

Worship in the Narthex:
Identifying a Contemporary Site for the Eucharist

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The narthex is not a part of the building in the intimate way the nave and sanctuary are (at one time, penitents were relegated to it), and yet it is not alien to the building; it both joins the church to the street and the market-place, and yet keeps the church distinct from them; it is a route by which we pass into the church, and yet the passage itself shows that the origin of our route is not its terminus. The narthex does not polarise, for it is open to both street and church; but its very openness is not to be taken as a reduction of either of them to the other; it both links them and keeps them apart.

P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: the Eucharist and Ritual*: p. 286.

In loving memory of my father,

Charles Davis
1923-1999

and of Cardinal George Basil Hume
1923-1999

each in his own way a servant of God and a priest of the Church.

And for my mother,
Florence Henderson Davis,
who made me to love the liturgy.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to describe a contemporary site for eucharistic celebration. In the Introduction, we begin with the premise that a common context for understanding the liturgy, and in particular the Eucharist, as the public language of the Roman Catholic Church, has been lost. In order to restore the practice of the Eucharist, it is therefore necessary to restore a common context in relation to which the Eucharist makes sense. In Chapter One, we begin this task by exploring the history of the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church with the help of an important recent book by P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual*. We look in particular at how the form of the Eucharist is shaped by the centralization and clericalization of power in the Church. In Chapters Two and Three, we take up FitzPatrick's suggestion that the way forward for our understanding of the Eucharist is to describe it as a ritual. What this accomplishes is to situate us within the arena of human action. In these two chapters, we explore what it means to say that the world is linguistically-structured. Language, as we discover, is not simply a tool for naming objects, rather, it embodies patterns of meaning and relationship which form us at a pre-conscious, bodily level. Likewise, the purpose of the liturgy as the Church's public language is not to pass on consciously-held beliefs or knowledge, but to give Christians a particular, pre-conscious bodily formation. Describing the Eucharist as a ritual is not sufficient, because the Church's rituals express whatever kind of life the Church is actually leading. Unless the Church is living the Gospel in practice, her rituals will not provide an adequate Christian formation.

In Chapter Four, we situate this discourse in relation to the discourses of modernity and post-modernity. With the breakdown of the unified social vision of the Middle Ages, we find, in modernity, the hope that differences can be united through a common rationality. In post-modernity, we discover the extent to which our rationality is itself contingent - tied to our formation at particular locations in space and time. This awareness of the limits of what we say creates a crisis in human action. We can find no basis for common action which does not appear to eliminate differences, and we cannot act individually without being aware that what we do and say is put in question by the position of others. It is within this context that the theologian John Milbank proposes a return to Christianity as a metanarrative. Only Christianity, he argues, provides an account of difference which is not simply the occasion of violence. Milbank demonstrates how secular rationality, which presupposes the inevitability of violence, arises out of an heretical departure from Christian orthodoxy. The problem with Milbank, however, is that he creates a dichotomy between the Church and the secular which gives the impression that there is such a thing as the Christian Church uncorrupted by collusion with the secular order. Milbank creates what the philosopher Gillian Rose calls a "holy middle", a sociality outside time and space, and therefore, not a real beginning for action. Rose, by contrast, is concerned in her idea of the broken middle of modernity with the problem of how to act, aware of the limits which always already constrain us, but not paralyzed by them. We explore Rose's metaphor of modernity in Chapter Six.

In the Conclusion, we return to the question of the Eucharist to show how Rose's broken middle of modernity locates for us a contemporary site for eucharistic celebration. The revolution which Christ embodies has to do with his relationship to those who fall outside the Law. Jesus teaches that love is the medium of this encounter. This love, however, demands the kind of risk which Gillian Rose describes, because it involves a movement outward from our present categories of understanding towards a greater vision which we cannot yet articulate. The poor are those who fall outside our present vision of the social whole. It is only from the perspective of the poor, therefore, that the Church can celebrate the Eucharist as the sacrament of Christ's real presence in the world.

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INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1996, in anticipation of a general election in Britain, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales published a statement designed to promote reflection and discussion on the key issues, in the light of Catholic Social Teaching. The document, *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching*,¹ covers a wide range of topics from the regulation of the market to the protection of the family, from abortion to the minimum wage, from the influence of the media to care for the environment. On each subject, without laying down any specific plan of action or endorsing any particular political party, the bishops outline the moral framework within which each question should be addressed.

One reaction to the bishops came from William Rees-Mogg writing in *The Times*:

I wish bishops would not talk about politics, and that politicians would not talk about religion. It is not because I want to deprive either group of their proper freedom of speech, but because they will not do their homework. When politicians talk about religion they usually, though not always, reveal that they have given the subject only superficial thought, and done too little reading. Bishops are even worse on politics.²

He goes on to accuse the bishops of skirting over the complexities of the present economic situation, employing the outdated social theory of *Rerum Novarum*³, a papal encyclical issued by Pope Leo XIII in 1891, and according to Rees-Mogg, backward looking even in its own time.

In 1995, prior to the bishops' statement but also in anticipation of a general election in Britain, a book by economist and journalist Will Hutton, *The State We're In*,⁴ was published. Hutton offers a detailed and passionate account of the history of the present economic situation and argues the need for an urgent change of government away from the disastrous policies of the Conservative era. He too provides a moral vision, arguing for a minimum wage, the importance of employment as a source of meaning and participation in society, and the need to harness the creative potential of

¹The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. *The Common Good and the Catholic Church's Social Teaching* (London: The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, 1996).

²William Rees-Mogg. "How Pope Leo XIII Hobbled the EU", London *The Times*, 21 October 1996, p.20.

³*Rerum Novarum Centenary Edition*. (London: The Catholic Truth Society, 1991).

⁴Will Hutton, *The State We're In*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).

the workforce. Are Hutton and the bishops in competition? At one point in the bishops' statement they write:

The Church does not reject the findings of economics, sociology and anthropology, but welcomes them, in so far as they are true, as valuable aids to a deeper understanding of how society works.⁵

But how is such truth determined? What does it even mean to speak of economic or sociological truth, and is the Church the arbiter? One striking fact about the bishops' statement is that it makes no mention of the Church's liturgy, or of the Eucharist in particular. The idea of the liturgy as the Church's public work is entirely absent. This is in marked contrast to another document published in 1980, prepared for the Commission for International Justice and Peace of England and Wales by the Benedictine David Morland, entitled *The Eucharist and Justice: Do this in memory of me*.⁶

Morland, beginning from the everyday experience of ordinary Catholics, takes the Eucharist as his point of departure and asks what bearing this practice, at the heart of Catholic identity, has on the work for social justice. He writes:

If the Church is defined as the sacrament of the world's salvation, then it must be engaged in a practical way in liberating human beings from every form of oppression. This sense of practice has come to be seen as just as important as being a member of a eucharistic community. But what is the connection between eucharistic worship and action for justice?⁷

In other words, is the Eucharist an instrument of creative change for the transformation of the world or a private event made available to satisfy the religious needs of Church members? Is the Church itself the sacrament of Christ in the world or a private club bounded by its observance of peculiar rites?

At the Second Vatican Council, in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* the Church is described as follows:

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity.⁸

⁵The Catholic Bishop's Conference of England and Wales, op.cit., p.7.

⁶David Morland, *The Eucharist and Justice: Do This in Memory of Me* (London: Infoform, 1980).

⁷Ibid., p.1.

⁸"Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" in *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p.15.

Furthermore, it is through the Eucharist, the celebration of God's relationship to humanity through Christ, that the Church as a sacrament is brought into being:

As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which "Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed: (1 Cor.5:7) is celebrated on an altar, the work of our redemption is carried on. At the same time, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor.10:17) is both expressed and brought about.⁹

Nor is belief in the sacrament of the Church and the power of the Eucharist a private article of faith, according to the Fathers of the Council:

All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and toward whom our journey leads us.¹⁰

Bishops in particular have a special role to play:

A bishop, marked with the fullness of the sacrament of orders, is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood," especially in the Eucharist, which he offers or causes to be offered, and by which the Church constantly lives and grows.¹¹

The Eucharist is "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life"¹². In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, explaining why reform of the liturgy is so important, the Council Fathers write:

For it is through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that "the work of our redemption is exercised." The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church.¹³

According to this vision, the Church is understood as the sacrament of God's relationship to humanity through Christ. In the Eucharist the real presence of Christ is made manifest in such a way that the Church as His Mystical Body becomes incarnate. The bishops are in a special sense, through the apostolic succession, the stewards of the Eucharistic celebration by virtue of which they receive the means to

⁹Ibid., p.16.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., p.50.

¹²Ibid., p.28.

¹³"Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" in *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p.137.

preach the Good News to all the world. Given this Christian faith, it is noteworthy that in a document such as *The Common Good*, designed by the bishops to offer a vision of the just society, no mention is made of the liturgy or of the Eucharist in particular, as the means by which such justice is brought about.

One might reply that the document is offered to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and therefore, that any appeal to the Eucharist as the source of creative change for society's transformation is likely to alienate and divide rather than unify. But is this reply not in itself a judgement upon the Church?

If the practice of the Eucharist is so obscure outside the boundaries of the institutional Church that no language is available in which to offer it as a path for others, is the Church not failing in her vocation of true catholicity?

Perhaps closer to the truth is the observation by David Morland that,

There is little sign...that the performance of the liturgy and the Eucharist in particular is an evident instrument of change in raising the consciousness of those who participate and in showing them how their worship is related to action for justice.¹⁴

The Common Good document is a symptom of the Church's confusion over her public role in a pluralist society, and evidence of a lack of faith in the liturgy as the medium of her public work. It is through the liturgy, above all else, as I shall argue in this thesis, that the Church can offer the world a vision of the just society. This argument, therefore, is at the same time a call for liturgical renewal, but renewal that comes about only indirectly through a re-articulation of the Christian life as a whole.

In order to make this argument, however, we begin with the recognition that a truly catholic understanding of Christian life has been lost, and that, as a result, there is no taken-for-granted context, no common language, from which a picture of the liturgy, or of the Eucharist in particular, can be readily drawn. In order to talk about the Eucharist and the liturgy, it is necessary to begin by reclaiming the common context in relation to which these practices have meaning. From the perspective of the West, this common context is the Jewish-Christian tradition understood as the gradual articulation of a particular historical relationship between humanity and God. In the next few pages, we paint a picture of this tradition as a series of

¹⁴David Morland, *op.cit.*, p.3.

revolutionary changes, each of which alters the whole framework of human action in the world, superseding the previous terms and categories of human existence. The direction of this historical progression, for human beings, is away from a state of union with nature towards a state of union with God.

Herbert McCabe writes in his classic monograph, *Law, Love and Language*:

A revolution is never intelligible in terms of the society it supersedes; but that society must be intelligible in terms of the revolution. Adult life cannot be understood in terms of childhood, but it is part of maturity to understand and accept one's childhood.¹⁵

Each creative change is a break with the past, while, at the same time, being a fulfilment of the very possibility which the past terms afforded. In other words, the fulfilment of a potential, imagined within a certain framework of understanding, creates a break in which the framework itself is superseded, and a radically new beginning is inaugurated in which a new framework altogether begins to be imagined. McCabe continues:

A creative, revolutionary change, then, even though it is not a mere advance along the old lines of continuity, but a discovery of new lines, does not fully realise itself until it can be seen as in a new kind of continuity with the past. The revolution is not consolidated until it sees itself as the 'natural' fulfilment of the aspirations of the people.¹⁶

The first such revolutionary change we must consider, in our historical progression from nature to God, is language. Language represents a creative, revolutionary break from other forms of animal life, and constitutes human life as different in two important respects: First, language places human beings in a new relationship to time. It enables us to articulate an imagined world, either in the past or in the future, other than the one which exists in the present. As a result, the present becomes contingent: Human beings can change the conditions of the present by acting to bring about a state of affairs other than the one which presently exists. Through language, human beings become masters of their own environment.

The second important implication of language for human life as distinct from animal life, is that for human beings maturity is contingent. In animals, adulthood is a fact of biology marked by sexual life and reproduction. Maturity, for human beings, is

¹⁵Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), p. 27.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 29.

marked, not only by biological maturity, but by position within a linguistically structured community. Creative life is not constituted by the reproduction of the species alone, but by the reproduction of the world of human meaning. The passing on of human life, therefore, is not guaranteed, but by language is made contingent and problematic. Our entry into the present, and therefore our ability to act in the present, is contingent upon our successful entry into a linguistically structured world through education and socialization.

The second revolutionary change that follows language is the discovery that God communicates with human beings not via nature, but via history, via the linguistically structured world of human relationships. The Law, which governs how human beings live with one another in this world, becomes, at the same time, the means by which we live and communicate with God. Again, as Herbert McCabe writes:

In Exodus the revelation of the ten commandments occurs in the context of a theophany, a manifestation of God, and they are essentially concerned with the difference between Yahweh and the other gods. The decalogue is part of the general demystifying of the divine that lies at the centre of the Jewish-Christian tradition. The other gods, the ones that Israel has beyond everything else to shun, make their demands in terms of special religious cults, but the demand of Yahweh is that men should have a certain kind of relationship with each other in the secular world.¹⁷

Unlike the pagan and fertility cults which surrounded them, Israel was called upon by Yahweh, above all else, to obey the Law. The Law distinguishes Israel as different from other peoples, and gives the history of this people a special meaning. The telling of this history becomes, at the same time, the telling of the relationship between God and humankind, a story marked by disobedience and anger, repentance and forgiveness, faithfulness and love. Unlike the pagan and fertility cults, tied to the cycle of nature, the history of Israel has a linear direction. The present is constituted by the remembrance of a particular past and the anticipation of a particular future. The future that comes to be imagined is one in which Israel is liberated from oppression by a Messiah who brings about the New Jerusalem, the restoration of the Temple, the fulfilment of the Law, and the coming of the Kingdom at the end of time.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 57-8.

Christian history begins, therefore, with the conviction that Jesus is this long-awaited Messiah. This is the next revolutionary step in our progression, for Jesus, as it turns out, is not the kind of Messiah generally expected. He is not a warrior Messiah bringing about the Kingdom through a military defeat of the enemies of Israel. Jesus, rather, is a Messiah who preaches a different kind of gospel altogether, a gospel which supersedes the Law as the medium of God's communication to humanity, a gospel of love.

It is Jesus, himself, however, who supersedes the Law. He does not set out a new Law and say that we must obey this Law above all else. What he commands is that we do as he has done, love as he has loved, forgive one another as he has forgiven us, and in doing so, that we become like him, one with him in love. Jesus expands the parameters within which human beings are called to be in relationship to one another. He does this, not by expanding the limits of the Law, but by demonstrating how the Law is transformed through love.

The Law serves, at the same time, to govern relations between people within Israel, and to distinguish Israel from other peoples. Jesus, throughout his ministry, causes scandal by associating, first, with outcasts who fail to keep the Law - prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners of all kinds - and then, with people completely outside the Law - Samaritans and gentiles. By relating to these people, Jesus questions and challenges the boundaries which the Law imposes.

The Law is a vehicle for maintaining differences - the difference of the people of Israel from other peoples, and the difference, within the Law, between the righteous and sinners, clean and unclean. These differences are maintained through judgment about what falls within the categories of the Law and what falls outside them. Judgment, however, is an essentially static form of relationship because it provides no means by which differences can change the categories of the Law themselves. Love is another kind of relationship with difference, and one, which, in Christ, supersedes judgment. We find this shift from judgment to love, from the Law to Christ, demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, told within the context of a conversation between Jesus and a lawyer:

A lawyer tests Jesus by asking him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks in return, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" The lawyer produces the reply which the law provides: "You shall love the Lord your

God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus replies, “You have answered right; do this, and you will live.” But the lawyer doesn’t leave it there. Desiring to justify himself he asks, “And who is my neighbour?”

Now the lawyer knows the answer to this question just as well as to the first one - obligations to one’s neighbour are defined in the Law. He is not asking Jesus for information, he is challenging his orthodoxy. Jesus is known to associate with people with whom the Law forbids contact. Given this fact, the lawyer wants to know how Jesus will defend himself. But Jesus does not try to defend himself, instead, he tells a story about a man who is mugged on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and left for dead by the side of the road. While a Priest and a Levite both pass by without stopping, a Samaritan comes to the injured man’s aid and takes care of him.¹⁸

When he has finished telling the story, Jesus turns to the lawyer and asks, “Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?” The lawyer answers, “The one who showed mercy on him.” Jesus says, “Go and do likewise.”

At first glance, the answer to the lawyer’s question seems clear: Your neighbour is whoever most needs your help. Many Christians would certainly recognize this interpretation and the command to assist the poor and suffering which it entails. I want to argue, however, that this reading of the parable fails to grasp its significance. This parable is not about helping those in need, but about how love exists in the recognition of need, and how our own need is the medium for our encounter with the other who is different, and in the other, with Christ.

The lawyer, to whom Jesus is speaking, cannot imagine loving a Samaritan. The Samaritans are a people despised by the Jews. If Jesus simply said to the lawyer, “the Samaritans are your neighbours”, this would accomplish nothing except to confirm the lawyer’s worst fears about Jesus as an apostate. What Jesus does instead is to take the lawyer on an imaginative journey. Jesus tells the story from the perspective of the man who is left beaten on the roadside. This is the character with whom the lawyer will identify, and the situation is one that he can reasonably imagine. Watching the scene from this position, two men pass by who have an

¹⁸Luke 10:25-37.

obligation, according to the Law, to help the man in distress. These two men, formally speaking, are the man's neighbours, yet, they do not stop.¹⁹ The man who stops is a Samaritan, someone whom the lawyer would shun in normal circumstances, and a person who falls outside the legal definition of neighbour. Nevertheless, it is the Samaritan who has compassion.

