrants to the United States. Thus the present writer's own narrative finds particular resonance with the identity of white male United States Catholics, especially those of Irish heritage. Second, and more importantly, the present work adopts its limitation upon the grounds of interest. The interest of this project is to showcase the plurality of competing narratives emplotted by the productive human imagination according to the *mimetic* spiral of interpretation. The limitation in scope serves this interest by demonstrating that, even within an allegedly dominant and homogenous demographic, the productive imagination still conveys multiple and often conflicting narrative interpretations.

### **Catholicism Encounters the New Nation**

#### UNITED STATES CATHOLICS IN THE FIRST YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE

The colonial Catholics who lived during the American Revolution experienced an encounter between the Church's traditional monarchial model of authority and the novel

American Republic model. This dialectic encounter is a lasting reality, both complex and dynamic. No single descriptive would be sufficient to capture every aspect. Any attempt to describe the meeting between these two contrasting paradigms of authority with a singular characterization would be a grossly reductionist endeavor. Enlightenment reasoning, democratic thought, religious freedom, and the resulting attempt to separate church from state would all exert varying degrees of influence upon United States Catholics from the nation's birth forward.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, for the historical trajectory under emphasis, this early experience was not one of tension but of embrace, as the Catholics in the early United States adopted the country's democratic ideals and applied them to parish life.<sup>34</sup>

By 1820, up to 124 Catholic parishes had already been established across the new nation.<sup>35</sup> These churches were the center of Catholic life for the parish communities. Situated within the context of a society born out of independence, democracy, and liberty, most of these parish communities governed their respective churches with a board of trustees comprised of lay membership.<sup>36</sup> These democratic procedures in the Catholic

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<sup>33</sup>The encounter between religion and the emerging modern United States society is certainly not restricted to Catholicism. See Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 210, for an example of a Calvinist thinker who embraced Enlightenment ideals in his discussion of Protestant Benjamin Rush. Likewise, see Dolan *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 75–6, for a brief discussion of the response of United States Judaism to modernity. Dolan proceeds on page 77 with a short comparative analysis of Judaism, Protestantism, and Catholicism with regard to early encounters with modern culture in the United States.

<sup>34</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 52–9.

<sup>35</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 29.

<sup>36</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 52–9.

parishes were indicative of a distinctively American influence, but the practice was not entirely new. Rather, the lay trustee boards blended innovative United States constitutions and elections with existing traditions of lay involvement within European Catholic churches.<sup>37</sup>

The early American Catholics found precedence for their democratic system in Church tradition both from the time-honored participation of the laity in the governance of French and German parishes and from the recent involvement of laymen in Catholic churches in Ireland and England. And they quickly appealed to these traditions when defending their lay trustee model against those opposed to their system.<sup>38</sup> In the lay trustee system, each board typically drafted a constitution that upheld the sovereign right of the people to enjoy freedom of religion and detailed the procedures for popular elections of the parish trustees.<sup>39</sup>

#### EARLY ADVOCATES OF PARISH DEMOCRACY

Trustee boards in Catholic churches existed across the nation with examples in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Scott County, Kentucky, Georgia, and the Carolinas—these numerous widespread examples reveal the extent to which democratic ideology had already taken hold in early United States Catholic thought.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Mathew Carey was an Irish Catholic immigrant to America near the end of 1786 who became a trustee of his parish board in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He published the first Catholic Bible in

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<sup>37</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 30.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

the United States in 1790, started his own magazine *The American Museum*, became very active in charity work, worked with Benjamin Franklin on certain municipal purposes, and eventually established one of the most successful bookstores in the country. An influential academic and Catholic apologist, this parish trustee endorsed Enlightenment ideals that agreed with Catholic thought.<sup>41</sup> While certain facets of Enlightenment teaching challenge the worldview of Christianity, Carey found other features to be potentially compatible, as he actively supported humanism, moralism, education, tolerance, and an emphasis upon reason and nature in his theology.<sup>42</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Erasmus comfortably informed Carey's own thinking without any compromise of faith because, for Carey, a number of Enlightenment ideas could stand in accord with Church teaching. This Irish immigrant became a prominent, influential leader in early American Catholicism, and his presence on the trustee board of St. Mary's parish was itself an expression of the Enlightenment political theory that he favored.<sup>43</sup> His application of democratic principles to the monarchical tradition of Catholicism called for the election of both pastors and bishops in the American Church.<sup>44</sup> Patrick Carey's recent discussion of trusteeism quotes Mathew Carey as saying that the code of canon law

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 17–9.

<sup>42</sup>Patrick W. Carey, "Republicanism within American Catholicism, 1785–1860," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3/4 (Winter 1983), 416.

<sup>43</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 16–7.

<sup>44</sup>Mathew Carey, *Address to the Right Rev. the Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Catholic Clergy of Philadelphia, and the Congregation of St. Mary in this City by a Catholic Layman* (Philadelphia: H.C. Carey and I. Lea, 1822), 30–1. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 34.



most expressly declared, that no Bishop shall be appointed for a people unwilling to receive him—and even that those are not to be regarded as Bishops, who are not chosen by the clergy—or desired by the people.<sup>45</sup>

At the same time, Carey taught that Catholic lay leaders ought to be *debarred of divine service* if they go a year without receiving the Sacraments of the Eucharist or Confession.<sup>46</sup> In this way, he held to both democratic ideals from the Enlightenment and to the tenets of his Catholic faith comfortably at the same time.

History finds an additional example of democracy within early United States Catholicism in September 1823 when John England, the bishop of South Carolina and a notable advocate of the lay trustee system, advanced a written constitution for local church government in which he endorsed an increased cooperation between clergy and laypersons through an overtly republican political model. His constitution promoted the popular vote of lay trustees to the board's membership, as did most parish constitutions in the early United States. In addition, the bishop's constitution also endorsed the popular election of lay representatives. These individuals represented the parish community in attendance at annual conventions with the clergy.<sup>47</sup> The hierarchical authoritative structure of Old World Catholicism contrasted the American emphasis upon independence, hence the first generation of United States Catholics exercised democratic governing systems in adaptation to their new situation.

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<sup>45</sup>M. Carey, *Address to the Right Rev. the Bishop of Pennsylvania, the Catholic Clergy...*, 30. Cited by Patrick W. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates: Ecclesiastical Democracy and the Tensions of Trusteeism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 184.

<sup>46</sup>Mathew Carey, *An Address to the Roman Catholics of the United States, By a Layman of St. Mary's Congregation*, (Philadelphia: July 1821), 7.

<sup>47</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 35.

The democratic trustee boards did not question Catholic doctrine but addressed the mechanisms of local parish operation, in the hopes of adapting to the new context. As Catholics, the trustees respected Church dogmas; as Americans, they embraced personal liberty at the same time. They maintained continuity with their trusted tradition regarding religious beliefs, and practiced democratic lay governance with regard to operative procedures.<sup>48</sup> The trustee system drew upon Enlightenment ideals that concurred with the Catholic tradition. The practice allowed Catholics situated in the new American context to honor Church authority with regard to the teachings of the faith while simultaneously honoring their treasured democratic freedoms by safeguarding the voice of the laity in the governance of parish affairs.<sup>49</sup> This adaptation was for the time harmonious, as this uniquely American version of Catholicism emerged onto the world stage.

#### MULTIPLICITY REVISITED

The specification of *among white Catholics* in the subsequent section heading is a limiting parameter that could repeatedly reappear throughout the entire present work. As mentioned earlier, the historical trajectory presented herein is predominantly a white male Catholic narrative of the context on the grounds of scope, particularity, and interest. But history, as delineated in the previous dissertation chapter on narrative, has a truth project. And this truth project is indeed undermined by the emphasis of one historical trajectory to the neglect of so many others which also explicate the context. The perspective of the context then becomes distorted to the extent that these marginalized trajectories are

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<sup>48</sup>P. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 154–89.

<sup>49</sup>Joseph P. Chinnici, O.F.M., “American Catholics and Religious Pluralism, 1775–1820,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 16 (Fall 1979), 733–6.

ignored. African, Hispanic, feminist, womanist, and mujersita narratives, among numerous others, are all constitutive of the context under review. If a white male Catholic trajectory is treated as the only part of the context, then these other constitutive aspects receive no treatment. Since these other narratives are also part of the context in actual reality, the truth project of history is undercut to the extent that these realities are not addressed.

The project has already admitted this danger, but the current section in particular provides an expedient opportunity to revisit this problematic and offer at least some degree of a partial corrective. In short, even a white male dominant presentation of United States Catholic history must relate to actual historical reality. And the objective reality of the experience of black Catholics in the United States during this period under current review is certainly not accurately depicted as a move from democracy to Romanization. The trajectory shift from democratic ideals to a closer tie with Church authorities in Vatican City describes the trend among white Catholics specifically, during this period in the United States. Black Catholics in the context under review, however, were experiencing the shift from slavery to emancipation during this same era.

For example, this section will discuss Archbishop John Hughes whose voice spoke against cultural adaptation with regard to democratic elections in Catholic parishes. Hughes held a strong position against choosing clergy based upon the popular vote. For Hughes, such a practice is not an acceptable adaptation to the context because the practice is inherently not Catholic. However, this same individual was a vocal supporter of negro slavery.<sup>50</sup> Davis states:

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<sup>50</sup>Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States*, 60, 96.

Hughes made no secret of his feelings about slavery. He felt that the lot of slaves in the South was not half as miserable as that of the exploited Irish workers in the North. . . . he spoke about what he considered to be the wretched condition of black prisoners in Africa and affirmed that their condition of being sold as slaves was much better than the alternative, the *butcheries prepared for them in their native land*.<sup>51</sup>

Thus a voice characterized by a *resistance to cultural adaptation* with regard to parish elections comes from the same archbishop who *adapted to the mainstream culture* with regard to his attitude about slavery. This reality required at least some degree of attention, especially because the following section regards the historical shift from democracy to Romanization, a transferal exclusive to a particular trajectory. A move from democracy to Romanization does not characterize a segment of the United States Catholic population that had yet to experience any democratic voice whatsoever. The remaining discussion's treatment of adaptation refers specifically to a theological shift in the narrative of the white Catholic population from parish democracy to hierarchical Roman authority, bearing in mind that the reality of the black Catholic population in the United States was experiencing the shift from slavery to emancipation during this same epoch of history.

#### FROM DEMOCRACY TO ROMANIZATION AMONG WHITE CATHOLICS

During the era from 1820 to 1880, the encounter between the Catholic Church's traditional monarchial model of authority and the new American Republic model changed shape. Whereas *adaptation* characterized the relationship between Catholicism's traditional hierarchy and the spirit of American independence among the first generation of Catholics in the United States, the mid-nineteenth century witnessed a turning away

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 60. Davis takes the quoted portion from John Rose Greene Hassard, *Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, D.D.: First Archbishop of New York, with Extracts from his Private Correspondence* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1866), 436–7. See footnote 107 in Davis, detailed on p. 278.

from that distinctively democratic version of Catholicism that had emerged along with the new nation. While the earliest United States Catholics experienced a harmonious adaptation of the monarchial mode of traditional Catholicism to the United States democracy, the middle decades of the 1800s moved away from the trustee system that had given the laity voice in the decision-making processes of local parish communities.<sup>52</sup>

Until the 1820's, lay trustee boards had indeed been an intentional adaptation that preserved the voice of the people—a voice that the new sovereign nation understood to be a natural right. As one Philadelphia parishioner expressed to the United States bishops, “Is it wise, is it prudent, that those whose voice is *law* in everything else, should be made to feel, that *in that very thing*, in which they are most deeply interested they have *no voice at all?*”<sup>53</sup> American ideals within local church operations had reached their peak with Bishop John England's extension of the lay trustee system into a democratic republic of elected lay representatives in the United States Catholic parish, as outlined by his written constitution. But rather than spread, the bishop's unique adaptation of a monarchial tradition to a democratic context came under severe criticism by most other United States bishops who chided him for his *republican notions*.<sup>54</sup> Although the Vatican did not express any alarm over the democratization of Catholicism in the United States during the union's earliest period, no other American bishop adopted England's method of parish

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<sup>52</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 169–76.

<sup>53</sup>Thadeus O'Meally, *An Address Explanatory and Vindictory to Both Parties of the Congregation of St. Mary's* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Author by Wm. Brown, 1824), 64. Cited by P. Carey, *People, Priests, and Prelates*, 165.

<sup>54</sup>Archbishop James Whitfield is one such critic, as evidenced in a letter written to his agent in Rome, Father Nicholas Wiseman, on June 6, 1833. See McAvoy, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 130–1, for an excerpt from this correspondence.

government; consequently, John England's annual conventions, combining clergy and elected parish representatives, died along with the bishop in 1842.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, lay trustee Mathew Carey's church witnessed the demise of its trustee board when another Irish Catholic named Francis Kenrick immigrated to the United States after his education in Rome. In 1830, Kenrick entered Philadelphia as bishop and put a freeze on all church services by placing the parish under interdict, until the lay trustee board surrendered all political power in their parish over to their new bishop. As Dolan explains:

By abolishing the tradition of lay trustees, Kenrick sought to remove any taint of democracy in the government of the local church. Democracy was clearly incompatible with his vision of the church, a vision that was more monarchical than democratic, more European than American.<sup>56</sup>

The end of England's and Carey's adaptations exemplifies a new direction for United States Catholicism in the pre-Civil War era away from the American emphasis upon democracy and toward a reinforcement of monarchical authority based in Rome.

From 1820 to 1880, a widespread Romanization of Catholicism in the United States strengthened a sentiment of sectarianism among Catholics and shifted the cultural momentum away from patterns of adaptation and toward intensified local communities instead. While history clearly observes *that* this change took place, history also concerns itself with *why* United States Catholics moved from adopting the spirit of their surrounding context to intensifying their parish communities with a sense of local identity at odds with the surrounding context. Amidst multiple historical narratives and their

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<sup>55</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 35.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 49.

respective causal links between the emplotted components, a few reasons for the change surface without dispute. In particular, some theological concerns regarding democratic practice in ecclesial institutions begin to surface. Moreover, unprecedented waves of Catholic immigrants into the United States result in bigoted attitudes among some of the native-born population, and in the shift from geographical to nationality-based churches.

#### HISTORICAL REASONS AS THE CAUSAL LINKS OF EMPLOTMENT

Keeping in mind that the current analysis is an application of Ricoeur's narrative theory to United States Catholicism, the story of the context unfolds through causal links formed in the productive human imagination that connect various items together into the followable coherence of a plot. As discussed in the previous chapter of the present project, history makes sense of a constellation of otherwise fragmentary happenings and momentary concerns when the mind comprehends each fragment as the result of another, through the imaginative process of emplotment constitutive of human cognition.<sup>57</sup> In this process, the productive human imagination connects the various fragments together with causal links which the mind imbues onto the emplotted items.<sup>58</sup> This causal interrelation between the ordered events gives the story its rational structure, thereby furnishing the internal figuration of the historical narrative.<sup>59</sup>

In the story of the context under review, theological considerations, along with the onset of nativism and the rise of the immigrant parish, are all contributing factors in the movement away from democracy in the American Church and toward the Romanization

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<sup>57</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:67.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>59</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:38–42.

of United States Catholicism from 1820 to 1880. These considerations provide the causal links of emplotment which answer why things took place as they did in the story. In particular, each contributing factor provides impetus for United States Catholicism to move away from the innovative narrative of Carey and England toward the familiar story of established Old World structures. All of these factors thereby supply the present project with real-world examples of forces of narrative sedimentation. This observation extends to the entire analysis of contextualization. Any time historians suggest why something took place in the narrative of Catholicism in the United States, they are supplying the connections of causality that link different items together into the sense-making coherence of a plotline.

#### THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS REGARDING DEMOCRACY IN THE PARISH

The initial reason that the United States Church departed from democratic practices was theological in nature. Some prominent leaders in the American Church began to challenge the catholicity of democratic practices within the parish. In the controversy at St. Mary's church in Philadelphia, Bishop Kenrick exclaimed that the exercise of his episcopal authority was something that the laity *must not dare to control*, because that exercise of power fell outside of the appropriate boundaries for Catholics.<sup>60</sup> In addition, an Irish Catholic immigrant named John Hughes supported Bishop Kenrick at St. Mary's in Philadelphia. Ordained a priest in Philadelphia in 1826 and ordained a

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<sup>60</sup>Kenrick is being quoted here by his supporter John Hughes; Hughes' quotation cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 48.



bishop twelve years later, Hughes moved to New York City where he ardently challenged the lay trustee board at the Old St. Patrick's church.<sup>61</sup>

Whereas Carey had advocated the popular election of priests and bishops in the Philadelphia diocese, Hughes called such practice *uncatholic*.<sup>62</sup> As Hughes explained during the conflict at Old St. Patrick's parish in New York, "Episcopal authority came from above and not from below and Catholics did their duty when they obeyed their bishop."<sup>63</sup> His autocratic methods eventually triumphed over the trustee board of the Old St. Patrick's church with positive results. Dolan notes that *the church needed someone like Hughes to bring a measure of unity and solidarity to a very diverse and rapidly growing population*.<sup>64</sup> The outcomes aside, Hughes' reasoning lay in the understanding of popular votes for clergy as fundamentally contrary to Catholic tradition.

Catholic leaders like Kenrick and Hughes voiced the conviction that the election of the clergy is not an acceptable adaptation to the context because the practice is inherently not Catholic. In addition to Catholic clergy, Protestants also began to observe the ideological encounter—between the theology of hierarchal authority in Catholicism and the philosophy of democratic elections in the new republic—as an incompatible clash. For instance, during the antebellum period one of the debate societies at Yale University

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<sup>61</sup>Henry J. Browne, "The Archdiocese of New York a Century Ago: A Memoir of Archbishop Hughes, 1838–1858," *Historical Records and Studies* 39–40 (1952), 139.

<sup>62</sup>Cited by Jay P. Dolan, *The Immigrant Church: New York's Irish and German Catholics, 1815–1865* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 164–5.

<sup>63</sup>Cited by Lawrence Kehoe, ed., *Complete Works of the Most Rev. John Hughes* (New York: Lawrence Kehoe, 1865), 1:323.

<sup>64</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 35.

declared that *the Roman Catholic religion [is] inconsistent with free government.*<sup>65</sup>

Catholics and nonCatholics alike observed an essential ideological contrast.

Opponents of the lay trustee system emphasized that in the Catholic faith, the ultimate source of authority does not rest in the majority opinion of the people; rather, Jesus Christ is the head of the Church and the authority that the Lord left with the Church was entrusted to Apostolic succession. As one immigrant pastor worded it:

If you desire to work in the name of God, pay heed to the words of Christ, because God the Father gave us only one Christ; if you wish to labor for Christ, then listen to Peter, for Christ gave us only one Peter; if you want to work in Peter's name, obey the Pope, because he is the only true successor to the first Pope; if you wish to work in the Pope's name, obey the bishop, for only the bishop rules the diocese; if you wish to obey the bishop, then you must obey your pastor, for the bishop gave you only one pastor.<sup>66</sup>

For Kenrick, Hughes, and the Catholics whose beliefs they represented, Catholic authority originates from a sovereign God above, whereas American civil authority originates from a sovereign people below—a foundational disagreement observed by Protestants as well. During the pre-Civil War era, both Catholics and their opponents began to discuss the encounter between the Church's traditional monarchial model of authority and the novel American Republic model as an ideological confliction.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 57.

<sup>66</sup>Vincent Barzynski, quoted in an unpublished paper by Joseph Parot, "Steelmills, Stockyards, Sweatshops and Slums: The Social Class of the Polish Catholic Working Class in Chicago, 1870–1900," 14. Cited by Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 223.

<sup>67</sup>Dolan, *The Immigrant Church*, 164–5.

## ANTI-CATHOLIC NATIVISM

In addition, a crusade of native-born United States citizens, hostile to foreigners and Catholics, emerged during the antebellum period. Under the pressure of this anti-Catholic nativism, the members of local parish communities rallied together and experienced a new degree of detachment from the mainstream culture. The widespread support and substantial impact of the nativist social movement was tethered to the unprecedented influx of Catholic immigrants to America during the mid-nineteenth century. The years from 1845 to 1855 witnessed the arrival of three million foreigners to the United States, many of whom were Irish Catholics.<sup>68</sup>

The remarkable and sudden rise in the number of immigrants altered the demographic profile of the nation considerably. For example, 85% of the population of Buffalo, New York had been born in America during the 1830's, with a foreign-born population of just 15%. By 1855, the percentage of the city's native-born population had shrunk to 26%, with 74% of the population coming from foreign countries.<sup>69</sup> Since so many of these immigrants were Catholic, Catholicism had become the largest religious group in the United States with roughly 3.1 million Catholics living in America by the year 1860—a 900% increase across just 30 years.<sup>70</sup> Although Catholicism comprised the

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<sup>68</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 56.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

largest religious group, the vast majority of United States Catholics were not born in America.<sup>71</sup>

Thus Protestantism, the religious denomination of the native-born populace, delineated the major cultural institutions of the pre-Civil War United States, and Protestants filled the seats of public office.<sup>72</sup> Suspect of foreigners and Catholics who suddenly constituted the majority of the population, the nativists acted upon a predilection for other native-born citizens, rallying themselves together against a perceived threat. On Orange Day July 12, 1824, a fight broke out in the Greenwich Village settlement on the outskirts of New York City between Irish Protestant immigrants and Irish Catholic immigrants.<sup>73</sup> The police force consisted of American-born citizens whose nativism manifested itself in the arrest of 33 Irish Catholics and zero Orangemen.<sup>74</sup>

In 1834, nativists burned down a Catholic convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts. Nativist riots in Philadelphia during the summer of 1844 escalated into the burning of Catholic churches.<sup>75</sup> That same year, nativists burned down the homes of their Catholic neighbors—an activity that students at the University of Pennsylvania

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<sup>71</sup>David A. Gerber, *The Making of an American Pluralism: Buffalo, New York 1825–60* (University of Illinois Press, 1989), 113–4.

<sup>72</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 58.

<sup>73</sup>Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763–1834* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 134.

<sup>74</sup>Walter J. Walsh, “Religion, Ethnicity, and History: Clues to the Cultural Construction of Law,” in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 60–5. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 55–6.

<sup>75</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 50–7.

considered to be justified. Likewise, a student group at the University of Georgia claimed that Catholicism *should not be tolerated in the United States*.<sup>76</sup> Dolan concurs with the following quotation: “the average Protestant American had been trained from birth to hate Catholicism.”<sup>77</sup> Parish burnings, Bible riots, anti-Catholic lectures, and anti-Catholic books continually fueled intense emotions on both sides of the conflict.

This bigotry eventually showcased itself nationally in the political arena with the founding of the *Know Nothing* party. The aim of its membership was to keep foreigners and Catholics out of public office; its motto was *Americans must rule America*.<sup>78</sup> The members of the *Know Nothing* party all took an oath in which they swore never to vote for an immigrant in any election for a governmental office.<sup>79</sup> The political party specifically excluded Roman Catholics.<sup>80</sup> As Abraham Lincoln said, “As a nation, we began by declaring that all men are created equal. When the Know Nothings get control, it will read all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners and Catholics.”<sup>81</sup> Lincoln called the degeneration of the nation *pretty rapid*.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 103–6.

<sup>81</sup>Cited by Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 266.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

Anti-Catholicism also worked its way into the new public school system that swept across the country during the antebellum age. Whereas Protestant children regularly attended Catholic schools during the United States' earliest years as its own sovereign nation, the institution of public education changed dramatically during the subsequent period. As large-scale immigration was taking place, numerous governmental reform movements spread rapidly. A chief piece of this wave of political reform was a system of public education funded by United States tax dollars.<sup>83</sup> Support for public education reached its climax between 1830 and 1850; by 1860, every state in the nation practiced some degree of public education, teaching an American brand of anti-Catholicism that came with it:

Rooted in the Protestant culture of the United States, the public school movement encouraged an American Protestant imperialism. Its supporters promoted it with a crusader's zeal, and before long the schoolhouse became the established church of the American republic. As spectacular as this movement was, it had a fundamental flaw. It was rooted in a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant ideology that was not very tolerant of those outside this culture.<sup>84</sup>

Run by people whose religion was rooted in a protest against Catholicism, the public schools became a learning center for anti-Catholic indoctrination at a very young age.<sup>85</sup>

In addition to anti-Catholic bigotry in the institutions of government and education in the antebellum United States, other influences connected to immigration also played a role. For instance, during the late eighteenth century in Ireland, a political movement advanced the ideals of tolerance and equality, and Irish Catholic immigrants to the United

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<sup>83</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 59–60.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

States during this era, like Mathew Carey, took these Enlightenment ideas with them to America. This political movement in Ireland disintegrated by the end of the 1700s as religious dividing lines became reinforced along with a strong sectarian attitude among the Irish people, and the new Irish Catholic immigrants to the United States such as Kenrick and Hughes took this sectarian sentiment with them into America.<sup>86</sup>

#### NATIONAL PARISHES REPLACE GEOGRAPHICAL PARISHES

Furthermore, the tremendous in-pouring of foreigners re-centered the parish community around nationality as opposed to territory. German Catholics and Irish Catholics, for instance, each desired to preserve their respective traditions from the Old World and worship in their own languages. Consequently, parishes structured around nationality became the norm by the mid-1800s, replacing churches based on geographical location.<sup>87</sup> While the Protestants, especially the Methodists, witnessed this same phenomenon in their churches, the large majority of immigrants were Catholic. Catholicism felt the predominant impact of the shift from territorial to national churches—a change that further enhanced Catholicism’s turn inward to intensified local communities set apart from the mainstream.

During this time period from approximately 1820 until 1880, the American context included an unprecedented influx of foreign immigrants, a mounting attitude of United States nativism, the fierce anti-foreign racism and anti-Catholic bigotry that precipitated, an advancing public education system rooted in Protestantism, and the polarization of

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 55. See also Walsh, “Religion, Ethnicity, and History,” in *The New York Irish*, 49.

<sup>87</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 60–1.

Catholics to their own nationality at the parish level. Forced to survive and protect themselves from a surrounding context of increasing hostility, Catholics rallied themselves together into the closed communities of their nationality-based churches. As Dolan explains:

Pushed to the margins of society by the forces of nativism and anti-Catholicism, Catholics began to build their own enclaves in the immigrant neighborhoods. Religion became their badge of identity, and the local parish became the hub around which most of their lives revolved. Socially and religiously they had become separated from American society.<sup>88</sup>

Thus a hostile environment worked to solidify an emerging Catholic counterculture.

Although they comprised the majority relative to any religious denomination, the violent realities that situated them as well as the predilection to congregate based upon nationality caused American Catholics to understand themselves as a minority besieged by a Protestant majority. The enmity of the nativists was one contributing factor in the furnishing of a sectarian Catholic ethos, but it was not the only cause. The violences of anti-Catholic bigotry coincided with an existing Catholic preference for withdrawal, as nationality-based parish communities appealed to the injustices of nativism to buttress a sense of community identity. As Ann Taves clarifies:

Although nativist hostility may have played a part in the formation of a Catholic subculture...mid-nineteenth-century Catholic theology and practice itself fostered the creation of an enclosed Catholic subculture and indeed was able to use nativist hostility to reinforce American Catholics' view of themselves as a beleaguered minority banding together to protect itself from the attacks of its enemies.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>89</sup>Ann Taves, *The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 128.



The necessary defensive posture was not however the orientation of the victimized or defeated. Rather, the refusal to return violence for violence is itself an expression of the Catholic faith. The posture of Catholics toward the surrounding antagonism was not weak and terrorized.

Rather than being passive agents, victims of nativist forces who were forced into isolated communities, Catholics self-consciously built up a strong community that was centered on the immigrant parish. This was their strategy of survival in a nation that was not very welcoming.<sup>90</sup>

Catholics actively defended their churches and their faith with conviction and even sass, much like the Christian charity that would be exhibited by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. while under persecution from his surrounding context, expressed in his *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*.<sup>91</sup>

In response to the Protestant imperialism of the new public school system, Catholicism developed its own educational system to such an extent that the Catholic parochial school became a delineating mark of American Catholicism by the late 1800s.<sup>92</sup> Another example of Catholic sass can be found in 1844 when Father Hughes, opponent of the lay trustee system, employed his militant, autocratic leadership style once more in New York City. This time, instead of battling against lay democracy inside the parish, he rallied the laity together under his episcopal authority to defend their local parishes from

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<sup>90</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 59.

<sup>91</sup>My use of the term *sass* relates to the dignity of the sufferer in a response of resistance to the oppressor. I take this notion from the theology of M. Shawn Copeland, “‘Wading Through Many Sorrows’: Towards a Theology of Suffering in a Womanist Perspective,” in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*, eds. Charles Curran, Margaret Farley, and Richard McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 156.

<sup>92</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 59.

the burning of Catholic churches. From among the multiple church burnings during the 1844 summer riots, not one of the burned parishes was from inside New York City—a fact that Dolan attributes to Hughes’ intensely active and militant stand in defense of the Catholic parishes of his city.<sup>93</sup>

One finds in the rich devotional life of pre-Civil War Catholicism another indication that Catholics did not identify their nationality-based communities according to victimization or despair. Spiritual devotional practices centered on a specific emphasis increased dramatically from 1840 until 1880. Prayer books that guided devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Way of the Cross, the passion and death of Jesus, the Adoration of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Eucharist, recitation of the rosary, and Marian devotions added to a rise in local parish missions and revivals, and to other spiritual practices devoted to St. Joseph, St. Patrick, and St. Anthony. Of all the prayer guides published between 1830 and 1880 in the United States, 98% of these were published after 1840.<sup>94</sup> This rise in devotional Catholicism started after 1820, became common among United States Catholics after 1840, and increased in popularity during the 1850’s. By the 1860’s, devotional spirituality had grown to become yet another delineating mark of United States Catholicism expressed throughout the national parish communities.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 52–3.

<sup>95</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 219–20.

## SYNOPSIS

Amidst the violence and fear that surrounded them, Catholics in America came to understand their community identity as standing at odds with their surrounding context. However, to characterize the entire context as racist against foreigners and bigoted against Catholics would itself be an overstatement and an unfair stereotype. The anti-Catholic nativism was an unfortunate reality, and the story shaped Catholic identity in the pre-Civil War era as surely as the Exodus narrative shaped the identity of the Old Covenant people who suffered under Egyptian persecution.<sup>96</sup> But the antebellum United States also witnessed American-born writers and intellectuals who vehemently defended Catholicism during this period. Two such individuals were Orestes Brownson and Isaac Hecker who were native-born United States citizens and well-known converts from Protestantism to Catholicism.<sup>97</sup> In fact, roughly 57,400 Protestants converted to Catholicism in the United States between 1831 and 1860.<sup>98</sup>

Abraham Lincoln, himself a Protestant, spoke against anti-Catholic bigotry in his complaints about the *Know Nothing* political party. Lincoln associated anti-Catholicism with the ethical degeneracy that was drawing the nation away from her founding principles. Examples such as these safeguard the current analysis from the promotion of a singular, sedimented narrative of the American context; after all, the present project embraces narrative innovation through reconfigured emplotments. The

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<sup>96</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>97</sup>Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism* (University of California Press, 1994), 281.

<sup>98</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 61.

violences indeed occurred. At the same time, numerous exceptions to bigoted trends existed throughout the antebellum United States as well. With some exceptions noted, the overall pattern exhibited a thorough Romanization of the Catholic Church in antebellum America in response to a hostile environment that strengthened local Catholic community identity. During the pre-Civil War period, Archbishop M. J. Spalding of Baltimore confidently announced that the American Church had become *Roman to the heart*.<sup>99</sup>

The first one hundred years of the United States had forged a hardy Catholicism in the furnace of persecution. Situated within a context of anti-Catholic forces working against them, Catholics developed a strong sense of their own identity within the sectarian community centers of the local immigrant parish. However, contextualized descriptions of any particular group of people located within the surrounding society incur the danger of oversimplification, beyond the ever-present exceptions to widespread cultural trends. In addition to the identification of exceptions, historical narratives remain mindful of the dynamic and complex circularity inherent to narrative theory. It is worthy to note that communities are not merely situated within a surrounding context; instead, according to the healthy *mimetic* spiral that Ricoeur elucidates, people in any community are themselves an integral part of the contexts that situate them.<sup>100</sup> In the case of a contextualized presentation of Catholicism's narrative identity within the United States

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<sup>99</sup>Quoted in J.L. Spalding, *The Life of the Most Rev. M.J. Spalding, Archbishop of Baltimore* (The Catholic Publication Society, 1873), 383. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 59.

<sup>100</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

context, Catholics constituted the largest group of Americans as the country moved into the twentieth century.<sup>101</sup>

With approximately 9 million members nationwide, the Catholic Church in America had grown to comprise the most sizable religious body in the United States by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>102</sup> On the one hand, the surrounding United States context exerted anti-Catholic pressures that helped to galvanize the lively devotional spirituality, the parochial school system, and the vibrant life of the local immigrant parish community that had all come to define United States Catholic culture by the time of the Civil War. On the other hand, as the largest church in the nation, 9 million United States Catholics represented a significant portion of the United States context itself. As Ricoeur observes, people are indeed part of the contexts from out of which their stories derive.<sup>103</sup>

### **The Recurring Question of Compatibility**

#### AN ONGOING TENSION BETWEEN TWO PARADIGMS

The emerging modern American culture championed the Enlightenment emphasis on the individual, whose voice is dignified by democracy and personal religious liberty. The sovereignty of the people, as opposed to the authority of a monarch, expressed itself in the right to vote and in the freedom to choose one's own religious beliefs. These foundational principles of the United States coincided with and helped to facilitate scientific advancements that challenged former assumptions, critical methods of inquiry

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<sup>101</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 71.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:144–5.

regarding human origins and theology, and new attitudes about the rights of women.<sup>104</sup>

The friction between Catholic hierarchy and the American emphasis upon personal liberty and popular sovereignty had already surfaced in the previous era, especially in the debates about the popular election of priests and bishops in the lay trustee system. During the antebellum period, the election of clergy raised the question of whether the American context could accommodate traditional Catholic understandings about authority. The tension between these two competing narratives of authority continued into the post-Civil War period.

This question regarding the compatibility of Catholicism and United States culture showcased an ongoing conversation between two competing worldviews. Echoing modernity on a global scale, the United States highlighted this tension in the 1880's and 1890's as widespread public deliberation regarding the relationship between religion and society began to fill sermons, journals, and newspapers across the country. The relationship between Catholicism and the emerging modern United States culture became subject to severe scrutiny as the topic grew to become one of the most talked about issues among American Catholics in the middle class. In other words, the interaction between American Catholicism and the modern United States culture that contextualized it escalated into pervasive public debates as the nation approached the close of the nineteenth century.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), xii–xiii.

<sup>105</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 73–4.

With 9 million Catholics representing the largest religious group within the United States context, the intensified focus upon church-state relations across the society as a whole impacted the Church itself. In particular, during this period two distinctive schools of thought appeared within the American Catholic Church with respect to Catholicism's relationship to the surrounding context. The first group saw Catholicism as compatible with modern American culture. Like Mathew Carey and John England during the United States' first years as a sovereign nation, a new group emerged that emphasized areas of convergence between certain Enlightenment ideals of the modern era and Catholic tradition. The second group echoed the message of Kenrick and Hughes from the pre-Civil War era with a perception of Catholicism and modern American culture as fundamentally incompatible systems.<sup>106</sup>

Amidst these respective narratives for and against adaptation, a novel posture toward the culture was also born out of the mid-1880s as well: an engagement with the context that publically sought to transform the society with Catholic social teaching and action. In particular, Cardinal Gibbons' endorsement of the Knights of Labor during this period initiated a Catholic social gospel that would eventually grow to have a remarkable impact upon United States Catholicity—an impact that the current project will return to in detail, when the movement ignites in the subsequent era.<sup>107</sup> Aside from this spark of transformative, public engagement with the surrounding culture, the period from 1880 until 1920 observes the polarization between two competing narratives: (1) the story of

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 74–5. See also Frederick J. Zwierlein, *The Life and Letters of Bishop McQuaid* (Rochester: Art Print Shop, 1927), 3:234.

<sup>107</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 147–8.

Catholics who wanted to adapt to the modern culture and (2) the counter-cultural story of sectarian withdrawal from society.

### VOICES FOR ADAPTATION

One of the chief advocates of the first group, the Americanists, was Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota. He understood the Enlightenment ideals of democracy, religious freedom, tolerance, social justice, material progress, and the advancement of knowledge as compatible with Catholic teaching. According to the Americanists, United States culture and Catholicism were not necessarily incongruent; rather than a relationship of competition, these two powerful forces should converge.<sup>108</sup> This group held to the optimistic conviction that a cooperative partnership between modern America and United States Catholicism would prove a synergistic relationship that would spread the best of both worlds globally, into a bright future available to everyone. The constituents of this first grouping of late nineteenth century American Catholics desired the end of a sectarian sense of Catholic identity. As Ireland says, “Men must be taught that the Church and the age are not hopelessly separated.”<sup>109</sup> For the archbishop, the separate institutions of church and state could coexist comfortably:

There is no conflict between the Catholic Church and America. I speak beneath this Cathedral dome as an American citizen no less than as a Catholic bishop...and when I assert, as I now solemnly do, that the principles of the Church are in thorough harmony with the interests of the republic, I know in the depths of my soul that I speak the truth.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>109</sup>Most Reverend John Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society: Lectures and Addresses* (Chicago: D.H. McBride and Co., 1896), 94.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 10.



Ireland and his supporters not only understood a harmonious adaptation of Catholicism to the American worldview to be possible, but as destiny.<sup>111</sup>

Time blurred the previously obvious lines between natives and foreigners as the first generation of immigrants settled and gave birth to American-born children. Originally, immigrants had filled working class job positions requiring little to no skill. But the upward mobility that democracy enabled allowed for numerous Catholics descended from the nation's initial wave of immigration to advance up the socio-economic ladder. By 1880, 30% of the Irish Catholics in Baltimore, Maryland had advanced from blue-collar work into skilled, middle-class occupations and even some low upper-class positions.<sup>112</sup> Unlike their foreign-born parents, the Irish Catholics of the United States' second generation were American-born, and they were employed in reputable occupations as merchants, lawyers, and physicians.<sup>113</sup>

No longer hiding out exclusively in the sectarian enclaves of their immigrant parishes, these Catholics had integrated into the larger culture with positions of wealth and influence. In just one generation they watched their religion grow into the largest in the nation relatively quickly, and they already enjoyed the opportunities that the American society had afforded them. This group of middle-class Irish Catholics was understandably optimistic about the benefits of American opportunity and about the principles undergirding the nation—Enlightenment principles about equality that had made new lives possible for them, and could also do so for others. They amplified the enthusiasm of

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 94, 138.