Through this story, the lawyer is enabled by Jesus to make an imaginative leap. It becomes possible for him to imagine a situation in which he would recognize the Samaritan, his enemy, as his neighbour; a situation in which his own vulnerability and need are made explicit. In answer to the question, "Who is my neighbour?", the lawyer is forced to identify the Samaritan, and it is to the Samaritan, therefore, that the beaten man owes the obligation of love.

Love surpasses judgment because judgment requires only that I see the lack in the other, I perceive the other only within pre-established categories of meaning, and judge him either in or outside the Law. Love is a relationship in which I perceive the other from the perspective of my own need. It is my own lack whose fulfilment I seek in the other, to whom I am thus drawn. Love is a creative form of relationship in a way that judgment is not. Judgment is static because it allows no means by which the categories of meaning can themselves change. Love, by contrast, is a constant movement outward from the categories of the present, seeking, through the recognition of need, the fulfilment of what the present lacks. By imagining his own need made explicit, the lawyer transforms his understanding of the category of neighbour in such a way that he can identify his enemy, the Samaritan, as someone he might be called upon to love.

The idea of love, here, is inextricably bound up with the recognition of need - not the recognition of the other's need, but the recognition of my own need for the other. It is only when this need is made explicit that I come to know Christ in my neighbour. This need, however, is an unknown, an empty space, precisely because it cannot be accounted for in present terms. How, then, do I find a language in which to express this need, a language wherein my relationship to Christ is made manifest? The answer Jesus gives is that the only way to approach the other, and in the other to find him, is as a servant.

¹⁹The failure of Priest and Levite to stop is itself born of legal reasons - the concern not to be defiled by touching an unclean body. As Donald MacKinnon writes in *The Problem of Metaphysics*: "Priest and Levite avoided danger; at least they preserved their fitness to offer prayer for the victim at the hour of the evening sacrifice." (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) p. 88.

A servant is not a person in a position to impose judgment on another. A servant is one who enters the world of another and ministers to their needs as these are defined by the person themselves. It is this test of service that becomes, in Christ, the criterion for distinguishing the righteous from the cursed, as we see in the parable of the Last Judgment: “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.”²⁰ The paradoxical dimension to this parable, what prevents its interpretation as a straightforward injunction to help the poor, is that neither the righteous nor the cursed know who they are. Both must ask the Christ when they ministered or failed to minister to his needs.²¹

The poor are those who cannot be accounted for within the present framework of society except in terms of lack. Their need is defined in relation to criteria for success which the present framework affords, and they are found wanting. If society’s relation to the poor is one of judgment, whether punitive or benevolent, it tries to bring them, either coercively or persuasively, within the Law, within the terms of its own self-understanding. Christians, however, are not called upon to judge the poor, but to love them, to be one with them in Christ.

The Christian revolution is inextricably bound up with the problem of relating to difference, because Christ’s teaching is that salvation is not simply within the Law, within Israel, but that all people are chosen by God, and through Christ, can come to the Father. The coming of the Kingdom is an imaginative vision which is extended to encompass the whole world; nothing in the world falls outside the vision offered by Christ. At the same time, however, this means that as long as anything or anyone is excluded, it is a sign that the Kingdom has not yet come. The poor, therefore, are a sign of our own lack.

If we relate to the poor only through judgment, then we do not face the limits of our own imagination, and cannot, therefore, recognize any path towards growth. If, however, we adopt the perspective of the poor and look at our society from the vantage point of those who are excluded, then the limits of the present come into

²⁰Matthew 25:31–46.

²¹For my interpretation of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the Parable of the Last Judgment, I am indebted to Donald MacKinnon’s work on the parables in *The Problem of Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 1974), and to Roger White’s article, “MacKinnon and the Parables” in *Christ, Ethics and Tragedy*, edited by Kenneth Surin (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

focus and it becomes possible to see the direction that growth must take. The task of the Christian, therefore, is not to help the poor - to draw the poor into the limits of our present vision - but to live with the poor so as to see these limits more clearly in such a way that our vision is expanded.

Let us say that service is the form of entry into relationship with those with whom one has no common language. Language, as we have seen, is a specifically human mode of interrelationship; it provides the structure for a common social life. Those who are excluded from the common life, therefore, are excluded linguistically - their existence is only negatively defined. It is only by entering the world of the poor, truly as a servant, listening in silence, that our language is extended, and thus the boundaries of our world. In the description of the Last Supper in the gospel of John, Jesus washes the disciples feet:

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."²²

It is only by entering the world of the poor in silence, as a servant, that the Christian learns to articulate a perspective truly outside the language currently spoken, and so to extend the horizon of possible relationship. This is the creative work involved in bringing about the Kingdom of heaven on earth. By articulating the perspective of the poor, the poor are brought into communion, not through judgment, but through love - the articulation of a need for those who, until now, have remained outside the limits of our vision. It is in this way that the Body of Christ is gradually made incarnate in society as a whole.

On this account, worship refers to the communal work involved in extending our imaginative horizon from the perspective of those who are excluded. The Eucharist, in particular, is a re-telling of the story of the incarnation of Christ in such a way that this incarnation is made a present reality.

It is the lack of any imaginative vision that is found at the heart of the aimlessness and confusion of contemporary Western society. The Bishops of England and Wales write in *The Common Good* document that, "the nation's real crisis is not

²²John 13:12-15.

economic, but moral and spiritual.”²² It is a crisis constituted by a breakdown in imagination, the loss of faith in “the possibility of a better future”:

This crisis concerns loss of individual belief and confusion over personal moral behaviour. But the social dimension is not less in crisis. Surveys and studies of the national mood display a nation ill at ease with itself. Such surveys tell us that the British do not look forward to their society becoming fairer or more peaceful. They no longer expect security, either in employment or in personal relationships. They accept fatefully but without enthusiasm the prospect of their lives being increasingly dominated by impersonal economic forces which leave little room for morality. They seem to be losing faith in the possibility of a better future.²³

As we have already noted, however, the Bishops make no mention of the Eucharist, or of the liturgy, as the means for addressing this imaginative vacuum. David Morland, in his earlier document, *The Eucharist and Justice*, writes:

The Church sees as one of its main functions the provision of the sacraments, and especially the Mass, to its members. But this is seen less as a revolutionary celebration of a new heaven and a new earth here and now present in the world and rather as satisfying the religious needs of Catholics understood in a very narrow manner.²⁴

He also describes a lack of vision, but one from which the Church herself is suffering:

One of our most basic needs is for a vision, a Christian vision of faith which is at once true to the tradition we have received, to the worship we celebrate and also responsive to the demands of contemporary life. Worship, in particular, requires a vision which forms those who participate, so that what they celebrate really gives heart to their whole life.²⁵

This vision only comes, he writes, to a Church living the gospel of Christ in practice:

Failure in practice means that our worship becomes alienated, ritualised, domesticated. It is infected by a sort of collective hypocrisy which does not stem from the ill-will of its participants but rather from a massive misdirection of the whole system of worship...It is a deep theme of the prophets that worship turns into idolatry and misses the mark of praising God when the style of life of those who participate is unjust...This can render the worship ineffective, closed in on itself, a source of false

²²Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, op.cit., p. 25.

²³Ibid., pp. 25-6.

²⁴David Morland, op.cit., p. 5.

²⁵Ibid., p. 9.

comfort and security. It can give the impression of holiness, of justification, while in fact it is merely legitimating or at least leaving unchallenged an unjust state of affairs. For us to discover the meaning of our worship, to re-enact the symbols so that they give light and life, requires us to re-tell the true story of Christ. We have to discover how he is the sacrament of God.²⁶

And we only discover Christ as the sacrament of God among the poor:

One crucial aspect of the incarnation is that Jesus designates the poor as the privileged members of the new order, the kingdom; He takes their side, identifies His own mission and life as belonging to them...The Church is **o**f the poor, not primarily to provide assistance to them, not **f**or the poor, but because there the action is God's action among men, where true history is being made.²⁷

The only way to renew the Church's worship is for Christians to be with the poor as servants:

If the Church is to celebrate the Eucharist authentically, it has to be stripped of its power where that is merely for itself. It has to be a suffering servant unconcerned for its own survival in worldly terms, but rather 'washing men's feet', taking its agenda as Christ did from the poor.²⁸

Morland is writing after the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, but as he insists, no real liturgical reform can take place apart from a consideration of the whole Christian life. Otherwise, reform becomes, not a renewal of life, but the making bare of an emptiness and a lack of meaning at the heart of the Church's ministry. Unless the Church herself is living justly, in right relationship to God through Christ, she cannot make Christ manifest to the world, and therefore, cannot offer the Eucharist to the world as the vehicle for communion with God. Reform of the liturgy and reform of the Church go hand in hand. As Morland writes:

There is a basic passivity on the part of the laity in the performance of the rite despite some moves towards greater lay participation. This legitimates and reinforces the broader passivity of the laity in the life of the Church as a whole. The hierarchical structure of the Eucharist is both a sign and also a cause of the particular model of authority and power in the life of the Church generally.²⁹

²⁶Ibid., p. 10.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 11-12.

²⁸Ibid., p. 15.

²⁹Ibid., p.4.

This connection between the structure of power and authority in the Church and its relation to the celebration of the Eucharist is the subject of an important recent contribution to Catholic theology by P.J. FitzPatrick, in his book *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual*.³¹ FitzPatrick argues that in the newer, post-Vatican II rite of the Roman Mass, a vision of the Church is celebrated which is prevented from being embodied in the Church at large by an outdated structure of government, more in keeping with the older, unreformed rite. Because the liturgy has been changed in isolation from the life of the Church as a whole, the connection between liturgy and Church, and in particular between the Eucharist and the Church, is severed. One vision of Church is found in the liturgy while another, hostile to change, continues to prevail in the administration of Church life.

If, as we have argued above, the Catholic Church's contribution to a vision of the common good stems from her commitment to the Eucharist as "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life",³² then the Eucharist must be our point of departure for a renewed articulation of Catholic faith offered to the world at large. P.J. FitzPatrick sets his discussion of the Eucharist within the context of the Church's life as a whole, and of the Church's relationship to the world, faithful to the connection between Church, Eucharist and world which we have elaborated above as the foundation of Catholic teaching. We therefore begin this investigation into the possibility of a truly contemporary expression of Catholic faith and worship by examining FitzPatrick's analysis of the Eucharist in order to pursue at greater length some of the questions and concerns which arise from his discussion, and to set these within the context of the crisis in Western society at large.

Although the Eucharist is our point of departure, this work is not about the eucharistic rite as such, but about where the Church must be situated in order to gain the vision necessary for eucharistic worship. The liturgy is the public and communal language of the Church. It is not a language addressed to the Church, but to the world. "A liturgy of Christians", writes Aidan Kavanagh, "is thus nothing less than the way a redeemed world is, so to speak, done."³³ What makes the liturgy different from the language spoken by the world is not an esoteric strangeness, but the fact that it is a language uttered from a perspective beyond the present limits of

³¹P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³²"Dogmatic Constitution on the Church", op.cit., p.28.

³³Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*. (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984) p. 100.

the world's self-understanding. In order to speak this language, therefore, the Church must, in practice, live outside the world. Outside, here, however, does not refer to an utopian retreat, but to a life of poverty, with those whose lives have, as yet, no positive meaning within the present terms of the world's collective imagination.

If, however, the Church is not poor, then the language that she speaks will be no different from the world's language. And with no perspective from which to challenge the limits of the present, the Church will have no greater vision to offer. The language of the liturgy exists in order to describe a distance - the distance between the present conditions of human life in the world, and the conditions that will prevail with the coming of the Kingdom, the second coming of Christ. The only reason that the Church is able to describe this distance is because she is already living in the Kingdom, in communion with Christ. And Christ is living with the poor, always outside our present horizon of vision, drawing us ever forward to the Father. If this real distance does not exist, however, then the Church is just as blind as the world.

At the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church was extensively reformed while her political life remained essentially unaltered. The effect of these changes has been equivalent to adopting Esperanto - the creation of an artificial language. The vision of Church expressed in the new liturgy is democratic - all present, both clergy and laity, are called to active participation. The Church, however, is an undemocratic institution - the laity have no authority of any kind in Church affairs, and the clergy are subject to a strictly top-down form of government. The liturgy, here, is not the language of the Church, it is the language of the world spoken badly. The Church is not leading the world forward, the world, in its language and vision, is ahead of the Church, and the Church is struggling to catch up and stay abreast. Many Christians, sensing this reversal, have left the Church and joined the world, and even among those who remain are many who can't help but wonder what the Church is offering that is not better expressed elsewhere.

In this thesis, I shall argue that what the Church can offer to the world is her liturgy, for despite an increased consciousness, the world remains full of unspeakable poverty. First, however, she must locate herself at the limits of the present, and in order to do so, must learn the language of the world, for these limits are

linguistically described. It is not enough to offer food and clothing to the homeless, for material poverty is only a sign of a deeper and more insidious form of linguistic exclusion. What is needed is a language that creates communion by articulating an expanded vision of human relationship in each particular situation where poverty is found - a language that transforms the nature of the world itself.

In Chapter One, we examine how the Church has come to be in her present predicament, relying on P.J. FitzPatrick's account of the present situation, and setting this within the context of work by Henri de Lubac and others on the historical development of the Eucharist, and its relationship to increasing clericalization and centralization of power within the Church. What we discover is that the language of transubstantiation in which the Eucharist comes to be described, in the absence of any real distance between the Church and the world, creates an artificial distance by turning the Eucharist into a symbol that cancels the meaning of human language. Transubstantiation is not a real discovery of the limits of our linguistic world, it is an abuse of human language justified by an appeal to divine intervention, in the interests of defending a very worldly kingdom. FitzPatrick suggests that the way out of this language of mystification is to understand the Eucharist as a ritual. What this accomplishes is to situate us firmly within the arena of human language as the medium for our communication with God.

As we have already seen, in our discussion of the revolutionary stages of the Jewish-Christian tradition, human beings are not born into the present, but acquire the ability to act in the present through successful entry into a linguistically structured world through education and socialization. What we find in Chapter Two is that ritual is a technique for transmitting a linguistic world that works at a pre-reflective level by shaping a community's embodied structure of consciousness, and forming individuals able to act in the environment so structured. Ritual, in itself, therefore, cannot provide a sufficient account of the meaning of the Eucharist. What it does provide, however, is a way of understanding how meaning that arises in the ordinary course of human action enters the public sphere to become part of a shared language.

On this account, it is no surprise that an hierarchical and authoritarian Church should produce an hierarchical and authoritarian liturgy, or that changing the liturgy without changing the Church should create a language that communicates this discrepancy itself. The laity's reaction to the new liturgy bears this out: On the one

hand, are those dissatisfied with the Church because she clearly does not conform to the vision which the new liturgy expresses, and on the other hand, are others dissatisfied with the new liturgy because it no longer expresses their vision of the Church. On both sides, we find a desire for the liturgy and the Church to be reconciled.

We conclude from this Chapter that the Church's ritual cannot be artificially distinguished from the life the Church is actually leading. The liturgy's irrelevance for the contemporary world is not addressed in endless discussions of ritual form, but by a Church committed to living the Gospel.

In the West, we tend to think of knowledge in terms of consciously-held information in the mind. It is difficult, therefore, to claim to know something without being able to explain what it is. Understanding ritual, however, gives us insight into another kind of knowledge, less widely recognized than the conscious form. Rather than describe Christians as people who consciously adhere to certain beliefs, this new understanding helps us to demonstrate how Christians might be described, more accurately, as people who embody a certain way of life.

Our discussion of ritual demonstrates how an individual body takes on an historical shape by acquiring the language of a particular place and time. By describing someone as a 'Victorian' or a 'Thatcherite' for example, we are not simply referring to consciously-held beliefs, but to an entire culture reflected in the person's whole manner and way of life. The person themselves, however, may not be fully conscious of the identity which they nevertheless embody. Having self-knowledge, therefore, does not consist in an interior search for hidden depths, but in coming to understand the outward circumstances by which one's identity has been constructed.

In Chapter Three, we investigate this pre-conscious level in greater detail, and its relationship to conscious knowledge, appropriating this discourse to a discussion of Christian identity. A pre-conscious level of knowledge is elaborated in the work of the linguist Noam Chomsky, as competence. Chomsky uses the term competence to refer to an individual's ability to speak their mother tongue, irrespective of any conscious grasp of the rules of grammar. We appropriate this idea of competence to describe the way a person comes to embody the culture of a given place and time, irrespective of their conscious understanding of the historical

circumstances in which this culture has arisen. Our surrounding culture forms us at a pre-conscious level in a manner mostly beyond our power to control. We cannot refuse to be affected by the films we see, the television we watch, the music we hear. The genius of advertising lies precisely in recognizing this fact. Yet, we may remain consciously unaware of the particular identity which this formation bestows upon us. Within this context, we describe the Church's liturgy as a deliberately alternative media, whose purpose is not the communication of doctrine but the formation of Christian bodies.

Coming to appreciate this influence of the media overturns traditional accounts of power. It becomes necessary to see power residing, not in the hands of traditional authority figures - politicians, religious leaders and members of public service professions - but in the hands of those actively engaged in shaping our collective imagination. This is a frightening realization precisely because power exercised at this level is for the most part anonymous, invisible, unelected and seemingly impossible to bring to account. In Chapter Four, we look at this problem of power directly, and in the face of such power, the possibility of resistance. On the basis of this new understanding of power, we pursue the argument that the real vehicle for social transformation in the Church is the liturgy.

Resistance, here, is synonymous with our ability to see the present as contingent, in other words, with our becoming aware of the particular historical and psychological processes by which the present is constructed. Achieving self-consciousness, therefore, involves understanding the present in relation to different historical possibilities both in the past and in the future. In the West, the period known as modernity is characterized by this achievement, by the gradual realization that the human world is an artefact that can be changed through human action. As a result, institutions and forms of authority once considered timeless and divinely sanctioned are overthrown. The Roman Catholic Church, however, continues to resist modernity by clinging to a form of authority universally discredited in the world at large. The Church's liturgy, on the other hand, is changed in accordance with the democratic revolution in the rest of society. As a result, the liturgy is forming Christians who, as a result of their formation, are led to reject the Church, or else to hanker for a return to the older rites.