<sup>112</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 73.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

Catholic clergy who celebrated the American spirit and rejoiced in their remarkable 9-million member religious majority.

Although they comprised the minority group within the American Church, Catholics who were optimistic about their religion's compatibility with the society definitely made their voices heard. In 1889, Baltimore hosted a centennial event in honor of John Carroll, the first American Catholic bishop from the late 1700s. As thousands of Catholics gathered together to remember Bishop Carroll and to celebrate Catholicism in the United States, an enthusiastic spirit was evident throughout a crowd of American Catholics.<sup>114</sup> The words of cardinal archbishop of Baltimore James Gibbons were illustrative of this attitude:

But while we rejoice in the numerical strength of the Catholic religion, we rejoice still more that...the church exhibits an organic vitality, an exuberant spirit, a vigorous activity and a sturdy growth which afford a well-founded hope of unlimited expansion in the future.<sup>115</sup>

Gibbons was not the only speaker to voice an imperialistic hope in unlimited expansion; other Catholic leaders shared his belief.

Archbishop Ireland also spoke during this one-hundred year celebration of Catholicism in the United States, and he resonated Gibbons' outlook. As Bishop Ireland said in a Sunday-evening homily during the centenary, "The Church triumphant in America, Catholic truth will travel on the wings of American influence, and with it

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 71–2.

<sup>115</sup>Quoted in *Three Great Events in the History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Detroit: William H. Hughes, 1889), xv. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 71.

encircle the universe.”<sup>116</sup> He was optimistic that a friendly church-state separation and cooperation were indeed possible to achieve between Catholic tradition and American society. He went so far as to call for the Catholicization of America; according to Bishop Ireland’s platform, Catholics have to *make America Catholic*.<sup>117</sup> To do this, the Catholic Church in the United States would have to make certain concessions to modern American society by embracing church-state separation, integrating into the public school system, and embracing religious liberty and tolerance. John Ireland called for the Catholic Church to adapt to the emerging modern American culture in the civic sphere. He and the supporters of his campaign became thus known as the Americanists.<sup>118</sup>

#### EMPLOTTED COMPONENTS OF THE AMERICANIST STORY

Nationalism was common across multiple European ethnic heritages during this era. The working-class newcomers from the Old World remained proud of their respective ethnic nationalities, and many American-born citizens were proud of America—especially those who had benefited from the land of opportunity. In the late nineteenth century, the middle- and upper-class segments of the population had experienced the benefits of American opportunity and they took pride in the democratic system that had made their success possible. Second-generation immigrants would often exhibit dual senses of nationalism, proud of their ethnic background and proud of the United States at the same time. The American brand of nationalism, or Americanism,

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<sup>116</sup>Quoted in *Three Great Events in the History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 13–6. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 72.

<sup>117</sup>Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society*, 28, 73. Cited by Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 309.

<sup>118</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 101.

often coincided with an imperialistic enthusiasm that understood the United States as the force which would usher in a new global order. Caught up in the boosterism, many Americans understood the nation to stand at the cusp of a golden age of democracy, liberty, and prosperity. The nation's founding principles had proven successful, and now the United States could illuminate the dark corners of the world with her enlightened political philosophy.

Thus the extent of John Ireland's sense of nationalism was typical in the United States in the 1880's and 1890's when numerous Americans understood themselves to be alive during *the greatest epoch of human history...assisting at the birth of a new age*.<sup>119</sup> The Americanists within the Catholic Church were illustrative of this far-reaching spirit of Americanization that was prevalent throughout the native-born population of the United States. This sense of American nationalism, common across the white portion of the society, fed the archbishop's religious imperialism. But Ireland's desire to see Catholicism sweep the nation and the globe was not just an extension of his nationalistic spirit.

Although his nationalism and his religious imperialism coincided, the archbishop's optimism about church-state compatibility also had roots in his theology. In the Thomistic sense of the terms *substance* and *accident*, Ireland differentiated between the divine, which is substantially unchanging, versus its *accidents*—its sensory manifestations in the temporal order. While the principle of divinity never changes, the application of that principle does indeed change by adapting to its environment. According to Ireland,

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<sup>119</sup>Quoted in *Three Great Events in the History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 13–6. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 72.

Catholic tradition must *jealously guard its essentials*; at the same time, the Church must always be prepared *to abandon the accidentals, as circumstances of time and place demand*.<sup>120</sup> He explains that, since heavenly truth is simultaneously ancient and new, so too should the Church be both ancient and new at the same time; therefore, *at times, there seems to be a change when there is no change*.<sup>121</sup> For Ireland, a new circumstance in the natural world may look like a change when in fact the grace remains the same. The Church can therefore *adjust to new situations while yielding nothing of her divine elements*.<sup>122</sup>

Ireland's longing to harmonize two competing worldviews was not out of convenience for somebody who stood to benefit in a utilitarian sense from adaptation. Rather, the archbishop's hope in a Catholic America was influenced by his nationalism and informed by his faith. His dream of a Catholic America was the outgrowth of his theological conviction that divine truth adapts when applied to the context, yet without changing in principle. For Ireland, unchanging truth can appear differently as applied to different contexts, but in reality only the applications change with the circumstances—not the divine principles behind them. Catholicism can and ought to protect the essential, principle teachings of the Christian revelation while simultaneously recognizing and embracing the contextualized adaptations of those timeless teachings to new situations.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup>Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society*, 95.

<sup>121</sup>*Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 391.

<sup>123</sup>Dennis J. Dease, "The Theological Influence of Orestes Brownson and Isaac Hecker on John Ireland's Ecclesiology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1978), 221.

## THE CALL FOR RECONFIGURATION

Bishop John J. Keane of Richmond, Virginia and Bishop John Lancaster Spalding of Peoria Illinois joined with bishops Gibbons and Ireland in this Americanist movement. Echoing Ireland's cry for adaptation, Bishop Spalding taught that the Church must *fit herself to a constantly changing environment, to the character of every people, and to the wants of each age.*<sup>124</sup> These Americanists called for an integration of the Catholic parochial school system into public education, a promotion of religious liberty, and an abandonment of any intolerant mindsets toward Protestantism.<sup>125</sup> In these ways, the Americanist narrative sought to restructure formerly systematized and countercultural patterns in favor of adaptation.

In addition, though the American Church had abandoned the popular election of the laity as trustees or parish representatives, United States Catholicism restored a significant lay voice in Catholic affairs through the selection of delegates. Instead of holding public elections, the bishops of their respective dioceses appointed these lay delegates to represent their local parishes at congressional gatherings. For example, part of the Baltimore centenary was a two-day Catholic congress in which 1,200 laymen from across the nation congregated to discuss topics that included young people, the school systems, literature, virtue, and employment.<sup>126</sup> Even though voting had ceased as a parish

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<sup>124</sup>David P. Killen, "Americanism Revisited: John Spalding and *Testem Benevolentiae*," *Harvard Theological Review*, 66 (1973), 435.

<sup>125</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 101.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 72.

practice, a degree of lay representation had returned through this system of appointed delegation from among the laity.

Finally, despite their vocalized hopes for a triumphant American Catholicism (or for a Catholicized America, for those who took the dream as far as John Ireland took it), the Americanist movement officially promoted a separation of church and state with respect to the operations of religious institutions and governmental institutions. In the union between Catholicism and America that they had envisioned, the marriage was the cooperative union between two compatible and independent forces that ought to remain separate. These Catholic leaders understood the supernatural as superior to the earthly; thus in the cooperative union between religion and society that they preached, the Catholic Church should of course maintain the upper hand in her marriage to the state, and eventually *win the age*.<sup>127</sup> This being said, they definitively endorsed church-state separation—a position that would soon place them at odds with Pope Leo XIII.

This optimistic group of middle-to-upper class Catholic laity and clergy like Gibbons, Ireland, Keane, and Spalding marked a return to the specifically American version of Catholicism that had initially developed after the Revolution. Like Mathew Carey and John England a century earlier, the Americanists of the 1880's and 1890's wanted to see Catholic tradition adapt to the new age.<sup>128</sup> Their burgeoning voice called for adaptation, and therefore, for change in an institution that some understood to be immutable in every respect—both in its substance and in its accidents. The optimistic cry

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<sup>127</sup>Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society*, 101.

<sup>128</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 309–11.

of the Americanists was for the period only momentary, for the other group within American Catholicism would win the day.

### COUNTERCULTURAL VOICES

As aforementioned, in the late nineteenth century two distinctive schools of thought appeared within United States Catholicism regarding the Church's relationship with modern society. The first grouping understood Catholicism and modern American culture to be compatible. These vocal and enthusiastic Americanists comprised the minority of Catholics in the United States from 1880 to 1920. Their group consisted of socially active clergy and lay delegates selected by diocesan bishops. The Americanist laity came mostly from second-generation immigrant Catholics, especially the Irish, who had advanced up the socio-economic hierarchy and assimilated into the middle class of modern American society. The second group within the American Church consisted of the newest wave of foreign Catholics to immigrate into the United States. This influx of late-nineteenth century foreigners emigrated from Italy, from Poland, and from other areas of Eastern Europe. The immigrant Church of the 1890's echoed the sectarianism of the previous generation. The newcomers did not rejoice in American dominance. In contrast to the sentiment of nationalism that had swept across the native-born population during this era, the new influx of Catholic immigrants concerned themselves with retaining their ethnic culture from the Old World.<sup>129</sup>

This majority saw Catholicism and modern American culture as incompatible paradigms. They disagreed with the views of John Ireland and the other Americanists, criticizing them for promoting a dangerous syncretism of Catholicism with modern

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<sup>129</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 72.



society. As Moses had warned God's covenant people to beware of blending with an idolatrous pagan context before entering into the Promised Land, the opponents of the Americanists warned Catholics against amalgamation with American notions contrary to Catholic convictions. This majority of Catholics understood that authority derived from above according to their faith. They believed that this position was fundamentally incompatible with the location of sovereignty with the people. It was the challenge of the Church in America to preserve her Catholic identity and traditions amidst a society that emphasized a personal freedom from ancient restrictions. The Catholicity of the Americanists *differs materially from the faith once delivered to the Church and always preserved by her.*<sup>130</sup> For this majority, a Catholicity merged with modern America would no longer be Catholic.

Like the Americanists had John Ireland and John J. Keane, their traditionalist opposition also possessed some visible and outspoken Catholic figures who voiced a more conservative orientation toward the emerging modern United States context. Like Bishop Francis Kenrick and Bishop John Hughes before them, individuals such as Chancellor Thomas Preston, Archbishop Michael A. Corrigan, and Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid all warned the Church in the United States against making cultural concessions that compromised the integrity of Catholic identity. Preston, the influential chancellor of the archdiocese of New York, criticized the Americanists for *falsely representing...the one true religion which we are bound to defend and profess.*<sup>131</sup> For Preston, the Americanists'

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<sup>130</sup>Thomas S. Preston, "American Catholicity," *American Catholic Quarterly Review* 16/62 (April 1891), 397.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*

nationalistic spirit of United States superiority had puffed up an arrogant view that American Catholicity was superior to previous Catholic tradition.

#### EMPLOTTED COMPONENTS OF THE TRADITIONALIST STORY

The New York chancellor characterized the Americanist position as claiming that Old World Catholicism was too strict, restricting personal liberty with rules. According to Preston, the Americanists believed that these numerous prohibitions shackled previous eras of the Catholic Church, but the Catholicity of the Americanists *boasts a freedom from restrictions which bind the ages of the past*.<sup>132</sup> Thus for Preston, the Americanists were preaching that their preferred cultural amalgamation with modern United States society was an advancement that superseded tradition. Pope Leo XIII agreed with this depiction of the Americanists' position, condemning their belief that *the Church ought to adapt herself somewhat to our advanced civilization, and relaxing her ancient rigor, show some indulgence to modern popular theories and methods*.<sup>133</sup> Such concessions to popular culture constitute unacceptable compromises; according to this conservative position, American Catholicism should never be understood as a novel Catholic identity that advances the Church past outdated or obsolete traditions from the past.

John Ireland defended his theologically-based stance, and he officially denied holding to the ideas that his opposition attributed to him. He and other Americanists claimed that the views associated with them by their critics were in reality unknown to them and nonexistent in the United States. They argued that the characterization of their

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Quoted in John Tracy Ellis, ed., *Documents of American Catholic History* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1967), 2:539.

position made by their opponents was not an accurate portrayal of what they were truly advocating.<sup>134</sup> But the conservative majority agreed that the modern notions of Ireland and his supporters threatened Catholicism in America with a poisonous hubris—an arrogance that infected Catholicity with United States nationalism.<sup>135</sup>

In explicating the conservative ethos of this period, Dolan draws on the writing of Father William Kerby from 1897. Himself a moderate who deems both the progressive and traditionalist viewpoints as *legitimate and desirable*, Kerby gives a valuable, balanced criticism against the conservatives that falls outside the scope of Dolan’s analysis.<sup>136</sup> In particular, Kerby quotes one Msgr. Schröder as saying, “Liberalism is the creation of hell—No Catholic can be a liberal.”<sup>137</sup> The Monsignor thus insinuates that the liberals in the Church *are really heretics*; Kerby denies any such insinuation, calling Schröder’s words *mean, contemptible, and false*.<sup>138</sup> Kerby’s analysis conveys that, just as conservatives reprove progressives for alleged errors and arrogance, conservatives are also the recipients of such criticisms.

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<sup>134</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 110.

<sup>135</sup>William Kerby, *Letter to Edward Kerby Concerning Liberals and Conservatives in the American Church* (Louvain, Belgium, April 11, 1897). William Kerby’s letter is published as *Appendix VIII*, in Colman J. Barry, *The Catholic Church and German Americans* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1953), 323. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 104.

<sup>136</sup>Kerby, *Letter to Edward Kerby*, in Barry, *The Catholic Church and German Americans*, 325.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

According to the conservative voice, the attempt to forge a novel Americanized Catholicism, in which the Church concedes its own traditions to the modern spirit of the age, constituted an arrogant sense of advancing the Church out of the past. The conservatives did not necessarily believe the Americanists to be malicious or consciously acting against the Church, for the pope was clear to condemn the position, but not the people in this case.<sup>139</sup> Nonetheless, the conservative position understood the American model of authority as fundamentally incompatible with Catholicism. The progressive Americanists were therefore inappropriately proposing their own unique replacement, whether they had intended to or not, according to the perspective of the conservatives.

For these traditionalists, it was not that the Americanist position had been misunderstood; rather, it was that the Americanists, although they were well-meaning, had not recognized the error of their doctrine nor its implications. For example, a conservative Jesuit wrote in the journal *Civiltà Cattolica* that the teachings of the Americanists constituted *deceitful maxims*, and he admonished them for *sliding on certain doctrines*.<sup>140</sup> Catholicism in the United States ought to sustain a longstanding heritage and treasure two thousand years of Church tradition, not purport to surpass it. From the conservative point of view of the traditionalists, even the strict prohibitions of the tradition should be

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<sup>139</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 110.

<sup>140</sup>Cited by John Louis Ciani, “Across a Wide Ocean: Salvatore Maria Bandi, S.J., and the *Civiltà Cattolica*: From Americanism to Modernism 1891–1914” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1992), 222.

respected.<sup>141</sup> Such restrictions did not diminish human liberty, they actually safeguarded true human freedom from the enslavement to sin which results from self-sovereignty.<sup>142</sup>

Joining Preston, Corrigan, and McQuaid were Church authorities in Europe like the German and Italian Jesuits. During the late nineteenth century, the Jesuit order was closely allied to the papacy. Themselves alarmed by the potential dangers of syncretism with modern society, Roman authorities shared the concerns of the conservative majority of American Catholics. Dolan summarizes the conservative position as follows:

They were not at all enthusiastic about the opportunity of uniting church and age. For them, Catholicism was incompatible with modern culture. They were patriotic Americans, but being Catholic had nothing to do with being American. Their crusade was not to unite church and age, but to strengthen the immigrant church so that it could withstand the attacks of the modern world.<sup>143</sup>

The conservative majority of United States Catholics endorsed Catholic schools, and did not trust the Protestant-run public schools. Although the new immigrant Church arrived after the nativist riots of the mid nineteenth century, they experienced some of the same pressures that the earlier wave of immigrants had faced. And like the immigrants before them, they rallied together into lively parish communities based on nationality, suspect of their strange new surroundings.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup>Joseph M. White, *The Diocesan Seminary in the United States: A History from the 1780s to the Present* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 263.

<sup>142</sup>Ellis, *Documents of American Catholic History*, 2:546.

<sup>143</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 103–4.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, 125–6.

## DEBATE BETWEEN COMPETING NARRATIVES

During this period, several issues surfaced in United States Catholicism that specifically delineated the progressive minority from the conservative majority. Whereas the Americanists called for an integration of the Catholic parochial school system into public education, the conservative majority of United States Catholics fiercely opposed any such effort. For instance, Bishop McQuaid of Rochester called the secular school system *Godless*, and actively worked against attempts to incorporate the Catholic parochial system into the public school system.<sup>145</sup> In addition, fraternal associations with secretive initiation rites like the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, and the Sons of Temperance were popular in late nineteenth-century American culture. While the Americanists tolerated membership, conservatives worried that such organizations would tempt men away from the local parish and therefore sought to ban membership.<sup>146</sup>

Furthermore, the Americanists believed in a separation of church and state, understanding the two institutions as compatible and independent parties in a mutually-beneficial union. Denying such compatibility, the conservatives understood visible Church structures and offices as a divine institution that exercised the heavenly authority appropriate for the regulation of society. Strictly earthly authoritative structures were a suspicious modern invention, unfit to rule the people as effectively as the Church. The two institutions should not be treated like separate entities; rather, the state ought to be viewed as deriving its authority from the Church.<sup>147</sup> As Dolan summarizes the

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<sup>145</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 105.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

conservative position, “The ideal situation or model was the medieval Christian society, in which church and state were united in the person of the Christian ruler.”<sup>148</sup> Finally, the Americanists actively promoted religious tolerance, whereas conservatives adopted a relatively reserved stance toward other faiths, especially toward Protestants. For example, Gibbons, Ireland, and Keane all attended an interfaith gathering in Chicago in 1893 called the *International Parliament of Religions*. Shortly thereafter, the pope voiced the conservative view when he issued a letter that asked Catholics not to be present at such interreligious assemblies.<sup>149</sup>

Eventually, this era witnessed the end of the Americanist movement. In the 1895 encyclical *Longinqua oceani*, Pope Leo XIII publically renounced the American attempt to separate church and state.

It would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church, to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced.<sup>150</sup>

Backed by the advice of Italian Jesuits in Rome, the pope later issued the letter *Testem Benevolentiae* in 1899, officially condemning what he termed *Americanism*.<sup>151</sup> This papal decree effectively ended Ireland’s attempted crusade to unify United States Catholicism with modern America. Michael A. Corrigan, archbishop of New York, applauded the pope’s condemnation of the Americanists’ liberal ideology. He and other conservatives

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 105–6.

<sup>150</sup>Quoted in Ellis, *Documents of American Catholic History*, 2:502.

<sup>151</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 108.

like Preston and McQuaid now had papal authority backing up their concerns. They felt reassured that Catholic identity in the United States would remain truly Catholic, untainted by incompatible modern claims of human sovereignty.<sup>152</sup>

### FORCES OF SEDIMENTATION

Although Ireland's Americanist campaign had been effectively silenced, an intellectual enterprise followed that was similar to Ireland's optimism regarding the compatibility between religion and society. Whereas the Americanists focused upon a practical political platform of Catholic adaptation to the American republic, the modern theologians that followed extended their concerns more broadly to the relationship between Catholicism and modernism on a philosophical level. Instead of talking about achieving parochial school integration into the public school system, for example, academics like Father John Zahn at the University of Notre Dame were writing about the compatibility of Darwin's theory of evolution with Catholicism.<sup>153</sup> While critical of certain details of the theory, Zahn calls Darwin's overall concept *ennobling* and *uplifting*.<sup>154</sup> Numerous articles were published in Catholic journals in the early twentieth century that talked about how to reconcile Catholic thought with modern science and philosophy.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 110–1.

<sup>153</sup>R. Scott Appleby, *Church and Age Unite! The Modernist Impulse in American Catholicism* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 36.

<sup>154</sup>John A. Zahn, *Evolution and Dogma* (New York: Arno, 1978), 435–8. Date of original publication February, 1896. Cited by Appleby, *Church and Age Unite*, 37.

<sup>155</sup>Appleby, *Church and Age Unite*, 7–8.



Then in 1903, Pope Pius X, Pope Leo XIII's successor, issued the encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in which he delineated the *errors of modernism* and listed pragmatic means for fighting against any subsequent attempts to modernize Catholic theology.<sup>156</sup> Papal writings like *Longinqua oceani*, *Testem Benevolentiae*, and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, all expressed a conservative stance allergic to modernization. The Vatican issued these documents across a relatively short span of time, all taking a conservative stance in opposition to the philosophy of modernism, and all bearing the indelible mark of papal authority. These documents, coupled with the condemnation of Zahm's work about Darwin in 1898, effectively curbed efforts to adapt Catholicism in the United States to the emerging modern culture.<sup>157</sup> By 1910, Catholicism in the United States had returned to its sectarian posture toward the surrounding context and became more connected to the Vatican than ever before. Once again *Roman to the heart*, a widespread sense of opposition to the mainstream culture would characterize the Catholic Church in the United States through both world wars.<sup>158</sup> The traditionalist narrative was thus illustrative of the resistance to alteration that designates the sedimentation pole of Ricoeur's second *mimetic* relation.<sup>159</sup> The United States Church's predominantly countercultural orientation toward her surrounding context would last until the 1950's,

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<sup>156</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 115.

<sup>157</sup>*Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>158</sup>Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 1, The Irony of It All 1893–1919* (University of Chicago Press, 1986), 200.

<sup>159</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:64–70.

when a reevaluation of Catholic thought would resurface—indicative of the innovation pole of *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>.

In summary, the context up to this point has illuminated a narrative pattern. Like Carey and England before them, the Americanists, and the subsequent theologians whose thought resembled Americanist reasoning, voiced a desire to adapt Catholicism in the United States to the cultural ideals of the age. Although hierarchical forces from Rome had momentarily curtailed their efforts, their call for adaptation would return. The brief flourish of the Americanists designated a narrative innovation that continually resurfaces in every century of American Catholicism. Albeit without the nationalism and imperialism commonplace to the cultural context of Gibbons and Ireland, the desire to see the Catholic Church in the United States adapt to the emerging modern American culture would indeed return in the voices of future United States Catholics during the 1950's, and would eventually find expression in the new Catholic evangelization in organizations such as Woman Church, discussed in the third chapter of the current project. Likewise the voice of the conservatives, and their timeless cautions against syncretism with the surrounding context, would also find expression in the new Catholic evangelization in organizations such as Prison Fellowship, out of Washington, D.C.<sup>160</sup> The conservative conviction that certain tenets of Catholicism are incompatible with modern American culture would inform versions of the new evangelization, just as the progressive cry for adaptation would inform other versions—across a multiplicity of competing narratives.

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<sup>160</sup>The organization's founder, Charles Colson, worked with Richard Neuhaus on the new Catholic evangelization. Colson's conservative voice is discussed in Chapter 3, as is the Woman Church movement.

## Catholic Evangelization Emerges from the United States Context

### A THRIVING IMMIGRANT PARISH

In the period from the 1920's until the second Vatican Council, the countercultural posture that United States Catholicism adopted toward modern America took two primary shapes: one private, the other public. Sectarian withdrawal describes the first form and typified most of the immigrant Church. Apparent in the daily life of nationality-based parishes across the country, the immigrant Church was a *thriving, self-confident institution*, as Alan Ehrenhalt remarks.<sup>161</sup> He states that immigrant Catholicism had reached the highest point of its influence during this period. As Ehrenhalt notes, “It was not searching for a new identity. It was simply not interested in change. It cared about tradition and authority.”<sup>162</sup> Similarly, Dolan states, “In the 1920–1950 era devotional Catholicism reached its high-water mark.”<sup>163</sup> Celebration of the Eucharist at Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation were the two most emphasized rites within these parish communities. They held the clergy in the highest regard, and their spirituality highlighted Church authority based in Rome, special devotions especially to Mary, traditions, rituals, signs, and wonders.<sup>164</sup>

Catholicism continuously remained the single largest religious denomination in the United States throughout this entire period, numbering 18 million by 1920 and growing to

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<sup>161</sup>Alan Ehrenhalt, *The Lost City: The Forgotten Virtues of Community in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 120.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 115.

<sup>164</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 221.

40 million by the end of the 1950's. By the time of Vatican II, Catholics comprised almost 25% of the United States population.<sup>165</sup> The speedy expansion of the institution necessitated popular fundraisers like annual church carnivals to support the establishment of new parishes, orphanages, parochial schools, and Catholic hospitals.<sup>166</sup> Smaller associations within the churches formed and met regularly to minister to the particular needs of different age groups. Many local parish communities held special social events on a monthly basis such as minstrel performances, card-playing clubs, ethnic dinners, and flea markets.<sup>167</sup>

The local church became the fulcrum of recreational activities for United States Catholics during this period. Parish basketball courts seated close to 2,000 spectators, and parish community centers hosted dances that became famous among the youth. Such lively parish activities cultivated a strong sense of community pride as well as a strong sense of loyalty to the ethnic heritage of the local church.<sup>168</sup> This vital parish life linked the Catholics' faith to their social sense of neighborhood identity so much so that real estate investors advertised properties in these communities according to the name of the church rather than the name of the location. For instance, instead of reading about a home for sale in Auburn Park, one read an advertisement for a *St. Sabina Two-Flat*.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 115.

<sup>166</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>167</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>169</sup>Quoted in Eileen M. McMahon, *What Parish Are You From? A Chicago Irish Community and Race Relations, 1916–1970* (University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 27, 71–8. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 130.

Similarly, Catholics would identify where they lived according to their parish membership, not according to street addresses, districts, or municipal regions.<sup>170</sup>

Of the 18 million Catholics in United States parishes at the start of this period, not all of them were immigrants, of course; however, the term *immigrant parish* nonetheless characterizes United States Catholicism and the vitality of the local church community during this era. While a significant number of American Catholics included converts from Protestantism and Americans whose heritage traced back to the Colonial age, first-generation and second-generation immigrants still made up the sizable majority of United States Catholics. New to the United States, foreign-born Catholics and the initial generation that followed maintained close cultural ties to their European languages and customs from the Old World. From 1920 until the 1950's, parishes remained centered around nationality rather than geographical location. For example, first-generation and second-generation immigrants constituted nearly two thirds of Chicago's overall populace in 1930. At this point in time, over half of the people living in Chicago attended a local parish based upon their respective ethnic heritage.<sup>171</sup>

Even where membership was mixed, a single ethnicity still ran the parish and colored all of its social activities. For example, Saint Sabina's parish in Auburn Park was an Irish church. About 60% of the parish membership consisted of American-born Irish, and several recent immigrants who had been born in Ireland also attended the parish. But 60% does not account for the entire membership; indeed, the parish consisted of some French and German members as well. But the 1920 carnival committee had no French or

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<sup>170</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 130.

<sup>171</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

German people on it. Many of the nuns who taught at Saint Sabina's parochial school came from Irish decent. The pastor was an Irish priest, and the school's curriculum offered an Irish History class. In spite of having a congregation comprised of Catholics from divergent ethnic backgrounds, a single ethnicity defined the church as an immigrant parish—in this case, an Irish one.<sup>172</sup> Some cities contained numerous different Catholic parishes within the city limits due to the diversity of the immigrant population. For instance, an influx of foreign immigrants from Canada, Poland, and Italy entered Boston during the early twentieth century. These newcomers added to the multiple ethnic communities already living in the city from previous waves of immigration, and Boston witnessed the establishment of 35 new Catholic churches within its borders between 1907 and 1930 to accommodate the additional need.<sup>173</sup>

#### AMERICANIZATION PROGRAMS IN THE UNITED STATES CHURCH

Recalling the Americanist movement of John Ireland during the late nineteenth century, his transitory crusade for adapting the religion to the culture was in part rooted in his theology. At the same time, however, his crusade was also partially symptomatic of a broader phenomenon in society that had swept the cultural landscape as a whole. The Catholic Americanists who had advocated an adaptation of Catholicism in the United States to modern American society had been fueled by a nationalistic attitude of

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<sup>172</sup>McMahon, *What Parish Are You From*, 31–3.

<sup>173</sup>Robert H. Lord, John E. Sexton, and Edward T. Harrington, *History of the Archdiocese of Boston*, 3 vols. (Sheed and Ward, 1944), 725ff. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 133–4.

Americanism already prevalent across the culture.<sup>174</sup> Even though the Vatican had taken its stand against the Americanist movement in the United States Catholic Church prior to the first World War, American nationalism remained strong across the civic sphere of society throughout the post-World War I period, and it continued to affect the experience of Catholicism in the United States long after John Ireland's campaign had been quashed.<sup>175</sup>

Americanism reached a fevered pitch through World War I and the years that followed. This intensive sense of national pride drove efforts to Americanize the immigrant population already living in the United States and restrict any further waves of immigration. The United States brand of nationalism had taken on a note of imperialism for those who understood themselves to live in the dawn of a new glorious epoch of democracy which the United States would spread to the world. In an atmosphere of American nationalism, the United States produced the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 that curtailed subsequent influxes of immigration into the country.<sup>176</sup> Even with these new restrictions placed upon immigration, Americans of foreign descent still comprised the majority population in cities like Chicago, where nearly two thirds of the city inhabitants were first-generation and second-generation immigrants in 1930.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>174</sup>*Three Great Events in the History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 13–6.

<sup>175</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 126.

<sup>176</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

According to the American nationalists, limiting future immigration was by itself insufficient to foster the holistic sense of cultural identity appropriate to United States greatness and destiny. In an atmosphere of United States nationalism, the country thus aimed to unite a society fragmented by ethnicity beneath a singular sense of national pride. Beginning in the 1920's, the United States government established Americanization programs around the country that provided citizenship classes and courses in the English language. The aim of these Americanization programs was to *assimilate and amalgamate* the foreigners into the *American race*.<sup>178</sup>

Although the papacy had effectively silenced John Ireland's social discourse championing American superiority in cooperation with Catholicism, local efforts at the parish level sought to change immigrant Catholics into American Catholics. This attempt at Americanization primarily affected working-class Catholics at the local parish level. The same American nationalism that motivated English language programs and citizenship courses around the country found expression in the local immigrant parishes of this era. Even though these churches were associated with the ethnicity of their respective majority memberships, a minority of American nationalists also attended these churches and challenged the foreign identification of their parish community. Their goal was to change the immigrant parish into the American parish by Americanizing Catholics of foreign descent.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 95–105.

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.



Catholic churches funded settlement homes and catechesis in addition to their own civic instruction and English language courses in an attempt to transform the immigrants into proud Americans, fully integrated into United States society. One of numerous examples is that of Bishop John Cantwell of Los Angeles who financially backed a comprehensive Americanization program for the city's Mexican newcomers. Classes in economics and household budgeting supplemented education in language, citizenship, and the Catholic faith for the influx of Mexican Catholics into California.<sup>180</sup> But the nationalistic pride in their own ethnic heritage was still too strong among the immigrant Catholics to reprogram their sense of nationalism in one generation. American nationalism did not replace the nationalism that immigrant Catholics still felt for the respective countries of their ethnic heritage.<sup>181</sup>

From Bishop Cantwell's extensive program in Los Angeles to the movement to Americanize the Polish Catholic communities, Americanization efforts in United States Catholicism did not persuade those of foreign descent to replace traditional ethnic ways with new American customs. As Dolan describes United States Catholicism in this period:

...the immigrant church was very much alive, and Catholicism continued to be a religion rooted in diverse ethnic traditions. The national parish was the key institution in maintaining the people's loyalty to a specific ethnic heritage and strengthening their sense of identity as Catholics...The attempt to force them to replace their traditional religious culture with an American style of religion would not succeed.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup>Jeffrey M. Burns, "The Mexican Catholic Community in California," in *Mexican Americans and the Catholic Church 1900–1965*, ed. Jay P. Dolan and Gilberto M. Hinojosa (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 189.

<sup>181</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 146.

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*, 129, 146.

Instead of simply swapping one sense of nationalism for another, the cultural adaptation of the immigrant parish to the United States context remained a gradual process that occurred steadily across time. Suburbanization would begin to loosen ethnic ties in the 1950's, but until then, the Americanization classes had failed to transform working-class Catholics of foreign descent into fully amalgamated Americans with a new sense of United States nationalism. Rather, the immigrant Church remained the immigrant Church, and this designation continued to characterize Catholicism in the United States until the second Vatican Council.

#### A RESURGENCE OF ANTI-CATHOLIC NATIVISM

The Johnson-Reed Act resulted in a decline in immigration after 1924, but the substantial percentage of first- and second-generation immigrants who were already in the United States lived in a cultural atmosphere of intensive and even imperialistic Americanism. Afraid of the sheer size of the immigrant population already in the country and suspect of the enclave communities that perpetuated ethnic ties, American nationalists rallied together to voice their fears and suspicions regarding the foreigners in their midst. Often racist and bigoted, these voices echoed the anti-Catholic nativism of the previous century as United States Catholics suffered a resurgence of hostility from an unfriendly society.

One source of discrimination was Protestantism. Dolan quotes French professor André Siegfried who observed the United States during a six-month tour in the 1920's: "Protestantism is the only national religion, and to ignore that fact is to view the country

from a false angle.”<sup>183</sup> Dolan’s analysis highlights Siegfried’s observation that those with a preference for Catholicism over Protestantism *are considered bad Americans and sure to be frowned on by the purists.*<sup>184</sup> Beyond Dolan’s discussion, Siegfried also remarks, “Even in spite of sincere protestations to the contrary, American Protestantism is still the religion of the Anglo-Saxon or the *superior* race.”<sup>185</sup> This Protestant ethos and the resulting pressures that such anti-Catholic sentiments exerted on the parish communities encouraged Catholics to form tightly knit bonds with one another.

The nativist revival during the post-World War I era could also be seen in the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. Historian John Higham explains that the Ku Klux Klan was *an instrument of modern American nationalism.*<sup>186</sup> He notes that within the Klan, *anti-Catholicism actually grew to surpass every other nativistic attitude.*<sup>187</sup> Higham refers to incidents during the summer of 1921 in which the Ku Klux Klan destroyed an Illinois parish following an initiation rally, and a Klansman gunned down a Catholic priest on the

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<sup>183</sup> André Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*, trans. H.H. Hemming and Doris Hemming. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1927), 33. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 133. See also the front matter of Siegfried’s work, v–vii, by H.H. Hemming and Doris Hemming.

<sup>184</sup> Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*, 33. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 133.

<sup>185</sup> Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*, 48.

<sup>186</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), 287.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 291. Higham’s quote here is a well-known one, cited by Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (Oxford University Press, 1967), 21; Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921–1928* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 23; Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 135.

priest's doorstep.<sup>188</sup> Anti-Catholic attitudes contributed in stopping Al Smith, an Irish Catholic, from becoming the president of the United States.<sup>189</sup> The Klan's verbal assaults against Catholicism fed the growing sense among immigrants that they were outsiders detached from the mainstream society. Simultaneously, anti-Catholic attacks solidified the self-understanding of Klan members as white Protestant Americans. The Klan claimed that Catholics could not be good Americans because they were *actually and actively alien, un-American, and usually anti-American*.<sup>190</sup>

The nativist revival was not limited to the Ku Klux Klan—it extended even to the United States presidency. President Calvin Coolidge said *America must be kept American*.<sup>191</sup> Since the predominant majority of foreigners were Catholic, bigotry was a common thread throughout this nativist sentiment, which extended into the academic community as well. In 1949 Paul Blanshard published an overtly anti-Catholic work entitled *American Freedom and Catholic Power* which sold over 100,000 copies in its first year.<sup>192</sup> In it he claimed that *the American Catholic hierarchy...is still fundamentally Roman in its spirit and directives. It is an autocratic moral monarchy in a liberal*

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<sup>188</sup>Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 292–3.

<sup>189</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 69.

<sup>190</sup>Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 135.

<sup>191</sup>Cited by Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 2, The Noise of Conflict 1919–1941* (University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81.

<sup>192</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 167. After its 26 printings, Blanshard's first edition of his book eventually sold 240,000 copies—a statistic taken from the front matter of Blanshard's second edition.

democracy.<sup>193</sup> Blanshard called for *champions of traditional American democracy...to build a resistance movement designed to prevent the hierarchy from imposing its social policies upon our schools, hospitals, government and family organizations.*<sup>194</sup> He proclaimed himself to be an *anti-Catholic bigot*, and his work received accolades from respected academics including Albert Einstein and John Dewey.<sup>195</sup> In an expanded second edition published 9 years after the original, Blanshard challenged *Catholic clerical absolutism*, calling the pope the *Catholic dictator*.<sup>196</sup>

Anti-Catholic attitudes were again prevalent in the society. Admiral William S. Benson, a Catholic from this period, describes the discrimination that Catholics experienced in daily life:

They meet bigots in their work, in their neighborhood life, in the organizations to which they belong. If they are teachers, they are in danger in many instances of being discharged. If they are in public life, their religion loses them votes and prevents them, perhaps, from giving their full services to their city, state or country. In some way or other we are all handicapped.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1950), 10. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 167.

<sup>194</sup>Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, 303. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 167.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid. See also Martin E. Marty, *Modern American Religion, Vol. 3, Under God, Indivisible 1941–1960* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 158.

<sup>196</sup>Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power: Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), xii.

<sup>197</sup>Quoted in Lynn Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties: ‘Assimilated’ Catholics’ Response to Anti-Catholicism,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11 (Fall 1991), 26. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 135.