Rationality is the promise of modernity - the ability to explain, to give reasons for how things are in the world, and to argue for how things ought to be. Post-

modernity is the discovery that rationality itself is contingent, that there is no single account of the world, but that one's description of the world will depend upon one's location in it. The hope of modernity, to unite the world in a single rationality transcending cultural and linguistic divides, is shattered in post-modernity with the unmasking of this rationality as a particular account of the world told from a Western, male perspective.

As a result of the post-modern challenge, the whole project of critique, of looking at the world from the outside, is called into question. Speaking from the outside is seen as an attempt to mask the particular location of discourse. The world is revealed as an infinity of particular perspectives without any unifying principle, and the only legitimate form of discourse becomes the making explicit of particular sites of action and reflection. There is an increasing awareness of the body as the medium for our participation in the world, and of how the body takes on a particular cultural and historical shape.

The present crisis in Western society can be described in these terms: On the one hand, there is an unprecedented awareness of the extent to which we are influenced by factors beyond our control - our upbringing and education, the influence of the media, our particular genetic endowment. On the other hand, while we are aware of these processes, we cannot agree on any perspective from which to examine the construction of the present with a view to changing it, because we are also aware of the contingency of any perspective that we may adopt. As a result, we are made helpless victims of our environment. In Chapter Four, we look at this crisis in more detail, concluding that in order to escape being victims of history we must locate a non-arbitrary site from which to articulate a renewed vision of the social whole. Christianity, offers, as we have seen, a non-arbitrary path to an outside perspective through the Gospel teachings on poverty. The Roman Catholic Church in particular, with her combination of particularity and universality, were she to locate herself with the poor, might have a unique role to play in this post-modern context.

In Chapter Five, we examine an attempt to articulate the place of Christianity in a post-modern world, in a book by the theologian, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*.³⁴ Milbank, adopting a genealogical method of critique, demonstrates how the secular social sciences, which attempt to explain

³⁴John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

the world outside explicitly Christian terms, are nevertheless based on pre-suppositions which are Christian in origin, and more specifically, which express an heretical departure from orthodox Christian theology. We can only make sense of our present situation, he continues, by redefining it in explicitly Christian terms, because it is only Christianity that offers an account of how differences can be related without violence; an account able to rescue us from the nihilism of competing and irreconcilable particularities.

The problem with this argument arises in Milbank's attempt to reconcile the failure of Christian practice, which, on his own account, leads to the development of the secular, and hence to the situation described above, with the argument that Christianity is also the way out of this same crisis. Here, Milbank falls into a confusion, as Nicholas Lash points out, between the Church and the Kingdom of heaven.³⁵ The idea of Church has two meanings: First, it refers to the human institution endeavouring to tell the Christian story in its life and teaching, and second, it refers, in a mystical sense, to the actual incarnation of Christ in real relationships. These two meanings of Church are not unrelated, but nor are they contiguous, and while the second meaning of Church can be identified with the Kingdom of heaven, it is imperative to maintain a distinction with the first. It is this distinction that Milbank fails to observe.

After arguing that a failure in Christian practice, a failure on the part of the institutional Church, leads to the development of the secular, Milbank's discourse switches to an opposition between the Church and the secular, in which Church comes to be used in the second sense, indistinguishable from the Kingdom. Milbank fails to situate us in the historical present because the Church which he describes is not a real place located in space and time, and is not, therefore, a site from which action for change is possible. Even if we agree with Milbank that Christianity offers the only non-arbitrary perspective on the present, this does not mean that there is a language readily available in which the Christian story can be told. Milbank ignores the real dilemma caused by the Church's failure to be Christian, which is that there is no contemporary Christian language at hand. The choice is either to adopt a Christian language, already rejected by the world, or to recognize the failure of Christian practice as our point of departure, the basis for any renewal of Christian life, and out of the silence of this new beginning, to wait for a contemporary language to emerge.

³⁵Nicholas Lash, "Not Exactly Politics or Power?" in *Modern Theology* (8:4 October 1992) p. 362.

After the death of Jesus, the disciples receive the gift of tongues at Pentecost and are sent forth to preach the Good News to all the world. This is an extremely problematic mission, however, for all the world does not share the language and history which have made it possible to recognize Jesus as the Messiah in the first place. In the absence of this common ground, how on earth to explain who Jesus is and why it is so important to be in communion with him. This question arises, for example, in discussions of the early Church about whether or not gentiles who wish to become Christians should be circumcised. The issue at stake here is central to understanding the revolutionary transformation of the world which Christ embodies. Is the world to be brought within the boundaries of the Law, to enter the covenant marked by circumcision, or does the covenant of Christ supersede this Law, and if so, how is it transmitted? The final decision of the Church is that the gentiles should not be circumcised, nor are they called upon to obey the Law of Moses.

What this decision means, in effect, is that Christianity has no language of its own. Think of the problem of translating a story into a foreign tongue. The problem resides in the fact that two languages are never simply equivalent; the meaning of something in one language does not correspond exactly to the meaning it has in another. Think of the image of Jesus as the lamb of God. What will be the meaning of this metaphor in a country without sheep? Yet, Christians do have a story to tell. How, then, will it be possible to tell this story outside the boundaries of a single linguistic world? This is the problem the disciples face.

If, as we have argued above, what Jesus offers is a form of relationship that leads us to the limits of our linguistic world, and this relationship, as he teaches, is not limited to a single language, then we have some insight into how to tell this story in a foreign context. For what is found at the limits of any linguistic world, as we have seen, are the poor. The poor are those who cannot be contained within the present vision of the social whole. By entering the world of the poor as a servant, in silence, and learning the native tongue from this perspective, it is possible to come to the limits of any linguistic world, and from these limits, to tell the story of Christ. This story, then, becomes, not the imposition of a new language and a new culture, but the transformation of a culture and a language from within, in its own terms. The way forward in our present context lies not in re-asserting Christianity as a metanarrative, as Milbank suggests, but in re-articulating, in contemporary

language, this mode of encounter with the outside by which Christ is made incarnate.

It is in the work of philosopher Gillian Rose that we find this encounter described in contemporary terms. In Chapter Six, we look at Rose's account of the present, and in particular, at her location of the broken middle,³⁶ as a potential site for eucharistic worship.

According to Rose, we are trapped, in the West, in a false dichotomy between universal and particular, modern and post-modern. On the one hand, universal truths are asserted about the human world, unfettered by any sense of emanating from a particular location. On the other hand, universality is rejected altogether, and in its place, the world is constituted as an infinity of different and irreconcilable points of view. Rose argues that these responses are but two sides of the same coin, and what is missing from both is real political engagement.

Politics is a necessity that arises from the fact of sharing a world with limited resources; this necessity compels us to make decisions with real and tangible consequences for ourselves and others. The fact of scarce resources forces us to seek agreement with others over the basis for our shared existence. The contemporary problem with political engagement concerns how to formulate a shared account of the world, as the basis for political decisions, which doesn't simply eliminate or mask the differences which particular perspectives bring to bear. It is in this context that John Milbank argues for Christianity as the only account of the world which describes how differences coexist without violence. Since, as we have already seen, however, he fails to locate his own discourse in a real historical present, his metanarrative of Christianity remains, in effect, an uncommitted universal imposed upon the world but not itself answerable to any particular site.

We can rephrase the question by asking how it is possible to act, conscious of the limits that define any site of action, but not determined by them. In earlier Chapters, we look at the extent to which our individual identity is constructed at a pre-conscious level by influences beyond our control. Coming to consciousness means becoming aware of the limits imposed by one's particular location in the world. Becoming free is the work involved in transcending these limits by exhausting their potential. The movement Rose describes places us at the intersection of universal

³⁶Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

and particular, at the crossroads where the linguistic world that makes us products of a particular place and time meets an individual history that describes a path to freedom through the unique configuration of unfreedom at a given historical moment. The desire to escape the difficulty involved in acting at this crossroads leads to versions of reality collapsed to one side or to the other. On the one hand, the linguistic world remains unchallenged by its own outside, by the differences which call its hegemony into question, and on the other hand, it becomes impossible to recognize an outside, because there is no shared language against which real differences can come to light. Particular voices demand recognition, but cannot escape arbitrariness.

Abandoning the tension between universal and particular, either to one side or to the other, represents an illusive search for immediacy - a desire to forego the difficulty of actuality. Either, I accept an objective identity and escape the burden of individual responsibility, or else, I assert a personal identity and escape the burden of history. In both cases, I ignore the need for political engagement and its particular location in the present, what Rose terms, the broken middle.

This configuration of the present is articulated within the terms of a particular historical tradition, constituted at its very source by a dichotomy between Judaism, cast as the religion of the Law, and Christianity, the faith in a God of boundless love. To remain with this dichotomy is to lose the paradox at the heart of Christ's teaching, which characterizes, as we have seen, his encounter between the Law and its outside, an encounter in which the identity of love is revealed and Christ is made incarnate. Rose's account of the broken middle is an account of incarnation in contemporary terms. Her description of this site identifies, for Christians, a locus for the renewal of eucharistic worship.

Rose's account of the relationship between Law and Love, allows us to compare becoming a Christian with becoming an artist: In order to become a Christian, one must find oneself within the Law, within the boundaries of a particular linguistic world. It is then in discovering the limits of this world that these limits are transcended, and the world itself expands. It is the poor who lead us to the limits of our worlds, and the poverty of our own vision, expressed as need, that creates the love which transforms these limits themselves. Just as one cannot become an artist without a particular technique, so one cannot become a Christian without a particular language, without Law. At the same time, however, just as technique is not the

purpose of art, but the medium by which art is produced, so too, Law is not the purpose of Christianity, but the medium which leads us to relationship with God. As Charles Davis writes:

The pianist, for example, knows that the technically learnable part of his art has to be practiced to the saturation level. The aim, however, is not to acquire a deliberate, rational control of his playing. On the contrary, it is done to reach the point where there is no further need of a controlling intelligence. But playing the piano is not an automatism, and no merely mechanical dexterity will produce art. When a high level of technical accomplishment has been attained, there can be, and for art there must be, a breakthrough to a new spontaneity in which the player responds to the music through his fingers and the piano with an immediacy of feeling. Because of his technical skill, the player is able to respond connaturally and spontaneously in his art, in a manner analogous to our everyday responses, but on a different level. He achieves an artless art.³⁷

The liturgy of the Church is, potentially, a revolutionary vehicle for the transformation of the world. This potential can only be realized, however, by a Church actively committed to living the Gospel - living outside the world, among the poor - because it is only from this perspective that the liturgy becomes a language that expresses a new imaginative vision of the world, able to inspire real political change. The Church can only truly celebrate the Eucharist as a servant, offering up to God the needs of the world, for it is only by articulating the world's lack, that the Church creates a space, in the Eucharist, which can be filled by the presence in love of the risen Christ.

³⁷Charles Davis, *Body as Spirit: The Nature of Religious Feeling*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976) p. 56.

CHAPTER ONE

P.J. FitzPatrick: The Eucharist and the Church

The Eucharist is the central cultic activity of the Roman Catholic Church. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, it is “the fount and apex of the whole Christian life”¹. Eucharistic theology, therefore, is at the heart of the Church’s struggle for self-understanding and self-realization. P.J. FitzPatrick, in his book *In Breaking of Bread: the Eucharist and Ritual*,² offers a theology of the Eucharist written in the wake of the liturgical changes brought about by Vatican II. He demonstrates the need for a new way of understanding the Eucharist through a critique of the doctrine of transubstantiation as expressed in older and newer accounts alike. Most significantly, however, FitzPatrick insists on re-establishing the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church, and between the Church and the world, as the context for any renewed understanding of the Church’s worship. This central concern is insufficiently recognized in reviews of the book with a consequent failure to fully appreciate the contribution it makes to a truly contemporary vision of the Church’s life. There is, nevertheless, an implicit sense of this wider purpose in the consistent comments, both favourable and unfavourable, made about the book’s method and style. Paul McPartlan describes the approach as, “relying not on a single line of argument but rather on a restless questioning and rather circular style”.³ Regis Duffy writes:

This book is not for everyone. It demands close reading and some patience with what might at first appear to be frequent digressions. It does not provide a solution but a series of neglected connections that link Church and Eucharist in a dialectical fashion.⁴

And Bryan Spinks, on a more negative note:

The book suggests a great frustration about many things in the Roman Catholic Church which the author has taken the opportunity of getting off his chest in a single work under a eucharistic title.⁵

Lest we too readily conclude, however, that FitzPatrick is simply engaged in an idiosyncratic style of argument, or intent on venting his numerous frustrations with

¹“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” in *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), p. 28.

²P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³Paul McPartlan, Review in *The Journal of Theological Studies*. 45 (O 1994) p. 811.

⁴Regis A. Duffy O.F.M., Review in *Worship*. 69 (May 1995) p. 284.

⁵Bryan D. Spinks, Review in *The Expository Times*. 105 (March 1994) p. 187.

the Catholic Church, McPartlan reminds us of FitzPatrick's debt to the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac, locating him within a broader theological tradition in terms of both the content and method of his argument. He writes:

Though his final position could never be associated with Henri de Lubac, FitzPatrick clearly took much early inspiration from the great Jesuit theologian. He acknowledges his debt (pp.176, 366) to de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum* (2nd ed., 1949), ostensibly for bringing to the fore the intimate link between the Eucharist and the Church...However, FitzPatrick has also learnt much from de Lubac's painstaking historical method, which restored doctrine to its historical context.⁶

FitzPatrick is not interested in an isolated discussion of the eucharistic rite, but in reconstructing the context within which it makes sense to talk about the Eucharist at all. This concern explains his method which involves weaving together severed or neglected links between Eucharist, Church and world, moving in his discourse from one site to another and back again, and often repeating the movement in light of newly clarified relationships. He describes his own project as a journey, not one which attains a fixed goal, but one which offers a way forward by reminding us of our inheritance, and of the choices for the future, both good and bad, which it presents. He writes:

Accept or reject my arguments as you please, I do submit that new things are calling for new thoughts, and that the new thoughts will not be what they should be unless they take account of what older thoughts there have been on these things.⁷

FitzPatrick's thesis is developed within the framework of a comparison between the old and new rites of the Roman Mass. The old Roman Mass is characterized by "a primacy of transformation over distribution".⁸ The whole focus is on bringing about the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, and the distribution of communion to the celebrating congregation is incidental. There is an absolute dichotomy between the role of the priest and the role of the people. The congregation, "come into church for Mass; they make no responses of any sort during the Mass; they remain kneeling all the while, except during the gospel, when they stand".⁹ By contrast,

The priest's role is both all-absorbing and in effect just as simple. Not simple in the sense that his role involves no ceremonial, it involves a good deal. But the complexities of what he has to do are in great

⁶Paul McPartlan, op.cit., p. 813.

⁷P.J. FitzPatrick, op.cit., p. 360.

⁸Ibid., p. 213.

⁹Ibid., p. 210.

measure concealed from the congregation by his posture of what I have called *undifferentiated dorsality*. He turns every now and then to address them briefly (and the rubrics direct that he keep his eyes down the while - his voice too, in some cases). For the rest, he remains with his back to them, and the actions he has to perform are thus largely hidden.¹⁰

FitzPatrick contrasts this vision of the Eucharist with that offered in the post-Vatican II rite. In the newer rite, the participation of the congregation becomes central: in responses, in receiving both bread and wine, and in a differentiation of roles - readers, servers, eucharistic ministers. Readings from scripture are extended and diversified, comprising a more important part of the total celebration. And perhaps most significantly, the Mass is offered in the vernacular. From these changes we can note a shift in emphasis from the presence of Christ in the consecrated elements to the presence of Christ in the celebrating community. FitzPatrick argues, however, that these liturgical changes have failed to have any impact on the Church's structure and administration which continues to operate according to the cultic picture of the old Mass. A discrepancy now exists, therefore, between the Church's institutional life and her celebration of the Eucharist:

The significance of the newer cultic picture is simply at odds with the pattern and drift of so much that is associated with Rome; it is at odds with it because papal and curial interventions are still of a piece with the older cultic picture...ritual needs catching up with.¹¹

FitzPatrick's account of the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church is heir to de Lubac's famous historical study, *Corpus Mysticum*,¹² in which this connection is first extensively explored.

"In the thinking of Christian antiquity, the Church and the Eucharist are linked", writes de Lubac. He goes on that for Augustine, as for those writing in his wake, who relied heavily on his teaching, "the Eucharist is to the Church as cause is to effect, as the means is to the end, and, at the same time, as sign is to reality."¹³ The Eucharist is conceived in dynamic terms as an action by which the Church,

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 210-11.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 260-1.

¹²Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*. (Paris: Aubier, 1949).

I am indebted to Gerald McHugh for his help in translating passages cited from de Lubac. The original French is also given in footnotes.

¹³Ibid., p. 23.

"Dans la pensée de toute l'antiquité chrétienne, Eucharistie et Église son liées...L'Eucharistie est rapportée à l'Église comme la cause à l'effet, comme le moyen à la fin, en même temps que comme le signe à la réalité."

understood as the communion of all the faithful in Christ, is brought into being. “A mystery, in the older sense of the word, is more an action than a thing”, explains de Lubac.¹⁴ Within this framework of meaning, the expression *corpus mysticum*, in its original usage, refers to the Eucharist. It arises as a quasi-technical expression which serves to distinguish the Body of Christ in the Eucharist from the Body of Christ born of the Virgin Mary, and at the same time, to relate the eucharistic Body to the third Body of Christ, the Church, as the fruit of eucharistic celebration.¹⁵ Gradually, however, *verum* replaces *mysticum* as a description of the Eucharist, while *mysticum* replaces *verum* as an epithet of the Church.