One of the parishioners at Saint Sabina's church explained that Catholics *were on the defensive...raised in a kind of enclave, maybe you should call it a ghetto*.<sup>198</sup> In the continual encounter between two different models of authority, American society again understood the United States and Catholicism as two incompatible models; or as the Klan purported, an incompatibility between democracy and Catholic tyranny.<sup>199</sup>

Marginalized by the context into what Dolan calls *island communities*, Catholics in the post-World War I era shaped their own sense of communal identity withdrawn from the mainstream, as they had done in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>200</sup> Siegfried notes that Catholicism in the United States during this period was *a thing apart in the heart of the American body politic. It collaborates in its own time and in its own way, but in the long run it remains distinct and does not fuse*.<sup>201</sup> From Communion and Penance, to devotional prayer life; from the fun of the annual carnival that supported the building fund, to the strong sense of pride in one's heritage that the festivals celebrated; from the parish sporting events, to the dances; and from the interpersonal conflicts between family and friends, to the resolution of such feuds—local parish life looked inward to itself with a private spirituality that withdrew from mainstream society.<sup>202</sup>

For the private face of American Catholicism during this era, a countercultural orientation took the form of detachment from an unfriendly society. Amidst a modern

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<sup>198</sup>Quoted in McMahon, *What Parish Are You From*, 53.

<sup>199</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 134–5.

<sup>200</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>201</sup>Siegfried, *America Comes of Age*, 51.

<sup>202</sup>Morris, *American Catholic*, 131–2.

American culture that had rekindled nativist suspicion and bigotry against Catholicism, a Catholic subculture developed its own neighborhood that imbued the civic with a sense of the sacred for the parish community.<sup>203</sup> Thus from the 1920's until the 1950's the sectarian enclave, or island community, of the local church facilitated a thriving Catholicity within an otherwise hostile environment, as it had done during the mid-nineteenth-century nativist riots.<sup>204</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL GOSPEL

While the private face of Catholicism withdrew from mainstream society, the United States Church also possessed a public face. Regarding the relationship between church and society during the 1920's, Dorothy Day remarked, "Catholics were a nation apart, a people within a people, making little impression on the tremendous non-Catholic population of the country."<sup>205</sup> While her comment describes one aspect of United States Catholicism during the initial post World War I period, another more public face emerged in the Church that coexisted alongside patterns of withdrawal. This public side of the United States Church would exert a significant impact on the wider American culture. Like the private side, the public side adopted a predominantly countercultural posture toward modern American culture. But unlike the withdrawal that characterized the private

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<sup>203</sup>James Terence Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933–1962* (University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 17.

<sup>204</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 133.

<sup>205</sup>Cited by Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933–1962*, 17.

lives of churchgoers, the public face of United States Catholicism engaged the modern context with the goal of transformation.<sup>206</sup>

A countercultural orientation toward modern society took the form of detachment in the private life of the local parish community in the era from 1920 until Vatican II. But during this same period, active lay leaders, academics, and clergy began publishing and circulating an assortment of profound and influential materials that challenged American society. This movement expressed its countercultural stance in the form of indictments against the philosophy of modernism, explicating the evils that its alleged errors had caused in the United States, and imploring the society to adopt the Catholic social thought that could remedy these problems and heal the nation. This movement gave a public face to the United States Catholic Church that coexisted alongside the private life of the local parish community.<sup>207</sup>

In particular, a body of native-born middle-class Catholic intellectuals encouraged the United States Church to abandon the stance of withdrawal and actively work to counteract the evils of modern culture. The sectarian enclaves of both the nineteenth and the twentieth century were illustrative of a position of detachment. In contrast to the island-community phenomenon, the Americanists of the previous era had called for United States Catholicism to adapt by allowing itself to be shaped by the society. The post-World War I era now observed a different stance as educated clergy and laymen proactively engaged society in the effort to heal the evils of the secular world. Unlike the

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<sup>206</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 185–90.

<sup>207</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 189.



sectarianism of immigrant communities, and unlike the adaptation called for by the Americanists, a new group of United States Catholics sought an engagement with the culture in order to evangelize it.

The movement harkened back to the mid-1880s when the organization known as the Knights of Labor received their endorsement from Cardinal Gibbons. This endorsement marked what Dolan calls *the emergence of a Catholic social gospel or what can be labeled a public style of Catholicism*.<sup>208</sup> This department of transformative, cultural engagement grew to an unprecedented level of impact between the 1920s and the 1950s when a Catholic intellectual revival coincided with the multiplication of social action groups in response to contextualized problems such as the Great Depression. In other words, a public voice critical of the culture emerged in the form of a new Catholic evangelization. A novel form of Catholic evangelism particular to the United States context developed as Catholic social thought and action directly applied the Christian gospel to meet the needs of a suffering public.

The advocates of this public style of United States Catholicity protested the clannish mindset of the immigrant enclave. The public face of the American Church complained that the tight-knit parish communities were inappropriately adopting a defensive disposition of inferiority and fear when they ought to be the voice of bold proclamation to the rest of society. For example, Professor Carlton Hayes at Columbia University was a prominent supporter of Catholic public discourse. He observed:

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<sup>208</sup>Ibid., 147–8.

...a tendency too marked on the part of Catholic Americans to shut themselves off from the life and thought of their fellow countrymen, to insulate themselves against powerful intellectual and social currents in their own nation.<sup>209</sup>

He called Catholics *to practice their religion publically as well as privately*.<sup>210</sup> For Hayes and others, evangelism had to engage the society.

Likewise, Michael Williams distinguished between a preferable *outlook* that would convey Catholic thought to all American people versus the Catholic *inlook*, focused entirely on individual experience.<sup>211</sup> Friends and benefactors from among both clergy and laity shared Williams' desire for communicating the principles of Catholicism to the mind of the public. With the help of his supporters, Williams founded of the journal *The Commonweal* in 1924 and published its first issue in November of that same year. The journal's purpose was to convey Catholic thinking to the public mindset.<sup>212</sup> George Shuster, formerly professor of English at Notre Dame, became a frequent contributor to Williams' new journal from 1925 to 1937. In addition to publishing his own essays in the journal, Shuster recommended submissions from other writers from the United States and from Europe; eventually, Shuster became the managing editor of *The Commonweal*.<sup>213</sup> Numerous articles across the years offered a Catholic vantage point on issues like Darwin's theory of evolution and the growth of the Nazi movement. The journal

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<sup>209</sup>Hayes, "Obligations to America," *The Commonweal* , 1/10 (January 14, 1925): 26.

<sup>210</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>211</sup>Rodger Van Allen, *The Commonweal and American Catholicism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 5.

<sup>212</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 394.

<sup>213</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 149.

facilitated an ongoing and reputable instrument for sounding the American Church's critical perspective of the modern world.<sup>214</sup>

#### A CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL RENAISSANCE IN THE UNITED STATES

Even before the Great Depression, Catholicism in America expressed a proactive, public voice in the work of Father John Ryan at Catholic University. He connected Catholic social teaching to political reform. His fight for minimum wage tied the theology of morality to the civic sphere of economics, and he wrote the *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction* in 1919. This document outlined the Church's proposal for rebuilding the United States after the First World War by applying *the principles of charity and justice...to the social and industrial conditions and needs* which the country faced after the war.<sup>215</sup> Ryan's document and the launching of *The Commonweal* journal five years later laid the groundwork for a continual Catholic social message to the cultural context. In addition to working for *The Commonweal*, Shuster authored a book entitled *The Catholic Spirit in America* in which he credits the *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction* for initiating the Catholic conversation between religion and society, *as if the Church had learned to talk to modern America*.<sup>216</sup> According to Shuster, Father John Ryan afforded United States Catholics the chance to enter into and engage the mainstream of United States society as Catholics.

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid.

<sup>215</sup>John Ryan, "Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction," in *American Catholic Thought on Social Questions*, ed. Aaron I. Abell (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 327. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 148.

<sup>216</sup>Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 149.

New professional societies organized, and new scholarly journals added to Ryan's document, to Shuster's book, and to the numerous publications in *The Commonwealth*.

Taking the public face of the United States Church even further, Jesuits Francis X. Talbot, Daniel A. Lord, and Calvert Alexander led a literary revival. The purpose was

...to develop an articulate laity capable of defending and explaining the Church to a seemingly hostile world and to prove to themselves and the rest of the American intellectual community that Catholicism was an intellectual and cultural force worthy of respect and recognition.<sup>217</sup>

Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno (On the Reconstruction of the Social Order)* in 1931 echoed Father John Ryan's voice, teaching that Catholics had a social responsibility to help shape the context in which they lived according to Catholic principles of justice.<sup>218</sup>

With papal support for labor, many clergy and laity joined the labor movement in the United States.<sup>219</sup> During the 1930s, Ryan supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's programs associated with the New Deal, like the National Labor Relations Act, social security, and minimum wage.<sup>220</sup> Roosevelt's administration sought Ryan's counsel several times, and Ryan saw President Roosevelt at least four times throughout the duration of the New Deal.<sup>221</sup> Francis Broderick called Father Ryan *the New Deal's*

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<sup>217</sup>Arnold Sparr, *To Promote, Defend, and Redeem: The Catholic Literary Revival and the Cultural Transformation of American Catholicism, 1920–1960* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 15–6.

<sup>218</sup>Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931, 1–3.

<sup>219</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 402.

<sup>220</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 69.

<sup>221</sup>Francis L. Broderick, *Right Reverend New Dealer John A. Ryan* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 241.

*Ambassador to Catholics*.<sup>222</sup> Ryan's primary concern until his death in 1945 was to convince United States society *of the need for a social gospel*.<sup>223</sup> Catholic conferences attracted people to discuss problems associated with industrialization, and clergy attended social action schools. As Dolan explains, "The number of converts was increasing; a brilliant crowd of novelists, poets, philosophers, and theologians appeared on the scene; and Catholic book publishing became a thriving industry."<sup>224</sup> Shuster says that the Catholic Church was *experiencing an awakening of its creative and intellectual force*.<sup>225</sup> In the academic community, Catholics were calling this period a Catholic renaissance.<sup>226</sup>

When the United States fell into its economic depression in the 1930's, the society witnessed forced deportation and repatriation along with the rise of mass politics and unionism. The heterogeneous culture of ethnic fragmentation began to share the mutual experience of economic hardship and the longing for recovery across every section of the society. As an otherwise ethnically divided world began to converge in the mutual experience of poverty, the public style of Catholicism submitted to the society that secularism was apparently not a trustworthy guide into the future.<sup>227</sup> In opposition to secularization and the injustices that resulted, Catholic thought offered practical solutions.

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid., 242.

<sup>223</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 402.

<sup>224</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 151.

<sup>225</sup>George N. Shuster, *The Catholic Spirit in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1927), 118.

<sup>226</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 150.

<sup>227</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 72–3.

Catholic traditions regarding the corporeal and spiritual works of mercy were welcomed in poverty-stricken streets. And the Catholic principles of virtue, like the theological virtue of charity and the cardinal virtue of justice, provided principles upon which a just society could develop.<sup>228</sup>

An intellectual renewal of Thomistic philosophy had achieved extensive popularity between the two world wars. While a thorough ideological dialogue comparing scholastic thought with modern thought lies beyond the focus of the present analysis, suffice it to say that Aquinas' classical worldview offers a lens through which to view reality far different than the lens offered by secularism. Strikingly different than the modern worldview, the Thomistic renewal, known as neo-Scholasticism, proved a valuable way to perceive the problems associated with secularization. Consequently, neo-Scholasticism was an effective tool for critiquing the contemporary cultural situation and presenting the alternative of Catholic social thought. Moreover, neo-Scholasticism had the Vatican's endorsement. Whereas the papacy condemned the cultural adaptation called for by the Americanist movement, this new Catholic renaissance developed upon an officially-sanctioned school of thought.<sup>229</sup>

#### CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH MODERN SOCIETY

In contrast to the nationalistic optimism that had peaked to an unprecedented extent across America during World War I and into the 1920's, the Great Depression led

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<sup>228</sup>For a detailed presentation of Catholic social teaching beyond the particular context of United States Catholicity, see Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931. See also Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*, 1891, the doctrines of which are advanced in *Quadragesimo Anno*.

<sup>229</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 150.

many Americans to believe that their society was falling apart from the 1930's until World War II. Some people maintained a sense of imperialistic Americanism and blamed foreigners and Catholics for society's ills, such as the Ku Klux Klan members already discussed. But many other Americans felt betrayed by their previous optimism as they experienced deadly conditions and unfair wages in industrial workplaces, and witnessed unemployment, hunger, and homelessness in their city streets.<sup>230</sup> The widespread prosperity that modern America could allegedly bring became a suspicious notion that warranted reevaluation as new anxiety replaced former optimism. Numerous Americans began to sense a disintegration of society, and Catholic social thought put forward both an explanation of the problems and a hopeful path forward toward a remedy.<sup>231</sup>

In particular, neo-Scholasticism proposed a link between modern American culture and the society's new troubles. The modern emphasis on the individual and personal liberty along with the absence of sovereign authority from above had led to secularism, materialism, subjectivism, and relativism.<sup>232</sup> Protestants agreed that these ideologies all undermined the nation's Christian roots. And as godless political philosophies like Fascism, Communism, and Nazism gained popularity in places in Europe, apprehensions mounted, especially with the rise of Hitler. Secularism was proclaimed the cause of these ills, and Catholic doctrine the solution.<sup>233</sup> At a 1940 lecture series at Loyola University in

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<sup>230</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 72–5.

<sup>231</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 152.

<sup>232</sup>*Ibid.*, 153–4.

<sup>233</sup>Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America: A History* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2004), 94.

Baltimore, Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray said, “American culture, as it exists, is actually the quintessence of all that is decadent in the culture of the Western Christian world.”<sup>234</sup> He proceeded to explain how Catholic thought could remedy the problem.

Building on the Scholastics, neo-Scholasticism emphasized the connections between aspects of life that modern thought often treated as separate spheres. For Thomas Aquinas and for those who sought to rekindle his philosophy in the twentieth century, religion and culture were tethered together in an inseparable way.<sup>235</sup> As Phillip Gleason explicates the position: “the disorder, incoherence, and fragmentation of the modern world could be healed only by a return to Christian truth as taught by the Catholic Church.”<sup>236</sup> Elsewhere Gleason explains that, according to the opponents of modernism, the *only* way to make *improvements in the intellectual sphere* would be for United States Catholicism to distance itself from modern mentalities.<sup>237</sup> Dolan adds, “By synthesizing reason and revelation, nature and grace, neo-Scholasticism provided the intellectual system to construct a truly Christian and human culture.”<sup>238</sup> Faith and reason, truth and meaning,

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<sup>234</sup>Quoted in J. Leon Hooper, “The Theological Sources of John Courtney Murray’s Ethics,” in *John Courtney Murray and the Growth of Tradition*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., and Todd David Whitmore (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 110. See footnote 1940a, detailed on p. 270.

<sup>235</sup>Joseph Komonchak, “John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology,” in *John Courtney Murray and the Growth of Tradition*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., and Todd David Whitmore (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 68.

<sup>236</sup>Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 120.

<sup>237</sup>Gleason, “The Crisis of Americanization,” 145.

<sup>238</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 154.



the scholar and the mystic, the natural and the supernatural, nature and grace—such realities were all interwoven in such a manner that distinctions are only drawn conceptually, to better understand how these interrelated aspects of reality are experienced together. In the relation between the spiritual and the material, for instance, the spiritual was primary and the material secondary.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, salvation was not a strictly individual matter because Catholics also had a collective responsibility for society as a whole.<sup>240</sup> Building upon the tradition of the Church's *angelic doctor*, the new Catholic social gospel could reunite what modern ideologies had tried to separate.<sup>241</sup>

Modern thought had attempted to separate faith and society not just conceptually but in actuality. This enterprise denied metaphysical reality, and thereby failed to recognize the chief importance of spirituality in everyday living. According to most intellectuals in the Catholic renaissance, the fundamental flaw in modern thought was the ideology of secularism. Secularism had given the self chief importance, over and above the community, and harmful consequences were the inevitable result. With its materialistic worldview, purely secular philosophy ignored the realm of the spiritual and attempted to collapse all reality into the physical order. The deception of materialism pretended that the tangible constitutes the entirety of existence. As Murray elucidates this problematic, the corruption of American culture roots in a *triple denial*: (1) *the denial of metaphysical reality*, (2) *the denial of the primacy of the spiritual over the material*, and

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<sup>239</sup>Ibid., 153.

<sup>240</sup>Komonchak, "John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology," 65–8.

<sup>241</sup>Ibid., 154.

(3) the denial of the primacy of *the social over the individual*.<sup>242</sup> This reductionism had created a civilization without God or religion. For the Catholic renaissance, the rejection of spiritual reality was an illusion because the human person is an embodied spirit, whether one consciously realizes that fact or not.<sup>243</sup>

The illusory notions of secularism in modern America did not remove the spiritual aspect of humanity which still called for goodness, meaning, and purpose; but in its denial of spiritual reality, the deceived philosophy warped the sense of what is good and what ought to define a happy person. People still sought fulfillment, but they mistakenly relocated fulfillment in individual status and wealth. They still practiced religion in that they still possessed pivotal concerns around which the rest of their lives revolved.<sup>244</sup> But they did not realize it because they had changed the terminology. For the intellectuals of the Catholic revival, secularists only used the terms *faith* or *religion* with regard to traditional religious institutions, patently ignoring their own faith-based assumptions about reality. In failing to recognize their own claims regarding absolute truths about reality, secularists had accepted their own belief systems uncritically, without any objective criteria to warrant their assertions.

For instance, in a rebuttal to Blanshard's *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, Murray illuminated the naturalist ideology operating behind Blanshard's thought and behind the thought of his liberal fans from the academic community. These advocates of

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<sup>242</sup>Cited by Hooper, "The Theological Sources of John Courtney Murray's Ethics," 110. See footnote 1940a, detailed on p. 270.

<sup>243</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 152–5.

<sup>244</sup>*Ibid.*, 156–7.

modern secularism complained about the autocracy of Catholicism in which the Catholic monarchy insisted upon its own moral absolutes. But Murray located a self-referential incoherence within the secularist position. Blanshard's argument contradicted itself because it had not done away with absolutes; it had merely replaced them with its own. In other words, a modern culture that had purported to separate from religion was in fact preaching its own universal truth claims; or as Dolan captures Murray's rebuttal, "By absolutizing democracy, they had transformed it into a secular religion."<sup>245</sup> As Murray revealed, Blanshard was imposing his own autocracy with democratic and naturalistic absolutes.<sup>246</sup> Blanshard's bigotry constituted nothing more than a deplorable resurgence of nativism that accused Catholicism of being *anti-American because it proclaimed that there was a source of truth beyond democratic majoritarianism and scientific naturalism.*

#### THE GOSPEL ADDRESSES THE CONTEXT

In Catholic thought, humans are understood to be spiritual creatures, and the modern culture of the United States had not eliminated the objective reality of human spirituality; human spirituality still had ample expressions in the modern context. The culture still practiced faith, but according to the developing Catholic social gospel, the faith that society had placed in modern ideologies like materialism, secularism, subjectivism, and relativism was misplaced. People still sought meaning in what was deemed to be the human good, but secular culture held to a reductionist and inaccurate notion of the good—an understanding of human purpose that proved dangerously selfish

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<sup>245</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 167.

<sup>246</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Paul Blanshard and the New Nativism," *Month*, n.s. 5 (April 1951): 214–25. Cited by P. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 97.

and observably harmful to the society. The United States businessman became the paradigm of the good, happy, fulfilled American, “a person for whom there is no divine transcendence, spirituality or collective responsibility, respectively,” as Murray worded it.<sup>247</sup>

Catholic social thought not only offered an explanation for the problem, but the road to recovery as well. By recognizing that both the spiritual and the material are real, that both are inextricable tied together in the experience of human life, that the spiritual holds supremacy over and above the material, and that salvation is for the community, not just the individual, the Catholic worldview sought to reintegrate faith and life and avow the unity of religion and culture.<sup>248</sup> Cognizant of human persons as fundamentally spiritual and relational creatures, Catholic thought aimed for the spiritual unity of the human community.<sup>249</sup> Murray wrote, “It is the Spirit of Christ, indwelling in man, that gives meaning and direction to the whole historical process... The spiritual unity of all men with each other, with the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit: that is the goal of history.”<sup>250</sup> Dolan explicates the thought of this Catholic renaissance with the following summary of its social teaching:

To be fully human, a person had to be united with God through the Spirit of Christ. Then the restoration of society could begin. This could best come about through

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<sup>247</sup>Quoted in Hooper, “The Theological Sources of John Courtney Murray,” 110. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 156.

<sup>248</sup>*Ibid.*, 152, 156.

<sup>249</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 408–9.

<sup>250</sup>Quoted in Komonchak, “John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology,” 65. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 156.

Catholic Action in which the church through the laity would transform a decadent culture into a Christian society. To help to rebuild this culture was a *sacred duty* for Catholics. They not only had a personal responsibility for their own salvation, but also a *collective responsibility of all for all*.<sup>251</sup>

Where modern American thought had advocated the illusion of a civic sphere independent of any faith, the Catholic gospel espoused a coherence between society and the faith of its citizens that ought never be torn asunder.

As the number of Catholics in the United States increased to 40 million by 1960, the Catholic social gospel and the intellectual renaissance that informed it continued to gain momentum across the United States.<sup>252</sup> Jacques Maritain, a philosopher from France, and Christopher Dawson, a historian from England, both converted to Catholicism and lectured at American Universities across the United States drawing support for the Catholic social gospel. Clergy such as Father Ryan and Father Raymond McGowan promoted social justice in the civic sphere. Prominent laity worked for social action and reform such as Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, who together founded the Catholic Worker movement in 1933. Murray's indictments against secularism and his rebuttals to anti-Catholic bigotry provided the academic world with the reputable voice of a respected Jesuit intellectual who would not allow the resurgence of nativism to go unchecked. This public style of United States Catholicism provided the principles and implementation of Catholic evangelism in response to the needs of the new modern context.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>251</sup>Ibid., 156–7. In this quotation, Dolan quotes Murray twice, citing Komonchak, “John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology,” 65–8. See Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 157, footnote 46, detailed on p. 273.

<sup>252</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 181.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid., 153–5.

## THE RECURRENCE OF INNOVATION AND SEDIMENTATION

With the Vatican-approved groundwork of neo-Scholastic tradition, the Catholic intellectual revival adopted an ideological orientation allergic to modern culture. Like the private face of the United States Catholic Church during this era, the public discourse of Catholic social teaching and action also conveyed a strong countercultural stance against the modern American context—with several exceptions. Certain voices in the intellectual renaissance, like Murray's for instance, were not as countercultural as others. Murray's problem was not with modernism broadly speaking, but specifically with the ideology of secularism within modern thought.<sup>254</sup> His critical pronouncements against United States decadence focused on secularism in particular, *that bears within itself the seeds of future tyrannies*.<sup>255</sup> But the secular aspect of modern culture aside, Murray did not see modernity as a necessarily negative development.

A rekindled voice for adaptation, Murray started promoting some of the very same ideas that John Ireland had taught.<sup>256</sup> During the late 1940's and early 1950's, Murray's contributions to the Jesuit journal *Theological Studies* attempted to make the case that United States Catholicism should adapt to the modern ideas of religious liberty and the separation of church and state.<sup>257</sup> While he believed in the unity of faith and life

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<sup>254</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>255</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Religious Liberty: The Concern of All," *America* 78 (February 7, 1948): 513–6. Cited by P. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 97.

<sup>256</sup>Donald E. Pelotte, S.S.S., *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York: Paulist Press, 1975), 7–10.

<sup>257</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Christian Co-operation," *Theological Studies* 3 (September 1942): 413–31. See also John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Co-operation: Some Further Views," *Theological Studies* 4 (March 1943): 100–11.

according to neo-Scholastic thought, the spiritual unity of the human condition did not require the institutions of religion and civic government to operate together. Murray broke away from other neo-Scholastic thinkers in arguing that the union between church and state from previous epochs of Catholicism was a system contingent upon a medieval context.<sup>258</sup> He states:

The complex notion of the freedom of the Church had...stated the essential claim that the Church perennially must make on the public power, as the essential requirement of positive divine law that is binding on the public power. But the tradition had been obscured by history—by the decadence of the constitutional tradition after the *quattrocento* broke with the medieval conception of kingship...<sup>259</sup>

The modern context simply did not blend the two institutions the way in which previous historical periods had—nor could it, due to contemporary pluralism; nor should it, according to Church tradition.<sup>260</sup>

Fighting against the withdrawal of the parish enclave, Murray taught that the best way for the Catholic social gospel to unite faith with daily living in the United States was to Americanize the United States Church. By embracing religious liberty and keeping church and state separate institutions, the United States Catholic Church would adapt to its modern situation. And by allowing this adaptation, American Catholics could best teach and exemplify Catholic doctrine as an integrated part of the society. By adapting to church-state separation, Catholics could preach and practice the good news of Jesus Christ

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<sup>258</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., “Sources Chrétiennes,” *Theological Studies* 9 (June 1948): 251.

<sup>259</sup>John Courtney Murray, S.J., *The Problem of Religious Freedom* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1965), 101.

<sup>260</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 159–60.

within the culture—something that the United States Church was not doing locked inside of its own sectarian immigrant communities. Under patterns of withdrawal, United States Catholics were the largest religious group in the nation yet they made little impression on the rest of the society, as Dorothy Day had noted.<sup>261</sup> But with a degree of adaptation, cultural integration could better facilitate evangelization. For Murray, Catholic thought and action would transform the society over time and administer the divine remedy to the poison of secularism that had threatened to disintegrate the civilization.<sup>262</sup>

In making this case, Murray located precedents from Catholic tradition. But Murray had publically endorsed the Americanist teachings of John Ireland regarding church-state separation, and those teachings had been officially suppressed by papal authority.<sup>263</sup> Church authorities worried that church-state separation opened the door to an affirmation of popular sovereignty, a notion that Murray opposed. As Murray defended his position, he argued that *the separation of church and state in the United States allowed religion to flourish without government meddling*.<sup>264</sup> But despite such defenses of his position, and despite his belief that he had been misunderstood, in July 1955 Jesuit authorities in Rome asked Murray to stop writing on the topics of religious freedom and church-state separation.<sup>265</sup> Adding to such forces of sedimentation was the private face of

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<sup>261</sup>Fisher, *The Catholic Counterculture in America 1933–1962*, 17.

<sup>262</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 156–7.

<sup>263</sup>*Ibid.*, 107–8. See also Ellis, *Documents of American Catholic History*, 2:502, for Pope Leo XIII’s remarks against church-state separation.

<sup>264</sup>McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 206.

<sup>265</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 161.



the Church in this period—many United States Catholics *preferred* sectarian withdrawal. Regarding the development of the Catholic social gospel during this era Gillis remarks, “Not all Catholics, clerical and lay, looked favorably upon this kind of activism in the church...some refrained from active participation.”<sup>266</sup> As for John Courtney Murray, he respectfully complied with the instructions of his order. Interestingly, his voice promoting religious liberty eventually won the day when in 1965 Vatican II approved Murray’s writing on the topic.<sup>267</sup>

### RAPID DEVELOPMENTS

During the years leading up to Vatican II and through the time of the council, the United States context was changing rapidly.<sup>268</sup> Average salaries and hourly wages doubled during World War II. This economic boom continued into the post-World War II era so much so that, by the middle of the 1950’s, over half the population of the United States could afford a middle-class lifestyle.<sup>269</sup> The extension of home-owner loans to veterans, government funding for the construction of freeways, and modern shopping plazas all contributed to the acceleration of suburbanization. Suburbs extended economic activity outside of the cities with new property developments for investors, suburban commerce sites, and new residential living quarters to accommodate the masses of

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<sup>266</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 72.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid.

<sup>268</sup>Ehrenhalt, *The Lost City*, 280.

<sup>269</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 184–5.

migrants into the new suburban regions. The automobile industry and the roadway systems enabled people to leave the cities and populate these more rural areas.<sup>270</sup>

The effects of such developments on the Church in America were considerable. Suburbanization marked the end of the age of the immigrant parish. The Catholic renaissance had given United States Catholicism a reputable place in the social discourse of the intellectual community. Bishop Fulton Sheen became a television celebrity from 1952 until 1957 with his program *Life Is Worth Living*. A Gallup poll indicated that Bishop Sheen was among the top ten most admired men in the United States, and with John F. Kennedy, the nation witnessed her first Catholic in the White House.<sup>271</sup> Clearly, the anti-Catholic bigotry of the nativists no longer designated the cultural ethos of the society as a whole. And with the help of the baby boom after World War II, the size of the United States Church had doubled from 20 million Catholics in 1940 to 40 million by 1960.<sup>272</sup> United States Catholicism had certainly changed since its days inside the immigrant enclaves of a nationalist climate.

From the 1920's into the 1950's, United States Catholicism took a predominantly countercultural stance toward the modern American culture both in local parish life and in public discourse. But while the local parish sought to withdraw from the mainstream society, public discourse sought to engage and transform it. Then at the end of this period, suburbanization brought the era of the immigrant parish to a close. The withdrawal that had formerly characterized the immigrant parish communities gave way

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<sup>270</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 76–7.

<sup>271</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 175.

<sup>272</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 76.

to the public engagement championed by the intellectual renaissance—a revival that observed the return of voices calling for adaptation. A public style of Catholicism had emerged in the United States that increasingly sought engagement with the cultural context. Both its countercultural appeals as well as messages advocating adaptation shared something in common: both wanted to abandon the attitude of withdrawal, both actively engaged the culture. In examples like Murray, diverse voices for Church reform continued to intensify until Pope John XXIII called a Vatican council to address these calls for reform and discuss the relationship between the Church and the modern world.<sup>273</sup>

### **Synthesis and Summary of the Contextualization Project**

#### CONTEXT PRODUCES THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

When Pope Paul VI published the defining document of the new Catholic evangelization in 1975, he was not launching an original movement so much as he was providing nomenclature for a phenomenon already well underway. From out of the preconiliar context of the United States an intellectual renewal coupled with corresponding civic action emerged in response to the needs of society. A renaissance in the United States Church advanced reforms that applied Catholic social thought to the cultural situation. The aim was to transform society with the message of Christianity. In other words, the Catholic social gospel in the United States prior to Vatican II was itself a *new evangelization*. The endeavor had indeed arisen from out of the context, for the Catholic social gospel constituted the response of the United States Church to the injustices of the cultural situation.

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<sup>273</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 417.

As the history indicates, the United States context had given rise to the Church's efforts to spread the good news of Christianity to a modern culture that was suffering from new forms of poverty and injustice particular to an increasingly industrialized society. Before Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, before Vatican II, the new Catholic evangelization in the United States had already begun with the Catholic intellectual renaissance and the coinciding social gospel. The United States culture was disenfranchised with modern society by hardships such as great economic depression and world war. Out of this context arose the story of United States Catholics evangelizing the new situation in which they found themselves.

As seen in the work of Murray, other clergy, and active laity, the gospel movement grew in both public discourse and social action. By the time of the council, Vatican II endorsed the stance for religious liberty that Murray had articulated years before, during his evangelization efforts in the United States. Before the Second Vatican Council, Murray advanced Catholic social teaching as the remedy for the new evils associated with secularization. And he preached, against American decadence, that *it is the Spirit of Christ, indwelling in man, that gives meaning and direction to the whole historical process.*<sup>274</sup> Without a doubt, the new Catholic evangelization in the United States was already underway prior to Vatican II.

#### A PATTERN OF SEDIMENTATION AND INNOVATION

Since the founding of the nation, the United States has experienced the relationship between Catholicism and modernity as a dynamic encounter between two different models of authority. As the traditional style of Old World Catholicism moved

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<sup>274</sup>Quoted in Komonchak, "John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology," 65.

into the American context, the Church's archetype of a monarchical hierarchy continually interacted with the United States paradigm of democracy and religious freedom. The divergent systems put an ecclesial hegemony in contact with the Enlightenment principles of individuality, independence, and popular sovereignty. Catholics in the United States context could associate their sense of identity primarily with a two-thousand-year-old community that possessed a heavenly citizenship in the Kingdom of God, or they could associate their sense of identity primarily with the democratic republic of their earthly government, or their self-understanding could derive from both designations equally. A monarchical power structure is observably different than a democracy; however, in the Church's encounter with the United States, Catholics held varying convictions regarding the compatibility between the two models of authority.

In particular, a narrative pattern of sedimentation and innovation emerges from the context in every epoch of Catholicism in the United States. In the first generation following America's Revolution, the traditional style of Catholic hierarchy which had sedimented into the monarchical European expression experienced a novel change. Previous traditions transformed into a distinctively United States brand of Catholicity with the popular election of laymen to parish government. The lay trustee boards facilitated the practice of democracy in the governing operations of the local churches, and supporters of the trustee system like Mathew Carey and Bishop John England advocated Enlightenment philosophies and understood elected lay representation as a significant constituent of Catholicity in the United States context. The innovation was brief. During the Antebellum era, opponents of democratic elective processes within the parish, such as Bishop Francis Kenrick and Bishop John Hughes, succeeded in their

efforts against the lay trustee system. Catholicism in the United States returned to the familiar story of the ecclesial monarchy.

Then near the end of the nineteenth century, the United States Church repeated this narrative cycle when the Americanists like Bishop John Ireland and Bishop John J. Keane called for United States Catholicism to break away from its customary patterns of Romanization and instead embrace the modern principles of democracy and religious liberty. Their innovation witnessed the attempt to separate church from state, integrate parochial education into the public school system, and practice interfaith dialogue. They also observed the recovery of lay representation by way of clerical appointment. Then the voices of traditionalists like Chancellor Thomas Preston and Bishop Bernard J. McQuaid actively sought to silence the voices of the Americanist reformers. As Kenrick and Hughes succeeded against Carey and England during the previous epoch, the traditionalists again succeeded in curtailing progressive attempts at adaptation. By acquiring support from Rome, the conservative voice required Ireland and his cohort to refrain from teaching the Americanist doctrine. Under the decree of papal documents such as *Longinqua oceani*, *Testem Benevolentiae*, and *Pascendi Dominici Gregis*, United States Catholicism again settled into the long-established narrative of monarchical authority.

Then in the middle of the twentieth century, the United States Church again witnessed this narrative cycle of sedimentation and innovation when the Catholic renaissance challenged tradition by revitalizing the voice of the Americanists. Like Carey and England at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and like Ireland and Keane at the end of the century, Jesuit John Courtney Murray sought to adapt United States

Catholicism to the modern context. The papacy had already silenced John Ireland's position in support of church-state separation when Pope Leo XIII condemned Americanism.<sup>275</sup> But Murray breathed new life into a previously condemned position when he too advocated a separation of church and state, locating precedence in Church history. Again, Catholic authorities quieted the innovation when Murray's Jesuit order asked him to cease any further publications about that topic. Murray's subsequent compliance was the third distinct incidence of narrative sedimentation following narrative innovation.

Ultimately, *mimesis* is a spiral that does not refer to the mere reappearance of past interpretations but the incorporation of past interpretations into new ones. Enough continuity exists to identify a pattern, but discontinuity exists at the same time. To explain, Murray does not simply repeat John Ireland. Rather, Murray incorporates Ireland's narrative of religious freedom into Murray's own unique innovation that supports church-state separation while simultaneously rejecting any Americanist adoption of secularization. There will be continuity simply because of the context but that continuity has also gone through some discontinuity, which does indeed break the flow of the pattern to accommodate innovation.

#### OBSERVING DIALECTIC RECIPROCITY IN THE CONTEXT

Although the sedimentation pattern succeeds the innovation pattern, it only *succeeds* in the strictly temporal sense of succession—*following after*. Sedimentation does not succeed in the sense of triumph. In an ongoing reciprocal dialectic, sedimentation follows each innovation, while at the same time, each innovation

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<sup>275</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 108.

challenges the previous sedimentation. Just as Catholic traditionalists followed after the reformists of their day, Catholic reformists also succeeded the traditionalists of the previous epoch with fresh challenges. In other words, Murray's agreement to stop writing *Theological Studies* essays that promoted church-state separation was indeed the third distinct incidence of narrative sedimentation following innovation in United States Catholicism; simultaneously, Murray's support of church-state separation was the third distinct instance of a progressive voice challenging an otherwise solidified system inherited from the previous time period.

Just as each instance of narrative sedimentation follows an innovation, each innovation modifies the established paradigm of the previous era. The historical narrative of the United States context is therefore illustrative of the reciprocity between sedimentation and innovation characteristic of *mimesis*.<sup>276</sup> Kenrick and Hughes helped to quell Carey and England; Preston and McQuaid helped to quell Ireland and Keane; and Roman Jesuits helped to quell Murray. At the same time, Carey and England challenged the European style of Catholicism; Ireland and Keane challenged the efforts of Kenrick and Hughes from the previous era; and Murray challenged Preston and McQuaid when he published essays in support of church-state separation—Murray rekindled Ireland's formerly silenced voice. By advocating a separation of church and state, Murray in effect published a Jesuit dispute against the papal encyclical *Longinqua oceani*. The context of United States Catholicism before Vatican II is hereby illustrative of Ricoeur's reciprocity between the narrative poles of sedimentation and innovation. While forces of narrative sedimentation seek a return to familiar structures, forces of narrative innovation

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<sup>276</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:64–70.



continually reconfigure those structures in every epoch with the rejuvenated call for change.

In less than two centuries as a sovereign nation, the United States observed three distinct cycles of sedimentation and innovation in the story of the American Church. Each narrative innovation treated the hierarchal model of Church authority and the democratic model of United States authority as compatible institutions. Based upon this sense of compatibility, each innovation calls the United States Church out of the solidified Old World paradigm and into a novel cultural adaptation. Respectively, a traditionalistic resurgence follows each innovation and counteracts it by asking the reformers to be quiet, and by calling United States Catholicism to settle back into established structures. In turn, this dialectic reciprocity perpetuates the circularity as each innovation kicks up the previous sedimentation with a new story.

#### FROM CONTEXTUALIZATION TO EVANGELIZATION

This context not only contributed to the overall relationship between Catholicism and the modern world, but also delineated the particular United States experience of the new Catholic evangelization. The new evangelization in the United States came out of a context defined by traditionalists and progressives caught in a narrative cycle of sedimentation and innovation, tradition and reform. As the new Catholic evangelization in the United States continued to expand and grow, the movement would echo the same voices as the context that had produced it: sedimentation and innovation; conservative traditionalists and progressive reformists; withdrawal and engagement; transformation and adaptation; debates about democracy in the parish and debates about church-state separation; arguments about religious freedom and arguments about interreligious

dialogue; countercultural orientations that believe Catholicism's hierarchy to be incompatible with democratic society and cultural postures that embrace modern philosophies; drawing caricatures of opposing positions and groups feeling misunderstood through unfair characterizations—all of these phenomena have surfaced throughout the analysis of context.