The site of agency is reversed as the Eucharist becomes an increasingly static display of the spiritual power of the Church as a temporal ruler in competition with secular princes. “An excessive assimilation from ‘mystical body’ to ‘visible body’ had been tried, all for the benefit of the most external element of the Church in its most contingent forms - power exercised by the Papacy over temporal things.”¹⁶ Presence takes the place of action in eucharistic theology.¹⁷ But, whereas for Augustine, the emphasis is on Christ’s presence in the faithful, gathered in the name of Christ, in His Body, the Church, Christ’s presence is now increasingly understood to mean the localised presence on the altar of His real, historical Body, born of the Virgin Mary.¹⁸ “It is no longer, as it was for Augustine, to nourish oneself on Christ in spirit and truth; it is, worthily or not, to receive the real Body of Christ.”¹⁹

Verum is formerly the description of the Church as the real fruit of the eucharistic mystery. With the reversal of *verum* and *mysticum*, and the changed meaning of Eucharist and Church which this denotes, the dynamic sense of mystery, by which what was hidden is revealed, is lost. The effect of the Eucharist is seen more and more in terms of individual salvation. The idea of purgatory replaces the image of the Just waiting on the threshold of the Beatific Vision for the consummation of

¹⁴Ibid., p. 60.

“Un mystère, au sens ancien du mot, est plutôt une action qu’une chose.”

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 87-8.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 131-2.

“Une assimilation excessive avait été tentée du ‘corps mystique’ au ‘corps visible’, tout au bénéfice de l’élément le plus extérieur de l’Église en ses formes les plus contingentes - le pouvoir revendiqué par la papauté sur les choses temporelles.”

¹⁷Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 177.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 241.

“Ce n’est plus là, comme pour saint Augustin, se nourrir du Christ en esprit et vérité: c’est, dignement ou non, recevoir le vrai corps du Christ.”

history.²⁰ Christ's Body in the Eucharist is presented as a *fait accompli*, conjured by the mystical power of the Church through Her clergy, and necessary for the salvation of each individual soul. As McPartlan writes: "Historically, from being the defining source of the Church, the Eucharist became an end in itself; 'the mystery to understand' became 'the miracle to believe'."²¹

By the early thirteenth century, a form of passive veneration of the host takes over from active participation of the laity in communion. Witnessing the elevation of the host at consecration becomes an alternative to consuming Christ's Body and Blood. Miri Rubin explains in her book *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*:

As the elevation was built up in practice and in meaning it came to be seen as possessing some sacramental efficacy. The enhancement of the power of the eucharist, as it was formulated to be the very body of Christ, had made access to it more problematical, and communion less easy and simple. Elevation offered a sort of substitute 'sacramental viewing', which like communion was taught to affect one markedly.²²

She continues: "The unambiguous definitions of Christ's real bodily presence in the eucharist had turned communion into an enormous event...Theologians discussed the criteria for reception and the consequences of their infringement."²³ As a result, communion became more and more infrequent, most people only received communion once a year at Easter.²⁴ This transformation of the Eucharist is linked to the increasing clericalization of the Church:

One of the consequences of the enhancement of eucharistic significance was that it became more clearly the preserve of the clergy, which protected and officiated it, and that consequently some of its aspects were withdrawn. Throughout the twelfth century the chalice was removed from lay communion.²⁵

The gap which previously separated the visible Church from the heavenly Church yet to be realized on earth, a gap bridged by the work of the Eucharist in revealing and realizing the true Church, is superseded by an unbridgeable gap between what human

²⁰Ibid., p. 323.

²¹Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church*. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) p. 79.

²²Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 63.

²³Ibid., p. 65.

²⁴Ibid., p. 73.

²⁵Ibid., p. 70.

beings can know through their own powers of reflection and rational inquiry, and the truth revealed by faith and taught by the Church, which must simply be believed. Faith and knowledge, belief and rationality are thus inexorably opposed. "The mystery to be understood disappears before the miracle to be believed, because the very idea of 'understanding' has changed. Faith no longer opens the way to contemplative understanding: it is an obstacle, placed by God himself, against the appetites of rational speculation."²⁶ This divorce between faith and knowledge, belief and rationality is entirely foreign to Augustinian thought and gives rise to a glorification of simple piety, unencumbered by learning, set in contrast, and wholly other, to the articulation of faith by theologians and philosophers.²⁷ What we are left with is a vision of faith which cancels and negates human knowledge, leaving human beings powerless in the face of beliefs to which there is no access apart from blind obedience. It is within this context that the doctrine of transubstantiation is defined, a doctrine which enshrines the gap between human knowledge and divine truth in its divorce of appearance from reality:

The positive relation of the representation and anticipation of the mystery to its fruits is abandoned and we are left with nothing but a banal antithesis...The truth of the Body is contrasted to the appearance of the bread as the invisible to the visible, as that which is believed compared to that which is touched and seen.²⁸

FitzPatrick argues that the doctrine of transubstantiation embodies a mode of thinking that divorces appearance from reality. It devalues human knowledge and experience by denying that anything at the empirical level can penetrate the mystery of a phenomenon entirely outside the range of human perception. Human perception is presented as a mask, a disguise which hides a higher, inscrutable reality to which the Church has a privileged access. The Pope's claim to infallibility and the kind of thinking that gives rise to the doctrine of transubstantiation go together. The only possible response to such authority is blind obedience since no amount of human scrutiny can get beyond the veil of appearances in which human beings are trapped.

²⁶De Lubac, op.cit., p. 269.

"Le mystère à comprendre s'efface donc devant le miracle à croire, parce que l'idée même du 'comprendre' a changé. La foi n'ouvre plus la carrière à l'intelligence contemplative: elle est un obstacle, posé par Dieu même, en travers des appétits de spéculation rationnelle."

²⁷Ibid., p. 263.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 243+45.

"Le rapport positif de figuration et d'anticipation du mystère à son fruit est alors abandonné, et l'on ne retient plus qu'une antithèse banale...Tous, à l'apparence du pain, opposent la vérité du corps comme l'invisible au visible, comme ce qui se croit à ce qui se touche et se voit."

FitzPatrick further argues that the liturgical changes, particularly to the Eucharist, brought about by Vatican II, were informed by a new way of thinking at odds with transubstantiation. These changes stress the presence of Christ in the celebrating community, and consequently, draw on the participation of the whole congregation in an unprecedented way. The potential of this new liturgy, however, has not been realized because the administration of the Church continues to operate according to the ethos of the older rite. Transubstantiation still prevails in the authority structure of the Church, while a new kind of Church, prevented from being embodied in practice, is celebrated in the Eucharist. The gulf between Church and Eucharist thus remains, and as a result, the Eucharist fails to be a vehicle for the renewal of the Church or the transformation of the world.

Newer accounts of the Eucharist, particularly that offered by the Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, provide many important insights, pointing the way forward for eucharistic theology. Even these, however, fail to offer a true alternative to transubstantiation because they do not adequately address the fatal gulf between human and divine that transubstantiation cements. What both older and newer accounts fail to recognize, argues FitzPatrick, is that the Eucharist is a ritual. And although, as Bryan Spinks observes in his review, “‘ritual’ remains a slippery term,”²⁹ what is clear is that an account of the Eucharist as ritual somehow describes the space between human and divine in a way that does not negate human knowledge and experience, and therefore, precludes the kind of authority that the Church at present claims.

The difficulty with Schillebeeckx’s contribution to contemporary eucharistic theology is that he does not associate the problem of transubstantiation with the problem of Church authority. “A completely new theological interpretation of the eucharistic presence arose in the thirteenth century,” he writes, “in reaction to the ‘sensualistic’ interpretation of the quite unique presence of Christ in the Eucharist...which had been generally prevalent, although not accepted entirely without criticism, in the Middle Ages.”³⁰ In an effort to move away from the cannibalistic overtones of eucharistic thinking and imagery a new language is appropriated by theologians such as Albert the Great, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas to describe Christ’s presence in the Eucharist. “All the ‘new theologians’,” he continues, “were in complete agreement

²⁹Bryan D. Spinks, Review in *Scottish Journal of Theology*. (Vol. 49 no. 4, 1996) p. 510.

³⁰Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Eucharist*. Translated by N.D. Smith. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968) p. 11.

about one thing - Christ did not transfer his dwelling from heaven to the altar, and he did not make himself small so as to 'conceal' himself in a mysterious manner in the consecrated host."³¹ Borrowing terms from Aristotle's description of natural change, a new account of the Eucharist is offered in which the substance of bread and wine are said to change into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ while the accidents, the visible and empirical properties, remain. This doctrine of transubstantiation is formally defined by the Church at the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century. Since then, advances in science have rendered Aristotle's description of natural change obsolete making it imperative, according to Schillebeeckx, for contemporary theologians to find a new language in which to talk about the eucharistic presence. By setting the problem up in this way, argues FitzPatrick, as if it were simply a question of the Church catching up with advances in human knowledge, Schillebeeckx neglects the more pressing concern, namely, whether the doctrine of transubstantiation ever made sense in the first place. FitzPatrick writes:

My thesis here is not going to be that Aquinas gives a formulation of eucharistic belief in Aristotelian terms, a formulation which might be regarded now as outmoded...For me, transubstantiation is a eucharistic application of Aristotelian terms which abuses them to the point of nonsense - it is 'Aristotelian' only in the sense that forged money is 'money'.³²

Aristotle first enters the eucharistic equation in the wake of the controversy over Berengarius and the eucharistic debate which it provoked, which marks the beginning of modern theology, according to de Lubac.³³ "The debate," continues Rubin, "was animated by a new intellectual contribution - Aristotelian logic - and a new political one - a Church which was making new universal claims about its authority and about the powers of its clergy."³⁴

The scholar Berengarius of Tours, educated at Chartres, claimed in the eleventh century that Christ is present in the Eucharist 'mystically, not truly', provoking the reaction 'truly, not mystically' in his opponents. The opposition to Berengarius gained ground, confirming a trend in eucharistic realism initiated in the work of Benedictine theologian, Paschasius Radbertus, in the ninth century.³⁵ This trend increasingly related the Eucharist to the historical Body of Christ, born of the Virgin

³¹Ibid., p. 13.

³²P.J. FitzPatrick, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

³³De Lubac, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

³⁴Miri Rubin, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

³⁵Paul McPartlan, *op.cit.* (1993), p. 84.

Mary, and detached it from its previous relationship to the Church.³⁶ According to Miri Rubin, Berengarius was seeking to avoid the dichotomy between faith and reason which eucharistic realism entailed:

The idea of sacramentality developed by Berengar assigned to the eucharist a 'figurative' relation to Christ's body, in an attempt to avoid the separation between accidents, the appearances of natural objects, from the essence/substance to which they belonged. Berengar was unwilling simply to accept an imputed miraculous operation in the all-important sacrament, but rather sought to find a symbolic link between that which stood to reason and that which scripture taught and faith accepted.³⁷

Berengarius was forced to recant on two occasions. The first at Rome in 1059, in the following words:

I Berengarius...profess...that the bread and wine which are placed upon the altar are after the consecration not only a sacrament [*sacramentum*], but also the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and are in a sensory fashion [*sensualiter*], not only in a sacrament [*sacramento*], but in truth [*veritate*] touched and broken by the hands of priest and crushed [*atteri*] by the teeth of the faithful.³⁸

This particularly carnal account of the Eucharist, which became a source of embarrassment, was toned down in his second retraction at Rome in 1079:

³⁶De Lubac, op.cit., p. 184.

³⁷Miri Rubin, op.cit., p. 17.

³⁸This translation is by P.J. FitzPatrick, op.cit., p. 221. I include also the original Latin text in full from Denzinger and Schonmetzer:

Ego Berengarius...cognoscens veram et apostolicam fidem, anathematizo omnem haeresim, praecipue eam, de qua hactenus infamatus sum: quae adstruere conatur, panem et vinum, quae in altari ponuntur, post consecrationem solummodo sacramentum, et non verum corpus et sanguinem Domini nostri Iesu Christi esse, nec posse sensualiter, nisi in solo sacramento, manibus sacerdotum tractari vel frangi vel fidelium dentibus atteri. Consentio autem sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae et Apostolicae Sedi, et ore et corde profiteor de sacramento dominicae mensae eam fidem me tenere, quam dominus et venerabilis papa Nicolaus et haec sancta Synodus auctoritate evangelica et apostolica tenendam tradidit mihique firmavit: scilicet panem et vinum, quae in altari ponuntur, post consecrationem non solum sacramentum, sed etiam verum corpus et sanguinem Domini nostri Iesu Christi esse, et sensualiter, non solum sacramento, sed in veritate, manibus sacerdotum tractari et frangi et fidelium dentibus atteri, iurans per sanctam et homousion Trinitatem et per haec sacrosancta Christi evangelia. Eos vero, qui contra hanc fidem venerint, cum dogmatibus et sectatoribus suis, aeterno anathemate dignos esse pronuntio.

from *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*. Edited by Henry Denzinger and Adolf Schonmetzer S.J. (Barcelona: Herder, 1963) p. 227, no. 690. Berengarius' first retraction was not included in Denzinger's collection of texts until this revised edition in 1963. Nor is it found in the English equivalent of Denzinger edited by Neuner and Dupuis. This simple exclusion of what was later considered an embarrassing moment in Church history is an example of what FitzPatrick means by the Church's refusal to come to terms with the past.

I, Berengarius, in my heart believe and with my lips confess that through the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of our Redeemer the bread and wine which are placed on the altar are substantially changed into the true and proper and living flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord, and that after consecration it is the true body of Christ which was born of the Virgin and which, offered for the salvation of the world, was suspended on the Cross, and which sitteth at the right hand of the Father, and the true blood of Christ, which was poured out from His side not only through the sign and power of the sacrament, but in its property of nature and in truth of substance, as here briefly in a few words is contained and I have read and you understand. Thus I believe, nor will I teach contrary to this belief. So help me God and these holy Gospels of God.³⁹

In an attempt to offer a credible account of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist against spiritualising tendencies on the one hand, and crude carnal realism on the other, theologians appropriated Aristotelian categories used to describe natural change. Transubstantiation, as a doctrine of the Eucharist, however, is not formally defined by the Church until the Council of Trent (1545-63).

Matter and form are terms used by Aquinas, following Aristotle, to describe two different degrees of natural change. In accidental change, only the form changes while the matter remains the same, for example, plasticine which is moulded first into one shape, then into another, but which remains plasticine throughout.⁴⁰ In substantial change, the matter itself is transformed, for example, if we burn the plasticine it becomes residue. In this case, Aquinas says that an underlying matter, *materia prima*, which has no distinct form of its own but is purely potential, is qualified first by one form, plasticine, then by another, residue.⁴¹ It is this description of substantial change that Aquinas applies to the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, he argues, the substance of bread and wine are changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ while the outward form, the accidents, remain unaltered.

This application of Aristotelian terms, argues FitzPatrick, is illegitimate to begin with, because it abuses the distinction between matter and form in precisely the way that Aristotle warns against, namely, by disregarding “the warnings given against *reification*, against making *things* out of matter and form.”⁴² It only makes sense to draw the distinction between matter and form in relationship to a composite, a

³⁹*The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. Translated by Roy J. Deferrari from the Thirtieth Edition of Henry Denzinger's *Enchiridion Symbolorum*. (London: Herder, 1957) p. 144, no. 355.

⁴⁰P.J. FitzPatrick, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 13.

whole. In speaking of change, therefore, it is the composite that changes, not the matter or the form in isolation. This important limit on language, however, is ignored by Aquinas when it comes to the Eucharist. Here, substance and accidents, matter and form, become things-in-themselves which change independently of one another in ways which defy the laws of nature even insofar as these are understood. It is simply not possible, within Aristotle's own system, to say that accidents remain while the substance of those accidents ceases to exist. It is like saying that roundness remains when that which is round has gone. What is at issue is not simply the problem of an outdated worldview, but rather, a more fundamental question about power, for it is only through a direct appeal to divine power that this otherwise non-sensical combination of terms gains coherence: "This or that constituent can remain while others do not; human power is confined to some; divine omnipotence can replace or interchange them at will."⁴³ The problem is not with an appeal to divine power as such, but with divine power presented as a substitute for intelligibility in a way that negates the human struggle for understanding and the language, however limited, in which that struggle is expressed.

Despite the fact that Schillebeeckx fails to situate the problem of transubstantiation within the broader context of the Church's bid for temporal power and claim to infallible authority, he nevertheless goes a long way towards providing a new approach to the Eucharist on the basis that the doctrine of transubstantiation rests on an outmoded philosophy. Schillebeeckx's work does much to recover a sense of the sacramentality of the world and of all human creativity within it. In other words, he offers a vision of life in which human engagement with and in the world leads us towards a knowledge and love of God and is not simply a disguise concealing a divine yet impenetrable reality beneath. In particular, Schillebeeckx offers two basic principles which FitzPatrick takes as the starting-point for his own account of the Eucharist and which he names the "Givenness of Reality" and the "Humanness of Perception".⁴⁴

As FitzPatrick explains, the principle of the Givenness of Reality claims that our "human world both manifests and conceals a reality we can never wholly grasp, so

⁴³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 73.

that our knowledge of it pertains to the category of sign, with the revelation of God as what is signified.”⁴⁵ Schillebeeckx writes:

...it is therefore possible to say that the entire world has a general quasi-sacramental significance. This Christian view of creation does not empty matter of its proper meaning, but renders it intelligible in its deepest meaning. For the believer, the function secular reality has as a *sign* is deeply involved with its *concrete* being.⁴⁶

Within the context of a reality that is given to us, through our human perception of that reality, we participate in the creation of a world of meaning. This is the principle of the Humanness of Perception. Thus,

Purely sensory perception...does not occur in man. He sees, hears, smells, tastes and touches in a human manner, and thus humanises both what he perceives and perception.⁴⁷

As we have seen, however, reality is not limited to human perception, rather, our human perception of the world is at the same time an engagement with a reality which ever eludes our total grasp. Taken together, these two principles describe a space between a given reality, in which our human life is situated, and our human perception of that reality, which reveals itself to us through our engagement in the world, understood as a sign or sacrament.