And all of these phenomena will characterize the experience of the new evangelization in the postconciliar United States. Not only did the pre-Vatican II United States produce the new Catholic evangelization in the American Church, but the pre-Vatican II context also designates the distinctive United States experience of the new Catholic evangelization. All of the phenomena already observed throughout the context also occur across the multiplicity of competing narratives regarding the new evangelization. Context thus highlights the source of the new evangelization, and provides a framework to showcase its distinctively American expressions.

As the nation moves into the era of the council and the years that followed, multiple voices like Murray's continue to surface; not all of them are countercultural, not all of them are neo-Scholastic. Some are nostalgic for the age of the immigrant parish and desire a return to withdrawal. Others advocate adaptation to the point of secularization.<sup>277</sup> No single depiction is adequate as the number of competing narratives seems to multiply exponentially. A significant piece of this emerging United States Catholicity in the contemporary period is the new evangelization. The contextualization project of this present chapter conveyed that the United States context gave rise to the

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<sup>277</sup>Gabriel Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53/4 (December, 1985): 777.

Catholic evangelistic efforts of the social gospel. Similarly, the narrative pattern of innovation and sedimentation descriptive of the context also describes the interplay between newness and resistance that persists amidst the multiplicity of Catholic evangelization programs in the United States currently. Context thereby initiates and continues to characterize the new Catholic evangelization as the United States experiences it.

The new Catholic evangelization in the United States, like United States Catholicism in general, takes a variety of current shapes. As Dolan states, “A new Catholicism is taking shape in the United States, and it is not yet clear what it will look like.”<sup>278</sup> In this remark Dolan describes the appearance of Catholicism in the current United States as *not yet clear*.<sup>279</sup> Perhaps the reason *it is not yet clear what it will look like* is that the face of the United States Church now defies any singular countenance. Rather, multiplicity itself characterizes the appearance of *a new Catholicism...taking shape in the United States*.<sup>280</sup> And just as a plurality of competing narratives delineates the appearance of United States Catholicism in general, a coexistence of multiple emplotments designates the new Catholic evangelization in particular.

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<sup>278</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 197.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE: CONVERSION

### Introduction

#### SYNOPSIS OF NARRATIVE

According to Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative, the human mind makes sense of the discordant fragments of temporal occurrence by constructing a meaningful plot out of an otherwise unintelligible constellation of various experiences. At the same time, however, the imitation of temporality is precisely what makes sense of a story. So just as people come to understand time through emplotment, people simultaneously comprehend narrative in a temporal mode.<sup>1</sup> Ricoeur addresses this epistemological and interpretive circularity as inescapable, due to the hermeneutical circle of three-stage *mimesis*, and as healthy, due to the cultivation of individual and communal senses of narrative identity.

The list of items constitutive of any historical narrative transcends a mere succession of time-bound events. One observes instead that a discordance of temporal fragments such as earthly causes, human goals, and random occurrences are rendered meaningful when linked together by way of a causality that the productive imagination intentionally imbues upon the constellation of experiences through emplotment. The mind purposefully draws the most probable causal connections between the items that comprise the plot. The fragmentary concerns, catalysts, aims, happenings, and other time-bound pieces of lived human experience become meaningful as the human imagination produces a picture out of the various items from a constellation of piecemeal incidence. Whenever the human mind intends causal links between the discordant pieces of temporal existence, the mind is generating the sense-making coherence of a storyline.

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<sup>1</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:52.

Through this process of emplotment, the discordance of temporal experience ceases to be a meaningless randomness because the mind sees the constellation of fragments not just as the fragments themselves but as an image, a meaningful picture—a narrative. The experience of lived human time is a mystifying, discordant reality since the past is no longer, the future is not yet, and the present moment has no persisting duration. But emplotment makes the discordance into a concordant one by imbuing onto the fragmentary pieces of lived human experience reasons which answer why things took place. In conveying a sense of meaning to otherwise indecipherable fragments of temporality, an interpretive construct becomes the received standard.

At the same time, the innovative capacity of a narrative can alter otherwise solidified constructions, allowing paradigmatic interpretive structures already received to continually reconfigure against new internal figurations of the same fragments. In other words, the same temporal pieces can reconfigure into new and different stories. The hermeneutical spiral of three-stage *mimesis* facilitates the ongoing innovations of endless narrative reconfigurations, as what people come to know is continually shaped and reshaped by what they have already come to know.<sup>2</sup> If one emplotted model of understanding became exclusive, then the mediation between historical narratives and human encounters with those narratives would stop at reception. But received paradigms do not terminate their cognitive impact after first being received but go on to influence further encounters with narratives.

Thus the meaningful coherence supplied by a narrative does not cease its cognitive activity with the initial reception of the plot but continues to interpret future

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 170.

encounters with narratives when the productive imagination makes sense of life's fragments according to the meanings already received by previous plotlines. In particular, the dynamic interplay between sedimentation and innovation designates the hermeneutical move from reception to the mediated interpretation of human actions. This innovative capacity of emplotment to disrupt sedimentation facilitates the healthy coexistence of competing interpretations. The relation between the productive imagination and the actions imitated into the organization of a plot is precisely what safeguards the new evangelism from solidifying into one and only one privileged, exclusive version.

#### SYNOPSIS OF CONTEXT

The official call for the Church to renew her evangelical responsibility in the modern context comes from the Second Vatican Council, and the official terminology is popularized by the 1975 Apostolic Exhortation of Paul VI and subsequent emphasis of Pope John Paul II.<sup>3</sup> As the contemporary expression of the Church's missionary role, the new evangelism articulates the Catholic Church's reply to the appeal of the Council Fathers for renewed gospel proclamation in the modern epoch. Although the call for the new evangelism comes from Vatican II, and although its official designation develops through the years following the council, the new evangelization itself derives in the United States from the pre-Vatican II context.

As Catholicism developed in America, the Church's traditional model of monarchical authority stood in dialectic tension with the democratic republic of the United

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<sup>3</sup>William Houck, "Introduction," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 18–9.

States. The encounter between these two opposing modes of hegemony highlighted the impact of American democracy, religious liberty, and church-state separation upon United States Catholicism. In each century of American Catholicism, the same pattern of sedimentation and innovation emerged with some countercultural voices withdrawing from mainstream society into seclusion, and with other voices embracing the American brand of modernism and calling for the Church in the United States to increasingly adapt to democratic practices, religious freedom, and the separation of church and state. As American society experienced modern problems and needs, a third narrative emerged that was countercultural in its critique of secularization, yet equally critical against patterns of withdrawal at the same time. This new story rejected the seclusion of the immigrant parishes' island communities and embraced instead a posture of active engagement with the surrounding culture.

This critical engagement with mainstream society did not comprise an orientation of adaptation, for it harshly rebuked the evils of secularism, materialism, and moral relativism. At the same time, however, the active engagement with the surrounding culture produced a degree of adaptation, as this new story supported ecumenical endeavors and church-state separation. In short, the context produced a new Catholic evangelistic effort in the United States known as the Catholic social gospel—a public style of Catholicism fueled both by civic activity and by the new Catholic intellectual renaissance.<sup>4</sup> Not only did the new evangelization derive from contextualized considerations, concerns, problems, challenges, and needs, but the pattern of sedimentation and innovation that

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<sup>4</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 147–8.

emerged across time continues to characterize the ongoing development of the new evangelization in the United States currently.

### SYNOPSIS OF CONVERSION

This current chapter now shifts its focus to the period of the council up to the present day. Whereas pre-Vatican II America provided the context that initially gave rise to the story of the new Catholic evangelization in the United States, the period from the council forward is the milieu within which the narrative of the new evangelism continues to develop, evolving into a multiplicity of permutations. Of particular interest to the current project is that this development takes the form of an explosion of varying versions of the new evangelization. The movement now defies any singular expression; rather, a plurality of narratives characterizes the new Catholic evangelization in the United States presently. The focus of this project is not the detailing of the content of any one version of the new evangelism but the multiplicity itself.

Theology observes profuse variations of the new evangelization, and these competing stories cover a variety of interpretations and emphases. This chapter explores the question of the new evangelism's meaning within United States Catholicism amidst its variety of expressions by applying Ricoeur's narrative theory to this plurality of configurations. Ricoeur's theory supplies a mechanism for understanding the explosion of competing perspectives. As innovations challenged sedimentation, multiple figurations of the Church's missionary role emerged from a variety of productive human imaginations that produce a variety of divergent emplotments. In the reciprocal dialectic between sedimentation and innovation, emplotment informs each and is informed by each—an



epistemological circle which allows for multiple reconfigurations when narratives engage imagination.

With all narratives, including the story of the new evangelization in the United States, an otherwise meaningless jumble of temporal fragments assumes the sense-making coherence of a storyline when the productive imagination intends causations onto those fragments thereby connecting them into the figuration of a plot. Since the causal links imbued onto the emplotted items differ from one imagination to the next, multiple plots result. This innovative capacity for reconfiguration resists the solidification any singular version as exclusively normative.<sup>5</sup> The constellation of temporal fragments that relate specifically to Catholic evangelization in the modern United States includes a variety of concerns, aims, and occurrences; but human minds can connect these fragments together into different stories by intending different causal links between the emplotted items.

For instance, as the previous chapter already observed regarding the parish-enclave phenomenon, one narrative tells the story of violent bigotry that forced Catholics into seclusion. Yet their powerful gospel witness did not return violence, and showcased the vitality of a tightly-knit bond inside of a hostile environment.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, another narrative tells the story of immigrants with a preference for their own kind. They used the instances of violent bigotry to buttress their self-understanding as a besieged minority. They had little evangelical impact on the wider culture as a result of their cloistered communities.<sup>7</sup> In the former story, immigrant communities rallied together *because* they

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<sup>5</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:69.

<sup>6</sup>McMahon, *What Parish Are You From?* 53.

<sup>7</sup>Taves, *The Household of Faith*, 128.

had to protect themselves from the attacks of their enemies. In the latter story, they rallied *because* they preferred to live among other immigrants who shared the same ethnic heritage. In the former story, the evangelism was potent *because* Catholics shared such a tight-knit bond with one another. In the latter story, the evangelism proved lacking *because* they had little influence on the surrounding culture.<sup>8</sup> The former narrative presents a positive gospel witness *because* a strong sense of community is important to evangelization and the immigrant parish demonstrated this communion. The latter narrative presents a negative evaluation of evangelical impact *because* public influence is important to evangelization and the immigrant parish had little impact on the civic sphere.

Even from among the same temporal fragments, when the causal links intended onto the items that form the plot are different, the respective narratives of Catholic evangelization in the United States are different. Not only does this narrative theory provide a framework for understanding the abundance of permutations of evangelization in the modern era, but it stimulates an increased openness to reconfiguration itself. The application of Ricoeur's theory indicates that theology is not about the new evangelism so much as it is about *new evangelisms*, and that the Church may embrace a breathing room for multiple voices without losing herself to the vacuum of relativism nor to the suffocation of autocracy.

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<sup>8</sup>Carlton J.H. Hayes, "Obligations to America," *The Commonweal* 1/10 (January 14, 1925): 26.

## The New Catholic Evangelization

### THEOLOGY OF THE NEW EVANGELISM

Simply stated, evangelism is *the transmission of the Christian faith*.<sup>9</sup> This meaning is evident in the Latin in which the term *evangelium* means *gospel*, in reference to the written gospels in particular.<sup>10</sup> Evangelism, or *evangelization*, is both proclaiming and bearing witness to the Christian life. As the current working document on the new evangelism states, “Evangelization in general is the everyday work of the Church.”<sup>11</sup> Evangelism itself is certainly nothing new to Christianity. Since Jesus Christ called his followers to go and make disciples of all nations in the Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28:19–20, the mission to spread the good news to others has defined the followers of the risen Christ. As *Lumen Gentium* states, “Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord himself.”<sup>12</sup> Bishop William Houck reiterates that *evangelization is a natural and unavoidable activity of all baptized Christians who truly believe in Jesus Christ, his message, and his values*.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Church is a missionary community by her very nature as Church.

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<sup>9</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

<sup>10</sup>Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the New Evangelization—What Does it Mean?” in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 26.

<sup>11</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

<sup>12</sup>Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ‘Lumen Gentium’* (Vatican City, 1965): no. 33.

<sup>13</sup>Houck, “Introduction,” in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 19.

While evangelism is nothing new to Catholicism, the designation of a *new* evangelism signifies something novel. As a rallying cry for Catholics worldwide, the new Catholic evangelization designates the Church's attempt to articulate the proclamation and practice of the Christian gospel in the modern world. The standard position regarding the newness of the new evangelization, contra the thesis of this present work, claims an essentialist position. According to the theology of the new evangelism currently espoused by Church authority, the communication styles and methodologies for gospel transmission constitute that which is new in the new evangelism; however, the position holds that the content of the gospel message is a static deposit that remains essentially the same. According to the standard theological position on the movement's novelty piece, the essence of the message does not change.

This essentialist standpoint claims that, while the gospel of Jesus Christ has remained the same essential good news, the world has changed considerably. According to this position, evangelism is not new in its essential content, which remains the good news of the Christian faith. What is novel is the mode of the faith's transmission to the new modern context. For instance, in concurrence with the thought of John Paul II, Cardinal Avery Dulles states that evangelization

cannot be new in its content, since its theme is always the one gospel given in Jesus Christ. ... Evangelization, however, can and should be new in its ardor, its methods, and its expression. It must be heralded with new energy and in a style and language adapted to the people of our day.<sup>14</sup>

The movement, as it has developed thus far, emphasizes that the content of the Christian faith is not what is novel in the new evangelism; rather, the manner of its communication

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<sup>14</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 28.

should meet people in their current state. Mirroring the incarnation in which God met people in their existing circumstance, the Church—as Christ’s hands and feet—should touch lives in a way that speaks to their present situation. It is this situation that has changed, and therefore evangelization’s expression must change as well to meet people in their current circumstance and need. But the gospel message itself, according to this position, has remained essentially static.

To be clear, the current project rejects this essentialist position according to its exposition and application of Ricoeur’s theory of narrative. In the three stages of the *mimetic* spiral, people bring preexisting understandings and interpretations into their encounters with the constellation of life experiences at the first stage. In the second stage, old sedimented paradigms get modified through reconfigurations. Then in the third stage of the emplotment process, the world structured and restructured by the sense-making plot interfaces with and the real world of the reader, wherein the action actually occurs, unfolding within its particular temporality.<sup>15</sup>

This process is an ongoing spiral precisely because *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> is not terminal, but then proceeds to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> by providing prior understandings and comprehensions that people take into their encounters with texts. In this ongoing interpretive spiral, some degree of continuity appears through the continual resurfacing of patterns derived from similar contexts. But these patterns are not simply repeats of the past. Because of the narrative movement from *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in the ongoing hermeneutical spiral, any observable pattern is itself continually changing and developing, reinterpreted with new voices emerging every time the pattern reemerges across time. There is enough continuity

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<sup>15</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:52–71. See also Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

to locate recurring patterns. Simultaneously, there is always discontinuity as well because of the endless reconfigurations of received narratives interpreting and reinterpreting new encounters with the emplotted components of temporality.

Reconfigurations received at *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> inform dynamically-developing senses of individual and social identities at *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>, and also continually interpret and reinterpret emplotments as the identity-forming innovations become the prior understandings brought to encounters with temporality's discordance. As emplotment makes sense of new constellations in the productive human imagination, the prior understandings that influence the imaginative formulation of the *muthos* at *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> came from previous emplotment spirals. In other words, *the message itself changes*. The encounter between the gospel and the culture not only changes culture and the culture's reception of the gospel message, but the encounter also changes the message itself. *Mimesis* therefore indicates an important area of theological investigation and inquiry regarding the innovation of the message itself, which has observably taken place through the development of doctrine.

The observable reality of narrative cognition and narrative identity witnesses the figurations of multiple narratives and the perpetual rectification and reinterpretation of received paradigms with reconfigurations. To honor the truth projects shared by both history and theology, the spiral of *mimesis* disengages essentialism in order to account for reality. The present project will circle back to this important aspect of its thesis at a later point in order to develop the idea even further, especially in a look to the ongoing development of revelatory doctrines. This section of the overall project now continues

with its exposition of the development of the theology of the new Catholic evangelization, keeping in mind that the current work rejects the essentialist position.

In addition to addressing the novelty of the new evangelization, the theology of the movement also emphasizes both interior and exterior spiritual renewal as simultaneously constitutive of evangelism. When speaking of evangelization, many Catholics during the time of Vatican II understood the term to mean *the proclamation of the basic Christian message of salvation through Jesus Christ*.<sup>16</sup> But since evangelism is both proclaiming and bearing witness to the Christian life, its renewal naturally takes on both exterior and interior dimensions. A love that meets others where they are, rather than where they ought to be, requires continually-renewed expressions, both interiorly and exteriorly. Catholic evangelism incorporates both *living and sharing this great gift of faith*.<sup>17</sup> Pronouncement and practice each bear public witness to faith, but in order to live out a faith that communicates Christ's love through words and actions people must experience spiritual rejuvenation within themselves.

Accordingly, lives that portray the transforming power of God's loving grace must themselves be transformed in order to show it. Lives illustrative of peace and joy, the fruits of the Spirit, must actually exhibit the transcendent peace and joy of the Lord. The attractive lure of Christian hope and happiness cannot be evident in lives where such conditions remain absent, no more than slaves can bear witness to freedom. Since out of the depths of the heart the mouth speaks, interior renewal animates the proclamation and

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<sup>16</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 26.

<sup>17</sup>Houck, "Introduction," in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 20.

especially the living praxis which both bear witness to faith.<sup>18</sup> The new evangelism thus calls for spiritual renewal both in a Catholic's own inner spirituality (the *ad intra* dimension), and in the actions and words that visibly announce the Christian message to the surrounding society (the *ad extra* dimension).

From these general considerations, Dulles draws out four distinctive features that differentiate the new evangelism from the Church's previous efforts at evangelization. First, the new evangelization (1) emphasizes the participation of every Christian. John Paul II explained that the every-day living of all of the laity should be an illuminating and persuasive testimonial to the good news of Jesus Christ.<sup>19</sup> Second, the new evangelism (2) is distinct from foreign missions. In its call for interior spiritual rejuvenation, the new evangelization includes the re-evangelization of believers.<sup>20</sup> As Paul VI worded this *ad intra* dimension of inward renewal, "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself."<sup>21</sup> This emphasis upon interior renewal disallows any strict equivalency between the new evangelism and the concept of foreign missionary activity. Rather, within the new evangelization foreign missions become one particular expression of evangelism's *ad extra* dimension.

Third, the new evangelism (3) is directed to cultures. Instead of focusing exclusively on the conversion of individual persons, the new evangelization also intends to

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<sup>18</sup>Avery Dulles, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," *America*, 166 (February 1, 1992): 52–59.

<sup>19</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 29–30.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.* 30–1.

<sup>21</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15. Cited by Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 30.



minister to cultures themselves. The goal is not to dominate cultures, but to serve them in a way that cultivates a sense of accord with Christian values and an openness to at least hearing the gospel. Any culture which does not embrace the dignity of human life and is hostile to the message and service of other peoples is one that cannot reach its full potential.<sup>22</sup> Finally, the new evangelization (4) is one envisaging comprehensive Christianization. Initial proclamation of the *kerygma* is merely the first of many steps in an ongoing growth process of total transformation in God's loving grace.<sup>23</sup> The *rich and multifaceted program of evangelization* that Paul VI delineates and John Paul II further develops includes sound catechesis, partaking in the liturgical worship, sacramental observance, perpetual growth in virtue both individually and communally, and the ongoing development of a mature social consciousness that recognizes the dignity of all humanity and lovingly seeks the welfare of all societies.<sup>24</sup>

The new evangelization does not merely refer to the initial step of communicating the Christian faith with interior and exterior aspects of renewal. John Paul II says that a complete evangelism

will penetrate deeply into the social and cultural reality, including the economic and political order. ... Such a total evangelization will naturally have its highest point in an intense liturgical life that will make parishes living ecclesial communities.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 31–2.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>John Paul II, *Ad Limina* visit of Puerto Rican bishops, October 27, 1988; *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), December 5, 1988, pp. 7 and 14, at 14. Cited by Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 32.

Subsequent to all the ways in which the Church bears witness to the gospel, the ultimate aim of evangelization is what Paul VI and John Paul II both refer to as a *civilization of love*.<sup>26</sup> In its expression peculiar to the United States context, the new evangelization has especially showcased efforts toward this fourth vision in a public engagement with the civic sphere—a social gospel that highlights the economic and social penetration that John Paul II emphasized.

Moreover, the American bishops drafted a strategic plan that explains the meaning of the new evangelism to the United States Church in particular. In their document *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization*, the bishops summarize contemporary Catholic evangelization in a threefold statement of purpose. First, they emphasize the interior and exterior facets of rejuvenated faith that ground the new evangelism in both inward and outward spiritual renewal. The bishops invite all Catholics to come to a renewed enthusiasm in their Christian faith. This revitalized life in Christ will then become an impetus for sharing the faith with others.<sup>27</sup> By drawing focus to interior renewal, and extending the invitation to all Catholics, *Go and Make Disciples* covers the first two points of the new evangelization summarized by Dulles.

Second, the American bishops invite the entire culture to be open to hearing the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. This point also coincides with the new Catholic evangelization worldwide which is directed at cultures, the third item in Dulles' synopsis

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<sup>26</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 32.

<sup>27</sup>United States Bishops, *Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1992): 1–10.

of the movement.<sup>28</sup> Building upon their cultural directive, the American bishops invite the entire United States society to cultivate gospel values by recognizing the dignity of all humankind and the importance of the human family. With this invitation, they express their third purpose: the hope that continual transformation by Christ's salvific power will lead to a common good for the entire social reality.<sup>29</sup> This final desire is faithful to the new evangelism of the whole Catholic Church worldwide which envisions comprehensive Christianization, the fourth feature summarized by Cardinal Dulles.

### HISTORY OF THE NEW EVANGELISM

While the new evangelism—the transmission of the Christian faith to the modern context—was already underway before Vatican II, the Church's official nomenclature of the *new Catholic evangelization* originally derives from the Second Vatican Council's program aimed at spiritual rejuvenation.<sup>30</sup> The twentieth century ushered in a variety of matters that urged the Church's attention in the council proceedings, but undergirding all the particular issues was the overall goal of spiritual revitalization which Pope John XXIII made clear in the council's opening address. In particular, the Church's missionary role necessitated spiritual revitalization both interiorly with a renewed embrace of the gospel by Catholics in the modern era, and exteriorly with a renewed pronouncement of the gospel that was relevant to the context of modernity.

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid. Cf. Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 29–32.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Robert S. Rivers, *From Maintenance to Mission: Evangelization and the Revitalization of the Parish* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2005), 35.

In order to cultivate the connections necessary for serving others in their present circumstances, the council examined the new needs, questions, and problems associated with the modern world such as secularization, materialism, consumerism, and relativism. Motivating the analysis of modern challenges was the desire to find an effective expression of Catholicity that honored the Great Commission while making coherent and relevant sense to a modern audience. Pope Paul VI, John XXIII's successor, closed the council in 1965 following its four major sessions; over 3000 bishops representing six different regions of the world attended.<sup>31</sup> According to the spiritual agenda of the council, communicating the good news of Christ to the modern setting necessitated spiritual renewal, both inwardly and outwardly.

Vatican II's call for renewed evangelism echoed into the subsequent years when John XXIII's successor took the name of Paul, the gospel's missionary to the Gentiles, thereby devoting his pontificate to evangelism.<sup>32</sup> In 1967, Pope Paul VI changed the title of the *Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith*. The new name he gave was the *Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples*.<sup>33</sup> In an address to the Cardinals in 1973, the pontiff summarized the new evangelism with the following description:

The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 86–94.

<sup>32</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 27.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Paul VI, Address to the College of Cardinals (June 22, 1973) AAS 65 (1973), p. 383. Self-quoted by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 3.

The following year, Paul VI decided upon the evangelization of the modern world as the topic for the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. At the close of the assembly, the Synod Fathers declared, “We wish to confirm once more that the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of the Church.”<sup>35</sup>

One year later the pontiff issued his 1975 Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (*On the Evangelization of the Modern World*). Issued on the tenth anniversary of the close of Vatican II, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* became not only the first major postconciliar work outlining the Church’s missionary role, but the defining document of the new evangelism. The encyclical claims with regard to the Christian faith that *the Church has the duty of preserving in its untouchable purity, and in presenting it to the people of our time, in a way that is as understandable and persuasive as possible.*<sup>36</sup> The document also avows that the aims of Vatican II can all be summarized into a single objective: *to make the Church of the twentieth century ever better fitted for proclaiming the Gospel to the people of the twentieth century.*<sup>37</sup>

In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*’s declaration that the Second Vatican Council’s objectives had been evangelical in nature, Paul VI explicitly roots this new evangelism movement within the council’s program of spiritual rejuvenation.<sup>38</sup> As Robert Rivers, Vice President

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<sup>35</sup>“Declaration of the Synod Fathers,” 4: *L’Osservatore Romano* (October 27, 1974), p. 6. Cited by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 14.

<sup>36</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 3.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 2.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.* See also no. 67.

for mission advancement at the *Paulist National Catholic Evangelization Association* explains:

In effect, Paul VI declared, harking back to the words of John XXIII, that evangelization was the purpose of the Council. In fact, in his perspective, evangelization is synonymous with the Council's renewal agenda. The bishops of the world sought to lead the church to an ever-more faithful embrace of the gospel through the process of *aggiornamento* or renewal, both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, both within its walls and out in the world.<sup>39</sup>

In accordance with the goals of Vatican II, Paul VI understood that the new evangelization called for renewal in both the inward revitalization of Catholic spirituality (the *ad intra* dimension), and the outward proclamation of the gospel (the *ad extra* dimension). He described the new evangelism as *the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today*; in the same encyclical he also said that the Church *begins by being evangelized herself*.<sup>40</sup>

Subsequent to the pontificate of Paul VI, Pope John Paul II continued his predecessor's call for a new evangelism. Like Paul VI before him, John Paul II made numerous trips to different countries, including ten different visits to countries on the African continent. In 1979, he took part in the Puebla conference of Latin American bishops on evangelism in Latin America. In numerous public declarations since 1983 John Paul II reiterated the call for a new evangelization.<sup>41</sup> On May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1990 in Mexico City, he made the following announcement:

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<sup>39</sup>Rivers, *From Maintenance to Mission*, 35.

<sup>40</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 1; no. 15.

<sup>41</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 27–8.

The Lord and Master of history, and of our destinies, has wished my pontificate to be that of a pilgrim pope of evangelization, walking down the roads of the world, bringing to all peoples the message of salvation.<sup>42</sup>

In 1990, John Paul II echoed his predecessor's work with the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (*The Mission of the Redeemer*). One of his foremost encyclicals, this document emphasizes evangelism, a primary focus of his papacy, as the primary mission of the entire Church. In this letter the pope shared his *sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization*.<sup>43</sup> He declared, "No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church, can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples."<sup>44</sup> Deeply concerned with an epidemic of lukewarm, nominal Christianity in the Church, John Paul II emphasizes the new evangelism's *ad intra* dimension—that aspect of the new evangelism which aims the call for renewal inwardly, at Catholicism itself:

Nor are *difficulties* lacking *within* the People of God; indeed these difficulties are the most painful of all. As the first of these difficulties Pope Paul VI pointed to "the lack of fervor [which] is all the more serious because it comes from within. It is manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope." ...one of the most serious reasons for the lack of interest in the missionary task is a widespread indifferentism, which, sad to say, is found also among Christians. It is based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that "one religion is as good as another."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>John Paul II, Arrival Speech in Mexico City, May 6, 1990; *L'Osservatore Romano* (English ed.), May 7, 1990, pp. 1 and 12. Cited by Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 27–8.

<sup>43</sup>John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (*The Mission of the Redeemer*), (Vatican City, 1990): no. 3.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 36.

Several times throughout the encyclical John Paul II refers to the need for *re-evangelization*.<sup>46</sup> One commentator goes so far as to say that *re-evangelization* of Christians is what John Paul II primarily means by the term *new evangelization*.<sup>47</sup> By directing its attention mainly upon nominal members of the Church, the new evangelism thus becomes a primary means of renewing the body of Christ.

### THE NEW EVANGELIZATION TODAY

Further amplifying the call for a new evangelization, the current pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI, has continued the emphasis of his predecessor. At the close of the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod Bishops, he announced that the new evangelism would comprise the theme of the XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops—this synod took place in October 2012 to coincide with the pope’s inauguration of the current *Year of Faith*.<sup>48</sup> The synod’s working document, *Instrumentum Laboris*, is titled *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith*. As this working document expressed the expectations of the assembly, the bishops conveyed both the desire for rejuvenated joy among believers themselves as well as a renewed passion for proclamation.

The convocation of the Synod on the new evangelization and the transmission of the Faith is part of a determined effort to give new fervor to the faith and to the testimony of Christians and their communities. . . . the celebration of the Synod is expected to enliven and energize the Church in undertaking a new evangelization,

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., nos. 32, 33, 64.

<sup>47</sup>Dave Nodar, *Characteristics of the New Evangelization: A Call from Our Redeemer* (Baltimore, Maryland: ChristLife, 2000), no. 3. Copyright © Dave Nodar.

<sup>48</sup>Benedict XVI, *Porta Fidei*, no. 4.



which will lead to a rediscovery of the joy of believing and a rekindling of enthusiasm in communicating the faith.<sup>49</sup>

Thus the synod reemphasizes both the *ad intra* and *ad extra* dimensions of spiritual renewal. Echoing Vatican II, the working document hereby reemphasizes that evangelization is more than merely the proclamation of the faith by itself. Evangelism includes both the enthusiastic communication of the faith and *a rediscovery of the joy of believing* for those communicating it.<sup>50</sup>

In addition, the recent synod builds upon the work of Vatican II, Paul VI, and John Paul II by reiterating that the Church's evangelizing mission is not exclusive to the clergy. The transmission of the faith is not restricted by any particular vocational calling because *this fundamental mission of the Church is also the duty of all baptized Christians*.<sup>51</sup> The current working document of the new evangelization also draws the critical distinction between the continuity of the Christian message versus the necessary adoption of a novel manner of expression that communicates the Christian message effectively in today's paradigm. The synod writes that *the goal of evangelization today is, as always, the transmission of the Christian faith; but new methods and new forms of expression are needed to convey to the people of today the perennial truth of Jesus Christ*.<sup>52</sup> The communication of the Christian message is as it always was, but its appearance must adapt to contemporary concerns to better convey its timeless power to transform lives.

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<sup>49</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 9.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, no. 11. On this point the working document references *Lumen Gentium*, no. 31.

<sup>52</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

The synod also builds upon the work of the new evangelism by extending the sense of its novelty beyond the manner of evangelistic expression. In clarifying what is *new* in the new evangelism, the working document explicitly ties the notion of newness directly to the gospel itself. In other words, the working document expands the *newness* of the *new* evangelism past the novelty of its mode of expression in modern times. To call the gospel *old* and its manner of communication *new* would constitute an inaccurate characterization. *New methods and new forms of expression are needed*; but the Lord himself is also new.<sup>53</sup>

#### THE PRODUCTIVE HUMAN IMAGINATION AT WORK

As the synod's working document calls for evangelizing activity to be *endowed with a renewed vigor*, the bishops proclaim the timelessness of God's salvation by referring to Jesus Christ as *forever new and the source of all newness*.<sup>54</sup> Emmanuel, *God with us*, is the eternal God Who comes to people in the present moment. The gift of such inexplicable intimacy renders every encounter with the Almighty as new.

The newness of the new evangelization subsists in its expression and in the interior spiritual renewal of individuals and communities of faith as God encounters them presently with an everlasting love.

The current synod on the new evangelism has made a remarkable move here, one that supports the current thesis. As the present work examined the theology of the new evangelization, an essentialist position had surfaced in the historical development of the theology. The current project quoted Dulles' concurrence with the thought of John Paul II

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

as illustrative of this position; the position holds that the newness of the new evangelism is located in its exterior expressions while the essential content of the gospel message itself remains static.<sup>55</sup> The project then expressed its dissent from such a notion and disengaged essentialism to better account for the reality that, throughout the *mimetic* spiral, the message itself does indeed change as narratives perpetually interpret and reinterpret narratives. Across an ongoing epistemological circularity, the productive human imagination emplots endless reconfigurations from the pieces of temporal existence. The transformative intersection between the gospel and the culture changes the culture, changes the culture's reception of the message, and also changes the message itself.

That the message itself also changes is evident across the development of doctrine. The current synod has demonstrated this capacity of the productive human imagination to write a reconfigured story of the theological message itself. Whereas Dulles had explicitly stated that the new evangelization *cannot be new in its content*,<sup>56</sup> the recent synod has stated that the content of the message is itself always new because *Christ is forever new*.<sup>57</sup> The temporal and space displacement of the message of Jesus, who was himself a dynamic human being rather than a static deposit, necessitates narrative encounters with the good news that are not locked into a two thousand year old past. In Ricoeur's juxtaposition between Augustine's wrestling with the mysteries of time and Aristotle's treatment of tragedy, Ricoeur demonstrated how emplotment brings a sense of concordance to the otherwise discordant experience of temporality.

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<sup>55</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 28.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

Applied now to the message of the new evangelism, the temporal-geographical distance between Christ's present followers and Christ's own temporal experience of earthly life presents a discordance, to which narrative reconfiguration brings a sense-making concordance. Because each generation encounters a living story rather than a static deposit, every Christian identity can develop afresh with vitality in every epoch. In the *mimetic* spiral, the working synod reinterpreted the theology of the new evangelization, and recognized the eternal newness of a message that indeed is not locked into a static deposit. In the synod's reconfigured narrative of the new evangelization and its theology, content—that was said could not be new—was reinterpreted to be always new. The development is illustrative of a creative modification from the productive human imagination and demonstrates that the gospel message itself does in fact change.

The bishops explain their clarification further that *the question is not simply devising something new or undertaking unprecedented initiatives in spreading the Gospel, but living the faith.*<sup>58</sup> Emphasizing that *Christ is forever new*, the bishops of the synod connect the newness of the movement to the spiritual vitality practiced by the faithful.<sup>59</sup> The content of the good news of Jesus Christ has not been static across two millennia. On the contrary, as good news, the Christian message remains able to save presently. The new evangelism is thus new in both form of expression and in divine encounter. To capture both dimensions of newness simultaneously: in the new Catholic evangelization, novel manners of expressing the Christian message must convey the faith's ever-present power. In summary, not only has the topic of faith received the current pontiff's special

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., no. 9.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., preface.

emphasis, but the work of the bishops' latest synod also seeks to clarify the ongoing efforts of the new evangelism in bearing witness to the faith effectively within the modern milieu.

## **The New Evangelism in the Postconciliar United States**

### **A COMPLEX OF MULTIPLE CONTEXTS**

Insomuch as the space of experience grounds the horizon of expectation within the parameters of lived human time, the human persons whose imaginations emplot narratives are contextualized entities. As this project has observed throughout, all narratives arise out of the contexts that situate the narrators because the context provides the various items that the productive human imagination weaves together into narrative comprehensions.<sup>60</sup> Although the United States experience of the new Catholic evangelization derived from the pre-Vatican II setting, the time from the council forward constitutes the milieu within which the movement continues to materialize and proliferate into a coexistence of different versions. Contextualization illuminates the developmental trajectories of these divergent narratives and helps to elucidate the sudden emergence of numerous expressions.

In the preconciliar context, the new evangelism in the United States originally took shape as a public style of Catholicism in the Catholic social gospel—a renaissance of intellectual activity and social action that addressed the particularities of modern American society.<sup>61</sup> Just as the pre-Vatican II stage facilitated the initial development of the new Catholic evangelization in the United States, the cultural setting from the time of

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<sup>60</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:57–9.

<sup>61</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 147–8.

the council until the present day accounts for the movement's extensive multiplication ever since. In the same way in which the original narrative derived from contextualized issues prior to Vatican II, the current multiplicity of divergent expressions derives from the plurality of diverse voices characteristic of today's cultural situation.

From McAvoy to Dolan all historical narratives of the context, even amidst a degree of difference and tension between them, agree that the atmosphere of United States Catholicism from the Second Vatican Council forward is a complex of multiple contexts. These constituent and interrelated contexts encompass a variety of factors including cultural forces like the sexual revolution, technological innovations that led to new moral issues like euthanasia and contraception, the challenges posed by *Humanae Vitae* (1968), ideological revisionist movements such as the call for women's ordination, and its response from the papacy in *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988) and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994), to name a few.<sup>62</sup> In addition, Catholicism during this period in the United States was also responding to the liturgical reforms that the council issued.

Furthermore, the postconciliar United States milieu witnessed unprecedented demographic shifts as the number of Latinos more than tripled between 1960 and 1990; they came to comprise roughly 9% of the United States population.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, over seven times as many Asians were living in the United States in 1990 than were living in the United States in 1960.<sup>64</sup> Adding to this contemporary demographic shift, the influx of newcomers from Latin American and Asian countries coincided with a sudden drop in the

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 220.

percentage of European immigrants to the United States. Although potentially overwhelming in scope, the sheer vastness of these contextualizing factors actually supports the Ricoeurian application of this present project, which will narrow its focus to the coexistence itself of these many voices. It is precisely this multiplicity that expands epistemology to produce competing narratives regarding the new evangelization.

### THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE OF MODERNITY

The dynamic and multivalent relationship between United States Catholicity and modern American culture was symptomatic of the engagement between Catholicism and modernity globally. Questions, problems, tensions, needs, and opportunities similar to those detailed in the United States context were arising in various forms around the world wherever Catholicism interfaced with modernity. The relationship between the Church and the modern world across numerous manifestations provided the impetus for calling a Church council to address this variety of significant interactions between Catholicism and the modern era. While the focus of the present project is United States Catholicity specifically, the observed interaction between the Church and the emerging modern American culture is indicative of similar interactions between Catholicism and modernity across the entire world.<sup>65</sup> The opportunities, tensions, and challenges of the modern era transcended their particular American expression because modernity was a global reality.

For instance, the issues discussed in the previous chapter on context included aspects of modernity emphasized by the United States society such as democracy, religious freedom, and the separation of religious institutions from civic governance. As observed throughout eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century America, the

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<sup>65</sup>McAvoy, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 452, 466–8.

interaction between ancient Church traditions and certain Enlightenment ideals of the modern era proved to be multifaceted. American Catholicity showcased a conglomeration of various attitudes regarding the relationship between religion and society: orientations of religious withdrawal from mainstream culture faced postures of engagement with society, and attempts at adaptation confronted countercultural critiques.