Schillebeeckx stresses repeatedly, “that the *only* aim of the Council of Trent was to proclaim the unique and distinctive character of the eucharistic presence as an inviolable datum of faith.”⁴⁸ That this real presence was expressed in Aristotelian terms as transubstantiation, he argues, is simply due to the fact that Aristotelianism was the only framework of thought available to the Fathers of the Council.

Schillebeeckx makes this point in order to distance faith in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist from its articulation in the language of transubstantiation.⁴⁹ He

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Edward Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, p. 128.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 146.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 53. Cf. pp. 42, 43, 45, 48.

⁴⁹At the Council of Trent, the Council Fathers issued eleven Canons on the Sacrament of the Eucharist, defining doctrine by declaring to be anathema beliefs contradictory to the teaching of the Church. Schillebeeckx makes the point that belief in the real presence of Christ as an inviolable datum of faith is established in the first Canon, and only then, in the second Canon, expressed in terms of transubstantiation. This supports his contention that transubstantiation is a contingent expression of a fundamental truth of the Catholic faith. Here I include the two relevant Canons:

Canon I. If anyone denies that in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist there are truly, really, and substantially contained the body and blood together with the soul and

continues: "In a context of natural philosophy the *reality* of the Eucharist - stressed again and again throughout the whole tradition of faith against spiritualising tendencies - was bound to acquire a specially physical colouration."⁵⁰ Modern science, however, has dramatically changed our understanding of the physical world, making the scholastic categories of thought about substance obsolete, opening the way for an anthropological account of the real presence.⁵¹ Once more the emphasis is on Christ in the believing community and the Eucharist as a vehicle for bringing this presence about:

In this way, the early Christian view can be recovered in its full dimensions - the distinctively eucharistic presence is directed towards bringing about Christ's more intimate presence in each individual believer and in the community of believers as a whole. The eucharistic presence is thus no longer isolated. We no longer say, "Christ is there," without asking for whom he is present.⁵²

For Schillebeeckx, therefore, we move from a physical account of the eucharistic change, to an account at the level of human meaning. It is thus from an historical perspective that our understanding of the Eucharist begins, in an account of how bread and wine as symbols are transformed in a particular historical progression:

Bread and wine (or equivalent food) had become the symbol of life and had therefore acquired a place in the worship of the natural religions, in which God was experienced as the origin of all life, and especially in the so-called "cosmic liturgy," in which thanks were given to God for his good gifts of life. In Israel, these feasts were given a foundation in history, because Yahweh had not revealed himself primarily as the God of nature, but as the God of history, who had even forced nature to serve the history of his people. Israel's paschal feast was therefore the liturgical remembrance of an event of salvation, an anamnesis of the exodus from Egypt, Yahweh's deliverance of his people. The cosmic cult and Israel's liturgy of Yahweh's history of salvation with his people come together in the Eucharist, achieving their inward but transcendental fulfilment in something that was quite simply

divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the whole Christ, but shall say that He is in it as by a sign or figure, or force, let him be anathema.

Canon II. If anyone says that in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denies that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the entire substance of the wine into the blood, the species of the bread and wine only remaining, a change which the Catholic Church most fittingly calls transubstantiation: let him be anathema.

from *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*. op.cit., p. 270, nos. 883-4.

⁵⁰Edward Schillebeeckx, op.cit., pp. 91-2.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 94.

⁵²Ibid., p. 104.

entirely new.⁵³

Bread, on this account, cannot be treated as a natural substance, subject to natural change like copper or iron, rather, it is an object made by human beings whose meaning derives from a human, historical context. What changes in the Eucharist, therefore, is the meaning of bread (and wine) within this human context. The problem comes in the way Christ is identified as the agent who brings this change in meaning about. Charles Davis writes:

Bread, then, materially speaking, is the sum-total of the component substances, but, formally speaking, it is the unity or pattern imposed upon them, forming them into a particular human object related to man. By the words of consecration, Christ gives the same set of physical substances a new unity or pattern, and thus a new purpose and a new relation to man...The material components remain with the power to nourish man's body...But they have become part of a new whole, a new pattern or unity, with a new intelligibility and a new relation to man.⁵⁴

The problem here occurs when Christ's action is taken to override meaning at the human level. We see this happening when Schillebeeckx writes: "It is only the human meaning of the world that I can change...since its deepest, metaphysical meaning is beyond human understanding and intervention."⁵⁵ With transubstantiation, divine intervention changes the physical properties of bread and wine at a level imperceptible to human beings. Here, Christ changes the meaning of bread and wine, at a metaphysical level outside the range of human understanding. In each case, God does what human beings are unable either to do or to perceive. An impenetrable physical reality is replaced by an impenetrable "metaphysical meaning". What this represents, according to FitzPatrick, is a misreading of the gap, with which we began, between a given reality and our human perception of it. It is not possible to say, on the one hand, that our human perception of reality is limited and then, at the same time, to describe changes in that reality which we are unable to perceive.

The philosophy that both older and newer accounts of the Eucharist share, argues FitzPatrick, is scepticism.⁵⁶ They draw the gap between appearance and reality such that one negates the other; appearance becomes a disguise concealing a hidden reality

⁵³Ibid., p. 135.

⁵⁴Charles Davis, "Understanding the Real Presence" in *The Word in History*. Edited by T. Patrick Burke. (London: Collins, 1968) p. 175.

⁵⁵Edward Schillebeeckx, op.cit., p. 130.

⁵⁶P.J. FitzPatrick, op.cit., p. 100.

beneath. Understood in this way, the gap is unbridgeable. The first step towards a better account of the Eucharist, therefore, is to distinguish signs from disguises. A disguise is by definition misleading, masking something hidden, while a sign is itself an expression of a deeper reality. “Which is why signs, and not disguises, are the path to the eucharistic presence.”⁵⁷ It is here that FitzPatrick locates the place of ritual:

What I have called “the Way of Ritual” is an attempt to show how we can use the category of sign here, without falling back either into the language of camouflage that menaces the older account, or into the denial of meanings to words that menaces the newer expositions.⁵⁸

The Eucharist, he continues, is “a ritually achieved sign of [Christ’s] presence.”⁵⁹ This assertion is made in order to distinguish a new understanding of Christ’s presence from the kind of presence believed to be embodied in the old rite of the Roman Mass, referred to by FitzPatrick as the “Galilean Presence”: “The presence I call Galilean is quite simply the most vivid and basic presence we have yet encountered; it was in such a presence that the disciples came to know and to love their Master”.⁶⁰ The Eucharist understood as a sign, however, is not about achieving this unmediated presence of the individual, historical body of Jesus the Galilean, but about Christ’s presence mediated via the worshipping community who, through the Eucharist, are made into His historical Body, the Church.

The Eucharist is a sacramental signifying of the ‘spiritual eating’ which is the union of Christ with believers, a union that is the purpose of his saving work and that it touches our very being. The mystery of the eucharistic presence, I have insisted, does not start when we consider in isolation from ritual the perceptible elements; the mystery begins with the whole pattern of God’s love for us in the Incarnation, of which the achievement is the happiness of eternal life in the resurrection. But the hope and promise here do not have and cannot have the vividness that goes with what I call the Galilean presence. They point to something far greater than such a presence, but the pointing calls for faith, it offers no sight.⁶¹

What FitzPatrick is suggesting, in his opposition to the mode of thinking associated with transubstantiation, is that despite the limitations of our human struggle for greater understanding and insight, we have no choice in this struggle but to remain within the

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 150.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 204.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 205.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 219.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 219-20.

human arena. In other words, at no point can we escape the boundaries of our human finitude, and the fallibility which this entails, by appealing directly to an authority, be it God or the Pope, as a source of certainty providing answers to human problems from a field of vision unfettered by human blindness. This is not to argue that we cannot know God, rather, it is to say that all our strivings towards God, our worship and our theology, are expressed in human terms and share the same finitude which characterizes the human condition as a whole. Schillebeeckx writes:

According to the Catholic view of revelation and thus of the whole order of salvation, grace itself comes to us in a historical, visible form, on the horizontal level of human history (and, included in this, on the level of the cosmos or the corporeal world) and not simply vertically, like rain from heaven. What comes to us from heaven - grace - in fact comes to us *from the world*, from human history with its secular environment. Our personal relationship with God in grace is at the same time a relationship towards the secular world.⁶²

The tone of so much of what emanates from the Roman Catholic Church, however, denies any share in this human finitude, claiming instead a privileged vision of the truth, as unmediated as the presence of Christ offered in the old Roman Mass. Once again, the newer cultic picture points the way forward:

The newer rite of the Eucharist displays a cultic picture, as I have called it, which can serve as a pattern for what should be found in the Church. The picture has an openness and a vulnerability, and the Church needs to acknowledge these qualities in itself, even though the acknowledgment may be difficult and painful.⁶³

But does the answer lie with the newer rite? The changes introduced by Vatican II have not been universally loved by any means. There are activists at both extremes - those who feel that the reformers went too far, and those who feel that they didn't go far enough. These two positions have more in common than they might think, argues FitzPatrick, namely, the recognition of an increasingly centralized authority in the Church. "For those who hold to the older ways, the divisions since the council encourage an adherence to the centre, as to a focus of certainty and loyalty. For those who seek what is new, an appeal to Vatican Two seems to allow a complex past to be ignored in favour of what is present. But that present is one in which the central power is being vigorously exercised; and so the wish to innovate leads in the same direction as the wish to conserve."⁶⁴ The problem actually lies in

⁶²Edward Schillebeeckx, op.cit., p. 82.

⁶³Ibid., p. 310.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 335.

the centralization of authority itself and the changes in worship instituted by the Council are a prime example. The change from the old to the new rite, rather than maintaining an organic continuity between past and present, created a breach in which past was simply eliminated and replaced by present in a legislative enactment from the centre. The effect of this move was to reinforce the central authority which became the very symbol of continuity between past and present, seen to have been lost in the liturgical changes themselves.

The changes instituted by the Council have clearly had mixed effect on the Church. "On the one hand, it has moved in the direction I associate with the newer cultic picture. On the other hand, it has encouraged the belief that the complexities of past and present in the Church can be overcome by edicts centrally promulgated, obeyed at large, and regarded as new beginnings."⁶⁵ What this demonstrates is that reform of the liturgy and reform of the Church must go hand in hand. Changing the liturgy in isolation from the life of the Church as a whole robs it of power and meaning because it becomes the expression of a vision of Church which in practice does not exist.

Describing the Eucharist as a ritual situates it firmly within the arena of human expression. From this beginning we may move, on our journey, towards God, but the insights which we gain along the way do not negate or cancel our humble origins. The gap between human and divine, therefore, is one in which we struggle to articulate a relationship with God which is never fully disclosed, but which draws us ever forward. It is in this tension between the now and the yet to come that we live and worship. FitzPatrick uses the image of the narthex to describe this space:

The narthex is not a part of the building in the intimate way the nave and sanctuary are (at one time, penitents were relegated to it), and yet it is not alien to the building; it both joins the church to the street and the market-place, and yet it keeps the church distinct from them; it is a route by which we pass into the church, and yet the passage itself shows that the origin of our route is not its terminus. The narthex does not *polarize*, for it is open to both street and church; but its very openness is not to be taken as a reduction of either of them to the other; it both links them and keeps them apart.⁶⁶

In the next chapter, we take up FitzPatrick's suggestion that understanding the Eucharist as a ritual leads us away from the scepticism inherent in accounts based on transubstantiation.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 335.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 286.

CHAPTER TWO

The Way of Ritual

In this Chapter, we look at an account of ritual which moves away from seeing ritual as an independent category of activity, easily observed and recorded from the outside. On this new account, ritual is understood as a way of acting in which both secular and religious people are engaged. Ritual is seen, here, not as the expression of beliefs, but as a technique, employed at a pre-conscious level, for transmitting a world of meaning and relationship. This technique works by shaping the embodied structure of consciousness of individuals so that these in turn become the bearers and transmitters of a particular world. The process of appropriating and transmitting this world, however, is never a simple matter of repetition because there is always a space between the individual's own experience and his formation within a given culture or way of life. It is this distance that allows for the possibility of resistance and change. This account helps us to elucidate FitzPatrick's argument, that the way to understand the Eucharist is as a ritual, because it offers us a contemporary language in which to describe the role of the liturgy in expressing and transmitting the Christian life.

While arguing repeatedly throughout his book that the Eucharist ought to be understood as a ritual, FitzPatrick's observations about ritual itself remain fragmentary. In this Chapter, we focus on a recent approach in ritual theory, based on the idea that ritual is best understood, not as a discrete category of human activity, but as a way of acting that transforms everyday actions so that they participate in the expression of a common life. Here, the term 'ritualization' replaces 'ritual' as a description of this process. Catherine Bell, in her book *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, writes:

Most attempts to define ritual proceed by formulating the universal qualities of an autonomous phenomenon. They maintain, however provisionally, that there is something we can generally call ritual and whenever or wherever it occurs it has certain distinctive features. Such definitions inevitably come to function as a set of criteria for judging whether some specific activities can be deemed ritual.¹

¹Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. 69.

An alternative approach, Bell argues, lies in treating ritual as a strategy for distinguishing some actions from others. “Ritualization”, she writes, “is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian activities.”² Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, in their book *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual*, concur in this approach. “We suggest”, they write, “that ritual is a distinctive way in which an action, probably any action, may be performed. Thus a ‘theory of ritual’ is an account of the transformation of action by ritualization.”³ Although the term ‘ritualization’ has a history in different schools of ritual studies, “for most studies that use the term,” according to Bell, “ritualization is seen to involve the formal ‘modeling’ of valued relationships so as to promote legitimation and internalization of these relationships and their values.”⁴ What ritualization accomplishes in its activity of privileging differentiation is the production of a ritualized body. As Bell elaborates:

Essential to ritualization is the circular production of a ritualized body which in turn produces ritualized practices. Ritualization is embedded within the dynamics of the body defined within a symbolically structured environment.⁵

In other words, “required kneeling does not merely communicate subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself.”⁶ Ritualization produces a body endowed with a ‘sense’ of ritual. “This sense of ritual exists as an implicit variety of schemes whose deployment works to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can dominate in some way...This ‘sense’ is not a matter of self-conscious knowledge of any explicit rules of ritual but is an implicit “cultivated disposition”.”⁷ The production of a ritualized body takes place in the interaction between an individual body and an environment structured according to a framework of privileged oppositions. The individual internalizes the principles of the environment so delineated such that she becomes able in turn to transform other

²Ibid., p. 74.

³Caroline Humphrey, James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A theory of ritual illustrated by the Jain rite of worship*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 3.

⁴Bell, op.cit., p. 89.

⁵Ibid., p. 93.

⁶Ibid., p. 100.

⁷Ibid., p. 98.

sociocultural situations according to the same principles. The interaction of the body with the environment which forms it, and is in turn formed by it, is thus circular.

Ritualization operates through the differentiation and privileging of some activities over others. This process generates sets of binary oppositions - good/evil, male/female, light/darkness, Jew/gentile - structured hierarchically, which define the taxonomic order. The individual is formed by the environment so structured, which he internalizes and appropriates, and then in turn deploys. Ritualization thus affords the terms through which reality is both perceived and created. While the practice of ritualization involves the ongoing construction of hierarchized oppositions, these oppositions are never resolved, but rather, are taken up in an endless deferral of signification:

This orchestrated deferral of signification never yields a definitive answer, a final meaning, or a single act - there is no point of arrival but a constant invocation of new terms to continue the validation and coherence of the older terms. This process yields the sense of a loosely knit and loosely coherent totality, the full potential of which is never fully grasped and thus never fully subject to challenge or denial. One is never confronted with 'the meaning' to accept or reject.⁸

Ritualization does not resolve social contradictions or solve social problems, ritualization translates such contradictions and problems into its own terms through the agency of ritualized bodies and their interaction with a structured and structuring environment, thus effecting a transformation of the situation as a whole without producing closure. The effects of ritualization are neither transparent nor, therefore, immediately available, even to its agents: "It is a way of acting that sees itself as *responding* to a place, event, force, problem, or tradition...Ritualization does not see how it actively creates place, force, event, and tradition, how it redefines or generates the circumstances to which it is responding."⁹ Ritualization is misconstrued if it is seen as an activity expressing prior meanings which might just as well be communicated in simpler, more straightforward terms. As Bell argues, "rites take place specifically in lieu of explicit logical speculation. Ritual practices never define anything except in terms of the expedient relationships that ritualization itself establishes among things, thereby manipulating the meaning of things

⁸Ibid., p. 106.

⁹Ibid., p. 109.

by manipulating their relationships.”¹⁰ For this reason, rituals are not amenable to full discursive articulation.

Ritual mastery is what the ritualized body, through the practice of ritualization, comes to possess - “a practical mastery of the schemes of ritualization as an embodied knowing, as the sense of ritual seen in its exercise.”¹¹ Ritual mastery is deployed in relationship to an environment in which the ritual agent is formed and which she in turn generates and transforms. Schemes of ritualization, says Bell, “act as instruments for knowing and appropriating the world. The deployment of these schemes both structures experience of the world and molds dispositions that are effective in the world so experienced.”¹² Even within a tradition that appears quite static, ritualization is always an active and ongoing process. Indeed, the reproduction of fixed schemes of ritualization may itself be an active strategy for maximizing the domination of the present by the past. Bell uses the example of the Roman Mass to show how different forms of ritualization exist within a single tradition:

The evocation of tradition differs significantly in the early Christian eucharistic meal, the Roman rite codified by the Council of Trent, and the post-Vatican II folk mass of liturgical renewal. These liturgies display not only different formulations of the significance of Christ’s last supper but also different understandings of the relationship existing between the ritual and the original event. Similarly, in each case a different type of community is constructed, around different values and forms of authority - and all within a relatively stable liturgical tradition that presents itself as quite fixed.¹³

The textual codification of ritual introduces the problem of change, and the sanctioning of change. As Bell writes: “When accomplished through a variety of reinterpetive techniques...it leads to the proliferation of texts emending the tradition and institutions legitimizing the emendations; when accomplished through the upheavals of reform, invested authority may be painfully recalled only to be lodged more definitively in the text alone.”¹⁴ Textualization, through the problematizing of change, opens a gap between

¹⁰Ibid., p. 110.

¹¹Ibid., p. 107.

¹²Ibid., p. 115.

¹³Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 137.

what is written and what is done, promoting the illusion of uniformity and the marginalization of alternatives. As Bell continues:

Frequently the result is a written ideal quite alienated from what is in fact being done in common practice. As a consequence of standardization, the very sense of ritual in a culture may well come to embody forms such as those dominant in the West since the Enlightenment, namely, ritual as secondary enactment of prior mental states or belief convictions, the rote imitation of prescribed acts, or the performance of a script.¹⁵

A popular, although as Bell argues, misguided view is that rituals are symbolic expressions of belief. This idea assumes that ritual is communicating some definite message to participants, an assumption not supported by evidence that, “most symbolic action, even the basic symbols of a community’s ritual life, can be very unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways.”¹⁶ Bell continues that, “some level or degree of social consensus does not depend upon shared information or beliefs, and ritual need not be seen as a simple medium of communicating such information or beliefs.”¹⁷ Quite the contrary, writes Bell, the evidence in fact, “suggests that symbols and symbolic action not only fail to communicate clear and shared understandings, but the obvious ambiguity or overdetermination of much religious symbolism may even be integral to its efficacy.”¹⁸ Most people, in other words, do not have any systematic grasp of the beliefs or doctrines even of their own traditions, and furthermore, such understanding is not essential to their active participation in a common ritual life.

Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw take this point up at greater length in their account of ritual, illustrated by the Jain rite of worship. The idea that rituals communicate beliefs, they argue, is largely a construct of anthropologists themselves. As they write:

Even when a ritual can validly be cited as *evidence* that people hold this or that belief, it does not follow that the purpose of performing the ritual is to *communicate* the belief. But anthropologists have been tempted to assert of ritual that it ‘communicates’ the theories or observations about the society in question which the anthropologists themselves want to communicate to their readership.¹⁹

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁹Caroline Humphrey, James Laidlaw, op.cit., pp. 73-4.

Rather than see ritual as the expression of prior meaning or beliefs, Humphrey and Laidlaw, with Bell, describe ritual in terms of the transformation of action through ritualization. For them, however, the key feature which distinguishes ritual action from more quotidian activity is a break in the normal relationship between action and intention. They explain this idea as follows:

To identify actions we must form an intentional understanding of them - we must grasp their 'point'. To do this - to distinguish, for example, between 'lending' and 'giving' - requires that we see both ourselves and others as intentional agents, for it is with reference to the beliefs, desires, and intentions which we attribute to other actors that we grasp the intentional meaning of their action, and so identify their acts, and it is with reference to our own reflexively understood intentions-in-acting that we create and understand the acts we ourselves perform.²⁰

In ritual, however, the personal intention of the actor does not determine the identity of the act, because, in an important sense, the actor in ritual both is and is not the author of his or her own action. This is so because actions in ritual have a history and an identity existing prior to and independently of their enactment by any single individual. Action in ritual takes on the characteristic of an object - something which one can regard from the outside. Even from the inside, the actor in ritual has the sense of participating in something outside himself. As Humphrey and Laidlaw conclude:

Thus, in one way or another, ritualized acts stand beyond individual volition or intention. When new practices are established they must acquire this characteristic of distance or externality before we (or the practitioners) see them as ritual.²¹

Seeing an action as ritual, however, does not depend on a consensus about the meaning of the act. Indeed, precisely because the identity of the act is not contingent upon individual intention, there may be a great variety of meanings and intentions attributed to the act, without in any way compromising the identity of the act itself. The ability of an act to sustain a multiplicity of interpretations is in fact an indication of its having become ritualized. Humphrey and Laidlaw illustrate this point using the example of the Last Supper:

²⁰Ibid., pp. 92-3.

²¹Ibid., pp. 157-8.

The Last Supper itself cannot possibly be seen as a ritualized act, but the subsequent commemoration of that supper did become so, and this can be said because it could now represent *various* and *symbolic* purposes and meanings.²²

The independence of the ritualized act from personal intention means that ritual creates a space in which the individual is freed from the burden of his or her own intentionality. The break between action and intention in ritual thus affords an experience of personal liberation. "It is this gap", write Humphrey and Laidlaw, "a potential freedom from the everyday and inexorable suffusion of action with personal intentions - that provides a space which may suggest a reason why people perform ritual."²³ At the same time, the attempt to eliminate this gap by insisting on a consensus of meaning or belief just as effectively destroys the ritual space, and the freedom it allows. They continue:

In some religious traditions, the suspicion of ritual results in such insistent attempts to establish consensus about its meaning - attempts by religious authority to orchestrate the thoughts and intentions of practitioners - that the ritual itself is destroyed or ceases to be recognizably ritual.²⁴

If ritual is not based on a consensus of meaning or belief, what kind of consensus is it based on, since ritual clearly requires some level of consensus in order to exist? According to Bell, ritual expresses a shared ideology, understood as a shared, practical account of the social whole. She writes:

It is certainly in the interests of people to have some sense of reality by virtue of which they can live in communication with others. Indeed, it may well be the constraints of community as much as the interests of particular groups that hold ideas together for the sake of a flexibly unformulated but practically coherent worldview, even when that worldview limits, ranks, marginalizes, or frustrates.²⁵

Because the dynamics of ritualization for the most part remain implicit, the illusion of consensus can be maintained even in situations in which there is considerable dissent and resistance: "Ritualization both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body,

²²Ibid., p. 156.

²³Ibid., p. 99.

²⁴Ibid., p. 225.

²⁵Bell, op.cit., p. 192.

often leading participants to assume that there is more consensus than there actually is."²⁶ It is a mistake, however, to see ritual as a straightforward imposition of the social order. On the one hand, ritual creates a space independent of the personal intentions and meanings which individuals bring to it. On the other hand, individuals formed within the ritual environment, come to embody it in such a way that they are able in turn to have an impact on the social whole. As Bell, writing about ritualization, argues:

It does not merely socialize the body with schemes that structure and reproduce parts (large or small) of the social order, nor does it merely construct the social person with versions of these schemes as the order of its subjectivity and consciousness. To do all that it must also enable the person to deploy schemes that can manipulate the social order on some level and appropriate its categories for a semicoherent vision of personal identity and action. Socialization cannot be anything less than the acquisition of schemes that can potentially restructure and renounce both self and society.²⁷

Ritualization involves the transformation of ordinary, everyday human activities - eating, drinking, washing, sex, birth, death - into actions which have meaning within a particular, social and historical context. Through ritualization, ordinary actions become the expressions of a shared social reality; the means by which a whole world of relationship is conveyed and passed on. The transmission of this social world, however, takes place, not at the level of consciousness, but at the pre-conscious, pre-articulate level of embodied social interactions. This account of the transformation of action through ritualization, therefore, is based on a certain understanding of action in general - one which does not locate consciousness ontologically prior to action itself. We find such an understanding in Charles Taylor's distinction between a causal and a qualitative theory of action.

On the causal theory of action, actions are seen as events caused by desires, intentions and/or beliefs located in the mind of the agent. The causal theory can offer no account of unconscious, unreflected activity because consciousness is taken as a criterion for what counts as action in the first place. For the same reason, the causal theory cannot permit of action which is intrinsically shared. As Taylor argues:

The causal view was inherently atomist. An action was such because it was caused by desire, intention, some 'mental state'. But these mental states could only be understood as states of individuals. The mental is

²⁶Ibid., p. 210.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 215-16.

what is 'inner', which means within each one of us. And so action is ultimately individual. That is to say, collective actions ultimately amount to the convergent action of many individuals and nothing more.²⁸

On the qualitative account, by contrast, what is primitive is not self-conscious awareness of the causes of action, but rather, action itself. Consciousness, here, is understood as an achievement - the fruit of a struggle to articulate the direction our action is already imprinting on events. On this account, actions are qualitatively distinguished from non-actions by the fact of being intrinsically directed: "Actions are in a sense inhabited by the purposes which direct them, so that action and purpose are ontologically inseparable."²⁹ The direction of action, however, is not transparent, even to the actor, so that the ability to articulate that direction, making it available to consciousness, is an acquired skill.

The causal account of action creates a dichotomy between cause and effect. "Within the bounds of this outlook", writes Taylor, "there was a clear ontological separation between outer event and inner background."³⁰ Cause is part of the inner, mental world of consciousness which is immediately available to the agent, while effect belongs to the outer world of objective reality in which the agent's subjective standpoint has no privilege. While the agent is master of his intentions, the failure of these to correspond to the actions which result is, in a sense, beyond his power to control. On the qualitative account, by contrast, the agent is in a privileged position in relation to his or her own actions because the distinction made is not between an inner and outer world, but between two distinct kinds of knowledge: agent's knowledge and knowledge of external objects and events. Here, what is contingent is not the agent's ability to direct his actions, but rather, his ability to achieve self-consciousness in articulating that direction to himself and others. Taylor elaborates as follows:

We may never be without some sense of what we are doing, but coming to have knowledge is coming to formulate that correctly, and we may only do this in a partial or distorted fashion. Nor is this knowledge ever immediate; it is, on the contrary, mediated by our efforts at formulation.³¹

²⁸Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers 1*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 93.

²⁹Ibid., p. 78.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., p. 81.

Unlike the causal theory, therefore, the qualitative theory of action allows for a distinction between unconscious action and action whose direction is articulated:

The quality of consciously directed activity is different from that of our unreflected, semi-conscious performance. This flows naturally from the second view on action: if action is qualitatively different from non-action, and this difference consists in the fact that action is directed, then action is also different when this direction takes on a crucially different character. And this it does when we move from unreflecting response, where we act in much the same manner as animals do, to conscious formulation of our purposes. Our action becomes directed in a different and stronger sense. To become conscious is to be able to act in a new way.³²

The mental, inner realm of intentions, desires and beliefs is seen here as, "the inward reflection of what was originally external activity."³³ Self-consciousness is the inner appropriation of external experience, and action, in the first instance, is unreflecting bodily practice which only gradually and through struggle becomes self-aware. If we see action as primitive, in this sense, then it is also possible to see how it might also be the expression of a common purpose. As Taylor writes: "Both ontogenetically and in the history of culture, our first expressions are in public space, and are the vehicles of a quite unreflective awareness. Later we develop more refined media, in concepts and images, and become more and more capable of carrying out some part of our expressive activity monologically."³⁴ He continues:

An expression in public space may turn out to be the expression essentially of a common sentiment or purpose. That is, it may be essential to this sentiment or purpose that it be shared, and the expression may be the vehicle of this sharing.³⁵

If we put this qualitative theory of human action together with our preceding account of ritualization, we arrive at a description of the process of human socialization within a particular historical and linguistic world, which we can elaborate as follows: Human beings are born into a world which is an artefact, a creation of human hands. The natural world is incorporated within the human world and not vice versa. Learning to perform even the most ordinary human actions incorporates us into the expression of human life at a given

³²Ibid., p. 84.

³³Ibid., p. 85.

³⁴Ibid., p. 91-2.

³⁵Ibid., p. 94.

historical moment. Just as animals naturally learn to fend for themselves within their own environment, so human beings naturally adopt the language around them which expresses the human condition at a particular point in time. Our formation through language, however, does not occur at the conscious level, but at the level of our embodied spontaneity. It is, therefore, the temptation of every generation to imagine that their particular way of life expresses a natural humanity, and to forget that there is no such thing as an unconditioned human nature. It is, after all, not the naturalness of human life but its very contingency that makes it unique. It is the ability of human beings to imagine a way of life other than the one which presently exists that separates us from the natural environment and makes human life distinct from animal life.

In this Chapter, we have explored the manner in which a way of life is passed on. What we learn from this account is that a human body is not simply a physical object, but is, rather, the expression of a whole world. Through socialization, the human body acquires a historical and cultural identity, manifest in every action. As we saw with Taylor, the formation of the individual occurs as forms of expression, initially encountered in public space, are appropriated to articulate a personal identity. These forms of expression, however, also have a history; our language has a history which extends, not only beyond its use by any individual, but beyond its use by any generation. Rituals are forms of expression which carry a certain historical weight, and are not easily appropriated to individual use. What we have also learnt, however, is that the difference between rituals and other more quotidian activities is one of degree rather than of kind.

Ritualization describes a process by which certain actions, and certain relationships are differentiated from others and play a particular role in transmitting a world of meaning. Rejecting the idea that rituals communicate meaning is, in fact, the rejection of a certain understanding of consciousness, which we explored with Taylor, by which meaning is located in the conscious mind of the agent prior to its subsequent expression in action. Alternately, we argued, that the ability to articulate meaning, and so make it available to consciousness, is an acquired skill. By acting in the world, we constantly participate in meanings which we are as yet unable to express. Coming to have self-knowledge involves coming to understand the circumstances of our embodiment, our location at a particular time and place, defined from a cultural and historical, as well as from a personal,

perspective. It is only by achieving consciousness, in this sense, that we attain the vision, not simply to reproduce, but to change the world.

Understanding the Eucharist as a ritual leads us away from the scepticism of transubstantiation, and the dichotomy it creates between appearance and reality, by situating us firmly within the world of ordinary, everyday human action. At the same time, however, saying that the Eucharist is a ritual does not, in fact, identify anything particularly extraordinary about it. What it does is to help us locate a point of departure for our attempt to describe the contemporary significance of the Eucharist. From this point of departure, we see that the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church is a ritual environment. Individual Catholics and the Catholic community as a whole, through participation in the liturgy, are formed at an embodied, pre-conscious, pre-articulate level. Through this formation, they acquire the ability to reproduce this environment, and the kind of relationships that constitute it, in other sociocultural settings. It is only, however, by coming to a conscious understanding of this process, and of the kind of environment and relationships that are being reproduced, that we can make a decision about whether our activity as Church conforms to our vocation as Christians. Understanding the means by which the human body takes on a particular historical and cultural identity is clearly essential to a contemporary understanding of what it means to embody Christ, both as individual Christians and as the Christian Church. Perhaps the most important insight to be gained from this Chapter is that it is not possible to reproduce a world that does not actually exist. Ritualization is a heightening and a selection of actions and relationships that define a social world. The invention of rituals to express a world which does not have a life of its own will simply fail to have any real power or influence. It is for this reason that the attempt to reform the liturgy without reforming the Church is a fruitless task that can only cause dissension. Catholics, who have not already left the Church, are either hoping for reform to make the Church conform more fully to the vision they are living in the liturgy, or else, they are trying to return to the former liturgy because it expresses so much better the real state of the present Church.

In Chapter Three, we explore the idea of competence as a way of talking about the pre-articulate, pre-conscious knowledge that individuals acquire through socialization, but which they may be unable to articulate. We look at the relationship between competence and conscious knowledge particularly with regard to the need for a critical stance towards

both self and society. We relate this discourse to our discussion of the Church by looking at how we might approach the liturgy as an explicitly alternative medium, and what this would mean for contemporary Christian life.

CHAPTER THREE

The Liturgy and Christian Competence

In this Chapter, we investigate in greater depth an idea that emerges from our discussion of ritualization in the last Chapter, namely, that human beings, through entry into a linguistically-structured world, come to embody forms of knowledge of which they are consciously unaware.

Ritual, as we have seen, is not a category of activity that can easily be isolated so as to divide observers from participants. Rather, it is a way of acting that differentiates and privileges certain actions and relationships, giving them a heightened significance within a particular social and historical context. The process of ritualization permeates human social life, passing on particular schemes of value and significance. Rituals are not the expression of systematic or consciously held beliefs, but the embodiment of practical, loosely connected, and not always consistent visions of the social whole. Through ritualization, the human body acquires a particular cultural and historical identity, and becomes the living expression of a given time and place. This formation, however, occurs at a pre-conscious, pre-reflective level, meaning that a person may have an identity which she is nevertheless unable to articulate. In this Chapter, we explore the idea of pre-conscious knowledge as it is investigated by three different authors all using the term 'competence'.

The aim of the authors grouped together under the heading of 'competence theory' is to reconstruct a tacit knowledge manifest in the everyday practices of ordinary people. In each case, the aim is to demonstrate the structure mastered by an individual engaged in a certain form of behaviour. The significance of this approach is that it offers an account of knowledge which is not based on the idea of consciously-held information in the mind. So, for example, with the linguist Noam Chomsky, we see that a child learning her mother tongue does not do so simply by remembering the many sentences and phrases which she hears, but by mastering the structure of language by which she then generates new and original sentences. This structure, according to Chomsky, is innate and does not depend on a conscious grasp of the rules of grammar.

The philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas takes up Chomsky's idea of competence and uses it to argue that the values of truth, freedom and justice are inherent in the very form of our linguistic exchanges. His aim is to demonstrate the structure of intersubjectivity as a competence expressed in everyday communicative action.

Finally, the social anthropologists Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley attempt to show a universal structure of ritual, implicit in different ritual traditions, and expressed in the competence of ordinary ritual participants.