Although the notions of democracy, religious liberty, and church-state separation received focus in the American interface between Catholicism and modernity, these specific emphases in the United States comprised an outgrowth of the broader relationship between the Church and modernity in general. The interaction between modern culture and Catholicism, while adopting a variety of particular manifestations across a variety of different societies, exerted pressures and raised questions for the Church worldwide. In all of its expressions, this interaction provided the rationale for convening an ecumenical council to address modernity and the Church's relationship with modernity. The present day is still experiencing the tremendous impact of the council, the more notable reforms of which called for the installation of a new rite of the Catholic Mass, the replacement of Latin with modern languages, the increased participation of lay ministers in the liturgy, and the official endorsement of interfaith dialogue, especially with Protestant Christianity.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>James D. Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States: 1950 to the Present," in *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholicism since 1950 in the United States, Ireland, and Quebec*, ed. Leslie Woodcock Tentler (Catholic University of America Press, 2007): 188–95.



## SPECIFICATIONS FOR MODERN EVANGELIZATION FROM VATICAN II

John XXIII first announced that he would call the ecumenical council of Vatican II in January, 1959, and officially convened the gathering on October 11, 1962.<sup>67</sup> His opening presentation outlined the purposes for convoking the council. These reasons centered upon spiritual renewal which could aid the Church in her interaction with modernity and foster interreligious dialogue with other faiths.<sup>68</sup> Underlying the specific questions and reforms constitutive of the council's deliberations, the desire for renewal motivated the council, until it closed a little more than three years later in December of 1965. As John XXIII elucidated the purposes of the council, evangelization surfaced as a central emphasis.<sup>69</sup>

Beneath three years of assembly proceedings was the desire to articulate the Church's position vis-à-vis the modern context in which she now found herself. Building upon the rationale for holding an ecumenical assembly, the council eventually drafted the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* which summarized the results of years of theological deliberation. Drawing especially upon the work of popes since the nineteenth century and theologians from the post-World War II period, the document acknowledged that culture has a significant role in shaping theological articulation, practice, and doctrine. At the same time the document also stressed the need for faith to exert a transformative impact upon the culture.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>McAvoy, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 452.

<sup>68</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 193.

<sup>69</sup>Rivers, *From Maintenance to Mission*, 35.

<sup>70</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 193.

The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* hereby conveyed a need for the evangelization of the society as well as a need for the evangelization of Catholics. In the relationship between religion and society, a renewed understanding of evangelism recognizes a reciprocal influence in which the Church's need for transformation can receive illumination from the culture and the society's need for transformation can receive the illumination of the Catholic faith. Thus the council's renewed notion of evangelization did not restrict itself exclusively to the effort of transforming society but also incorporated within this understanding an acknowledgement that the faith has something to learn from the culture as well. According to Vatican II, Catholic evangelization includes efforts which seek inner transformation and the transformation of society simultaneously.<sup>71</sup> In summary, the council endorsed a renewed understanding of evangelization that recognized both society's influence upon religion and religion's prophetic role in transforming society at the same time.

A substantial analysis of this three-year meeting, the topics addressed, and the subsequent implementations of and responses to the council's reforms in the years that followed extends well beyond the scope of this current project; however, contextualization remains essential to any application of Ricoeur's narrative theory. Accordingly, the United States context will restrict the parameters of the current discussion, as will multiplicity itself. To explain, a thorough examination of all the relevant content that informs the context is not only impossible but unnecessary. The present aim is not to accomplish a detailed explication of the content.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

Rather, the present aim is to highlight the sudden increase in narrative innovations of the new evangelism in the United States that develop from out of a context characterized by plurality. A coexistence of competing narratives designates the continual reconfigurations of the new evangelization in the United States just as a multiplicity of competing narratives characterizes the context from out of which these new evangelisms are developing. The multiplicity of coexisting emplotments within the United States context is itself the primary interest of the current analysis, over and above the precise content that comprises each individual narrative.

#### THE SOCIAL GOSPEL INCORPORATES THE COUNCIL'S SPECIFICATIONS

The new evangelization in the United States took initial shape with the public style of Catholicism that delineated the intellectual renaissance and Catholic social gospel. This brand of critical engagement with the modern culture had achieved a reputable place in the society by the end of the 1950's. As the United States moved into the decade of the 1960's, the American mainstream entered into an era of pronounced social change.<sup>72</sup> Across the cultural landscape of the 1960's, racial riots, Woodstock, the increase in illicit drug use, the sexual revolution, the moon landing, the Beatles, and the assassinations of well-known figureheads compounded with a number of social justice movements in support of civil rights, in support of women's rights, and in protest against the Vietnam War.<sup>73</sup>

Kennedy's assassination in 1963 prematurely ended the political term of the first Catholic president of the United States. In addition to Kennedy's assassination, the death

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<sup>72</sup>Hennesey, *American Catholics*, 309.

<sup>73</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 191–3.

of Pope John XXIII that same year meant the loss of two Catholic heroes recognized around the world.<sup>74</sup> Radical changes marked multiple facets of culture as society experienced radical shifts in the spheres of politics, pop culture, travel, economics, art, international relations, music, new attitudes about human rights, the invention of weapons of mass destruction, technological advancements, and new ethical dilemmas associated with all of these developments. As the Catholic social gospel addressed these concerns, a general area of engagement concerned social justice in a myriad of forms.<sup>75</sup>

Social movements in support of civil rights, women's rights, and peace were surfacing nationally from among the mainstream citizenship, and the Catholic social gospel added its own advocacy to these causes in a number of ways. By the close of the 1960's, Catholics worked at the vanguard of the crusade to end the Vietnam War. Catholics provided a noteworthy backing of the urban renewal movement aimed at making housing more affordable in major cities. Catholics shared involvement with Cesar Chavez and the farm workers' movement, and held a church conference in the nation's capitol where Cardinal John Dearden and Cardinal Joseph Bernardin voiced a Catholic perspective on social matters of public interest.<sup>76</sup> Dolan recounts:

As the demands for social justice increased, Catholics responded in an unprecedented manner. A social gospel has now become a trademark of the Catholic religious community. In the 1970s and '80s this trend toward a social gospel, or what could be called a public religion, gained momentum when the American hierarchy mounted the national pulpit and spoke out on issues of national concern.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 424–5.

<sup>75</sup>Morris, *American Catholic*, 212, 260–3.

<sup>76</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 199.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*

The interaction between United States Catholicity and modern society was reconfigured by *a renewed focus on social justice* as the Catholic social gospel increasingly established its reputable and recognizable position in the society and leveraged its evangelistic impact in response to modern issues.<sup>78</sup> Of the 188 official letters and statements that the American Catholic hierarchy drafted in the 22 years between 1966 and 1988, over half of them dealt directly with matters of social justice.<sup>79</sup>

### THE CHALLENGE OF PEACE

This broad consideration for the promotion of social justice applied to a couple of specific issues that received special focus at the highest level of leadership in the American Church. During the postconciliar period in the United States, these two particular concerns afford the current analysis with a couple paradigm examples that are illustrative of the postconciliar social gospel. First, while the arms race threatened a global holocaust of nuclear war, the response of the Catholic social gospel in the United States provided an exemplary instance of the new Catholic evangelism at work in this period.<sup>80</sup> In particular, the American Church responded to the new level of nuclear threat with a pastoral letter entitled *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. The bishops took three years to draft this document which has been called the *most*

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<sup>78</sup>John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 161.

<sup>79</sup>Patrick W. Carey, *The Roman Catholics* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993), 124.

<sup>80</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 200.

*significant event in the American Catholic Church, and perhaps the international Church, since the Second Vatican Council.*<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the three-year process of the letter's composition, the bishops solicited advice from outside the Catholic Church. The American bishops engaged in dialogue with scholars who specialized in political conflict, with professional ethicists, and with foreign policy experts. These numerous consultations informed the document's content. In addition, the bishops addressed their pastoral letter to people of other religions, to Catholics, and to the entire nation.<sup>82</sup> Welcomed influence from outside the Catholic community, as well as the extension of the letter's address to nonCatholics, conveyed an acknowledgment of the legitimate role of society in shaping theological articulation and practice.

At the same time, the bishops exclaimed that they possessed *both the obligation and opportunity to share and interpret the moral and religious wisdom of the Catholic tradition by applying it to the problems of war and peace.*<sup>83</sup> In so doing, they recognized the crucial role of the Church in transforming the society. By proactively receiving from the society and addressing their pastoral letter to the whole society, and by simultaneously honoring the Church's responsibility to proclaim the gospel to the society, the United States Church demonstrated an evangelistic effort illustrative of the renewed spirituality called for by Vatican II. *The influence of the council, particularly of the Pastoral*

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<sup>81</sup>Jim Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb: Waging Peace in a Nuclear Age* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983), 180. Cited by Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 200.

<sup>82</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 200–1.

<sup>83</sup>Castelli, *The Bishops and the Bomb*, 197.

*Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, could be seen on virtually every page of the bishops' letter.<sup>84</sup> The promotion of peace constituted gospel evangelism both in its teaching and in the manner in which the bishops administered this teaching.

### ECONOMIC JUSTICE FOR ALL

A second issue that particularly highlighted the Catholic social gospel in the postconciliar United States was the economy. The well-established social gospel in its public, critical engagement with modern society was again evident as the United States Catholic bishops addressed economic problems with an application of the Christian message. In particular, they dealt with the issue of the United States economy in the 1986 pastoral letter entitled *Economic Justice for All*, which echoed John Ryan's influential document from 1919 entitled the *Bishops' Program of Social Reconstruction*. With a renewed understanding of evangelization, the 1986 pastoral letter consulted over two hundred economic experts and included people of other religions in its address.<sup>85</sup> As in *The Challenge of Peace*, Catholic evangelization efforts remained cognizant of the role of the society in informing religious endeavors. And like the peace pastoral, *Economic Justice for All* also applied the Christian gospel, specifically with an appeal to the dignity of human life. In their sharp critical engagement with the society, the bishops write, "We judge any economic system by what it does for and to people, and by how it permits all to

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<sup>84</sup>Timothy A. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 103.

<sup>85</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 201–2.

participate in it...whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person ...the economy should serve people and not the other way around.”<sup>86</sup>

Both specific issues—peace and the economy—continued to showcase the Catholic social gospel in the United States as the distinctively American expression of the new evangelism. This public style of critical engagement with modern culture, initially born out of the pre-Vatican II context, continued to advance after the Second Vatican Council according to the renewed understanding of evangelism that the council promulgated, especially as outlined in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. These two problematic issues of nuclear threat and economic injustice exerted a considerable impact upon numerous lives. But they provided the Catholic Church in the United States with opportunities to proclaim and demonstrate Christian charity, with transformative efforts directed both inwardly and outwardly, through both collaboration and proclamation.

#### SUMMARY OF PEACE AND ECONOMIC EFFORTS

After Vatican II explained a renewed vision for the Church’s interaction with modernity, the new evangelizing of the modern era—already underway in the United States—allowed the council’s renewal agenda to define the ongoing efforts of the social gospel. In their willingness to evangelize the society while simultaneously inviting evangelization inwardly with the growth and transformation of themselves, the bishops who spread the Catholic social gospel to the civic spheres of politics and economics applied the very same spiritual renewal that the council embraced. In the practice of the

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<sup>86</sup>United States Bishops, *Economic Justice for All: A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1987): 2.



council's renewed sense of evangelization and in the social promotion of love and justice, these two issues of peace and the economy exemplify the new evangelism in its particular expression in the United States as the Catholic social gospel continued its development after Vatican II. Extending this missionary witness beyond the United States, the American social gospel showed the Church worldwide what the spirituality of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* looks like at the praxis pole of Catholic evangelism.

But while the spirituality and the content communicated in these two examples are indicative of the new evangelism in the United States, the relative sense of magisterial agreement enjoyed through these two cases is certainly not the norm. After three revisions, the entire hierarchy approved the letter addressing economic issues.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, after four drafts, 96% of the bishops approved the pastoral letter on peace with only nine out of 247 bishops in dissent.<sup>88</sup> But this extent of consensus became increasingly rare as dissenting voices became more and more common. As the late twentieth century continued to present new social challenges, the Catholic social gospel started to adopt multiple expressions. For example, the Catholic social gospel supported the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 as well as the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, activities that generated multifaceted positions with regard to the issue of gender reform. Social efforts in Catholic healthcare and social service through the parochial school system took on multifaceted expressions as women increasingly worked in hospital and school positions. Similarly, the Church's public witness and social engagement took on a plurality of expressions with regard to

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<sup>87</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 202.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 200.

various innovations in response to the call for women's ordination, with regard to the practice of democracy in the parish, with regard to differing voices on the issues of religious freedom and church-state separation, and with regard to new ethical dilemmas. All of these issues are examples of multiplicity in the Church's public style of social engagement with the surrounding society, and all of these examples will receive more detailed attention in the following section.

As the cases of peace and the economy demonstrate, the Catholic social gospel in the United States critically engaged the new challenges, needs, and questions of the modern world according to its public style of critical engagement with society. But in an atmosphere defined by momentous change, the Catholic social gospel began to divide into different permutations according to different approaches and aims directed at different social realities. As the social gospel addressed a variety of modern social developments with varying perspectives, divergent narratives appeared. Unprecedented and multifaceted change characterized the milieu, so the social gospel's endeavor to engage and respond adopted a correspondingly multifaceted spectrum of expressions.

### MULTIPLICITY IN GENDER REFORM

One of these areas in which divergent notions of Catholic ministry began to develop regards gender reform. Across mainstream modern America during the postconciliar period, several cultural trends were indicative of changing attitudes about the role of women in society. First, World War II had observed an increasing number of women in the workplace, as women filled the occupations left vacant by the deployment of soldiers. This phenomenon expanded into the second half of the twentieth century. By 1950, 21% of married women in the United States were employed outside the home; by

the 1980s, the number had climbed to 50%.<sup>89</sup> These trends cultivated not just the voice for gender reform, but rather *voices* for gender reform. The characterization that some supported gender reform while others opposed it presents a binary opposition that distorts actual reality. Alleged dyads of opposition designate a closed system; however, the *mimetic* spiral of narrative comprehension transcends any closed system with the never-ending interpretation, reinterpretation, and reconfiguration of innovations. The productive human imagination endlessly enacts innovative narratives as the interpretive spiral will always move from *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> back to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub>.

To say that some people supported male-dominant power differentials while others called for gender reform would prove a grossly reductionistic, oversimplified, and inaccurate presentation. In reality, reconfigurations continually reproduce multiple voices, even from among those calling for gender reform. No single narrative is representative of feminism because the productive human imagination produces innovations within innovations that are always being reinterpreted, never static. For instance, Anne Clifford presents three different voices within feminist theology itself. They include *revolutionary feminist theology*, a post-Christian narrative that predominantly understands Christianity as irredeemably patriarchal; *reformist Christian feminism* that desires modest amendments within established traditions; and *reconstructionist Christian feminism* that seeks to rebuild structures in both Church and society.<sup>90</sup> Adding to these positions are the womanist and mujerista theologies mentioned in the previous chapter of the present work. The list goes on. The reality of multiplicity—which is illustrative of the *mimetic* spiral of

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>90</sup>Anne M. Clifford, *Introducing Feminist Theology* (Orbis Books, 2001), 32–3.

interpretation—transcends any closed system and defies any oversimplified understanding of binary oppositions. Instead, the productive human imagination generates numerous reconfigurations that keep producing further innovations as multiplicity cultivates multiplicity. This phenomenon is indicative of narrative figurations as applied to temporal discordance, as the *mimetic* spiral endlessly produces competing narratives.

As Clifford's different feminist theologies demonstrate, even amidst those who share a common interest in gender reform, a plurality of discordant trajectories continually branch off into their own identifiable and identity-cultivating stories. The present project recognizes that this perpetual multiplication of divergent emplotments characterizes every topic raised across this entire dissertation. Scope prohibits full engagement with every permutation within every issue discussed. However, the current work acknowledges that these ever-multiplying and inexhaustible permutations exist with regard to each topic raised herein, even where time and space restrict more comprehensive expositions. Having stated this important consideration and its broad application, the current section now continues with its particular discussion of gender reform and its relation to the public style of social engagement that came to characterize Catholic evangelism in the United States.

The domestic ideology of the homemaking, child-rearing housewife which had formerly dominated the cultural ethos subsided as women increasingly worked in occupations that had previously been held almost exclusively by men. Women pursued professions in fields that used to be closed to them such as law, medicine, and business.<sup>91</sup> Coinciding with the rising number of women in the workplace was the growing number of

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<sup>91</sup>Sheila Tobias, *Faces of Feminism: An Activist's Reflections on the Women's Movement* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 58–62.

female students attending colleges—a number that doubled from the 1950s to the 1960s.<sup>92</sup> In particular, an unprecedented number of women started to enroll in theological programs across the nation with an increase of more than 200% during the 1970s. By the close of the twentieth century, roughly one third of the country's theology students were female; in certain denominations, half of the theology students were women.<sup>93</sup>

Furthermore, the United States government worked to secure women's rights. Kennedy appointed the temporary *Presidential Commission on the Status of Women* in 1961. Two years after their appointment, the members of this commission issued their 1963 report which recommended federal funding for day-care services, paid maternity leave for women employed, and promotions for women into high-level governmental positions.<sup>94</sup> At the advice of this commission, Kennedy ratified the legislation known as the *Equal Pay Act* that same year. This new law endeavored to secure equitable pay for women, calling for equal wages in compensation for the same work between both genders. Subsequent to the disbandment of the *Presidential Commission on the Status of Women*, state governments established similar commissions to ensure that the measures of the President's commission were carried out.<sup>95</sup>

This shift in cultural attitudes regarding gender roles directly impacted the story of the Catholic social gospel in America. As Vatican II expounded upon renewed

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<sup>92</sup>Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 228.

<sup>93</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 225–6.

<sup>94</sup>Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 491.

<sup>95</sup>Tobias, *Faces of Feminism*, 75.

evangelization in the modern era, the council encouraged women to participate more widely in the various fields of the Church's apostolate. The council hereby endorsed the public style of evangelism already at work since before the council in the United States Catholic social gospel, and urged the increased participation of women in its efforts. In the 1960s and 1970s, women became prominent figures in the Catholic social gospel, especially in the peace and civil rights movements.<sup>96</sup> By the close of the twentieth century, 82% of the paid parish ministers in United States Catholic churches were women, most of them from among the laity. By 1965, women religious in the Church outnumbered priests three to one, working as the administrators of Catholic hospitals across the country and as teachers throughout the parochial school system.<sup>97</sup>

#### THE NARRATIVE OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION

As women became major characters in the narrative of the new evangelism in the United States, divergent and innovative reconfigurations of the story emerged with an increased call for women's ordination. In the Catholic fight for civil rights, the social gospel supported the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 as well as the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965. The *Civil Rights Act* in particular outlawed employment discrimination based upon gender. The civil rights movement thereby linked gender equality to women's ordination. The Catholic social gospel's overall support of the nationwide civil rights crusade experienced a rift between competing narratives. Many Catholic voices held to the

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<sup>96</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 225–6.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 228–9.

normative tradition which prohibited women priests—a tradition based upon Jesus' selection of exclusively male Apostles.<sup>98</sup>

Others called for change in the Church to allow the ordination of women. The proponents of this innovation viewed equal opportunity in employment as an essential piece to civil rights, and understood the Catholic backing of the nation's civil rights movement as a support that naturally extends to women having an equal opportunity to serve the Church as priestesses. The innovation was amplified in other religious denominations that began to ordain women in record numbers in the 1970s.<sup>99</sup> In the year 1970, women comprised only 3% of the nation's clergy. This figure increased to 12% by the 1990s.<sup>100</sup> As Dolan accounts,

...by the mid-1990s women had reached the highest positions of authority in some major denominations. Lutherans had elected two female bishops, the Methodists had elected eight, and the Episcopalians in the United States had four women bishops. Among the Presbyterians numerous women occupied key positions in their presbyteries.<sup>101</sup>

Currently, half of the Protestant denominations in the United States ordain women clergy, as do most branches of Judaism.

The aforementioned degrees of relative agreement across the United States Church regarding efforts promoting peace and economic justice were the exception to the norm of diversity. The case of women's ordination not only exemplified the diversity of views increasingly common across the United States Church throughout the postconciliar period,

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 227–8.

<sup>99</sup>Mark Chaves, *Ordaining Women: Culture and Conflict in Religious Organizations* (Harvard University Press, 1997), 49.

<sup>100</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 227.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 227–8.

but the issue became one of the most divisive. With one third of the Catholic theology students being women, theological scholarship observed a subsequent rise in the number of women theologians.<sup>102</sup> Eventually, Catholicism came to produce some of the most renowned theologians in the feminist revival.<sup>103</sup> These narratives expressed that the pursuit of authority, liberty, and independence for women is essential to feminist spirituality.<sup>104</sup> These voices challenged the longstanding norm of the all-male priesthood in the Catholic Church, and these voices were those of Catholics.

As the call for reconfiguration continued to swell from within the American Church, numerous permutations took shape. Among women religious, debates developed over clothing and democratic procedures for decision making in the convent. As Dolan highlights the controversy:

Through much of the twentieth century women religious followed a Roman model of religious life. Since the 1960s they have adopted a model that is deeply rooted in American culture, grounded in freedom of speech, due process, open deliberations, and participation in policy making. Such values are at odds with the authoritarian and hierarchical Roman model that emerged in the early twentieth century. This has led to conflict between American women religious and church authorities both in Rome and in the United States.<sup>105</sup>

Among the laity, some women are leaving the Catholic Church, dissatisfied with the persistence of a male magisterium. Others retain their Catholic identity, but stop attending

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<sup>102</sup>William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Ruth A. Wallace, *Laity: American and Catholic* (Kansas City, Missouri: Sheed and Ward, 1996), 11.

<sup>103</sup>Susan Hill Lindley, *You Have Stepped Out of Your Place: A History of Women and Religion in America* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 425.

<sup>104</sup>Mary Jo Weaver, *New Catholic Women* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 185.

<sup>105</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 227.



a local church on a regular basis; currently, over 20 million Catholics in the United States do not belong to a local parish community.<sup>106</sup>

Other women defended the tradition, as seen in the attempt to draft a pastoral letter regarding women's issues. Like the documents *The Challenge of Peace* and *Economic Justice for All*, the United States Catholic bishops sought to draft a pastoral letter addressing the concerns of women and clarifying the Church's ministerial witness at the magisterial level. But unlike the previous two letters, the pastoral letter about women's issues was never approved. After a nine-year process of consultations and four attempted drafts of the document, the required two thirds majority vote for approval was never reached. Never before had a pastoral letter had been *defeated on the floor of the conference*.<sup>107</sup> Controversy had surrounded the letter ever since its first attempted draft in 1988 when a number of conservative women criticized the initial version of the document for its relative neglect of relevant family matters. These women also expressed their concerns for maintaining respect for papal authority and for the uniqueness of the feminine nature as distinct from male nature.<sup>108</sup>

Still other innovations developed in the narratives of both informal and formal congregations of Catholic women who celebrate the Eucharist without a priest. The women who participate in these unofficial gatherings are typically members of local parishes who hold meetings each month outside of their church's official liturgical

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 236.

<sup>107</sup>Thomas J. Reese, "Women's Pastoral Fails," *America* 167/18 (December 5, 1992): 443.

<sup>108</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 236.

services. Formal organizations have also materialized under recognized banners such as the *Women's Ordination Conference* which held its first national meeting in 1975 and *Woman Church*, an offshoot group of Catholic women who hold local Eucharistic meetings without a priest as the celebrant. The *Women's Ordination Conference* aided in the founding of *Woman Church* in 1983.<sup>109</sup> Dolan calls the amount of controversy surrounding women's ordination in the Catholic Church a surprising development.<sup>110</sup> Mark Chaves accounts for the degree of controversy by connecting women's ordination to *a broader liberal agenda associated with modernity and religious accommodation to the spirit of the age*.<sup>111</sup> For many impassioned voices from throughout these abundant narratives, women's ordination symbolically reflects the degree of syncretism with the context with which one is at peace—or at odds.

On the one hand, those who wish to avoid marrying the spirit of the age will often resist women's ordination as a characteristic manifestation of the modern era. Concerned to preserve the Church's prophetic voice in the world, these voices remain continually wary of too much complicity with the surrounding society. On the other hand, those in favor of increased adaptation will often desire the conveyance of a gospel that remains timelessly relevant, meeting the needs of all ages. Such voices will often favor women's ordination and the general openness to cultural accommodation that the issue of women's ordination represents. Since women's ordination is symbolically tied to one's general attitude about the relationship between religion and society broadly speaking, stances on

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 235–6.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 237.

<sup>111</sup>Chaves, *Ordaining Women*, 192.

women's ordination are driven by additional emotional, psychological, and spiritual force. This particular issue in American Catholicity is fueled by passionate standpoints regarding women's rights in particular, and it is also fueled by faith convictions regarding cultural adaptation in general. Twice fueled, the controversy is doubly heated.

#### THE CHURCH RECONFIGURES IN RESPONSE TO THE INNOVATION

Although the highest levels of Catholic magisterial authority still hold overwhelmingly to the normative tradition of an all-male priesthood, an analysis in the 1990s indicated that nearly two thirds of the Catholics surveyed approved of women's ordination.<sup>112</sup> Even without Vatican approval for women priests, these competing visions have fostered innovations. From the dialectic reciprocity between conflicting narratives, the Church has produced the continual reconfiguration of women's roles in Catholic ministry. For instance, a revision of canon law in 1983 permitted women to become diocesan chancellors and church court judges.<sup>113</sup> More recently, the Church has allowed both lay women and women religious to serve as the pastors of Catholic parishes. In such cases, a priest arrives to say Mass and administer the Sacraments, but all other pastoral functions belong to the parish pastor. In a recent survey of the 2,000 parishes without a resident priest in the United States, in over 400 of these Catholic churches the pastoral ministry of the parish is run by an individual who is not a priest—in many cases this individual is a woman.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, and Wallace, *Laity*, 121–2.

<sup>113</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 230.

<sup>114</sup>Morris, *American Catholic*, 389.

For example, Sister Honora Remes served as the pastor of Saint Mary's Cathedral in Saginaw, Michigan. Morris observes that Sister Remes

does everything a pastor does, except say Mass and administer the sacraments. She hires the staff, manages the finances and budget, provides counseling and advice to parishioners, oversees the liturgies and supervises the religious, social, and educational programs.<sup>115</sup>

As the new Catholic evangelization continues to develop in the United States, the role of women within it continues to take on a variety of forms. This plurality then impacts both the *ad extra* and *ad intra* dimensions of the new evangelization. Regarding the new evangelism's outreach to the whole society, these various forms communicate a multifaceted public witness to the culture. And as the United States Church turns the new evangelism inward, competing messages coexist regarding women's roles.

Traditional voices aim to safeguard their conviction that Christ's all-male group of Apostles indicates an authentic revealing of appropriate, differing roles between equal genders. Progressive voices link gender equality to those roles; these voices are specifically sensitive to exclusionary restrictions that are attached to priestly and magisterial positions that have higher power differentials, relative to other positions in the Church. Even in the absence of an official sanction for women's ordination in the Catholic Church, the installation of women chancellors, judges, and pastors indicates that the progressive narrative has nonetheless been a catalyst for novel permutations.<sup>116</sup> Even though the narrative that seeks women's ordination has not won the day, its very existence is cultivating innovative reconfiguration nonetheless. And even if women's ordination is eventually approved, conservative voices will ever warn the Church regarding her levels

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 230–2.

of cultural accommodation, they will continually highlight a deep appreciation for gender distinctiveness, and they will emphasize the importance of authority and respect for authority.

Rather than collapsing every aspect of these ongoing conversations into the dualistic and reductionist question of *which side wins*, the current project's Ricoeurian application emphasizes an appreciation for multiplicity itself. In the issue of gender reform, the coexistence of competing narratives has facilitated continual reconfiguration, and preserved a rich tradition of valid diversity among the different parts in the mystical body of Christ. The particular issue of gender reform, as it relates to Catholic evangelism in both its *ad extra* and *ad intra* dimensions, is illustrative of the kind of narrative reconfigurations that are multiplying wherever innovative voices challenge received structures. This case demonstrates that the coexistence itself of competing narratives was not only inevitable in light of the context, but also beneficial in bringing a variety of legitimate concerns to the fore.

### DEMOCRACY IN THE PARISH

A similar pattern of ever-multiplying diversity characterizes the postconciliar context of United States Catholicism with regard to the practice of parish democracy. Although the American Church never returned unilaterally to the lay trustee system of Mathew Carey and John England from around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the inclination to democracy in parish governance has never died out in the United States. Vatican II's document on the Church *Lumen Gentium* encouraged the consultation of the laity in parish matters based on their shared responsibility with the clergy for the welfare of their local church communities. The new code of canon law published in 1983 gave some pragmatic

structure to this emphasis by recommending the establishment of parish councils which could facilitate lay consultation.<sup>117</sup>

But out of the ongoing dialectic between traditional Catholic authority and the United States democracy emerged a diversity of narratives. Some parish councils mirror the lay trustee system with the practice of full-fledged democratic procedures. They hold annual elections for council members and practice a majority-rule vote on church affairs. In these types of church councils, *the priest has more of an advisory role.*<sup>118</sup> Other parishes hold votes from among the laity, but these votes are deemed recommendations to the clergy who maintain all final determinations. By allowing the priest to make the final decision, these councils reflect *Lumen Gentium's* notion of consultation. Still other parish councils operate in such a way that the clergy maintain complete control over parish governance with little consultation from the lay members in actual practice.<sup>119</sup> No single interpretation designates a uniform method across the United States Church nor does any closed system of binary oppositions; again, multiplicity characterizes the context.

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The topic of religious liberty is also illustrative of the multiplicity that describes the postconciliar context. Eight years after John Courtney Murray's Jesuit order silenced his public discourse on religious freedom, Vatican II invited him as a theological expert on the matter of church-state separation. As the Second Vatican Council deliberated on the relationship between religion and society, the council members not only listened to

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 204–5.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

Murray's position in favor of religious liberty—they adopted his position as their own.<sup>120</sup> During the two years of consultation, Murray's position faced considerable opposition from Cardinal Ottaviani.<sup>121</sup> Amidst competing narratives, Murray's innovation which connected religious freedom with human dignity was approved at the council's fourth and last session held in December 1965.

Just as the issue of women's ordination was connected to the deeper issue of cultural accommodation, the Church's debate over religious freedom was tethered to the development of doctrine. Since Murray had been silenced by Church authority in 1955, the acceptance of his position a decade later was more than just the sanctioning of religious liberty. An acceptance of a formerly silenced voice admitted that the Church can and does in fact change.<sup>122</sup> Murray writes, "The notion of development, not the notion of religious freedom, was the real sticking-point for many of those who opposed the Declaration even to the very end."<sup>123</sup> Murray expressed that the development of doctrine was more at issue than was the issue of religious freedom in particular.

Again, the issue of religious liberty like all the other topics discussed in the current work is not simply a matter of a closed system of conflicting dyads of opposition with those in favor and those against. The second chapter of this current project located a reconfiguration pattern across history. But this pattern was never merely one of new

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<sup>120</sup>John Courtney Murray, "This Matter of Religious Freedom," *America* 112/2 (Januray 9, 1965): 41–3.

<sup>121</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 251.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 250–3.

<sup>123</sup>John Courtney Murray, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter M. Abbott, ed. (New York: American Press, 1966), 673.

reconfigurations constituting resurfacings of old ones. Murray did not merely rekindle John Ireland's teachings in favor of religious freedom; rather, when Ireland's voice resurfaced in Murray's narrative, the voice was also reinterpreted—for Murray was certainly not an Americanist as was John Ireland. Murray spoke in favor of religious liberty like Ireland did, but Murray reinterpreted this position in such a way that his innovation strongly criticized American secularism and materialism. Murray's critique against American culture was a far cry from John Ireland's Americanism.

Thus the voice for adaptation to the cultural norm of religious liberty was reinterpreted in an innovative way. Murray's encounter with the narrative of religious freedom in the real activity of his temporal experience (*mimesis*<sub>3</sub>) was then used to interpret and reinterpret his further encounters with narratives (*mimesis*<sub>1</sub>), and an unprecedented innovation resulted (*mimesis*<sub>2</sub>) that supported religious freedom while strongly criticizing aspects of American culture at the same time. *Mimesis* is a spiral that does not refer to the mere resurgence of past interpretations, but to the incorporation of past interpretations into new ones. Context will produce a level of continuity, because narratives arise out of the contextualized constellations of temporality. And this level of continuity will reveal patterns, like the continual resurfacing of voices calling for Church adaption, observed in the second chapter of this current work. Murray is to an extent a breathing of new life into an otherwise lost voice. There is indeed enough continuity that one can observe the pattern of reconfigurations that call for adaptation occurring in every era of United States Catholicism. At the same time, however, this pattern also clearly reveals discontinuity. John Courtney Murray's voice in favor of church-state separation is not a resurgence of John Ireland's Americanism.



Murray's narrative and Ireland's narrative both arise from the context of United States Catholicism, and both seek adaptation to the culture with regard to religious freedom; that is, enough to reveal a pattern. Simultaneously, discontinuity is evident because Murray does not repeat Ireland. Murray incorporates Ireland's thought into a reconfigured interpretation that favors religious liberty while also rebuking secularism. The social gospel itself came from an innovation that incorporated a willingness for cultural engagement into a critical and transformative framework. In continuity, one recognizes a returned call for engagement with the surrounding society in the social gospel. In simultaneous discontinuity, one observes that this engagement did not completely adapt—in fact, the Catholic renaissance communicated firm correctives to the surrounding culture. The reality of continuity and discontinuity exhibits the *mimetic* spiral of endlessly incorporating rekindled voices into new interpretations. This observable dynamic across United States Catholic history is illustrative of narrative theory, and prohibits any reduction to a closed system of binary oppositions.

#### DOLAN'S PRESENTATION OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Dolan offers a treatment of some ethical dilemmas that add to the coexistence of competing narratives indicative of the postconciliar milieu. This presentation is useful to the current work insofar as it showcases multiplicity within the United States Church. But this usefulness has its limits and warrants some subsequent critique for clarification. As Dolan's work presents the context, birth control and abortion serve as two characteristic examples of multiplicity in the postconciliar American Church. With regard to birth control, although Pope Paul VI defended the Church's traditional stance prohibiting artificial contraception in his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and although John Paul II

reiterated this position during his pontificate, 85% of American Catholics approved of artificial birth control by 1993. If the survey is restricted to United States Catholics born after 1960, the number in favor jumps to 90%. Attitudes about contraception have obviously undergone reconfiguration, especially in light of the fact that less than half of American Catholics supported birth control back in 1967, a year prior to the appearance of *Humanae Vitae*.<sup>124</sup>

Disparity between magisterial authority and the rest of the populace is also observed with regard to abortion. Church authorities continue to uphold a firm stance in opposition. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* referred to abortion as an *unspeakable crime*. But across the American Catholic populace, a division exists between those who hold to magisterial pronouncements and those who are in favor of legalized abortion. The United States context showcased this disparity in the 1984 presidential election when two American Catholics—Mario Cuomo, the governor of New York, and Geraldine Ferraro, a candidate for the vice-presidency—each voiced public support for legalized abortion. When Archbishop John O’Connor of New York spoke out in condemnation against their political platform, the American Church witnessed a division between United States Catholics who backed the archbishop, and those who supported Cuomo and Ferraro. The enduring attention in the national media familiarized most of the country with the conflict.<sup>125</sup> Compounding the increasing multiplicity of narratives indicative of the context are these and other highly controversial ethical questions of the new era.

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<sup>124</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 249–50.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 202–3.

## AVOIDING BINARY OPPOSITIONS

Throughout his work, Dolan prefers voices that call for cultural adaptation to voices that call for withdrawal from mainstream society. His accommodationist preference for progressive voices over and above more traditional, conservative positions is a preference that may depict a closed system of binary oppositions such as progressive versus traditional, liberal versus conservative, or adaptation versus withdrawal. But multiplicity is a reality that transcends binary oppositions as such; multiplicity transcends any closed system because the cultivation of senses of identity at *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> then moves to reinterpretations of narrative encounters at *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in an ongoing *mimetic* spiral. The *mimetic* process is not closed, and facilitates the creative production in the human imagination of far more voices than just two opposing camps at odds with one another.

Notwithstanding his observable attempts to incorporate multiple voices—after all, he served as the Cushwa Center’s director at Notre Dame—Dolan’s treatment of ethical issues provides a clear example of his occasional tendency to fall into a closed system that presents multiple interpretations as oppositional and reactionary dyads. The reality of multiplicity is far more complex and dynamic. Just as this project has observed a multiplicity of different historical trajectories, different narratives of gender reform, various innovations in response to those narratives, multiple degrees of democracy practiced within parishes reinterpreted in every era, and a plurality of innovative orientations toward American culture with regard to Ireland’s and Murray’s attitudes about religious liberty, this project also recognizes the same complex multiplication of various, dynamic narratives with regard to modern ethical dilemmas.

As already observed, *mimesis* is a spiral that does not refer to the mere resurgence of past interpretations, but to the incorporation of past interpretations into new ones; such is the case with the ethical problematics that Dolan discussed. Beyond narratives in favor of artificial contraception versus narratives opposed, and beyond voices in support of legalized abortion versus voices opposed, the reality is a matrix of multiplicity and endless reconfiguration as narratives continually reinterpret narratives. For instance, Germain Grisez and Servais Pinckaers both oppose legalized abortion and artificial contraception, the two ethical topics just addressed. So in a closed system of binary oppositions, Grisez and Pinckaers may appear to share the same narrative.

However, the truth is that Pinckaers harshly criticizes the deontological method employed by Grisez, and bases his own views upon different warrants than does Grisez. On the one hand, Grisez bases his positions on the notion of intrinsically wicked actions that always violate one's obligation to uphold the basic good of life. Pinckaers, on the other hand, bases his own position on a critique of nominalist philosophy—a philosophy that he rebukes deontologists of falling into unwittingly in their appeal to obligation.<sup>126</sup>

To simply lump these divergent narratives together into the same camp because they each

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<sup>126</sup>For a more in depth exposition of this particular discussion, please see the four sources upon which I base it: (1) Germain Gabriel Grisez, "A Critique of Two Theological Papers," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* 84/10 (July 1984): 12; (2) Germain Gabriel Grisez & F.A. Sullivan, "The Ordinary Magisterium's Infallibility: A Reply to Some New Arguments," *Theological Studies* 55/4 (December 1994): 720–2; (3) Servais Pinckaers, "A Historical Perspective on Intrinsically Evil Acts," in *The Pinckaers Reader: Renewing Thomistic Moral Theology*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus; trans. Mary Thomas Noble, Craig Steven Titus, Michael Sherwin, and Hugh Connolly, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005): 215–22; and (4) Servais Pinckaers, "Revisionist Understandings of Actions in the Wake of Vatican II," in *ibid.*, 247–67.

oppose contraception and abortion would do violence to their very different reasons behind their respective convictions. Recognizing this multiplicity more closely approaches truth than does an inaccurate blurring together of uniquely different ethical trajectories.

#### A MULTIFACETED GOSPEL WITNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

Amidst a plurality of messages, the narrative of United States Catholicity has experienced several notable trends since the 1960s. A decline in the number of priests corresponds with a shortage of diocesan clergy available to pastor local parishes. This development accompanies a reduction in the number of women religious, the number of parochial schools, and the number of Catholic colleges. A decrease in church attendance coincides with over 20 million American Catholics who do not belong to a parish community—roughly one third of the United States Catholic population.<sup>127</sup> And the massive influx of Catholic immigrants from Europe has ceased.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time, however, Hispanic Catholic immigrants from various Latin American countries and an influx of Catholic immigrants from different countries in Asia have joined the United States Church.<sup>129</sup> After a brief decline, a resurgence of devotional Catholicism has again taken a stronghold. And speaking for the thriving Catholic social gospel amidst the diverse cultural climate, Dolan exclaims:

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<sup>127</sup>James D. Davidson, Andrea S. Williams, Richard A. Lamanna, Jan Stenftenagel, Kathleen Maas Weigert, William J. Whalen, and Patricia Wittberg, *The Search for Common Ground* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Press, 1997), 195.

<sup>128</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 212.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 214.

...there is much more diversity of belief among Catholics than is generally assumed to have been the case in the pre-Vatican II era. Conflict has riddled the community, and dissent from official church teaching became public and commonplace. Nonetheless, interest in religion remains very high. Numerous vibrant parishes dot the landscape; laymen and laywomen have assumed key leadership roles in many areas of institutional Catholicism; volunteerism has become commonplace; and the church continues to be one of the most important social service agencies in the nation.<sup>130</sup>

In an atmosphere of multiplicity, the United States Church has maintained that public brand of critical engagement with and service to the society that delineates her own distinctive expression of the new evangelization. This critical engagement with a diverse society does not just transform society, it transforms the Church. As Burke states:

*Encountering diverse cultures* invites us to perceive reality and to think about our theological interpretations of reality in new ways. Similarly, *thinking about cultural diversity* opens up the possibility of imagining religious practices and the very nature of the church anew.<sup>131</sup>

The dynamic exchange between a diverse society and evangelization efforts brings transformation and multiplicity to both the society and the Church, thereby rendering diversity as a gift.<sup>132</sup>

Evangelization regards the Church's public witness of the gospel to the society as well as the Church's efforts for interior spiritual renewal. Consequently, each issue that the United States Church faces in today's context impacts evangelism as it relates to her public witness and to her own transformation. Every specific subject of engagement between United States Catholicity and the society, including peace, economics, women's

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 196.

<sup>131</sup>Kevin F. Burke, "Thinking about the Church: The Gift of Cultural Diversity to Theology," in *Many Faces, One Church: Cultural Diversity and the American Catholic Experience*, eds. Peter C. Phan and Diana Hayes (New York: Sheed and Ward, 2005): 44. The italicized phrases appear in the original quotation.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 40–1.

rights, parish democracy, religious liberty, and birth control, all shape the American Church's testimony of the Christian faith as well as her own interior, ongoing conversion. In both the *ad extra* and the *ad intra* dimensions, the transformative power of the Christian message has adopted a multiplicity of interpretations in the current culturally-diverse situation. In the postconciliar milieu, the United States Church's testimony of faith to the society has become as multifaceted as her own spiritual growth.

### **Explosion of Narrative Permutations**

#### A NEW EVENT IN THINKING

The witness of the Catholic Church in the United States has no singular expression. Just as a plurality of narratives characterizes multiple elements of American Catholicity, a corresponding plurality of narratives describes the Church's testimonial of the Christian message. In Ricoeur's theory, some temporal event within the contextual setting yields reconfigurations of narrative interpretation.<sup>133</sup> In *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>, innovative reconfigurations are designated by *unexploited potentialities that a new event in thinking will bring to light*.<sup>134</sup> Some event stirs up the sedimentation of inherited, established structures, but for Ricoeur, this *event* is not a single historical occurrence. Instead, those events that bring reconfigurations of narrative and new possibilities of interpretation are events that occur over time, across communities.<sup>135</sup>

A new level of awareness regarding the coexistence of competing narratives within United States society designates the multiple contexts of the post-Vatican II period. Issues

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<sup>133</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:155.

<sup>134</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:219.

<sup>135</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:224–5.

such as women's ordination, democracy in the parish, religious liberty, and contraception are all illustrative of a context characterized by a new degree of awareness regarding the coexistence of multiple voices that resulted from the spread of modernity. A new global consciousness made people aware to an unprecedented extent that a multiplicity of divergent truth claims coexists across the world—different expressions that stand side-by-side in simultaneous tension. This awareness expanded the dialectic between historical consciousness and personal identity, which could no longer be contained within a single narrative interpretation, in light of this new level of cognizance that diverse perspectives do indeed coexist.

The Second Vatican Council is undoubtedly a poignant moment in Catholicism's story, one that bookmarks the beginning of the milieu under focus. But the council is not itself the new event in thinking that stirs up sedimentations into innovations because the council is both a catalyst for and a response to numerous changes associated with modernity. Of particular interest is an undergirding reality that gave rise to Vatican II in the first place: this vast array of different voices that characterized the contemporary situation, both locally and globally. All the numerous and rival configurations that constitute the multiplicity of competing narratives is itself the new event in thinking, for the coexistence of multiple voices has changed the way people think about any singular voice.

#### A TRADITION OF MULTIPLICITY

The Great Commission portrays that plurality is nothing new. The initial followers of the *Way of Jesus* were obviously aware that competing stories existed by virtue of the very fact that they were missionaries. Even a cursory familiarity with Bible stories



conveys that the first Christians knew that other peoples lived in different cultural stories. The statue to the unknown god, the Jerusalem Council, and the issue of eating meat from an animal that had been sacrificed to Poseidon during the great Pan-Hellenic festival in Corinth all constitute encounters between divergent cultural narratives. In fulfillment of God's third promise to Abraham, the Gentiles were invited into the love covenant revealed through Israel's story. Consequently, competing narratives and the awareness of such plurality is certainly not unique to modern times.

In the Old Testament, Moses warned against syncretism with Canaanite idolatry as Israel reclaimed the Promised Land. Throughout the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, the TaNaK addresses the issue of idolatry in which God's covenant people would betray their greatest commandment and fall into idol-worship. God's covenant people were obviously aware that their own faith stood in tension with other religious stories, such as the stories of Isis or Ba'al, for example. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is a worthy reminder that a multiplicity of competing narratives is certainly nothing new to Judeo-Christian tradition, and nothing new to Christian evangelism in particular. To suppose that the challenges and opportunities of diversity are unique to contemporary times would prove as anachronistic a presumption as it would be haughty.

#### THE CONTEMPORARY MILIEU

While plurality is nothing novel, it has reached a new level of extensiveness because the rapidity of its expansion and the breadth of people's awareness are both unprecedented. The mosaic of national identities across the American Church is one indicator of the increased speed and scope of narrative multiplicity during the post-Vatican II era. Rather than the bulk of Catholic immigrants hailing from Europe, the

postconciliar United States observed an unparalleled influx of Catholics from around the world. The suddenness and the span of an incoming foreign population from across the globe made the society quickly aware of an extraordinary number of different ethnic stories. In 1960, roughly seven million Hispanics lived in the United States. By 1990, this number more than tripled to over twenty-two million, about 9% of the United States population.<sup>136</sup> As of 2005, 42 million Hispanics lived in the United States, about 14% of the United States population; 68% are Catholic. Projections estimate that this population will double by the year 2020.<sup>137</sup>

In 1960, the population of Asians living in the United States was fewer than one million. There were over seven times as many Asians living in the United States just thirty years later.<sup>138</sup> According to the United States Census Bureau in 2000, the Catholic dioceses with the highest number of Asians are Los Angeles with 1,317,890, Honolulu with 985,899, Brooklyn with 650,868, San Jose with 474,218, Oakland with 473,687, San Francisco with 445,347, Orange with 440,577, Seattle with 407,738, New York with 327,491, and Chicago with 323,865.<sup>139</sup> Immigration information accumulated from Asian and Pacific Catholic communities in the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, and Korea estimates that Asians comprise between four and five percent of the total Catholic population in the United States as of 2007. Projections anticipate an increase of

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<sup>136</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 216.

<sup>137</sup>Laurie Goodstein, "Hispanics Reshaping U.S. Catholic Church," in *The New York Times* (April 25, 2007), United States section, p. 1.

<sup>138</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 220.

<sup>139</sup>United States Bishops, *Asian and Pacific Islander Catholics in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: USCCB Department of Communications, 2007), 1.

Asian Catholics in the United States holding director-level positions in Church secretariats.<sup>140</sup>

In California alone, the ten-year period from 1985 until 1995 observed the arrival of nearly four million foreigners emigrating out of numerous Latin American and Asian nations.<sup>141</sup> In John Paul II's 1987 visit to Los Angeles, the pope stated:

Today in the church in Los Angeles, Christ is Anglo and Hispanic, Christ is Chinese and black, Christ is Vietnamese and Irish, Christ is Korean and Italian, Christ is Japanese and Filipino, Christ is Native American, Croatian, Samoan, and many other ethnic groups.<sup>142</sup>

The pontiff stressed the importance that Catholics practice a keen sensitivity to authentic cultures.<sup>143</sup> He expressed that the different ethnic heritages within Los Angeles all possess unique and genuine cultural traditions. John Paul II asked Catholics to integrate these various traditions into the ministries of the parish. In so saying, he reemphasized his predecessor's words in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Paul VI writes:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have impact on their concrete life.<sup>144</sup>

Paul VI and John Paul II both emphasized the importance of evangelizing in the language of the people. In bearing witness to Christ's love for all people, evangelization should adopt a variety of expressions according to the variety of cultural settings.

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<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 221.

<sup>142</sup>John Paul II, 1987 Los Angeles Address, quoted in Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 222.

<sup>143</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 223.

<sup>144</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 63.

The extensiveness of multiplicity in today's paradigm is not peculiar to the United States milieu. The United States remains the focus of the present project, but the unprecedented degree of plural awareness that is a reconfiguring event for United States Catholics relates to a broader framework of worldwide developments worth mentioning. Catholicism is a global institution; consequently, the new questions that came pouring in upon Catholics in the United States were also pouring in upon Catholics worldwide. Modernity, especially with its capacity for increased communication through technology and travel, facilitated an unparalleled degree of awareness that multiple, competing narratives coexist in tension with one another—an effect enhanced by a global reach. After all, out of the Church's response to the spread of modernity arose the call for a new evangelism in the first place. Accordingly, the discussion of the United States situation expands in its connection to the wider phenomenon of globalization, which further contributes to an unprecedented level of plural awareness within the United States context particularly.

## GLOBALIZATION

In the economic sphere of the United States context, relaxed trade regulations opened up foreign investment, transcontinental flows of capital and labor, and the intensification of cross-cultural business alliances. In this way, one might be tempted to understand the United States as the chief catalyst for globalization; however, such a caricature is simply not accurate. While the United States certainly helped to spread modernity, globalization is more than economics, and more than the United States by herself. In reality the United States is both contributor to and recipient of globalizing forces, which incorporate a combination of sociopolitical, economic, technological, and

cultural mechanisms. While the United States may stimulate globalization to a certain degree, the phenomenon has its own rationale which has impacted the United States in unexpected ways.<sup>145</sup> The United States is not only a globalizing agent upon the world stage, but also a society being transformed by globalization. The various forces included within the phenomenon of globalization are to some extent an outgrowth of, and to another extent an influence upon the United States context. Of chief interest to the new evangelism in the United States is the cross-cultural circulation of competing narratives that results from the increases in communications, transportation, migration, and commerce across this new, global network.

This expanded awareness that competing interpretations of reality coexist—not only within one particular society, but across the world—is an experience that transcends mere socio-economic and political factors. Indeed it can become dizzying to think of the changes that have taken place in the last couple hundred years: industrialization, technology, computers, the internet, cell phones, population growth, travel, and city skyscrapers are all familiar in today’s epic. But when one considers the past ten thousand years of the human timeline, one must remember that the global world occupied today constitutes a brand new historical situation in countless ways.

Communication advancements have put foreign expressions of relating to God right in front of people’s faces. No longer can people sit comfortably in a bubble and pretend that theirs comprises the single possible and best overall perspective of reality. Schreiter attributes three primary factors to these phenomena of globalizing forces. First,

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<sup>145</sup>Bertho, *Impact of Globalization on the United States*, 1–9.

the international relationships between governments have shifted from a bipolar to a multipolar political situation. Previously, the world was conveniently divided into a binary arrangement of democratic, capitalist countries and communist, socialist countries. The developing nations of the southern hemisphere either served as the staging ground for conflicts between the other two, or from time to time got to play spoiler in the world scene. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, this reality moved to a multipolar context in which dyads of opposition no longer explain the political landscape. Boundaries ceased being territorially based, and global communities ceased to be defined by contiguity.<sup>146</sup>

To add to the enormous change in world politics, the economic sphere moved to a single-world economy. With the collapse of the bipolar political reality came the demise, it would seem, of socialism as a viable economic option. Socialist economies were attached to their communist nations. Thus when communism fell, it took socialist economics down with it. This change intensified the world-wide expansion of market capitalism as it moved capital quickly, and ignored boundaries in doing so. A new polarization thus resulted between the 20% of people who benefit from the new global market and everybody else. The disparity between the rich and the poor continues to worsen as the class gap widens.<sup>147</sup>

Probably the most significant factor contributing to plural awareness is in the onset of new communications technologies. The internet, computers, email, faxes, modems, and

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<sup>146</sup>Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 1–10.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*

cell phones can send information instantaneously from one side of the planet to the other. In addition, air travel increases the availability and speed with which to move people and cargo across the world. This development allows for migrations on a massive scale, thereby reconfiguring societies. New societies result in which a variety of cultures come into contact with one another bringing new possibilities as well as conflict. Such reconfigurations of contexts will inevitable result in reconfigurations of the narratives that arise from out of those contexts.<sup>148</sup>

### THE COMPRESSION OF TIME

The emplotments that turn the discordance of time into a concordant one take the constellation of items which form the narrative from the space of context. But the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has reshaped human perceptions of both time and space. As Schreiter explains,

the convergence of these three phenomena—a multipolar world, global capitalism, and communications technologies—create what is known as globalization ... globalization, as defined here, is the extension of the effects of modernity to the entire world, and the compression of time and space, all occurring at the same time.<sup>149</sup>

Thus globalization has two related dimensions: (1) the extension of modernity's effects, and (2) the compression of temporal-geographic dynamics: a dyad which results in an unprecedented level of plural awareness.

Since narratives help make temporal experiences meaningful by emplotting elements from one's contextual location, the compression of time and space will squeeze competing emplotted figurations more closely together. In today's world, one's

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 8.

perception of time and space more densely incorporates elements from around the globe, with almost instantaneous access. To make sense of time, the imagination imbues connections onto items from one's context. But in the modern era, the space of one's context can include conversations with people from multiple continents, all in a relatively short amount of time. The narrative configurations emplotted from temporal-geographic dynamics will therefore pack together as time and space compress.

In particular, the productive human imagination emplots narratives to afford a sense of coherence to the discordant mysteries of time, and it emplots these narratives from a constellation of items in the space of one's contextualized location. Accordingly, the compression of time and space will affect the narratives that people emplot from the elements of the space of their contexts, in order to better comprehend time. The compression of human perceptions regarding temporal-geographic dynamics will also compress the emplotted configurations drawn from those dynamics, placing them side-by-side in simultaneous tension, causing among different narrators an overall increased exposure to the various permutations of one another.

## LOCALIZATION

As the political, economic, and technological pressures exert their extending and compressing force on a world-wide scale, there are not just these homogenizing and universalizing effects. Simultaneously, the immediate community responds to these forces with an *intensification of the local*, through the unleashing of new particularisms, the reassertion of old particularisms, and an overall emphasis upon safeguarding the



identity of the immediate community.<sup>150</sup> Afraid of fragmentation and hybridization stealing away identity, the local reemphasizes the humanity of local paradigms. The heightened sense of the particular manifests itself through antiglobalistic fundamentalisms and revanchisms, through ethnification or the rediscovery of forgotten cultural ties, and through reappropriations of earlier historical periods which get revitalized to give focus and direction to the present. As Schreiter states:

The risks caused by pharmaceuticals and chemical accidents, but especially by the acts of terrorism of those profoundly opposed to the inroads that modernism had made into traditional societies create a profound sense of unease and contingency in lives that modernity has promised to insulate from such vulnerabilities. When globalization offers only progress that provides no *telos* that can explain why things have come to be as they are; when the efficiency promised cannot be delivered; when the technical rationality does not address the sense of dread and fear that continues to arise, postmodernism in one or other of its forms will likely emerge.<sup>151</sup>

Against such unease, and apprehensive of postmodernity, numerous groups reinforce specific traditions.

Catholic evangelism in the United States has repeatedly observed these intensified localizations throughout its entire history. Even before the conception of the new evangelism, American Catholicism observed the cloistering of secluded parish communities that resisted adaptation and embraced particular ethnic traditions within local parish communities. Kenrick and Hughes, Preston and McQuaid, Murray's Jesuit order, and the opponents of women's ordination have all communicated throughout the history of United States Catholicity the concern that too much adaptation can dangerously

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<sup>150</sup>Richard Giulianotti and Roland Robertson, "Glocalization, Globalization, and Migration: The Case of Scottish Football Supporters in North America," in *International Sociology* 21/2 (March 2006): 171–198.

<sup>151</sup>Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 13.

compromise authentic faith. In each respective circumstance, these narratives seek insulation from modern vulnerabilities, a revitalization of longstanding traditions, and the recovery of the clear direction that that these traditions may provide in an otherwise uncertain context of change.

At the same time, however, the phenomenon of localization is certainly not restricted to the traditionalist narratives. For instance, the organization *Woman Church* and the gatherings of its members constitute an intensification of a particular conviction shared by a tight-knit community. They struggle to have their counter-traditional voices heard, and they desire opportunities to observe their shared belief that a woman can administer the Eucharist. Generally speaking, the intensification of the local is a heightened particularism.<sup>152</sup> A heightened particularism may take the particular form of the reassertion of old particularisms, as in the case of the conservative, traditionalist voices aforementioned. A heightened particularism may also take the form of the unleashing of a new particularism, as in the case of *Woman Church*. Ironically, both types—although on opposite sides of an ideological spectrum—place an overall emphasis upon safeguarding the identity of their immediate community amidst a diverse context of competing narratives.

#### AN EXPANDED EPISTEMOLOGY

Catholicism thus finds itself within the historical realities of today's globalized world, between the global and the local, with all of the new dynamic realities, fears, and

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<sup>152</sup>Giulianotti and Robertson, "Glocalization, Globalization, and Migration," 180–96.

needs that cry out for divine assistance.<sup>153</sup> Prior to Vatican II, the Church attempted to preserve the last remnants of a classical and medieval culture which, outside its walls in the surrounding terrain, had long since yielded to the advancing jungle of post-Enlightenment life and ideas.<sup>154</sup> As Gabriel Daly explains:

The Second Vatican Council breached the wall at several points and thus ended the seclusion so carefully fostered by several generations... questions from which the majority of Catholics, including theologians, had been sheltered by their education now poured in upon them. The main safeguard of pre-conciliar Catholicism was its seclusion. It had its peace, its certainties, its clarities, its regimentation and its carefully forged chain of command; but it had them often at the price of relevance, vitality, courage, and occasionally even of truth and justice. It met its problems not by discussion or open investigation but by decree. Many Catholics saw this as the distinguishing feature of their faith and Church, and they actually liked what they saw. Many still do. Most, however, have given the changes a welcome which ranges from the enthusiastic to the wary.<sup>155</sup>

Amidst this loss of seclusion and the engagement with new questions that displaced it, Vatican II faced the challenges and opportunities of modernity and in particular, the question of how to evangelize in the new context.

In summary, modernity in the United States connects with a wider phenomenon that was occurring at the same time: the extension of modernity and its effects to numerous regions of the world. The last fifty years have seen diverse voices multiply exponentially. People became aware to an unprecedented level that diverse and often contradictory narratives coexist across the world. Compressed exposure to this

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<sup>153</sup>In my opinion, globalization is not the totalizing event that Schreier and others present it to be; yet their analyses have merit in outlining many aspects of my context, especially as they relate to the new degree of awareness regarding the coexistence of multiple voices.

<sup>154</sup>Daly, "Catholicism and Modernity," 777.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid.

multiplicity expanded the way people think. No matter what plot the human imagination draws to make better sense of temporal experience, the *muthos* organizes the figuration with a host of competing versions in mind. The interplay between historical and personal identifications did not merely reconfigure against the new context. Rather, the awareness of the coexistence of multiple voices transformed the dialectic between historical consciousness and individual identity into an expanded epistemological process that renews historical and personal self-understanding.

The epistemological circle of story both informing and being informed by a historical and individual sense of identity has itself changed, because the process of knowing now engages *senses of identities* in today's context. The relationship between knower and known has fundamentally expanded as the mind of the knower is aware that what claims to be known takes a variety of different interpretive shapes within the minds of other knowers. In a Ricoeurian spiral, an unprecedented level of awareness regarding diverse stories is generating additional diverse stories, which then generate still more stories exponentially. Plurality begets increasing plurality. Narrative innovations beget more innovations. Interpretive reconfigurations beget more reconfigurations. In other words, multiplicity is itself a reconfiguring event for United States Catholicism.

Amidst this expanded epistemology, the call to a new Catholic evangelization was not received by the Church in a singular way. Even those organizations who wish to have their respective version of the call become normative are aware of the existence of competing interpretations. For instance, *Woman Church* is perfectly aware of competing narratives that bear witness to the Catholic faith with an all-male priesthood; that awareness is part of the impulsion to gather together at Eucharistic rites celebrated by

women. Catholics who opposed the separation of Church and State were certainly aware of Murray's position, and galvanized their own position in confrontation against Murray's. In turn, Murray and his supporters were aware of their opposition; Murray faced that opposition both in the 1950s and again during Vatican II. Whether open to, indifferent toward, or hostile against other voices, various permutations of a new evangelism are emerging with at least one factor in common—interpretations, approaches, and emphases of the new evangelization are developing amidst, and sometimes because of, an awareness that other versions exist.

#### THE NEW EVANGELISM IS NOT REDUCIBLE TO ITS AGENCIES

A danger lurking in any study of the new Catholic evangelization regards the misplaced equivocation between the new evangelism and its particular agencies or programs. To be clear, the new Catholic evangelization cannot be reduced to its agencies.<sup>156</sup> Self-referentially, the movement's analysis of Catholic evangelization maintains that the new evangelism transcends any missionary organization or program implementation. The new evangelism distinguishes itself from organized initiatives. As aforementioned, and presently reemphasized, the new evangelization includes the re-evangelization of believers in a call for inward spiritual revitalization.<sup>157</sup> Paul VI specified this *ad intra* dimension of interior rejuvenation, "The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself."<sup>158</sup> This emphasis upon inner renewal within

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<sup>156</sup>Seán MacGabhann, *The New Evangelization of Catholics: In a New Language* (Trafford Publishing, 2008), 15.

<sup>157</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 30–1.

<sup>158</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 15.

the Church disallows any strict equivalency between the new evangelism and programs or agencies. Rather, the new evangelism's programs, organizations, and initiatives are expressions constitutive of the *ad extra* dimension of the new evangelization.

To reiterate the quotation from the recent synod's working document, "Evangelization in general is the everyday work of the Church."<sup>159</sup> For example, although the group does not specifically designate itself as a new evangelization program, the organization of Women Church is indeed part of the new Catholic evangelization nonetheless. The Catholics involved with this organization are bearing witness to their faith. In the *ad extra* dimension, they proclaim their gospel witness to the surrounding society by testifying to their faith in practice. In the *ad intra* dimension, they seek their own spiritual revitalization, renewing their hearts in communion with one another, reawaking aspects of their faith convictions that they have otherwise experienced as suffocated and stifled by a system entrenched in patriarchy.

Their everyday work in the Church manifests in regular meetings. Their very existence challenges any notion associating patriarchy with all United States Catholics. They have at the same time been transformed by the culture, as women's rights in the civic sphere juxtaposed with the faith life of Woman Church members. Their narrative expresses itself with a multiplicity of permutations, as discussed earlier with regard to the various types of feminism. Past feminist narratives are then incorporated into womanist and mujerista innovations, as *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> moves again to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in the ongoing spiral of narrative interpretation. And the Church has reconfigured in her encounter with this part of the body with innovations such as women chancellors and pastors, as the Church is re-

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<sup>159</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

evangelizing herself under the illumination of this part of the body. The new Catholic evangelization refers to the task of bearing witness to the gospel in today's world; therefore, each facet of outward and inward spiritual renewal is reflective of the new evangelism. Through both outward proclamation and interior renewal, Woman Church exemplifies the new evangelism in relation to its communication of the faith.

The point is not that all Church activities already constitute evangelism in their entirety, but that all Church activities possess an evangelistic dimension to them. The capacity for the everyday work of the Church to bear witness to the faith through both the *ad extra* and the *ad intra* aspects of spiritual renewal renders the everyday work of the Church as reflective of the Church's evangelizing mission. The evangelistic dimension to the Church's everyday work is identified in the capacity to bear witness to the faith through both outer and inner spiritual renewal. The Woman Church organization provides just one example. Of the specific issues discussed thus far—from peace to the economy, from women's ordination to democracy in the parish, from religious freedom to the ethical debates—all of them directly relate to the new Catholic evangelism in the United States, and all of them are illustrative of narrative reconfiguration and multiplicity in the new evangelism. Since evangelization refers to the task of bearing witness to the faith, every aspect of outer and inner spiritual renewal can reflect the Christian message. The new Catholic evangelization is not reducible to its organizations.

While evangelism generally refers to every facet of faith life in relation to its communication of the Christian message, organizations dedicated specifically to the work of the new Catholic evangelization have indeed been forming and multiplying, and they warrant some attention. Granted, the new evangelism is not reducible to its programs. To

have studied the new evangelism's programs is not to have studied the new evangelism. However, descriptions of those organizations specifically dedicated to the new evangelism remain a significant part of any study on the topic. In light of the current project's Ricoeurian application, these new evangelism agencies in the United States prove particularly useful in showcasing how *mimesis* allows for these varying interpretations of the new evangelization to coexist as valid interpretations of the context. Since each agency mentioned in the following section is specifically dedicated to the new evangelism, each agency is thereby illustrative of a narrative trajectory which interprets the movement. Together, they highlight the coexistence of competing and mutually authentic narratives, emplotted from a variety of productive human imaginations that perpetually interpret and reinterpret the context with abundant reconfigurations. It is to these new evangelism agencies in particular that the current work now directs its focus.

#### NUMEROUS NEW EVANGELISM AGENCIES IN THE UNITED STATES

Ever since the hierarchy initially announced, persistently reemphasized, and continued its ongoing efforts to clarify an official schema for Catholic evangelism in contemporary times, a number of ministerial programs have materialized around various elements of the Church's evangelizing plan. Building upon the twofold spiritual renewal that grounds the entire movement in interior revitalization and enthusiastic proclamation simultaneously, these new evangelization groups will emphasize any or all of the movement's particular emphases: the affirmation that evangelism is the responsibility of all believers, clergy and laity alike; the distinction from foreign missions; the cultural directive; and the Church's vision for a comprehensive Christianization.<sup>160</sup> The

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<sup>160</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 29–32.



multiplication of different narratives has been so extensive in the postconciliar era that the different new evangelism organizations in the United States alone have filled books.

The difference between Tom Forrest's version of the new Catholic evangelization in contrast to Kenneth Himes version is illustrative of the diverse plurality. The former says that the new Catholic evangelization is a call *to save the world from the self-centered and devastating slavery to sin by winning followers of the risen Jesus.*<sup>161</sup> The latter, on the other hand, says that he *cannot imagine a strategy for effective evangelization* that does not focus upon social justice.<sup>162</sup> Richard Fragomeni adds an additional voice to the conversation. For him, *the Eucharist is the summit and font of evangelism* because it is the Sacrament which *evangelizes the community, forming Christians into compassion.*<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, Peter Herbeck, the Mission Director for Renewal Ministries out of Ann Arbor, Michigan and a coordinator of the new evangelization among Catholic laity in particular, does not place his emphasis upon winning converts, social justice, or Sacraments. Instead, he stresses the essential importance of working miraculous signs and wonders.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Tom Forrest, "Evangelization 2000: A Global View," in *The New Catholic Evangelization*, ed. Kenneth Boyack, (New York: Paulist Press, 1992): 214.

<sup>162</sup>Kenneth R. Himes, "A New Look at Social Justice," in *The New Catholic Evangelization*, ed. Kenneth Boyack, (New York: Paulist Press, 1992): 117.

<sup>163</sup>Richard N. Fragomeni, "The Eucharist: Summit and Font of Christian Evangelization," in *The New Catholic Evangelization*, ed. Kenneth Boyack, (New York: Paulist Press, 1992): 202–203.

<sup>164</sup>Peter Herbeck, "Employing Charisms in Evangelization," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 139–48.

According to Herbeck, miraculous works of power that testify to the reality of the Holy Spirit must accompany the preaching of the Christian message as warrants for the authentic saving power of the gospel. He states that the Church must rediscover the indispensable role these signs play in evangelization, adding that the success of the new evangelism depends upon it.

...the disciples were able effectively to communicate the life of the kingdom because Jesus had given them the power to do so. ... That is why a resurgence of the sign-gifts in our day is so important for the work of evangelism. We cannot reveal the kingdom of God by our own strength or eloquent words. Like the disciples, our proclamation of the gospel needs to be accompanied by the confirming signs, making clear to all who will hear and see that God himself stands behind the message.<sup>165</sup>

From individual salvation to the promotion of social justice; from the liturgical observation of sacramental rites to the working of miraculous power according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit—numerous versions of the new Catholic evangelization cover a diversity of interpretations across a multiplicity of narratives.

To further convey the plurality of new evangelization narratives, several organizations dedicated specifically to the new evangelism in the United States follow: *Isaiah Ministries* out of Bluffton, South Carolina; *Renewal Ministries* out of Ann Arbor, Michigan; *Spirit of the Lord International Mission* out of El Paso, TX; *Couples for Christ* out of Chicago, Illinois; *Cultivation Ministries* out of St. Charles, Illinois; the *Systematic Integral New Evangelization's National Office* out of Rockford, Illinois; *Kerigma Asociacion Misionera Hispana* out of Miami, Florida; and *Evangelization 2000, Prison Fellowship*, the *Paulist National Evangelization Association*, and the *National Conference*

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<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 140.

of *Catholic Bishops' Committee on Evangelization*, all out of Washington, D.C.<sup>166</sup> Indeed, the permutations are vast.

Moreover, these diverse narratives are often competing narratives that make mutually exclusive claims. In other words, sometimes different narratives of the new evangelism conflict with one another. The present project has already observed such disparity regarding women's rights, parish democracy, religious freedom, and birth control; an illustration from among the organizations expressly dedicated to evangelization further amplifies the occurrences of narrative divergence. For instance, a contrast between Charles Colson's new evangelization and Dr. Susan Blum's exemplifies such disagreement.

Charles Colson worked with Richard Neuhaus on the ecumenical document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, and Colson was a contributor to the volume entitled *JP II and the New Evangelization*.<sup>167</sup> He is the founder of *Prison Fellowship*, an evangelical ministry based in Washington, D.C. In a contribution to the new evangelism, Colson writes:

One-half of all Americans today believe that all roads lead to heaven. One-half believe in ESP. One-quarter believe in reincarnation. You do not think the New Age is a threat, even inside our churches? One out of three Americans says he has communicated with the dead! A sin before God!<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>This incomplete list is taken from *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization*, which includes contact information following several of its respective contributing essays.

<sup>167</sup>Charles Colson, "Striving Side by Side for the Gospel in a Post-Christian Culture," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 269–85.

<sup>168</sup>*Ibid.*, 270.

In contrast, Dr. Susan Blum makes quite a different claim, especially with regard to communication with the dead. Blum, Executive Director of *Isaiah Ministries* in Bluffton, South Carolina, served as the Vice President of the *National Council for Catholic Evangelization*. In her own contribution to the same volume on the new Catholic evangelization to which Colson contributed, Blum recounts the dramatic conversion of her mother from atheism to Christianity. A communication with the dead, which Colson categorically condemns, contributed to Christian evangelization in Blum's narrative.<sup>169</sup>

In a moving story of conversion, Dr. Blum's mother claims to have communed with not only a visible appearance of the risen Christ, but also with her parents who had been long dead. Dr. Blum rejoices in the appearance of her dead grandparents and the Lord to her mother, because the supernatural encounter led to her mother's conversion to the Christian faith. In Blum's account, the deceased relatives allegedly spoke to her formerly atheistic mother. On the one hand, a contributor to the new Catholic evangelization exclaims emphatically that communication with the dead is *a sin before God*. On the other hand, another contributor to the new evangelization rejoices in a communion with the dead that brought her mother to faith in Jesus Christ. The different permutations are not only numerous; competing narratives are sometimes mutually exclusive as well.

The current project has already demonstrated narrative multiplicity in the new evangelism's history. The current project has already demonstrated narrative multiplicity

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<sup>169</sup>Susan Blum, "Six Steps to Effective Evangelization," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 136–7.

in the movement's theological development through the social gospel; through theological reflection on the new evangelism from John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, Cardinal Dulles, the United States Bishops, Benedict XVI, and from the work of the recent synod on the new evangelism; across the context from pre-Vatican II, Vatican II, and the postconciliar milieu; and through the social gospel's incorporation of Vatican II theology into innovative reconfigurations in peace and economic efforts of evangelization. The current project has already demonstrated narrative multiplicity through the Church's interior and exterior faith witness across a number of areas including women's ordination, the practice of democracy in the Church, a plurality of continual reinterpretations regarding religious liberty, and current ethical deliberations. To add to this demonstration of narrative multiplicity in the new Catholic evangelization, the current work now proceeds through several more detailed expositions of specific new evangelism agencies in the United States. These sections not only critically present these organizations' respective theological narratives of evangelization for informative purposes, but more importantly they further convey how *mimesis* allows for competing narratives of the context to coexist as authentic interpretations of the new Catholic evangelization.

### ISAIAH MINISTRIES

Isaiah Ministries is a new evangelism agency centered in Bluffton, South Carolina that promotes spiritual rejuvenation through parish programs. Their organization is based upon practicing and promoting a theology which their executive director, Susan Blum, breaks down into six elements. The first is discipleship, which is deemed to be both the beginning and end of evangelization. This emphasis grounds their theology in authentic

followership of Jesus in which Catholics first have to *be sure of what they believe*.<sup>170</sup>

Belief is certainly an important part of faith. As this particular agency connects the items of temporality into a coherence, their theology is reminiscent of Hebrews 11:1, linking a disciple's faith with an assurance of belief. Orthodoxy is a significant element to sincere faith; this emphasis that draws a connection between discipleship and belief is a valid one. But this emphasis is not without its difficulties at the same time. To associate discipleship with an assurance of belief does not allow sufficient space for doubting disciples such as Thomas. Furthermore, the link between discipleship and faith can emphasize orthodoxy to the neglect of orthopraxis. In addition, *right belief* constitutes a nebulous notion in the first place, especially in light of dynamism and diversity. *Mimetic* innovation safeguards truth by disengaging essentialism and thereby more accurately approaching an objective reality of multiplicity. Thus Isaiah Ministries' first theological principle of the new evangelism is a valid interpretation; but it possesses these problematics which prevent its narrative of evangelism from being an exclusive interpretation of the context.

Their second theological emphasis encourages the proactive extension of oneself in true friendship. This friendship must be genuine, and not approached with any sense of superiority, power, or proselytizing. Rather than seeing people as prospects, genuine friendships honor the dignity of the other with needs-meeting and foot-washing, whether or not the other converts to Catholicism. Caring, not persuasion, defines the sort of relationship mission that this agency encourages. Blum refers to the United States bishops' pastoral letter in her explanation of this second component to Isaiah Ministries' theology of evangelism. She says, "You cannot pray all day long and evangelize. It just

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<sup>170</sup>Blum, "Six Steps to Effective Evangelization," 129.

does not happen that way. ... 'GO and make disciples.'"<sup>171</sup> She explains that evangelizers *go* when they befriend people, and she recommends a strong parish hospitality program accordingly.

As this agency encounters the evangelization narrative of the United States Conference of bishops, the organization incorporates the bishops' pastoral letter into its own reinterpretation of evangelization. This is another example of how the interface between narratives and lived experience at *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> is then incorporated into interpretations of narratives at *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> as the spiral of interpretation perpetuates. The new evangelization narrative of Isaiah Ministries is no mere resurgence of a past narrative. The organization's theology is no simple resurfacing of the ancient New Testament writings on discipleship, faith, and friendship; rather, the agency takes an encounter with the United States bishops two millennia later and incorporates that encounter into a reinterpretation of evangelism. Isaiah Ministries takes the bishops' instruction to *go and make disciples*—the title of their pastor letter on the new evangelization in the United States—and amplifies the imperative *go* by connecting it to their discipleship theology of proactively *going* to form new friendships. The bishops' letter never specified that they were referring specifically to the proactive formation of friendships when they employed the terminology of *go*.

The move of Isaiah Ministries from *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> back to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> led to the movement from reception to the mediated interpretation of human actions that designates *mimesis*<sub>2</sub>. As the received narrative restructured initial preunderstandings at the second *mimetic* relation, an innovative narrative reconfiguration resulted which reinterpreted the

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., 130.

bishops' story in a new way, applying it to the command to *go* make genuine friends. This innovation is an emplotted world configured in the productive human imagination; this narrative world then intersects with the real world of the reader, wherein the action actually happens, unfolding within its particular temporality in *mimesis*<sub>3</sub>. The narrative interpretation comes to cultivate Isaiah Ministries' sense of community identity at this third *mimetic* relation. The participants in this ministry bring their identifying message to their parish mission programs, where *mimesis*<sub>3</sub> moves yet again to *mimesis*<sub>1</sub> in the productive human imaginations of their audiences. And so the interpretive spiral continues.