In this Chapter, we look at each of these authors in turn, focussing in particular on four common features of the projects brought together under the competence heading: 1) an emphasis on the intuition of the 'native participant'; 2) the idea of competence as a creative form of knowledge; 3) the theoretical need to imagine an ideal situation; and 4) discourse described as a secondary activity, relying implicitly on competence as a primary source.

We appropriate this discourse of competence to a discussion of the liturgy. We argue that the purpose of the liturgy is not to transmit beliefs and doctrines to Christians at a conscious level, but to embody in Christians a structure of Christian faith. The liturgy is a deliberately alternative linguistic world whose purpose is to provide a vision of the Kingdom which enables Christians, competent in this vision, to make the Kingdom a reality in the world at large. We prepare for the next Chapter by introducing the question of the relationship between competence and critique.

LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

The term 'competence' is found in linguistics in the work of Noam Chomsky. Chomsky argues that previous approaches to the study of first language acquisition focus too heavily on the role of socialization and instruction, ignoring what he describes as the creative aspect of language use. In other words, children acquiring language skills do not simply repeat words and sentences which they hear, but rather, within a short space of time, demonstrate a mastery of the structure of language which enables them to form

original sentences. Such is the complexity of this structure, says Chomsky, that it points to the existence of an innate, rather than an acquired, knowledge. This thesis is further supported, he continues, by the poverty of the stimulus - the fact that the language children actually hear is never a perfect expression of the language structure which they nevertheless master. Furthermore, the process by which children acquire language skills is strikingly uniform across a spectrum of social settings. He elaborates as follows:

It seems plain that language acquisition is based on the child's discovery of what from a formal point of view is a deep and abstract theory - a generative grammar of his language - many of the concepts and principles of which are only remotely related to experience by long and intricate chains of unconscious quasi-inferential steps. A consideration of the character of the grammar that is acquired, the degenerate quality and narrowly limited extent of the available data, the striking uniformity of intelligence, motivation, and emotional state, over wide ranges of variation, leave little hope that much of the structure of the language can be learned by an organism initially uninformed as to its general character.¹

What these observations point to, argues Chomsky, is the existence of a language structure in the mind which he calls 'the language faculty'. Linguistics, then, is primarily a study of the mind itself. As Chomsky writes: "Hence, in the technical sense, linguistic theory is mentalistic, since it is concerned with discovering a mental reality underlying actual behaviour."² This genetic linguistic endowment, what we bring to our initial encounter with a particular language, is referred to as 'Universal Grammar', which, according to Chomsky, is both innate and universal. "If there is a significant genetic element in language acquisition, it must be common to all human beings: there is no evidence that any particular people are predisposed to learn one language rather than others."³

Chomsky makes a distinction between competence - the unconscious knowledge of properties of language in general and of specific languages in particular - and performance - the application of this knowledge in a given social context. Competence must be deduced and reconstructed from the data of performance. As Chomsky writes:

¹Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax*. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1965) p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Raphael Salkie, *The Chomsky Update: Linguistics and Politics*. (London: Routledge, 1990) p. 24.

"The problem for the linguist as well as for the child learning the language, is to determine from the data of performance the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker-hearer and that he puts to use in actual performance."⁴ The difficulty involved is that performance is influenced by a host of linguistically irrelevant factors which make it a very poor expression of underlying competence. Since, as Chomsky suggests, our understanding of performance ultimately relies on our understanding of competence, he makes the case for an emphasis on competence in linguistic research.

In his attempt to reconstruct Universal Grammar, Chomsky is striving, in the first instance, for an account of language that corresponds to the way people actually speak. In this endeavour, the role of the native speaker is central: "The structural descriptions assigned to sentences by the grammar, the distinctions that it makes between well-formed and deviant, and so on, must, for descriptive adequacy, correspond to the linguistic intuition of the native speaker."⁵ Although most ordinary speakers of a language could not provide a systematic account of that language's grammar, they can, with a fair degree of accuracy, judge whether a sentence is well-formed or deviant. This intuition, argues Chomsky, represents the workings of Universal Grammar. In order to arrive at the universal structure of language, Chomsky considers it necessary, from a theoretical point of view, to imagine an ideal speaker-listener in a homogeneous speech community. The use of this paradigm maintains the distinction between competence and performance, filtering out the linguistically irrelevant data which intrudes in any actual instance of language use. He explains:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance.⁶

⁴Chomsky, op.cit.

⁵Ibid., p. 24.

⁶Ibid., p. 3.

We can sum up linguistic competence as follows: Chomsky is interested in what he calls 'generative grammar' - the existence of a grammar which enables individuals to generate new and original sentences. He distinguishes between the content of language which is fluid and changing, and its structure - the framework for linguistic creativity. According to Chomsky, the structure of language is innate, located in a specific module in the brain. Its application, however, is always flawed, corrupted by grammatically irrelevant factors. In order to accurately reconstruct this innate linguistic knowledge, therefore, it is necessary to screen out extraneous influences by imagining an ideal situation in which performance represents a perfect expression of competence. Understanding of competence is mediated by the intuition of native speakers, who, although unable to give a systematic account of grammar, nevertheless, demonstrate a practical mastery of their language such that they are able to distinguish between well-formed and deviant grammatical constructions. It is this intuition that guides linguistic research which attempts to reconstruct a primary knowledge, not articulated, but manifest in the everyday linguistic practices of ordinary people. This primary knowledge is called competence.

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The philosopher and social theorist, Jürgen Habermas, appropriates Chomsky's idea of competence for his own account of language as the structure of human intersubjectivity. While Chomsky is looking for linguistic universals, Habermas is seeking semantic universals which transcend cultural and linguistic divides. Habermas's difficulty with Chomsky's account is with his attempt to isolate language from its function as the framework for intersubjective communication. This attempt, argues Habermas, distorts our understanding of language and its role in creating social relationships. Habermas writes:

Hence it follows out of these considerations that general semantics cannot be developed sufficiently on the narrow basis of the monological linguistic competence proposed by Chomsky...It is not enough, to understand language communication as an application - limited by empirical conditions - of linguistic competence. On the contrary, producing a situation of potential ordinary language communication belongs by itself to the general competence of the ideal speaker. The situation, namely, in which speech, i.e., the application of linguistic competence principally becomes possible, depends

on a structure of intersubjectivity which in turn is linguistic.⁷

This more basic structure which Habermas describes he terms 'communicative competence'. While Chomsky is interested in reconstructing Universal Grammar, the pre-conscious, pre-articulate knowledge that constitutes linguistic competence, Habermas wants to reconstruct Universal Pragmatics, the implicit knowledge of the structure of human intersubjectivity, manifest in human speech, that constitutes communicative competence. Thomas McCarthy, explaining Habermas's position, writes: "The idea of a universal pragmatics rests on the contention that not only phonetic, syntactic, and semantic features of sentences, but also certain pragmatic features of utterances, not only language but speech, not only linguistic competence but communicative competence, admit of rational reconstruction in universal terms."⁸ While for Chomsky, the basic unit of analysis is the sentence, for Habermas, it is the utterance. He writes: "Utterances have in addition to the meaning of their propositional content, at least implicitly, a meaning that is linked to the speech situation as such."⁹

According to Habermas, communicative action - by which he means action aimed at reaching understanding - is fundamental. "Thus", he writes, "I start from the assumption (without undertaking to demonstrate it here) that other forms of social action - for example, conflict, competition, strategic action in general - are derivatives of action oriented to reaching understanding."¹⁰ Habermas separates, for the purpose of his analysis, explicit speech actions from other forms of communicative action, like body language, and contends that anyone engaged in speech actions cannot help but implicitly raise certain validity claims. These validity claims comprise the basic structure of a situation of possible understanding in the same way that Chomsky's rules of Universal Grammar comprise the parameters of possible linguistic expression. They are as follows:

The speaker claims to be:

⁷Jürgen Habermas, "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence" in *Recent Sociology*, Volume Two, edited by Hans Peter Dreitzel. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970) p. 138.

⁸Thomas McCarthy in his "Introduction" to Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. xviii.

⁹Habermas, op.cit..

¹⁰Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991) p. 1.

- a) Uttering something understandably;
- b) Giving [the hearer] something to understand;
- c) Making himself thereby understandable; and
- d) Coming to an understanding with another person.¹¹

In other words, when engaged in speech action, the speaker is implicitly claiming comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness. In everyday speech, these validity claims, for the most part, remain unchallenged. If, however, this underlying consensus is called into question then validity claims must be explicitly addressed, and a new consensus achieved, before communicative action can proceed. Communicative competence denotes the ability to relate the content and context of speech together in an appropriate and coherent fashion. As Habermas writes: "By "communicative competence" I understand the ability of a speaker oriented to mutual understanding to embed a well-formed sentence in relations to reality."¹² For Habermas, the relationship between language and the context of language use is central to understanding the structure of human communication:

In being uttered, a sentence is placed in relation to (1) the external reality of what is supposed to be an existing state of affairs, (2) the internal reality of what a speaker would like to express before a public as his intentions, and finally, (3) the normative reality of what is intersubjectively recognized as a legitimate interpersonal relationship. It is thereby placed under validity claims that it need not and cannot fulfill as a nonsituated sentence, as a purely grammatical formation.¹³

Like Chomsky, Habermas adopts the paradigm of an ideal situation in order to filter irrelevant influences from his analysis. He argues that all speech implies an ideal speech situation, a situation of pure intersubjectivity that would issue if all four validity claims were perfectly redeemable. Such a situation is not empirically attainable, however, since all communication, like all language for Chomsky, is corrupt - influenced by factors such as ulterior motive or deliberate deception which hinder the expression of a pure intersubjectivity. Nevertheless, this idealization is implicit in speech and provides,

¹¹Ibid., p. 2.

¹²Ibid., p. 29.

¹³Ibid., pp. 27-8.

according to Habermas, "a linguistic conceptualization for that which we traditionally apprehend as the ideas of truth, freedom, and justice."¹⁴ He continues:

No matter how the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding may be deformed, the design of an ideal speech situation is necessarily implied with the structure of potential speech; for every speech, even that of intentional deception, is oriented towards the idea of truth.¹⁵

For Habermas, the identification of universal validity claims within the linguistic structures of intersubjectivity suggests a framework in which values such as truth, freedom, justice and reason can be universally grounded. He argues that these ideals are embodied in the very structure of speech which anticipates, but does not attain, the conditions of the ideal speech situation:

Insofar as we master the means for the constitution of an ideal speech situation, we can conceive the ideas of truth, freedom, and justice - which interpret each other - only as ideas of course. For on the strength of communicative competence we can by no means really produce the ideal speech situation independent of the empirical structures of the social system to which we belong; we can only anticipate this situation.¹⁶

Habermas further analyses the relationship between the content and context of speech in his distinction between the propositional and illocutionary components of the speech act. The illocutionary component is what embeds an utterance in relation to reality, what establishes a relationship between speaker and hearer:

To be understood in a given situation, every utterance must, at least implicitly, establish and bring to expression a certain relationship between the speaker and his counterpart. We can also say that the illocutionary force of a speech action consists in fixing the communicative function of the content uttered.¹⁷

The creative dimension of communicative competence resides in the illocutionary power of speech acts to generate new relationships. "Thus", writes Habermas, "the generative

¹⁴Habermas, op.cit. (1970), p. 144.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Habermas, op.cit. (1991), p. 34.

power consists in the fact that the speaker, in performing a speech act, can influence the hearer in such a way that the latter can take up an interpersonal relation with him."¹⁸ The propositional component of a speech act, by contrast, can be abstracted from this illocutionary setting and expressed in a different context altogether.¹⁹ Habermas is interested in analysing this double structure of speech, which he elaborates as follows:

(1) the *level of intersubjectivity* on which speaker and hearer, through illocutionary acts, establish the relations that permit them to come to an understanding with one another, and (2) the *level of propositional content* which is communicated.²⁰

This structure allows for an uncoupling of these two levels, a fact which reveals both an objective and a performative attitude present in every speech act. As Habermas writes: "Thus the peculiar reflexivity of natural language rests in the first instance on the combination of a communication of content - effected in an objectivating attitude - with a communication concerning the relational aspect in which the content is to be understood - effected in a performative attitude."²¹ This double structure is always present because, "it is not possible simultaneously to perform and to objectify an illocutionary act."²² In other words, as soon as one adopts an objectivating attitude to the performative dimension of a speech act, this aspect becomes the propositional component which is in turn embedded in a further illocutionary setting. These two levels of speech represent two semantic levels which we approach through different learning processes:

We learn the meaning of illocutionary acts only in the performative attitude of participants in speech actions. By contrast, we learn the meaning of sentences with propositional content in the objectivating attitude of observers who correctly report their experience in propositions. We acquire originally illocutionary meanings in connection with communicative experiences that

¹⁸Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁹This is not the case with propositionally nondifferentiated speech acts such as "checkmate", "fire!", or "hello" where the propositional component cannot be separated from its context. Habermas, however, is principally concerned with propositionally differentiated speech acts. He draws a further distinction between institutionally bound and institutionally unbound speech acts. Institutionally bound speech acts are acts such as "betting", "christening", and "appointing" that are bound to a particular institution which prescribes the speech act in advance and determines its success or failure. Habermas deals exclusively with propositionally differentiated and institutionally unbound speech acts.

²⁰Habermas, op.cit. (1991) p. 42.

²¹Ibid., p. 43.

²²Ibid.

we have in entering upon the level of intersubjectivity and establishing interpersonal relations. We acquire originally propositional meanings in reporting something that happens in the world.²³

The distinction of these two semantic levels has important implications, argues Habermas. Semantic content cannot refer solely to the propositional level of a speech act and ignore the illocutionary level in which it is embedded. This represents a failure to acknowledge the two pragmatic functions of language: to establish interpersonal relations as well as to represent facts. In actual speaking, either of these pragmatic functions may be more centrally thematic: in the interactive use of language, the interpersonal relations between speaker and hearer are thematized, whereas in the propositional use of language, it is the propositional content of the utterance. A third possible use of language is expressive. In this case, the intention of the speaker, namely, the speaker's self-disclosure, is thematized. Habermas argues that other approaches to semantics have focused exclusively on the propositional level of meaning and ignored the expressive and interpersonal levels altogether.

In each of the different uses of language, a different validity claim is more explicitly raised, although all four validity claims are presupposed in every speech act. With the interactive use of language, the claim to rightness - the claim to be coming to an understanding with another person - is stressed: "The validity of a normative background of institutions, roles, socioculturally habitual forms of life - that is, of conventions - is always presupposed."²⁴ In the propositional, or cognitive, use of language it is the claim to truth that is explicitly raised - the claim to be giving the hearer something to understand. And in the expressive use, the claim to truthfulness is thematic - the claim to be making oneself understandable: "Truthfulness guarantees the transparency of a subjectivity representing itself in language."²⁵ The claim to comprehensibility - to be uttering something understandably - cannot be made thematic, argues Habermas, unless there is a breakdown in communication, in which case it is necessary to resort to a hermeneutic discourse.

²³Ibid., p. 48.

²⁴Ibid., p. 54.

²⁵Ibid., p. 57.

This validity basis of speech, according to Habermas, reveals a universal and innately rational structure embedded in human communication, residing in the fact that validity claims, if challenged, could be defended and redeemed through recourse to rational discourse. He writes: "In the final analysis, the speaker can illocutionarily influence the hearer and vice versa, because speech-act-typical commitments are connected with cognitively testable validity claims - that is, because the reciprocal bonds have a rational basis."²⁶ The type of defense required to redeem validity claims which have been challenged depends on which validity claim is at stake, in other words, on the use of language being employed. For each of the different uses of language, the speaker takes on a different kind of obligation or commitment, a different burden of proof. In each case, there is an immediate and a mediate level of defense available.

With the cognitive use of language, the speaker undertakes the obligation to provide grounds. On the immediate level, this means an appeal to the experiential source which provides the speaker with the certainty that what he says is true. If this proves insufficient, then the truth claim in question becomes, on the mediate level, the subject of a theoretical discourse. In the case of the interactive use of language, the speaker takes on the obligation to provide justification. In the first instance, this entails an appeal to the normative context that gives the speaker the conviction that his utterance is right. If this appeal is inadequate, then a move to a practical discourse is required. Here, however, the subject of discourse is not the validity claim itself, but rather, the claim exercised by the underlying norm. With the expressive use of language, the speaker is under the obligation to prove trustworthy. She does this primarily by affirming what is evident to herself. If this testimony is insufficient, however, then the only further defense available is to show through actions that the intentions expressed are genuinely sincere. The truthfulness of the utterance in question can only be confirmed through the witness of the speaker's subsequent actions. In summary, Habermas writes: "Every speech-act-immanent obligation can be made good at two levels, namely immediately, in the context of utterance - whether through recourse to an experiential base, through indicating a corresponding normative context, or through affirmation of what is evident to oneself - and mediately, in discourse or in subsequent actions."²⁷

²⁶Ibid., p. 63.

²⁷Ibid., p. 64.

It is important to note that both in the case of the obligation to provide grounds and the obligation to prove trustworthy - in relation to truth and truthfulness claims - what is defended and redeemed both immediately and mediately is the validity claim itself. With the obligation to justify, however, the immediate level refers to the validity claim - to the claim that the speech act fits into a normative background. But on the mediate level of a practical discourse, what is addressed is the underlying norm itself. In a practical discourse, the normative background, i.e., taken-for-granted assumptions, practices, traditions and worldviews - what Habermas calls the lifeworld - is subject to public scrutiny. In the course of this public scrutiny, norms that are successfully defended take on a universal validity; they move from the private to the public domain.