This application helps the Church to better understand how these present-day permutations of the new evangelism are exploding, and presents the process as a healthy reconfigurational mode which prevents any singular narrative of evangelization from becoming the exclusive, essential norm. Isaiah Ministries' reconfigured evangelization narrative, which reinterpreted the bishops' command to *go* in an innovative way, is certainly an authentic interpretation of evangelistic action. But if Isaiah Ministries' narrative became the exclusive, sedimented, established paradigm, then other valid narratives would become lost, and the truth project would correspondingly become undercut to the extent that valid stories became silenced. For instance, if the terminology *go* in *Go and Make Disciples* referred exclusively to the exhortation to proactively form new friendships, then the Church would lose other authentic reinterpretations such as *go* feed the hungry, *go* serve the poor, *go* embrace the foreigner, or *go* and learn of the faith convictions and practices of persons of different religions. Allowing for multiplicity



recognizes that no single narrative is perfect, and this openness more closely approaches truth by allowing for multiple readings of the bishops' text on evangelization.

In the third piece to this particular agency's theological narrative, Catholics are asked to share their faith. As the organization director expresses this point, "This is what evangelization is all about: ongoing conversation."<sup>172</sup> This third piece refers specifically to telling others one's own personal narratives of life in the Christian faith. The fourth element to the organization's theology of evangelization commands Catholics to proclaim the gospel. Beyond the sharing of one's own stories, one must also, according to Isaiah Ministries, directly communicate Christian belief.<sup>173</sup> The fifth element then instructs the evangelizer to invite the other person into a conversion experience by praying together, and perhaps asking to hold hands in a circle while praying. The dignity of the other is honored at this step, according to Blum, by asking the person's permission first.<sup>174</sup> The final step is to integrate converts into the community. In doing so, the convert is disciplined, bringing the theology full circle back to the first step. In the discipleship process the new convert is catechized through RCIA, and through continuous community embrace, to become sure of what she or he believes and consequently, to become a disciple who is fit to evangelize. Blum explains that the circularity of disciples making disciples honors Pope Paul VI's description of the new evangelization in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.<sup>175</sup>

While some people may experience being dignified by an invitation to a time of hand-holding circle-prayer, other people may experience the invitation itself as an

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 135.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid.

imposition approaching ignominy. If the genuine friendship that builds from a discipleship model of evangelization is explicitly *not* supposed to cultivate a proselytizing social atmosphere, then an eventual invitation to a prayed conversion experience might retroactively color all previous hospitality with the appearance of an ulterior motive at work throughout the entire relationship. Thus, this agency's narrative of the new evangelization ultimately works against some of its own foundational elements, and dangerously reduces the new evangelism to an *ad extra* missionary endeavor to *win converts*. The present writer understands this uncomfortable sharing, proclamation, and invitation phase of the theological emphasis as the organization's most glaring weakness. Their incorporation of Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* into their own narrative is particularly fascinating. While valid, Blum's *circle of discipleship* model seems an interpretive stretch from Paul VI's emphasis upon interior renewal. And Blum only says that Paul VI *suggests* a circle of discipleship.<sup>176</sup> Isaiah Ministries' director therefore makes an interpreted suggestion the foundation of her agency's theological narrative.

Isaiah Ministries' invitation to conversion prayers detracts from the new evangelization's broader theological work of transforming culture and being transformed by culture, through both *ad extra* and *ad intra* spiritual renewal. Those members of the Church presently, whose personality types prefer a more ecstatic or communal orientation to their personal religious experiences, will be glad that Isaiah Ministries' narrative exists in the Church. For the sake of communities whose senses of identity engage this particular narrative, the present writer is grateful that evangelical organizations exist for Catholic parishes. But if Isaiah Ministries' narrative became the exclusive norm of the

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

new Catholic evangelization, then Catholics with legal, moral, mystical, or aesthetic orientations toward their personal religious experiences would be excluded from the spread of the good news which, in Catholic tradition, is an allegedly *universal* gospel. Isaiah Ministries' narrative of evangelism is a valid interpretation of the context. But their eventual invitation to conversion prayers and subsequent community integration smacks too much of Protestant evangelicalism for the Isaiah Ministries' narrative of the new Catholic evangelization to become exclusively normative.

### SINE

That which had begun in 1978 as a theological program for spiritual renewal in the archdiocese of Mexico City eventually grew into Father Alfonso Navarro's contribution to the list of New Evangelism organizations in the United States presently. Father Navarro served a diocesan Evangelization Center, which was responsible for the direction and implementation of various catechetical efforts in Mexico City. Once he was assigned to a parish, Father Navarro extended the diocesan center's evangelization efforts to his church. Throughout his work in evangelization, he formulated an evangelism program which delineated the operations of his parish organization called SINE, which stands for *Systematic Integral New Evangelization*. He began to host seminars for pastoral workers and other clergy. Interest spread, and requests led to the opening of a SINE office in San Antonio, TX headed by the National Coordinator for SINE in the United States, Ernesto Elizondo. As the SINE program increasingly spread further north, the United States

headquarters moved to Rockford, Illinois, where Elizondo is still the United States' National Coordinator of Father Navarro's theological conception.<sup>177</sup>

Like Isaiah Ministries, the SINE agency also explicates its theological narrative of the new evangelism. In particular, SINE defines evangelization in four theological components that follow sequentially as well as logically. As seen in the current work's exposition of Ricoeur's theory, the productive imagination's imbuing of causality—one item in an otherwise discordant constellation of temporal incidence following *because of* another—is sufficient to comprise a plot. For instance, even histories that were not written in a chronologically narrative style were seen to constitute a narrative understanding of time nevertheless. The emplotted followability that renders an otherwise discordant constellation as a concordant one does not have to take the form of a chronological sequence. Causal links are sufficient in and of themselves for the productive human imagination to configure the sense-making coherence of a plot.

While causal links are sufficient by themselves for the figuration of the *muthos*, often causal links will be sequential in a chronological manner as well as in a causal manner, simultaneously. Often, emplotted items follow both because of *and* after one another, at the same time. Such is the case with SINE's presentation of its theological narrative of evangelization. The organizations tenets are explicitly *meant to follow one after another*.<sup>178</sup> The new Catholic evangelization, according to SINE, needs to *provide*

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<sup>177</sup>John Paul Vandenakker, *Small Christian Communities and the Parish* (Sheed and Ward, 1994), 155.

<sup>178</sup>Ernesto Elizondo, "Transforming the Parish into an Evangelizing Community," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 250.

*each of these four elements and in this order.*<sup>179</sup> In brief, the four elements of this agency's theological story are (1) the *kerygma*, (2) the ministry of the word, (3) the development of ministries, and (4) social transformation.<sup>180</sup>

The initial part of SINE's theological employment of the new Catholic evangelization is the *kerygma*. This initial phase of evangelism is prior to all others. For SINE, the *kerygma* publically announces salvation as a free gift through Christ's death and resurrection. Following this first theological principle is the ministry of the word, which this particular new evangelism organization locates in liturgical homilies given by the priests and in the work of parish catechists in educating the young. After the ministry of the word, the parish must advance its missionary programs with liturgical ministries at the local level, community-building activities, and the activity of the social gospel. Civic service that promotes justice through social action then inevitably leads to the final part of the theological story: the transformation of society. The agency's National Coordinator explains this fourth item, "This means to build and establish the kingdom of God by transforming the unfair structures of society by the power of the Holy Spirit." According to SINE, the new evangelism, in any manifestation, necessitates all four components and in this precise order.<sup>181</sup>

Acknowledging the authenticity of this particular narrative of evangelization, the *kerygma* is indeed an integral part of Christianity. The good news certainly announced the redemption and reconciliation that Christ made possible. This proclamation of God's love to the world is a fitting first principle for the new evangelization. The narrative is an

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 251.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 250.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid.

authentic interpretation of the context. Simultaneously, this narrative is problematic, and the problems prohibit exclusive normativity. For instance, Elizondo defines the *kerygma* according to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But Elizondo says nothing of the triumph of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the cross that occupies much of the New Testament (see 1 Corinthians 15 and Colossians 2:15 for examples) is not simply the subjective teaching of how Christ's work accomplishes salvation for the human subject, but also an objective teaching of how God placed all authority beneath the feet of the obedient Son, regardless what individual subjects accept or reject the message. The triumph of Christ is an important aspect to the *kerygma* or *preaching* of the cross in the New Testament, but SINE's theological narrative makes no mention of it. To keep the message of Christ's triumph over darkness silenced would render the Church's preaching glaringly incomplete. SINE's emphasis upon salvation through death and resurrection is authentic, but if it became exclusively normative, a significant piece of the Christian tradition would be ignored.

Similarly, liturgical sermons and catechesis are important facets of the ministry of the word; however, more exists to the ministry of the word than just these items. One of the primary emphases in the theology of the new Catholic evangelization, as it has continued to develop across the years, is that it involves everybody—not just clergy and teachers.<sup>182</sup> Moreover, Church catechetics often focus on the young. Jesus, however, spent much of his earthly ministry catechizing the adult teachers and playing with the little kids. If liturgical homilies are emphasized, the work of the laity might become overlooked. And worse, while God is present in the liturgy, God is not limited by it.

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<sup>182</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 29–30.

SINE makes no mention of other avenues for ministering God's word that do not adopt an explicitly liturgical expression, yet communicate the image and likeness of God to others nonetheless.

This organization's emphasis upon social justice echoes the new Catholic evangelization in the United States across generations of American Catholics who brought the gospel into an encounter with society for mutual renewal. But SINE insists that its narrative is normative, even in its chronology. With regard to the four elements of this agency's theological story of evangelization, the National Coordinator declares, "They are not alternative choices. . . . When evangelizing, we need to provide each of these elements and in this order."<sup>183</sup> Elizondo never supplies warrants for his claim that the agency's narrative is normative both in its content and in its sequence. Nothing in the bible, tradition, reason, or experience necessitates this overstated assertion.

If it is indeed the Holy Spirit who transforms unjust structures in society, then it does not make sense that the Lord would lack the power to accomplish the mission outside of Ernesto Elizondo's sequence. Hypothetically, evangelization could take the reverse order. A person might be touched by the Holy Spirit's bringing of justice to a previously unjust system (4), then ask the civic worker who was an instrument of such divine work to explain more (3); then exposed to the ministry of the word given by this layperson (2) the individual encounters the gospel *kerygma* to become *evangelized* (1). As long as the Lord's ways and thoughts are higher than the understanding of humankind, any essentialist insistence upon a formulated theological chronology requires a self-critical examination and corrective (Isaiah 55:8-9).

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<sup>183</sup>Elizondo, "Transforming the Parish into an Evangelizing Community," 251.

This organization's narrative has validity. But if this singular expression of the new Catholic evangelization sedimented into the exclusive norm, theology's truth project would be undercut to the extent that other valid theologies and narrative sequences became marginalized. SINE's essentialist insistence upon its own precise recipe seems more magical than mystical. To protect the mission of the new Catholic evangelization, this prescription for essential content in an essential order ought to be disengaged. Rather, SINE's theological narrative of evangelism constitutes one authentic narrative among an abundance of others. Again, narratives open to reconfiguration are more true than those which close themselves off from such innovation.

#### CULTIVATION MINISTRIES

The current work has examined in some detail the theology of a new Catholic evangelism expression out of Bluffton, South Carolina, and another that originated in Mexico before moving into the United States, into San Antonio, Texas originally, then spreading further north into Rockford, Illinois. The present project now provides another characteristic exposition illustrative of narrative multiplicity among the agencies dedicated to the new Catholic evangelization in the United States currently—an organization that began in Saint Charles, Illinois, where its national headquarters are still stationed presently. At Saint John Neumann parish in Saint Charles, the youth director, Frank Mercadante, grew his church's youth program from ten teens and two catechists in 1980 to five hundred youth and seventy-five adult leaders ten years later.<sup>184</sup> Building upon his observations, outreach programs, and implementations across this period, Mercadante co-

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<sup>184</sup>Cultivation Ministries, "About Cultivation Ministries," (Cultivation Ministries, LTD., 2010), 1. (URL: <http://www.cultivationministries.com/home/about/>)



founded Cultivation Ministries in 1990, a national new Catholic evangelization agency focused upon evangelizing teenagers in the Catholic faith. Mercadante remains the Executive Director of this national organization.<sup>185</sup>

Before specifying his theological program for youth evangelization, Mercadante offers some general advice with regard to ministering to teens. The Church ought to target this age demographic in the new Catholic evangelization because, according to Cultivation Ministries' Executive Director, this adolescent age group experiences an identity crisis, this age group faces questions regarding purpose and the meaning of life, and this age group benefits adults because young people possess zeal, energy, passion, and idealism. He warns that *resolving relationship difficulties inflamed by hormones can be a huge challenge*, but youthful enthusiasm can work as a healing salve for calloused hearts otherwise jaded by bitterness or by life's more painful realities.<sup>186</sup>

In this interpretation of the new evangelization, the agency's Executive Director conveys an incorporation of Vatican II's call for mutual renewal into his own narrative innovation. Whereas the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* encouraged the mutual transformation of the society by the Church and the Church by the society, Cultivation Ministries reinterpreted this same concept according to a fresh perspective. Rather than a mutual transformative work in both Church and society, the new evangelization now extends this same notion of transformative reciprocity to the two age groups of adults and teenagers, which each bring spiritual renewal to the other. This

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<sup>185</sup>Frank Mercadante, "Bringing the Good News to All People," in *Pope John Paul II and the New Evangelization: How You Can Bring Good News to Others*, ed. Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995): 193.

<sup>186</sup>*Ibid.*, 195.

incorporation of an existing interpretation into a reconfigured one is again illustrative of the production human imagination emplotting multiple authentic narratives across the *mimetic* spiral. Cultivation Ministries did not merely repeat Vatican II's theological concept regarding the new evangelism's mutuality, but reinterpreted the concept in a new way. Again this present work observes how the hermeneutical spiral of *mimesis* produces competing versions of what it means to evangelize.

After his general advice, Mercadante then outlines a more specific program for evangelization. His primary component emphasizes routine. An outreach event that recurs on a particular day, time, and location appeals to a sense of consistency around which daily life operates. In addition, a routine evangelization diminishes the need to publicize the ministry's outreach programs. The second element addresses popular appeal. As the Executive Director of Cultivation Ministries states:

Second, we need to design quality events that carry an attractive and appealing image. Many young people assume a church-sponsored event will be boring. We need to develop innovative, fast-paced, and high-energy programming that can successfully compete for a young person's time and energy. ... The youth of our nation will be evangelized. The question is: by whom or what? Will it be the Church? Or will it be the contemporary American culture that packages its message with slick sophistication and catchy media?<sup>187</sup>

The next piece of the program involves a heartfelt and fervent welcome at the outreach event itself, where the ministers should employ an enjoyable activity and a generous use of humor. This relaxed atmosphere *weighs more heavily in the minds of young people than the content.*<sup>188</sup> Next, the evangelism program gives the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ through prayer and preaching, but both activities of prayer and preaching

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 197, 199.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 198.

should avoid any serious images and avoid any theological vocabulary. The unreached adolescents in a community *may include jocks, troubled teens, or unchurched kids*, so innovative activities appealing to common ground are especially useful—such as *a city-wide slam-dunk contest*.<sup>189</sup> Refreshments and conversations following specific evangelistic outreach events should coincide with conscientious follow-ups and ongoing relationship building with those in attendance.

By design, the evangelism narrative provided by this particular national agency of the new Catholic evangelization is far more practical than theological. In contrast to Isaiah Ministries and SINE, Cultivation Ministries emphasizes orthopraxis over and above orthodoxy. This emplotment of the new evangelism is particularly effective in showing Christ's love through practice. Cultivation Ministries emphasizes the discovery of personal needs and the engaging effort to meet those needs. The merciful activity of meeting the other in his or her current need to exhibit love takes precedence over the activity of catechetical instruction. Indeed, this story of the new evangelism is a valid one, for Jesus did not wax eloquent on speculative theology and dogmatic formulations during his earthly ministry. Rather, the Lord met people in their present needs and served them by feeding their hungry, healing their sick, forgiving their sinners, and washing their feet. The evangelism narrative of Cultivation Ministries coincides with the space of Christian experience; consequently, the interpretation is authentic.

At the same time, however, the interpretation is not devoid of problems; like the other agencies discussed, these problems proscribe any normative exclusivity of this specific interpretation. Throughout the history of the Church's interpretation of the

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<sup>189</sup>Ibid.

American context, many voices and reinterpretations have warned against the Church exhibiting too much complicity with the kingdom of this world. The enclave mentality of the immigrant parish led many Catholics to cloister together against the injustices of the hostile society that surrounded them. This countercultural voice was later incorporated into the innovative narrative reconfiguration of the social gospel which demonstrated a recurring pattern of countercultural attitudes in the United States Church to an extent, specifically with sharp criticisms against secularism. But the social gospel was no mere resurgence of a past voice. Discontinuity was also present to an extent as well, for the social gospel also criticized the enclave mentality with a preference for civic engagement. In each reinterpretation of the *mimetic* spiral across the history of United States Catholicism, evangelism has heard authentic voices warning against too much accommodation to society.

These countercultural voices in the Church facilitate a valuable critique of Cultivation Ministries' reconfiguration. To explain, if appeal and attraction are more important than the content of salvation, then the evangelization effort may cease to constitute a Christian one. To bend Christian evangelism to the slick packaging mode of the American culture sends a potential message that the kingdom of this world and its ways are more powerful than the gospel. A potential implication is precariously embedded in Mercadante's program. This possible implication is the message that Jesus is not appealing or attractive enough, and that his gospel message of the kingdom of God must submit to the kingdom of this world in order to be effective. By the time this program has finished making Christ appealing, is it still the Christ who is being

communicated? Jesus, especially in his role as the suffering servant, was more concerned with covenant faithfulness than with popular appeal.

In the Executive Director's evangelizing system, actual communication of the faith appears several steps into the program; the priority of this evangelizing program is located in *appeal*. Appeal and attraction can become peculiar emphases in a faith tradition that also teaches about redemptive suffering, bearing crosses, and a king who did not draw his followers with fun social activities. Mercadante's strategic avoidance of theological language or sober imagery in prayer may actually fail to communicate Christianity's power to more serious young people, and therefore fail to satisfy the spiritual hunger that many youth may bring with them to a parish event.

Cultivation Ministries indeed offers a valid interpretation of the new Catholic evangelization. Mercadante's agency constitutes an authentic expression of the new evangelism in the United States. But this narrative coexists with other valid interpretations, and rightfully so. For all of these ever-multiplying permutations can mutually illuminate and transform one another in a reciprocity, much like that mutual benefit between teens and adults that Cultivation Ministries treasures. Isaiah Ministries, SINE, and Cultivation Ministries are just three of numerous agencies specifically dedicated to the new Catholic evangelization in the United States today. The new evangelism is not reducible to its agencies. But such organizations comprise narrative interpretations of the new evangelism in the postconciliar United States, and afford the opportunity to showcase a multiplicity of competing interpretations of the context as mutually authentic. Out of the temporal constellation of context, each agency emplotted a valid picture of the new evangelism. But each agency connected the emplotted items into

different figurations. Productive human imaginations, across the hermeneutical spiral of *mimesis*, interpreted and reinterpreted varying constellations out of the same stars.

Openness to the plurality of diverse new evangelization narratives thus offers a much fuller presentation than does a reductionist and constrictive essentialism that seeks to name an exclusive, normative paradigm. Such a preference for exclusivity sacrifices a fuller expression of truth in exchange for simplicity. An essentialist quest for some allegedly exclusive, normative story of the new evangelization not only works against truth—the approach is slothful. Allowing the coexistence of different voices provides a much fuller presentation of the new evangelization than does any resistance to multiplicity. Yet the current synod’s recent work on the new Catholic evangelization expresses a resistance to the multiplicity of programs and initiatives in the interest of seeking a concrete unification. Rather than evangelization, the synod goes so far as to name the quest for concretization itself as its priority.<sup>190</sup> It is to this issue that the current project now turns its attention.

### **The Call for an Openness to Narrative Reconfiguration**

#### THE RECENT SYNOD’S RESISTANCE TO MULTIPLICITY

In its initial derivation from contextualized elements as well as the numerous reconfigurations it has taken, the new evangelism in the United States is illustrative of Ricoeur’s narrative theory. The new Catholic evangelization has hereby constituted the primary focus of this third and final chapter of the overall project. Not only does this last chapter discuss conversion as the aim of evangelization, but this final piece to the overall project calls for conversion in the way the Church understands the coexistence itself of

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<sup>190</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 5.

numerous, competing narratives of the new evangelism. The coexistence of multiple voices in our new United States contexts has changed the way people think. A new awareness that multiple cultural voices coexist transformed the way people think in such a manner that even more voices emerge and will continue to emerge exponentially. The new Catholic evangelization in the postconciliar United States clearly illustrates this narrative phenomenon.

This optimistic and hopeful embrace of tension needs to be stated, especially in light of the current working document's resistance to multiplicity. In preparation for the recent synod, a *Lineamenta* was prepared with questions and observations for the synod to address in its deliberations on the new evangelism. The document presented issues for synods of bishops of the Eastern Catholic rite, departments of the Roman Curia, and the General Secretariat.<sup>191</sup> Contributions to this preparation came from a compilation of submissions. Clergy, laity, new evangelization associations, consecrated laity, and ecclesial apostolates all tendered observations, issues, questions, and information regarding the new evangelism that aided in the composition of the *Lineamenta*. As the synod addressed the variety and the spectrum of voices from this preparation, their working document communicated a sense of alarm in response to the multiplicity of competing narratives.

Many of the contributions themselves *stressed the urgency* for the synod to consider the myriad of ways in which the Church has been responding to the call for a new evangelism.<sup>192</sup> The working document refers to the *danger of a dispersion of energy*, and

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<sup>191</sup>Ibid., no. 1.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., no. 4.

the danger of *fragmented efforts*.<sup>193</sup> The bishops explain that their preparation for the new evangelism synod revealed *an impressive list of initiatives undertaken by various ecclesial realities*.<sup>194</sup>

Over the last ten years, a number of particular Churches have documented and planned pastoral projects on evangelization and its renewal. Programmes on the diocesan, national and continental levels have been designed to raise awareness and offer support. Training centres were also created for Christians called to engage in these projects.<sup>195</sup>

After acknowledging their appreciation for these efforts and the positive results reported, the working document also refers to the *negatives aspects* reported from such a *considerable number of initiatives*.<sup>196</sup>

Since the multiplicity of new evangelism programs is not yielding the desired outcome, the bishops conclude the need to formulate a *unified response* to what the new evangelism is calling the Church to do.<sup>197</sup> The articulation of *concrete answers* is the goal of the synod.<sup>198</sup> They go so far as to say that this unified response is the purpose of the synod's convocation above all else.<sup>199</sup> With all due respect to the synod bishops and to the immense task that lay before them in their appreciated service to the Church, this

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<sup>193</sup>Ibid.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid., no. 5.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid.



dissertation submits that a singular response should not be the goal of the new evangelization.

### RICOEUR'S WARRANTS FOR OPENNESS

As the naturalist fallacy indicates, the fact that multiplicity *is* the case does not imply that it *ought to be* the case. Ricoeur's narrative theory can help the Church to understand why and how the explosion of permutations is occurring. But the fact of its occurrence alone is insufficient to deem the coexistence of competing interpretations a healthy reality that the Church ought to embrace. In order to submit that openness to the innovation pole of *mimesis*<sub>2</sub> constitutes a preferable orientation to the new evangelism's multiplication, more is required than simply a description of the phenomenon. Ricoeur's theory supplies this warrant. The multiplication of innovations indeed constitutes a positive development because an expanded epistemological process—a process that is both aware of and open to multiple, coexisting voices—renews historical and individual self-understanding.<sup>200</sup> Thus Ricoeur's theory of narrative provides *both* a way to understand the burgeoning innovations of various narratives of evangelism *and* a way to interpret the myriad forms that the new evangelization is taking in a positive manner.

In light of the reciprocity between sedimentation and innovation that perpetually recurs as people continually comprehend their temporal existence, the multiplicity of permutations regarding the new evangelism was not only inevitable, but preferable. The very term *new* in the new evangelism connotes innovation. If the new evangelization closes itself off to innovative reconfiguration and seeks instead to champion a sedimented depository of propositional truth claims, then it renders itself no longer a *new* evangelism,

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<sup>200</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:247–8.

by definition. As Ricoeur's theory anticipated, and as this current project has elucidated, the construal of events surrounding the new globalized context brought about reconfigurations of the new evangelism with fresh interpretations of the call to proclaim.

As the Church cultivates the *ad intra* dimension of the new evangelism, she should come to welcome this coexistence as a healthy phenomenon in and of itself. Openness to narrative reconfiguration is the most loving, merciful, and just orientation that Christianity can adopt toward the suffering other.

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.<sup>201</sup>

Evangelization in the Christian tradition is about the love of God and the love of people. The defeated, the lost, and the suffering are the least of these, whose stories warrant narration. Most importantly, openness to narrative reconfiguration dignifies the lives of these suffering others by honoring their voices. An evangelism that ignores the defeated and the lost ignores the least of these, and consequently, ceases to be a Christian evangelism.

In addition, openness to innovative narrative reconfigurations promotes the growth of personal and social senses of identity. The epistemological circularity which, as Ricoeur freely admits, haunts his entire theory turns out to be a productive enterprise that advances the analysis.<sup>202</sup> The reciprocal dialectic between sedimentation and innovation is received as the narrative identity of individuals and communities. When

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<sup>201</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 1:75.

<sup>202</sup>*Ibid.*, 60.

human persons obtain narratives, they receive more than just the plotlines; people also receive a sense of individual and communal identity. As ongoing reconfigurations of narrative innovations are received across time, people may continually return to the same stories of themselves and their communities, but at higher elevations with every encounter. The reception of identity conveys a reciprocity in which the circularity of time and narrative is not a vicious circle, but a healthy spiral. In developing this point, Ricoeur refers to

the narrative identity of an individual or a people, stemming from the endless rectification of a previous narrative by a subsequent one, and from the chain of refigurations that results from this. In a word, narrative identity is the poetic resolution of the hermeneutic circle.<sup>203</sup>

As Ricoeur explains, the Jewish people do not merely receive the plotline of Israel's Exodus. Rather, in the hermeneutical spiral of *mimetic* activity, their community has always drawn its sense of identity from receiving the very narratives that it produces.

#### EXTENDED REFLECTION ON THE EXODUS STORY

To build upon Ricoeur's example, the Exodus narrative is not a singular deposit of claims that is either accepted or rejected. It never takes the form of concrete, unified answers for the people of God, like the unification that the synod is seeking regarding the new evangelism.<sup>204</sup> Rather, every generation continually interprets and reinterprets the Exodus traditions, according to the reception of the traditions, in the ongoing cultivation of the traditions themselves—as the people perpetually develop their sense of who they are. The Exodus has not been received in a singular, unified, concrete way. If

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<sup>203</sup>Ricoeur, *T & N*, 3:248.

<sup>204</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 4 & 5.

sedimented paradigms were to solidify into concrete structures, then lifeless deposits would result.

Instead of sedimentation, the Exodus reconfigures in every generation with newness, as God's children are set free from whatever currently enslaves them. Entering into the narrative presently, one may accept the invitation to become part of the unfolding story of salvation history and say yes to the freedom from bondage that God offers to whosoever wants it. As a new character in the Exodus story, one may then brave the deserts that follow because freedom is worth it, always hoping in the better world-to-come. Salvation is a covenantal relationship, not the acceptance or rejection of an intellectual assent to a solid deposit of unified claims. The continual reconfiguration of the Exodus narrative reminds the people of God that they do not possess the truth, the truth possesses them. Therefore, there always remains more to the mystery than has yet been revealed. If the Exodus narrative had adopted the form of a concrete, unified answer rather than a living narrative, it could not have retained its newness; so too with the new evangelism. Rather than seeking a concrete unification, the primary goal should seek an openness to coexisting narratives that allow *whosoever* to enter the story anew.

To the extent that people close themselves off from the healthy process of narrative reconfiguration, they limit their participation in the living traditions that this process produces. The mere acceptance or rejection of one sedimented and exclusive list of claims prevents active participation in a living, developing, and reconfiguring tradition; consequently, total narrative sedimentation without any room for innovation renders a previously vital narrative as a lifeless deposit. To ensure the vitality of the innovative reconfiguration process is to ensure the vitality of the living traditions and

senses of identity that narrative reconfigurations cultivate. Likewise, to the extent that people close themselves off from the healthy reconfiguration of perpetually-emerging new evangelization narratives, they close themselves off to the living traditions and to the narrative identities that these living traditions nurture.

With regard to the new Catholic evangelism in the United States presently, the Church is observing an explosion of permutations. In light of the way that emplotment can draw varying and divergent images from the same constellation of temporal fragments, this multiplicity was inevitable. At no point in the history of United States Catholicism has the relationship between religion and society been received in a singular way, as showcased in the discussion of context. As the sheer number of Catholics continues to grow along with the global awareness of religious plurality, a multiplicity of competing narratives is the unavoidable result, especially in light of capability of the productive human imagination to construct divergent plots from the same items. The explosion of permutations was inevitable.

More importantly, the explosion of permutations constitutes a positive development. The coexistence of competing narratives is challenging to contemporary theology, but this plurality is preferable to any singular narrative solidifying as the absolute norm. Narrative innovations protect the horizon of expectation from collapsing into the space of experience, they protect living traditions from collapsing into a single, solidified construct, and they protect the healthy narrative reconfiguration process that is constitutive of individual and personal identity; therefore, the phenomenon of innovative reconfiguration ought to be embraced. The coexistence of multiple, competing narratives is indeed a healthy, albeit challenging, situation. Not only does the application of

Ricoeur's theory of narrative help explain the reasons and mechanisms by which these reconfigurations of the new evangelism are multiplying in the United States, but this application also offers a way to understand the multiplicity of competing narratives as a healthy reality.

#### GENERAL THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS IN SUPPORT OF OPENNESS

The warrants for the current application of Ricoeur's theory to the new evangelism must transcend Ricoeurian thought by itself; because the present project constitutes an application of philosophy to theology, its warrants should incorporate theological criteria. Ricoeur already overlaps his philosophy into Biblical and theological considerations with his utilization of the Exodus narrative, with his plea for justice, and with his concern for those who suffer senses of defeat or loss. Building upon Ricoeur's engagements, the present project now proceeds to highlight some additional theological reflections in support of openness to reconfiguration.

As aforementioned, the people of God do not possess the totality of truth; rather, the truth possesses God's people, leaving uncharted mystery at every point in one's spiritual journey.<sup>205</sup> Truth in Christianity is therefore the pilgrim trajectory of a covenant people, not a possession. When Catholics treat truth like a concrete answer, they forget their present imperfection and perpetual need of the Redeemer. And when they understand themselves as the guardians of truth who safeguard the deposit from error, they presume a role that ultimately belongs to the Holy Spirit. The mystical body of Christ needs more parts than just white blood cells ever-attacking the invasions of error.

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<sup>205</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 36.

An openness to reconfiguration humbly realizes that Christ's followers have not yet attained perfection, including a perfection of knowledge. Instead Christians press on throughout their narratives, because *Christ Jesus made us his own* (see Philemon 3:12). An openness to reconfiguration better recognizes that people wrestle with God in the story of their relationship with God; after all, the name *Israel* literally translates to *struggles with God*. The faithful wrestle with the Almighty throughout the narrative of a covenantal relationship with God. Christianity can therefore never emphasize concrete answers to the neglect of wrestling in a mystery with God, whose ways and thoughts are higher. An openness to reconfiguration signifies a cognizance that the Church is not in the primary business of solving mysteries. Rather, God's people wrestle in mystery, fall more deeply in love with mystery, fill with bewildering awe and wonderment at the mystery, and seek growing understanding amidst mystery—a seeking that begins with faith.

Openness to reconfiguration reminds Christians that Christianity is not simply a matter of *orthodoxy* but also of *orthopraxis*; for Love, in whose image people were created, is action. When the lawyer recited the two greatest commandments in response to Jesus' question about what somebody must do to be saved, the Lord responded that salvation results from *doing this* (Luke 10:25–8). The Lord did not say that salvation results from an intellectual assent to a concrete, unified answer to a mystery; he did not say that the lawyer was already saved having given the correct answer. God's Name as revealed to Moses is a verb and rightfully so, for God is love, and love is something lived.

Christianity is more than concrete answers, for the demons believe and tremble. As Chesterton said, “The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.”<sup>206</sup> Not only does the seeking of concrete, unified answers miss the point, but such seeking is dangerous. One could possess the knowledge of men and angels yet produce nothing but a noisy racket (1 Corinthians 13). From the foot-washing story to the contrast between Martha and Mary; from the Good Samaritan to James’ presentation of the brand of religion that God honors—Christianity is a matter of *doing*. The present writer already extended Ricoeur’s use of the Exodus paradigm into some theological considerations which portray the reconfiguration of narratives as more appropriate to Christianity than a framework of solid, doctrinal deposits. Additional reflection now provides foundational theological criteria that warrant the call for openness to narrative reconfiguration.

#### SPECIFIC REFLECTION ON DIVINE REVELATION

The willingness to embrace the coexistence of competing stories finds backing not only in a cognitive theory of emplotment, but also from the foundational theology of divine revelation, to bring this entire project full circle. One may understand theology as *faith seeking understanding*. In other words, theology begins with faith. Theological studies can exhibit an intellectual sophistication and scholarly erudition that convey faith as reasonable rather than blind; however, one must remember that faith remains the starting point. In another sense, theology is about God caring enough about creation to provide humanity with divine revelation so that people could know their Creator. In other words, theology must field many relevant questions, yes, but theology’s starting

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<sup>206</sup>Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *What’s Wrong with the World?* (London: Cassell & Co., Ltd., 1910), 39.



point—faith—is fundamentally a graced virtue that makes theological speculation possible to begin with. Stated alternatively, faith is a gift of grace from God that helps people to hear God’s voice and assent to belief. Faith strengthens the intellect to understand; thus, this graced virtue and gift of faith leads to the virtue of strength in facing the numerous challenges inherent to theological reflection.

More specifically, theological study wrestles with the questions of who does theology and how, of what one does when one deals with theology, of how religious faith relates to reason, and of how revelation and authority relate to doctrine. Foundational theology, then, articulates the grid upon which the theologian places all of these various content pieces. In particular, divine revelation constitutes one of the cores of this foundation. To explain, all of the various topics and issues with which theologians wrestle have divine revelation implicitly or explicitly in the background, in the groundwork upon which all theological speculation rests. Believers know about divinity through God’s self-communication to humanity; people know God through divine revelation.

In other words, Christianity affirms that its teaching was *revealed by God*, not *discovered by people*.<sup>207</sup> Consequently, the doctrine of revelation plays a central role in the life of the Christian Church and in the foundations of theology. An important part of Vatican II’s deliberations articulated a response to questions of the authority given to sources of revelation, and to questions regarding the value of the historical-critical method and other modern hermeneutical frameworks employed by many Protestants in interpreting the Sacred Scriptures. The Second Vatican Council’s *Dogmatic Constitution*

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<sup>207</sup>Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America*, 132–7.

*on Divine Revelation* delineates salient points that are important for understanding the doctrine of revelation. As the document states:

In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15, 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14–15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself.<sup>208</sup>

Christianity does not claim that people, in their cleverness and on their own merits, *discovered* truth about God. In contrast, Christianity proclaims that God *revealed* to the creation in love.

According to the *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, Christ is both the *mediator* as well as the *fullness* of all divine revelation.<sup>209</sup> When humans communicate, they do so with language. Language constitutes *what people say* to one another, whether through actions, through body language, or through the verbal utterances of words and sounds. This point might seem obvious on the surface, but the point is necessary to explicate the profound depth of the mystery of Christ *as* God's revelation to humanity. To explain, while human beings are limited to language when communicating, God knows no such limitations—words do not bind the God for whom nothing is impossible. That is, God can say things in ways other than the verbal utterances and other forms of language that people commonly employ. When Saint John calls Christ the *Logos* (the *Word*), he is in effect explaining that Christ is *what God said* to humanity. God self-

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<sup>208</sup>Paul VI, *Dei Verbum (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation)*, (Vatican City, 1965): no. 2.

<sup>209</sup>*Ibid.*

communicated to creation in the person of the Son. God did not merely speak a word, rather God spoke the Word—God *spoke a person* to creation. Again, Christ is what God said to humanity, God’s Word to people. For Christianity, then, Christ is the fullest expression of God’s self-communication, *the fullness of all revelation*.<sup>210</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE DOCTRINE OF DIVINE REVELATION

The reflection on divine revelation grounds the present work’s chief theological warrants for openness, beginning with the notion of the development of doctrine—a development that has occurred in the Church’s doctrine on divine revelation. In addition to Christ as God’s ultimate self-disclosure, God also communicated through the Sacred Scriptures, which were written down by the Biblical writers, and through Church tradition, which was handed down from one generation of God’s people to the next. Consequently, Scripture and tradition comprise other sources, in addition to Christ, of divine revelation. The *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* calls the Church to accept and venerate both Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition *with the same sense of loyalty and reverence*.<sup>211</sup> The document describes a *single common effort* between the faithful and the bishops in sharing a common sacramental life that holds steadfast to the Apostles’ teaching.<sup>212</sup>

One can compare and contrast this understanding of divine revelation from Vatican II’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* with the two previous Church councils of Trent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and Vatican I from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Specifically, the

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., no. 9.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., no. 10.

Church held the Council of Trent in response to Luther's ninety-five theses and the subsequent Protestant Reformation. Concerned with the issue of legitimate membership, Trent worked at defining the boundaries of authentic Christianity. Trent affirmed Scripture and tradition as sources of revelation, but emphasized the Biblical books as *containers*. To explain, Scripture and tradition together formed the deposit of faith, but Trent portrayed this deposit as a sort of direct dictation of revelation into the containers of the Biblical books.

Trent's fourth session devoted itself entirely to the Sacred Scriptures, employing this language of divine revelation as being dictated by the Holy Spirit. With only twenty-five to thirty bishops in attendance, Trent described Biblical revelation as

the fountain ... of both saving truth and moral discipline; and seeing clearly that this truth and discipline are contained in the written books, and the unwritten traditions which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down even unto us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand<sup>213</sup> (underlining added for emphasis).

A deposit of propositional truth claims was thus understood to have been dictated by the Holy Spirit and possessed in truth-containers; in the tradition's conception of a union between church and state, Roman Catholicism understood itself to have special authority to determine the *true sense* of the truth captured in its Biblical containers.<sup>214</sup>

For Trent, the Catholic Church and the state exemplified the two forms of perfect society. This understanding did not correspond with moral perfection, but rather viewed

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<sup>213</sup>Fourth Session Council of Trent, "*Canonical*" Decree, *Concerning the Canonical Scriptures* (Vatican City, April 8, 1546), 1.

<sup>214</sup>*Ibid.*, 2. In my opinion, this depiction of direct dictation from God into the containers of the Biblical books is far more compatible with an Islamic view of inspiration than a Judeo-Christian understanding of inspiration.

a perfect society as a complete institution whose origins and possessions afford what is necessary to accomplish its mission. Viewing the Roman Catholic Church as a perfect society, only Roman Catholicism had authority to judge *the true sense and interpretation* of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>215</sup> This statement, in contrast to the ecumenical attitude in Vatican II which affirmed the appropriateness of various Protestant modes of interpretation, clearly conveys Trent's reaction against the Protestant Reformation; and analogously reiterates the importance of historical context.<sup>216</sup>

Several centuries after the Council of Trent, in 1864 Pius IX called Vatican I in response to the onset of the modern age. Modernity embraced philosophical paradigms such as materialism, rationalism, naturalism, pantheism, and atheism. In the Church's desire to respond to these modern ideologies, around 800 bishops attended Vatican I and drafted several significant works such as *Paster Aeternus* dealing with the jurisdictional primacy and infallibility of the pope, and *Dei Filius* dealing with faith, reason, and their interpretation.<sup>217</sup> In particular, Vatican I's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith* echoes much of Trent's treatment of revelation in its emphasis upon the dictation of the Holy Spirit, and in its presentation of the Biblical books as containers.

...supernatural revelation ... is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, having been received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ himself; or from the Apostles themselves, by the

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<sup>215</sup>Fourth Session Council of Trent, "*Canonical*" Decree, 2.

<sup>216</sup>Theology is necessarily situated within the context of any given era, just as any human narrator is. As such, theology frequently takes place in response to challenges against faith at any given point in history. Bearing in mind that each Church council responds to specifically time-bound concerns, perhaps the development of doctrine might seem less alarming to those allergic to change.

<sup>217</sup>McAvoy, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, 211–4.

dictation of the Holy Spirit, have been transmitted, as it were, from hand to hand. And these books of the Old and New Testament are to be received as sacred and canonical, in their integrity, with all their parts, as they are...contained in the ancient Latin edition of the Vulgate<sup>218</sup> (underlining added for emphasis).

This Vatican I explication, like Trent's earlier depiction, understands the deposit of faith as administered in propositional truth statements.

Ultimately then for both Trent and Vatican I, divine revelation comprises the source of propositional truth claims necessary for salvation, administered via dictation and containment.<sup>219</sup> Vatican II's presentation differs in ways from the presentations in both Trent and Vatican I regarding this same topic. In contrast to the prior councils' notions of the agency through which divine revelation is administered, Vatican II exhibited a personalist tone in its treatment of Holy Spirit inspiration and its relation to the role of the human authors. Vatican II specified that *those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture* constituted the result of a divine inspiration that involved human authors.<sup>220</sup> While still adopting the terminology of *containment*, Vatican II places a new emphasis upon the role of the human authors. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these human authors exercised their powers and capacities *as true authors*.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>Third Session Council of Vatican I, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith* (Vatican City, April 24, 1870), Chapter II: *Of Revelation*.

<sup>219</sup>The understanding of the Bible conveyed by *Dei Filius* undoubtedly contributed to the practice of proof texting which often pulls statements of *propositional truth* out of context. Ironically, for a document that reacted against rationalism, this period piece incorporates a number of rationalistic arguments.

<sup>220</sup>Paul VI, *Dei Verbum*, no. 11.

<sup>221</sup>*Ibid.*

However, since God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion, the interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, should carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what God wanted to manifest by means of their words. To search out the intention of the sacred writers, attention should be given, among other things, to “literary forms.” For truth is set forth and expressed differently in texts which are variously historical, prophetic, poetic, or of other forms of discourse. The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express and actually expressed in particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture. For the correct understanding of what the sacred author wanted to assert, due attention must be paid to the customary and characteristic styles of feeling, speaking and narrating which prevailed at the time of the sacred writer, and to the patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.<sup>222</sup>

The portrayal of revelation through divine dictation into containers from Trent and Vatican I *developed* into Vatican II’s emphasis upon searching the literary forms of human culture and context. Development is apparent. After all, Pope John XXIII and Vatican II’s call for *aggiornamento* was a call for *reform*.

Davidson summarizes this overall development as a series of shifts in thinking. Prior to Vatican II, the understanding of revelation stressed the Church as a bureaucracy. In the bureaucracy’s role of safeguarding the deposit, special emphasis was placed upon episcopal authority, the Church’s distinctiveness, her importance, and the significance of knowing and obeying her teachings. After Vatican II, however, the thinking changed to emphasize the Church as the people of God more than a bureaucracy. Individual conscience became emphasized over and above episcopal authority. And interfaith similarities supplemented thoughts about Catholic distinctiveness. The notions of *personal relationship with God, being a good Christian, and thinking for oneself* increased in emphasis while the stress upon the distinctive importance of the Church

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<sup>222</sup>Ibid., no. 12.

declined.<sup>223</sup> Conscientious relationship is now understood as mattering more than merely knowing and obeying a dictated and contained depository of propositional truth statements. The doctrine of revelation is thus not a sedimented deposit but a dynamic, living tradition that grows and changes throughout its development. The doctrine of revelation has reconfigured.

#### DOCTRINAL DEVELOPMENT ELSEWHERE IN THE TRADITION

The development of doctrine manifests itself throughout Judeo-Christian tradition in numerous ways. Regarding the prophetic voice, established structures repeatedly responded to the prophets with an initial sense of threat and attempt to silence the voice, then future acceptance and eventual transformation. Many of the first Christians included the repentant people at Peter's Pentecost sermon who had at first rejected Christ's prophetic message (Acts 2). Mirroring these phenomena, Church tradition has often frequently witnessed the narrative of the heretic whose voice became orthodoxy during the following generation. After all, not even Thomas Aquinas, the Church's *angelic doctor*, was received in his own day.

In addition, the development of doctrine has included competing narratives standing side-by-side in simultaneous tension. For example, the Christian tradition has always allowed the Deuteronomic principle to stand in simultaneous tension with the Wisdom literature. According to the theology of the Deuteronomic History, right actions have good outcomes while wrong actions have wicked outcomes. This theme of reaping what one sows is explained thoroughly in Deuteronomy, then the theological principle continues to guide the historical books that follow. Joshua, Judges, First and Second

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<sup>223</sup>Davidson, "The Catholic Church in the United States," in *The Church Confronts Modernity*, 190–5.



Samuel, and First and Second Kings all explain the wayward history of Israel according to this Deuteronomic principle. When Israel made good choices, good consequences resulted; bad choices resulted in exile.

However, the Bible also includes the writings of the Wisdom literature such as Ecclesiastes and Job, which discuss the reality of innocent suffering. This reality of innocent suffering provides a check-and-balance system against applying Deuteronomy's formula in every case. Sometime people suffer because they face the negative consequences of sinful actions. And other times people are innocent, but they suffer anyway, as Christ himself demonstrated. Both realities happen; consequently, one cannot conclude fault from suffering.

When Jesus healed a blind man, some people questioned Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:3) Their question implied fault from suffering—an application of the Deuteronomic formula to the neglect of the Wisdom literature. Jesus' reply to their question indicated that the infirmity did not constitute a reaping of what had been sown. Allowing the competing narratives of the Deuteronomic principle and the Wisdom literature to coexist in perpetual tension is precisely what provides a fullness of truth. If this plurality had compelled Israel's leadership to articulate a concrete, unified answer as they passed down their sacred texts through the generations, then this fullness would have been tragically lost.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTRINE ON THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Such doctrinal development has also occurred in the development of the new evangelism specifically. John Paul II reiterated his predecessor's call for a new evangelism in *Redemptoris Missio*. At the same, by stressing the problem of *widespread*

*indifferentism* and the need for re-evangelization, the pope afforded special focus upon the new evangelism's inward aspect.<sup>224</sup> John Paul II thus reinterpreted the call in a new way. John Paul II deemphasized his predecessor's discussion regarding the new evangelization's *ad extra* dimension of outward proclamation and reoriented the new evangelism's primary emphasis to the interiority of the Church. Catholic tradition regarding the new evangelism has treated John Paul II's emphases as being just as valid as his predecessor's; hence, the magisterium has already recognized multiple configurations of the call to proclaim as being different, and at the same time, mutually authentic.

Even the working document—the same document that asks for concrete, unified answers in response to the diversity of initiatives—itsself represents a development of doctrine. Prior to the recent synod on the new evangelism, the movement's novelty had been consistently located in its expression, with an emphasis on the continuity of the *content* of the message.<sup>225</sup> As Dulles summarized the prevailing opinion as of 1995, the new evangelization is *new* in its *ardor, methods, expressions, energy, style, and language*, but it *cannot be new in its content*.<sup>226</sup> But now in 2012, the synod's working document on the new evangelization draws attention to the newness of the content itself; that content being Jesus Christ, who is always new.<sup>227</sup> The new evangelism can remember the lesson of John Courtney Murray, one of the chief catalyzing forces for the new

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<sup>224</sup>John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, nos. 32, 33, 36, 34.

<sup>225</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 28.

<sup>226</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup>*Instrumentum Laboris*, preface.

evangelism in the United States: his theology (of church-state separation and his coinciding call for religious freedom) had been silenced by the very same Church that later endorsed it. The Church's endorsement of Murray's *American* idea authenticated innovation itself.

#### OPENNESS TO RECONFIGURATION BEARS WITNESS TO FAITH

The development of the new evangelization has showcased that Church doctrines can change through their development. Openness to such reconfiguration facilitates this natural process, and it allows grace to build upon this natural process according to the Lord's promise that the gates of hell will not prevail against his body. The very notion of concrete, unified answers constitutes a faulty idea that attempts to bend the Christian mysteries into something that fits comfortably into human understanding. But if the revelation is to be faithfully trusted as authoritative and powerful enough to save, then the Church must bend to that authority, rather than trying to bend that authority to human comprehension. If revealed mysteries are forced into controlled, unified, concrete formulae, then God is no longer worshipped as sovereign.

In light of the two-fold darkness of sin and ignorance revealed through divine revelation, the gospel call is not to understand but to trust. When people attempt to satisfy their current, darkened, human understanding with the false sense of security that concrete, unified answers purport to offer, these people actually forget the salvation message in playing sovereign for themselves. The wild and awesome God revealed in Christianity always resists human attempts at taming. When Moses sought a designation that would identify the God of his forefathers to the Egyptians, God resisted the

encapsulation and limitation of human titles, responding with the powerful and profound self-affirmation of sovereignty: I AM WHO AM.

The development of doctrine illustrates that the Catholic Church already embraces reconfiguration both broadly throughout the traditions and specifically in the development of the new evangelization. The Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church through this process of doctrinal development, a process of reconfiguration. Against every purpose of evangelism, to favor a false sense of concrete answers over and above an openness to narrative reconfiguration fails to bear witness to the Church's faith in the Holy Spirit's trustworthy guidance over the process of salvation history. Openness to reconfiguration renews spiritual vitality inwardly as one trusts the Lord's promise never to abandon the Church; openness to reconfiguration renews spiritual vitality outwardly with a public witness that the Church places her trust in God, not in human understanding. Openness to narrative reconfiguration is more than just a preferred posture toward the innovative multiplication of the new Catholic evangelization; it is itself an integral component of evangelism.

#### THE SENSE OF THE FAITHFUL

The reflection on the Holy Spirit's guidance over the development of doctrine now leads to one final theological warrant for embracing an openness to reconfiguring narratives; in particular, the role of theologians and of the sense of the faithful across the entire Church. Trent and Vatican I give no attention to the role of grace at work in the intellectual and volitional capacity of all believers. In other words, no attention is given to personal and communal discernment. This absence raises the question of the appropriate roles that nonordained people of God and theologians play in the

interpretation and reception of revelation, especially contrasted with the role of the hierarchical Church authority. According to Catholicism, hierarchical Church authority holds the office of interpreting and handing on the *kerygma*. The magisterium, in an unbroken line of apostolic succession, comprises the visible center of authority in its ordained hierarchy. This authority gives the Church hierarchy the responsibility of interpreting the Sacred Scriptures and determining Church doctrine.

However, a significant difference exists between the *content of faith* as the magisterium presents it, and the *theological elucidation* of this content. Herein lies the role of the theologians; that is, theological scholars are responsible for shedding light upon nuanced considerations, raising and addressing the significant questions, and discussing philosophical insights and connections. One of the Church's chief concerns in present-day Christianity is the tension between the content of faith that calls for assent, and theologians' illuminating expositions of the faith, within which a certain level of questioning is necessarily appropriate. On one side, people are concerned that theologians, in their intellectual explications on the content of faith, might break with Church dogmas and become deceived—and in turn, deceive others.

On the other hand, people are concerned that, in the interest of avoiding dissent, an atmosphere of excessive rigidity will constrict theologians from performing their important vocational task in the body of Christ of contributing insights and developments from deep theological reflection. Notwithstanding the negative facets of this tension, the respective roles played by the magisterium and by theologians are both critical to the interpretation and reception of divine revelation. A healthy respiration between these two groups can work to maintain continuity while simultaneously

cultivating an appropriate space for dialogue and reflection. These two bodies can continuously breathe in the contributions of the other with the primary goal of being nourished by the good, and the secondary goal of exhaling error. Until the Church is perfect, and that definitely is not yet the case, both inhalation and exhalation are always required for ongoing life and growth.

The nonordained people of God also play a vital role in the interpretation and reception of revelation. The *sensus fidei* refers to an instinctive sense of the faith in Church laity that enables the nonordained people of God to realize divine revelation. In other words, a person does not need to be a bishop or a theological professor to have the capability to distinguish divine revelation; rather, God's grace provides all of God's people with this instinctive capacity for discernment. The *sensus fidei* recognizes the legitimacy of authentic discernment among the nonordained people of God in detecting divine revelation.

In addition, the *sensus fidelium* refers to the reception of the community as a whole to Church teaching. The *sensus fidelium* examines to what extent the whole Church community, including the laity, considers a doctrine to be revelatory. For instance, when Pope Pius XXII proclaimed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, he did not simply decide from ivory-tower speculation that he would invent a Church teaching. Rather, he solicited the help of the bishops to determine if the idea of the Immaculate Conception was a normative belief according to the *sensus fidelium*. As individual diocese polled their laity and reported back to the magisterium, Pius XXII saw that the Church community as a whole was conceiving of this particular theological

notion in a revelatory manner.<sup>228</sup> In other words, although the Pope made the declaration, the *sensus fidelium*, which included the *sensus fidei* of the laity, informed his discernment.

Ideally, the magisterium, the theologians, and the laity cooperate in the discernment process and speak with a collaborative voice. Such a family bond of friendship and mutual interdependency best reflects a healthy body in which all the parts contribute to the whole. This communal bond bears witness that Church teaching was not *discovered by people* but rather *revealed* to people by God. Conversely, the authority of the Church is weakened whenever there is no *sensus fidelium* that heeds the voices of all three groups. The respiration of the body of Christ must include inhalation and exhalation from the *sensus fidei*. For example, most United States Catholics approve of women's ordination. The magisterial hierarchy is still presently exhaling the narrative of women's ordination; but the Church has already reconfigured against that narrative by permitting women chancellors and pastors.<sup>229</sup> Thus the Church can and has listened to controversial narratives before, and does not have to live in fear of the challenges and changes that coincide with these narratives. The Church must always truly listen to the narratives of the *sensus fidei*, dignify the people whose voices write these stories, and allow the reconfigurations that result from inhalation.

Forces of sedimentation comprise senses of resistance to the process of narrative innovation, but the tendency to clarify the concrete has not stopped the natural and inevitable reconfiguration pole of the second *mimetic* relation as it continually interprets

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<sup>228</sup>Morris, *American Catholic*, 71.

<sup>229</sup>Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 230.

and reinterprets the stories of American Catholicity. Likewise, forces of reconfiguration comprise innovative reworkings of received structures, but the tendency to write new stories has not stopped the natural and inevitable sedimentation pole of the second *mimetic* relation as it continually seeks a unified concretization. The current project has shown that across every century of United States Catholicism, both poles have been at work in an observable pattern of interpretive reciprocity. As faith seeks understanding in Christian theology, a comprehension of this narrative dynamic can help the Church better recognize what is happening in the new evangelism as a natural, inevitable, and healthy process. Most importantly, reconfigurations can be met with a dignifying and open hearing rather than with fear and suspicion. After all, a *new* evangelism is by definition an evangelization of the *innovative*.



## CONCLUSION

### HOPE FOR OPENNESS

This project calls for an openness to narrative reconfiguration because the process of innovation honors an ongoing struggle with God in intimate covenant. Christians, in loving relationship with God and one another, journey on a pilgrim trajectory which increasingly approaches truth. They do not possess the truth as some depository totality; rather, the truth possesses them, and there is always more to the mystery than has yet been revealed. Narratives open to reconfiguration are rendered more true than narratives which close themselves off to such reconfiguration because openness honors mystery, and because openness dignifies those whose voices have been marginalized or silenced.

As the stories of Christian lives unfold, the endlessly reconfiguring narratives are formative of identity for individuals and for communities. To the extent that narratives close themselves off to reconfiguration, they close themselves off to the senses of identity that such reconfiguration cultivates. The people of God are not defined by any arrogant and alleged full understanding of God; instead, they walk and grow in love relationships with God and with each other across the stories of their lives. For all of these reasons, an openness to narrative reconfiguration honors the fact that Israel means *wrestles with God*.

The humble hope of this project is that the Church may increase her level of openness to the process of narrative reconfiguration, especially as the new evangelism is adopting such a considerable number of program initiatives. The humble hope is that, rather than seeking concrete unified answers above all else, the bishops currently working on the new evangelism would embrace the coexistence of competing narratives. The

humble hope is that the Church will better understand truth not as something which the Church possesses and protects, but as Someone who possesses and protects the Church. The humble hope is that the Church will increase her understanding of truth as the aim of a pilgrim trajectory rather than a safe-guarded deposit. These convictions relinquish the hegemony of human understanding and instead surrender the primacy of theological inquiry to God. By honoring mystery, such convictions allow for covenantal relationship, wrestling, and breathing room; as opposed to intellectual assent, sated human understanding, and suffocation. These warrants for reconfiguration hereby render an openness to narrative innovation as part of evangelization itself.

#### THE PROBLEMATIC OF CHRISTOLOGY

Ricoeur's theory and related theological reflection, especially reflection on the foundational theology of divine revelation, has provided a system that warrants the call for increased openness to the process of narrative reconfiguration as the new Catholic evangelization continues its development in the United States. But the current project is not without its difficulties. This conclusion addresses some of the questions, challenges, and frontiers for further research as regards an application of Ricoeur's narrative theory to the new evangelism. The present work does not attempt to solve these mysteries. But reflexivity would have this current project incur a wrestling with these problematic areas and concerns.

The present writer sees the greatest problematic in the establishment of normativity with regard to Christology. Any dogmatic tradition is by its nature as dogma a sedimented narrative. The story of Jesus the Messiah is a narrative that became the accepted, established structure for understanding the identity of Jesus within the faith

convictions of a Christian framework. If a competing story reconfigures this established paradigm for understanding Jesus with a narrative innovation, then a foundational teaching definitive of the Christian message can become compromised. A reconfiguration of the Messiah narrative alters an essential piece of the faith that is constitutive of Christ's identity. As part of the Christian faith itself, any innovation of the Christ's meaning in the unfolding story of salvation history thereby constitutes a change in the faith tradition of Christianity. Traditionally, attempted changes to the creedal affirmations of Christianity have been deemed apostate or even heretical at points.

By calling for openness to narrative reconfiguration, especially to the innovation of sedimented paradigms, this project admittedly faces the difficulty of establishing normativity amidst reconfiguration. By honoring the infinite mystery of God, a position of openness to innovation raises the question of what theological truths may yet be located within that mystery. If the mystery contains some presently veiled theological truth that reworks the Messiah narrative, foundational Christology becomes uncertain. It is not enough to claim that, presently, no such narrative exists as Christian, because an openness to reconfiguration may imply an openness to the *possibility* of such a foundation-altering narrative of Christ's identity. Once Christianity embraces an openness to narrative innovations that reinterpret Jesus' identity as the Christ, the very possibility throws the creed into ambiguity. Under the current call for openness, the voices of past heretics could be viewed as silenced voices that warrant the dignity of a narrative hearing deemed authentic.

To advance the problematic, Jesus the Messiah constitutes one of numerous presentations of Jesus in Christology. When one also considers the doctrines of a God-

man who is completely human and completely divine simultaneously, Jesus the healer, Jesus the teacher, the risen Christ as savior, the triumphant Christ expected at the eschaton, and the earthly Jesus as prophet, to name a few, the problematic multiplies exponentially according to the degree of openness permitted in a system that welcomes reconfiguration. One may also present the problematic from a perspective *via negativa*—by way of what God is not. To explain, if an orientation of openness remains unchecked, patently absurd narratives might be deemed authentic. Jesus, whose own openness to people from outside the Jewish community attracted suspicion and attack, might be painted with narratives such as Jesus the tyrannical condemner, Jesus the violent abuser, or Jesus the bigoted warlord. Such depictions betray all known information about Jesus, and reduce the creed to a relativistic vacuum; stated alternatively, if all characterizations of Jesus are authentic then none of them are.

### THE PROBLEMATIC OF ECCLESIOLOGY

The Christological problematic extends into an Ecclesiological problematic as well. The community component of any religious tradition sets parameters for inclusivity and exclusivity. If any narrative of Christ is considered to be a valid possibility within the realm of mystery, then Christ's Church becomes an indeterminate absence rather than a living mystical body. Those included within and excluded from a community define the community's identity. Even if boundaries are blurry and disputed at points, some degree of definitive parameters purports some sense of which persons comprise a community and which persons do not.

Just as it would make no sense by definition for a group of atheists to understand themselves as integral members of an Islamic community of believers, Christianity

obviously must have enough meaning to identify who is part of the Christian community. A standard of total inclusivity for a religious community is not Christian by definition; rather, such a standard is indicative of philosophical Hinduism. The creed determines some sense of community, and the Christian creed presents faith claims about Christ that delineate Christ's followers. Creedal faith traditions safeguard the narrative of the Christian *qua* Christian. A position of unchecked openness to any or all narrative innovations as authentic possibilities in the realm of mystery constitutes an innocuous position that empties Ecclesiology of any substantial content.

#### SEEKING SPACE WITHIN WHICH TO WRESTLE

Clearly, openness cannot go unchecked. Unchecked openness to any narrative innovation as potentially authentic fails to preserve the Christian narrative as Christian. Even amidst blurry and disputed theological borders, some level of normativity must remain. When Ricoeur handles historical narratives in the third volume of his trilogy, he protects history's truth project according to the horizon of expectation and the space of experience. In this dialectic reciprocity, the horizon of expectation protects the truth that history seeks from the limitations of a sedimented, exclusive narrative. At the same time, the space of experience grounds historical narratives from evacuating into the horizon of the expectations of the narrators. History narrates the contextualized components of the plot, and the space of human experience occurs in context. History cannot become a hermeneutical free-for-all of interpretations because historical narratives emplot lived human experience. Contextualized space thus places limitations upon the imaginative expectations of sense-making emplotments, thereby preserving history's truth project from the problem of any narrative being deemed authentic.

At the same time, imaginative expectation allows for innovation and reconfigurations that also protect truth from collapsing into a singular, exclusive, sedimented paradigm of understanding. The interplay between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation is thus an extrapolation of the dialectic between sedimentation and innovation. This reciprocity sets the parameters within which competing narratives can coexist as mutually authentic while no singular narrative is exclusively normative. This reciprocity protects the goal—of learning what is true in human history—from narrative constriction and from narrative anarchy at the same time.

Ricoeur's answer to history's truth project is helpful to the present project because Christianity is a historical religion. God's saving agency intersected human history; blatantly ridiculous Christologies such as Jesus as a cruel miser can be ruled out because they contradict the space of experience. The best records of Jesus' earthly life such as Luke's Gospel may not answer every question, but these records rule out the absurd. They showcase the context and provide enough information regarding the space of Jesus' actual experience to rule out fantastical plotlines that bear no resemblance to the space of Jesus' contextualized experiences. The reciprocity between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation hereby frames a theological region within which competing narratives may coexist in simultaneous tension as mutually authentic, without any singular narrative deemed exclusively normative. Normativity broadens to include the coexistence itself of authentic narratives while rejecting those with no attachment to the space of experience.

Jesus the greedy entrepreneur addicted to the accumulation of monetary wealth by any means necessary becomes a narrative that is exhaled as inauthentic. Meanwhile,

Jesus the Messiah and Jesus the advocate of the marginalized can coexist in tension as authentic narratives; the multiplicity itself of authentic narratives is normative. There is indeed a real tension here, for Christ's advocacy with the marginalized can extend to the marginalized of today's society, which includes Woman Church and Catholics who support gay marriage. Such extensions often create a deep sense of unease for conservatives who emphasize Christ's Messianic identity.

But both *Messiah* and *advocate of the marginalized* connect with the space of experience; consequently, the current project calls for the coexistence of these competing narratives amidst disagreement. The resulting tensions can contribute to a fullness and stimulate further inquiry. Inasmuch as Christianity is a historical religion, Ricoeur's protections for history's truth project help establish a framework for theological inquiry. Regarding the Christological and related problematics, the reciprocal dialectic between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation offers a degree of assistance in establishing authenticity and normativity amidst multiplicity.

Ricoeur's safeguard applies specifically to the truth project of historical narratives. Theology also has a truth project in that theology seeks to learn truth. But just as history asks different questions than theology, the kinds of truth sought in each discipline differ. As a historical religion, Christianity observes considerable overlap between historical considerations and theological ones. At the same time, history and theology also have points of departure in which their respective explorations follow different trajectories. Since the truth project of theology extends past the space of

experience into the transcendent, Ricoeur's safeguard is insufficient by itself to address all of the theological problematics discussed.<sup>1</sup>

### RETURN TO DIVINE REVELATION

The space of experience may set some limits against invalid narratives of the historical Jesus, but the space of experience is insufficient in establishing normativity with regard to the truth of the sacramental presence of Christ in the Eucharist, purgatory, the efficacy of prayer, the eschaton, judgment day, the place of other religious claims in Christianity, the afterlife, human agency in doctrinal development, and so forth. Such theological truths—which the Church approaches, wrestles with, is possessed by, heads toward, and explores—are truths that transcend the temporal order; therefore, the strictures for establishing normativity and authenticity appeal to transcendence. In particular, the establishment of normativity and authenticity must appeal to the transcendence of the revelation.

Just as reflection on the doctrine of revelation established theological warrants for openness, revelation simultaneously helps set some degree of a ceiling for valid theological speculation as well. The recent synod's primary objective of articulating a unified and concrete answer in response to multiplicity has received the focused critique of this current project. Such a position constitutes a return to Tridentine thinking that seeks to clearly define a dictated containment of revealed orthodoxy. The present

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<sup>1</sup>Ricoeur devoted the second volume of his trilogy to fictional narratives and the third volume to historical ones. His treatment of historical narratives is appropriate to Christianity as a historical religion, but ceases to be sufficient where theology and history depart in their respective questions of truth. If only Ricoeur had added a fourth volume to his *Time & Narrative* series that dealt specifically with theological narratives; yet the absence affords me with this present opportunity to wrestle creatively at the frontiers where historical and theological narratives overlap, and where they take their points of departure.



project's call for openness is not itself an innovation, but a return to a call already identified by the *aggiornamento* of the Catholic papacy; therefore the synod can honor Catholic tradition without returning to Trent. For instance, in John Paul II's contributions to the new evangelization, the pontiff recognized years ago that the new evangelism would adopt a considerable number of initiatives. As Cardinal Dulles says:

John Paul II has not sought to prescribe in detail the methods and modalities of the new evangelization, which will inevitably take on distinct hues in different situations. He is content to provide the stimulus for local initiatives.<sup>2</sup>

The pope allows for reconfigurations of Catholic evangelization, a missionary enterprise that ultimately roots in the revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the Great Commission in particular. Just as the Christian revelation was the genesis for evangelization, which is expected to adopt a variety of expressions, the revelation also helps establish some degree of limitation.

John Paul II avoided detailed prescriptions and allowed a plurality of local initiatives to take shape with regard to the new evangelism, a movement grounded in the revelation. The pope also appeals to the revelation to help set some parameters within which a multiplicity of different narratives can coexist. He declared that the theme of evangelization is always the gospel given in Jesus Christ. If evangelization derived from human understanding and circumstance, "it would not be 'gospel' but mere human invention, and there would be no salvation in it."<sup>3</sup> John Paul II's appeal to the revelation in order to avoid unchristian narratives echoes the work of his predecessor.

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<sup>2</sup>Dulles, "What Does it Mean?" in *JP II & the New Evangelization*, 29.

<sup>3</sup>John Paul II, *Opening Address*, Santo Domingo, October 12, 1992, no. 6; English trans. In Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Santo Domingo and Beyond* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 44–5.

Also authenticating multiplicity, Paul VI proposed a broad and inclusive concept of the new evangelization. Again, just as the revelation was the origin of Christian evangelism which permits a broad and inclusive range of plural expressions, the revelation is simultaneously Paul VI's theological vaccine against potential errors.

There is no true evangelization if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed. . . . Many, even generous Christians . . . are frequently tempted to reduce [the Church's] mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a man-centered goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order. But if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. She knows through revelation . . . that not every notion of liberation is necessarily consistent and compatible with an evangelical vision of man.<sup>4</sup>

The revelation grounds the call for openness, and the revelation simultaneously sets some level of restriction that protects the truth project of Christian theology. The creedal fundamentals that comprise the essential content of the Christian revelation cannot be contradicted by mere human innovation; one cannot have Christianity without Trinity, for example. A wholesale rejection of the Trinity is no longer a Christian voice by definition. To safeguard the narrative of the Christian as Christian, the revelation of God as Trinity cannot be silenced. The revelation thus safeguards the Christian voice as Christian, and upholds the Church's prophetic voice to the rest of the world amidst a liberal degree of doctrinal breathing room.

This appeal to the revelation, although it supersedes an application of narrative theory, nonetheless remains consistent with a Ricoeurian approach because Ricoeur appeals to transcendence as his warrant for the legitimacy of philosophy in the first place.

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<sup>4</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 22, 31–33, 35.

Accused of transcendental idealism, Ricoeur is more ready than most philosophers to relate this transcendence to the God of the Judeo-Christian revelation. Critiqued for his level of optimism that locates meaningful purpose in philosophizing, Ricoeur's response declares that one must appeal to transcendence eventually, for *the Ego must more radically renounce the covert claim of all consciousness, must abandon its wish to posit itself*.<sup>5</sup> If not, one will never break *the sterile cycle of the self's constant return to itself* for meaning.<sup>6</sup> Only *the nourishing and inspiring spontaneity* of something transcending the self can break the lifeless cycle of self-reliance.<sup>7</sup> The present project's appeal to revelation as providing some degree of an upward limit that helps protect theology's truth project is thus faithful to a Ricoeurian application.

#### PROBLEMS WITH REVELATION AS A THEOLOGICAL PARAMETER

As Paul VI and John Paul II both referred to the Christian revelation in the previous section, they appealed to God's self-disclosure in order to set some degree of a theological upper limit. Some extent of an upward limit helps to safeguard theology's truth project from a hermeneutical free-for-all in which any story is deemed valid. Again, if every version is true, then none of them are. The identity of the Christian as Christian becomes a lost, silenced narrative in a relativistic vacuum of meaningless suggestions that are all deemed authentic no matter how outlandish. Some degree of a boundary has to help ground the Christian tradition in the temporal reality of the context, in much the same way that the space of experience protects history's truth project from unchecked

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<sup>5</sup>Ricoeur, *Freedom & Nature*, 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

imaginative horizons. The need for the faith to articulate a theological grid within which to wrestle is an apparent need.

Yet this observable and understandable desire for theological parameters—the very same desire that urges the recent synod bishops to seek a unified concretization among plural initiatives—is a desire that is admittedly not solved by an appeal to God’s self-disclosure. At best, an appeal to the revelation attempts to establish some degree of an upward limit to theological inquiry and possibility. However, that theology boundary is a blurry and discordant line drawn within the discordance of time’s *aporias*. For this reason, no boundary is absolute. To explain, the revelation itself changes. The gospel message itself changes. God’s ultimate revealing of Who God is, God’s *Word* to the creation, is Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ is no static deposit. Jesus himself was a dynamic human person who grew and experienced change across the narrative of his own earthly timeline, an experience intimately shared with people according to Christ’s self-emptying. The Christian revelation is dynamic. God’s self-disclosure is progressively unveiled across time throughout the love story of salvation history. The gospel message itself changes, just as God’s *Word* to humanity was a dynamic human—not a unified, concrete, static deposit neatly contained.

Ricoeur’s contribution to hermeneutics was to move away from trying to theologially answer why something occurs to admitting that it does occur, and to investigate the mode of its occurrence. Such inquiry merely describes the mechanism of transformation, it does not purport to supply the theological reasons for temporal incidence. However, this *mimetic* descriptive of the narrative character of lived human experience admits something critical to theological interpretation. In particular,

Ricoeur's narrative theory admits that transformation does indeed occur. This dynamism includes transformation of the gospel message itself. Jesus himself did not affirm established structures in the house of God during his earthly ministry; in fact, he angered religious leaders to murderous rage with a reinterpretation of the place of the Mosaic Law in the lives of God's people, an innovation that had crowds calling for crucifixion.

This admission that the gospel message itself changes does not deny the *fullness* of revelation, but it denies the complete and final interpretation of revelation, and it denies any interpretation that pretends to possess certainty about some essential, static deposit. And Ricoeur conveys that even a changing and multifaceted deposit is not experienced directly. Rather, any revealed deposit is still *interpreted* through *mimesis* because in temporality, humankind's access to reality is always a *mediated* access—an access mediated by emplotment. *Mimesis* disengages essentialism to account for reality. It is not that reality does not exist, but that our access to it is always mediated by a narrative that brings the sense-making coherence of a plot to the otherwise unintelligible mysteries of time.

In order to seek truth, one must always remain humbly open to the present inadequacy of human understanding, and the need for ongoing reconfiguration and conversion. God's people may be on a trajectory to holiness, but they are still sinful at the same time. Any limited human understanding that pretends to have total possession of the final, complete interpretation of the revelation has forgotten its creaturely place in the temporal trajectory of Christian growth. As *mimesis* points to the question of the innovation of the message itself, theological boundary lines are themselves blurry and dynamic. In view of this problematic, the current project does not pretend to establish

clear parameters within which to wrestle. At this frontier in particular, further critical research is called for.

The present writer sees some hope in an increased development of *inclusivity* in the Church's understanding of the community. The present writer also sees a great deal of promise in an imitation of *kenosis*, Christ's self-emptying. Church authorities, rather than affirming and more clearly defining their power, could divest themselves of earthly authority to become entirely receptive to God's divine will. As an evangelistic proclamation, such a demonstration of *kenosis* would indeed show this world a kingdom from another place—a kingdom from out of this world (John 18:36). These areas of exploration require further critical development.

As the present project stands, the revelation can be appealed to for some sense of responsible limitation to theological inquiry, but this sense is far from exact. Theological borders are themselves dynamic, with a diversity of competing narratives multiplying exponentially through reconfiguration. In summary, theological parameters are themselves narratives which are subject to innovative reconfiguration and valid reinterpretation in the productive human imaginations which God knit into human creatures, made in God's image and likeness. Revelation may be approached or sought as a limiting parameter, but never alleged with finality and certainty. Ambiguities always remain according to the discordance of humanity's time-bound existence.

#### THE CHIEF AGENT OF THE NEW EVANGELISM

Admittedly, the current appeal to the revelation does not provide precise formulae, concrete answers, or any unified response to the challenges discussed. In the last analysis, the problematics remain problematic. But the current project rejects precise

formulae, concrete answers, or any singular unified response. Space within which to wrestle seems a more reasonable expectation than does any allegedly concrete answer. As long as Christians press on toward a perfection not yet attained, as long as the gracious Creator uses unfinished projects, and as long as imperfect human agency is a chosen instrument through which divine agency works, the disparity between human imperfection and God's holiness remains an ever-present reminder of humanity's radical dependency upon God, and of the undeserved giftedness that makes grace *grace*. And as long as Christians press on toward a perfection not yet attained, the narratives to be most wary of are those which proclaim salvation through human understanding alone.

One might criticize the appeal to revelation as inappropriate on the grounds that an appeal to revelation constitutes an appeal to something other than narrative; in an application of a narrative theory, the most suitable defense ought to appeal to some figuration that is constitutive of narrative cognition—not something outside of it. In response to this criticism, the chief agent in the new evangelization is the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> As the author of time, the Lord is not bound by temporality. Since the chief agent of the new evangelization is not bound by temporality, the Lord is simultaneously not bound by the emplotment process that draws sensible coherence from temporal experiences for those creatures who are bound by temporality. The discordance that accompanies temporal experience calls for the sense-making concordance that narratives supply, but the Lord transcends the discordance of temporality.

The indwelling Spirit chooses to make residence with time-bound creatures, and in that intimacy the Lord walks with people throughout their stories. Simultaneously, as

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<sup>8</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 75; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, all of Chapter III (nos. 21–30).

the author of time, the Lord is not bound by temporality. Since the chief agent in the new evangelism transcends temporal discordance, the warrants for the new evangelization are not restricted to narrative alone. On the contrary, the appeal to the revelation is entirely appropriate. As faith seeks understanding in the Church's wrestling with the new evangelization, the movement ought to start with and maintain as its source the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who both enters and transcends time and narrative.



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