According to Habermas, language embodies the structure of interrelationship between three fundamental domains of reality: 'the external world', 'our social world', and 'a particular inner world'. The different uses of language and the different types of validity correspond to these three worlds all of which are presupposed in every speech action, although one in particular may be thematic. The implication of this structure is that concepts such as meaning and knowledge are contingent in their definition upon the particular domain of reality in question, and their respective criteria for the success or failure of utterances. Habermas writes:

We can examine every utterance to see whether it is true or untrue, justified or unjustified, truthful or untruthful, because in speech, no matter what the emphasis, grammatical sentences are embedded in relations to reality in such a way that in an acceptable speech action segments of external nature, society, and internal nature always come into appearance together. Language itself also appears in speech, for speech is a medium in which the linguistic means that are employed instrumentally are also reflected.²⁸

Communicative action refers to everyday speech in which validity claims are presupposed but, for the most part, not called into question. This type of communication is distinct from discourse which represents a specialized use of language. "The realm of discourse", explains John B. Thompson in a study of Habermas, "is analytically distinguishable from

²⁸Ibid., p. 68.

the everyday context of communicative action. The participants in a discourse no longer seek to exchange information or to convey experiences, but rather to proffer arguments for the justification of problematized validity claims."²⁹ Criterion for the success of a theoretical or practical discourse is that the outcome should be determined only by the unforced force of the better argument.

Communicative competence, therefore, is a knowledge manifest in the everyday speech of ordinary people. It represents the ability to join the propositional and illocutionary dimensions of speech in a way which coherently and appropriately embeds an utterance in relation to reality. This activity is creative insofar as it generates new relationships between speaker and hearer, extending the web of intersubjectivity inherent in the structure of speech itself. This account demands that all communicative action be understood as action aimed at reaching understanding, and that communicative action which contradicts this aim be explained as a deviation. In other words, in order to grasp the structure of intersubjectivity implicit in human speech we must presuppose the ideal speech situation - a situation of pure intersubjectivity in which all validity claims were perfectly redeemable. For the most part, validity claims remain unchallenged, but when called into question they must be redeemed in order to establish a new consensus which allows communicative action to proceed. This happens either immediately - within the context of communicative action - or mediately - by reverting to discourse. There are two relevant types of discourse - theoretical and practical: A theoretical discourse is engaged in defense of a truth claim, while a practical discourse serves to justify the normative context in which a claim to rightness is made.

RITUAL COMPETENCE

Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley's work on ritual, in their book *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture*,³⁰ represents yet another application of Chomsky's idea of competence. Lawson and McCauley try to demonstrate, using the example of religious rituals, that certain socio-cultural systems are constrained by

²⁹John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) p. 87.

³⁰Thomas E. Lawson, Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

universal parameters in the same way that, according to Chomsky, natural languages are constrained. They explain the choice of ritual to illustrate this theory as follows:

Ritual's formality, its dramatic quality, and its sensuality all provide an intriguing contrast with ordinary behaviour. Its ready observability also makes ritual an attractive candidate for both interpretive and explanatory analyses. In addition, ritual has intricate relationships with other symbolic-cultural forms such as art and architecture, and drama and dance, as well as myth and language.³¹

But it is mainly the potential in the analogy between ritual and language that leads Lawson and McCauley to focus their analysis on religious rituals. They write: "We will argue that an approach to religious ritual which mimics the methodological orientation of theories of syntax in generative linguistics possesses the resources for rendering at least some claims about religious ritual empirically tractable."³² The purpose of their analysis is to identify the universal principles of religious ritual systems, and so to articulate the tacit knowledge of the participant in ritual. They continue:

Just as speakers have robust intuitions about numerous features of linguistic strings, participants in religious ritual systems possess similar intuitive insight into the character of ritual acts. Both sorts of intuitions reflect mastery of a body of knowledge about extremely complex cultural systems. Although this knowledge for some individuals may prove to be exclusively tacit, they demonstrate their knowledge, nonetheless, through their intuitions about the form of rituals and their successful participation in them.³³

For Lawson and McCauley, the basic unit of analysis in the case of religious ritual systems is the religious ritual act. As they explain: "What distinguishes religious rituals from both other sorts of rituals and everyday actions overwhelmingly concerns the peculiar conceptual commitments which characterize religion generally."³⁴ Although religious ritual acts do not differ in their basic structure either from everyday actions or from other types of rituals, according to Lawson and McCauley, the difference lies in the fact that in religion, objects and beings who would not normally qualify as agents are

³¹Ibid., p. 45.

³²Ibid., p. 50.

³³Ibid., p. 77.

³⁴Ibid., p. 79.

endowed with agency through ritual transformations that follow from a religion's beliefs about the nature of such objects and beings. Lawson and McCauley begin their analysis, therefore, with an account of action in general. They write:

For an event to qualify as an action presupposes that it originates with an agent. Actions do not turn solely on the occurrence of certain physical events. Their identification and differentiation assume complex hypotheses about the states of mind of the agents involved. The crucial points are that recognizing the objects of actions presupposes the recognition of actions, and that recognizing both actions and their objects presupposes the recognition of agents. It is agency that is an intrinsic - not a relational property.³⁵

In the case of religious ritual, the scope of potential agents is broader than in that of everyday actions. This is due to belief in superhuman agents who either act themselves or who bestow agency on other persons and things through processes of ritual transformation. Religious rituals are linked together in a system of causal relations which ultimately link the ritual act to the actions of a superhuman being. Thus: "In contrast to the grammatical relations upon which linguists focus, it is these causal relations which play the principal role in determining the systematic character of participant's representation of religious ritual acts."³⁶ While general principles which constrain all action apply equally to religious ritual acts, the action elements (meaning the agent or object of action), in the case of religious rituals, are modified by the religion's conceptual system. For example, although an action must have an agent, in a religious ritual that agent might be a tree or a superhuman being. Religious rituals, they argue, stand in special kinds of causal relations to one another, determined by the position of superhuman agents in a religion's conceptual scheme. Lawson and McCauley claim that all religious rituals presuppose the existence of superhuman agents, and that it is this attribute that gives religious ritual systems a universal structure, transcending the differences that distinguish particular religions. They continue: "It is, then, because of the priority that our theory assigns (and most religious people assign) to culturally postulated superhuman agents that we maintain that these principles of religious ritual are, in fact, universal."³⁷ Like Chomsky and Habermas, Lawson and McCauley use the paradigm of an ideal participant in trying to

³⁵Ibid., p. 86.

³⁶Ibid., p. 87.

³⁷Ibid., p. 89.

articulate these universal principles in order, as they write, "to avoid the problems which idiosyncrasy and individual variation present."³⁸

Lawson and McCauley argue that one of the universal characteristics of religious ritual action is the fact that such action, unlike action in general, always has an object. This fact stems, they explain, from the embedded nature of the relationship between one ritual and another, and the ultimate source of a sequence of ritual actions in the action of a superhuman agent. The object of ritual action links one ritual to another in a causal chain. Enabling actions can be traced back to superhuman agents whose actions represent the beginning of the ritual system. They base this theory on the following account of action in general:

The formation system generates initial structural descriptions of actions. The various available conceptual schemes penetrate this system, supplying the most specific action elements of the represented action. These include appropriate representations for the agent, the action, and the object of the action (if there is one), as well as any properties of each relevant to the action's accomplishment. The object agency filter screens the products of the formation system in order to preclude structural descriptions that would have ineligible entities functioning as agents. A derived structural description of an action results.³⁹

In the case of religious ritual action, this system is modified by the fact that it is the religious conceptual scheme that penetrates the action formation system in order to specify the action elements - the agent, the action, and the object of action. "The same principles of religious ritual action", they argue, "underlie all religious ritual systems. The variation in religious systems is overwhelmingly a function of the respective religions' conceptual schemes."⁴⁰ This conceptual variation, however, leads to significant differences in religious expression because of the conceptual scheme's penetration of the formation system, determining the action elements.

By way of illustration, Lawson and McCauley analyse the example of a parishioner in a Roman Catholic Church blessing himself with holy water by dipping his fingers into the

³⁸Ibid., p. 65.

³⁹Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 89.

font and making the sign of the cross. A surface account of this action, they argue, identifies the parishioner as the agent of the action, the blessing as the action itself, and the parishioner, again, as the object of the blessing. But this description, they continue, does not reveal the deeper structure at work here, and in particular, the role of the water in linking this ritual to previous ritual actions. According to Lawson and McCauley, the parishioner can bless himself in this ritual because the water has previously been blessed in a prior, enabling action. The water, on this account, plays an important role in the action of blessing, providing a link in a sequence of ritual actions, for it has previously been the object of a ritual transformation by a priest which changed it from everyday water to holy water. The priest's blessing is, in turn, dependent on a prior ritual, namely, his ordination. His ordination can be traced, according to Lawson and McCauley, either to a series of rituals pointing to the Pope as the Vicar of Christ, and hence to the institution of the papacy in Jesus' commission to Peter, or simply to the priest's ordination by the Church, understood here as a ritual agent. The key point for Lawson and McCauley, whichever story prevails, is that the parishioner's simple blessing leads back to the actions of a superhuman agent - Jesus Christ - in his institution of the Church.

Lawson and McCauley claim to have identified two universal principles in the structure of religious ritual systems - The Principle of Superhuman Agency, and The Principle of Superhuman Immediacy:

1) The Principle of Superhuman Agency:

The Principle of Superhuman Agency concerns where the superhuman agent appears in a ritual's structural description. The issue at stake is *the character of the superhuman agent's involvement* in the ritual. Those rituals where superhuman agents function as the agent in the ritual (for example, when Jesus institutes the Church) will always prove more central to a religious system than those where the superhuman agents serve some other role (as, for example, when they serve as the passive recipient of a sacrifice). In short, the most central religious rituals are always those where the gods themselves directly act. The more directly active a super-human agent is in ritual, the more fundamental that ritual will prove to the overall religious system.

2) The Principle of Superhuman Immediacy:

The Principle of Superhuman Immediacy constrains the application of the Principle of Superhuman Agency. This principle concerns the immediacy

of the superhuman agent's involvement in any ritual, rather than the character of that involvement. The principle can be summarized as follows: the fewer enabling actions to which appeal must be made in order to implicate a superhuman agent, the more fundamental the ritual is to the religious system in question. Hence, rituals in which a superhuman agent is directly involved even in some role other than that of the agent are more essential to the religious system than are those where the superhuman agent appears in the structural description only in some embedded, enabling action that has occurred previously. Hence, the parishioner's blessing is less important to the Catholic system than is Jesus's institution of the church.⁴¹

According to Lawson and McCauley, these two principles applied together serve to distinguish the relative centrality of specific religious rituals within a religious system. The criteria for determining this centrality is as follows: 1) Participants' own insights about a ritual's relative importance; 2) Whether or not the ritual presupposes the completion of previous, enabling rituals, (the most central rituals do not require enabling rituals); 3) The ritual's role in the preservation of the religious system, (the most central rituals are least susceptible to change). In order to understand their application of this approach, we examine Lawson and McCauley's analysis of the parishioner's blessing, the ordination of priests, the Eucharist, and Jesus's institution of the Church.

In the ritual of Jesus's institution of the Church, a superhuman being - Jesus Christ - is the agent of the action. It follows, therefore, that this ritual does not find its source in any enabling ritual, and is thus classified as central to the religious system. On this account, Jesus's institution of the Church is a hypothetical ritual presupposed in all other rituals of the Christian tradition. Lawson and McCauley elaborate: "This ritual is hypothetical in at least two respects. The action in question need not occur in the world of space and time, and it need only be done once."⁴²

The Catholic Eucharist is in the category of rituals in which a superhuman agent appears in the structural description in some capacity other than that of agent. It presupposes a number of enabling rituals - the ordination of the priest and Jesus's institution of the Church - and is therefore less central to Christianity, on this account, than the

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 124-6.

⁴²Ibid., p. 113.

hypothetical ritual of Jesus's institution of the Church. By the same token, according to Lawson and McCauley, the Catholic Eucharist is more central to the Catholic system than communion is to the Protestant system, since for Catholics God is actually present in the ritual, whereas for Protestants the bread and wine are a symbol and a memorial of the death and resurrection of Christ. In the Catholic version, the superhuman agent is more immediate than in the Protestant equivalent.

The ordination of priests is grouped with rituals in which the superhuman agent appears in an embedded ritual. The priest who is the agent of the ordination is himself ordained. His own ordination is therefore an embedded ritual, presupposed in his act of ordaining another priest. The sequence of ordinations of which he is a part can be traced back to the actions of a superhuman agent - Jesus Christ - in his institution of the Church. In the ordination, the superhuman agent is not the immediate agent of the action, but his actions are presupposed. Thus, this ritual is fairly central but not as central to the Catholic system as the Eucharist where the superhuman agent is actually present.

The parishioner's blessing falls into the category of rituals in which a superhuman agent appears in the structural description as the agent of an embedded ritual. In this case, the superhuman agent does not come under the category of agency in the ritual, and his presence is far removed by a series of enabling actions. Therefore, according both to the Principle of Superhuman Agency and to the Principle of Superhuman Immediacy, this ritual is least central of the four to the Christian (and for the most part Catholic) system. Thus, given this analysis, Jesus's institution of the Church is the most central of the four rituals, followed by the Eucharist, the ordination of priests, and the parishioner's blessing.

Lawson and McCauley further suggest that the universal principles of religious ritual which they define reveal a systematic distinction between rituals which can be reversed and rituals which are irreversible. This distinction is linked to the question of whether or not the ritual is repeated. Rituals which are permanent - i.e. not repeated - are potentially reversible. They write: "A ritual reversal presupposes the successful completion of the original ritual act, whereas that act's performance is completely independent of the ritual which reverses its effects. So, for example, divorce, excommunication, and defrocking

presuppose marriage, confirmation, and ordination respectively. All divorced individuals have been married, but not all married people get divorced."⁴³ The second category includes rituals whose effects are not permanent and which are therefore repeated. These include the Eucharist and the parishioner's blessing. This category is described as follows: "First, since it is not the gods who have acted, these rituals' effects are not super-permanent. Consequently, second, they must be repeated at periodic intervals. Furthermore, since their effects are not of cosmic proportions, they are not rituals that require reversal."⁴⁴

Sacrifice, according to Lawson and McCauley, is the paradigmatic example of this second type of ritual because it involves the giving of a gift, and gift-giving is not, of its nature, reversible. On the basis of this theory, there arises a tension with regard to the classification of the Eucharist. Lawson and McCauley write: "Note that even though most versions of Western Christianity maintain that Jesus's death was the ultimate sacrifice which requires no repetition (for neither repetition nor mind changing are typically associated with the God of Christianity), the commemoration of that event in the communion ritual is repeated on a regular basis."⁴⁵ In the face of this seeming anomaly, they argue that their analysis reveals a deeper structure at work in this ongoing ritual practice. They explain:

Undoubtedly, individual Christians gain solace from the repetition of this ritual act, especially in light of the interpretations of this ritual which the Christian conceptual scheme imposes. However, the present analysis suggests that its repetition can be explained on more basic principles underlying all religious ritual systems. Hence, although the theology of many religions holds that their gods typically need to do things only once, the religion's ritual practices sometimes embody deeper principles which are independent of and sometimes contrary to such doctrines. Such patterns of behavior are the surface manifestations of underlying universal constraints on the form of religious ritual systems.⁴⁶

Lawson and McCauley deal with the problem of meaning in ritual by referring to what they call 'reflexive holism' - the idea that the meaning is determined by the relationship of

⁴³Ibid., p. 131.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁶ibid.

the parts to the whole, and that the whole is a system of meaning independent of its reference to the outside world. They write:

The meanings of religious rituals are especially unclear. Not only are religious rituals symbolic, but they seem to be actions without instrumental value, and participants' descriptions of them inevitably invoke somewhat unusual ontological assumptions. All of these factors have considerably complicated attempts to explicate their meanings.⁴⁷

Following Chomsky, Lawson and McCauley regard the intuition of the native participant in ritual as the key vehicle disclosing the underlying structure of religious ritual systems. This structure is creative, they argue, because it not only explains existing rituals, but offers a framework in which new rituals can be generated. For example, in a survey of their students, Lawson and McCauley found that the overwhelming majority thought it would be possible, in the Christian tradition, to have a ritual of divorce, even though no such ritual now exists. This theory of ritual, they conclude, permits the possibility of future rituals as well as explaining those which already exist. Again following Chomsky, Lawson and McCauley argue that the underlying structure of religious ritual systems is obscured in practice by extraneous influences, making necessary the imagination of an ideal participant. They too understand their work in terms of the reconstruction of a tacit knowledge manifest in everyday practices - in this case, religious rituals.

COMPETENCE THEORY

The three authors we have examined under the heading of 'competence theory' all fall within the definition of reconstructive science offered by Richard Bernstein. He writes:

In each case...the aim is to provide explicit theoretical knowledge ("knowing-that") of implicit pre-theoretical "knowing-how". These sciences study a symbolically structured social reality. The rational reconstructions advanced by these sciences are directed toward making explicit universal species competences (e.g., the competence to speak and understand a language).⁴⁸

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 137.

⁴⁸Richard J. Bernstein in his "Introduction" to *Habermas and Modernity*, edited by Richard J. Bernstein. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985) p. 16.

The study of competence gives us an insight into our formation as linguistic animals. In other words, it demonstrates how learning takes place at the level of structure as well as of content, and how structure is acquired, or activated, primarily at a pre-conscious level. Difficulties arise, however, when we begin to explore the relationship between a supposedly universal structure and its particular linguistic expression.

Chomsky sees the language faculty as a feature of the human brain, a mental organ. The philosopher Anthony Kenny, however, argues that Chomsky demonstrates a confused notion of the mental. The mind is not a physical organ like the heart, says Kenny, "the mind is the capacity to acquire intellectual skills."⁴⁹ What is confused in Chomsky's account, and what needs to be distinguished, is the difference between possessors of abilities, abilities, and vehicles of abilities, or, in other words, the difference between human beings, their minds and their brains.

The human mind is an ability in the sense that it is an ability to acquire abilities - a capacity. The human brain is the vehicle of the human mind, but the human being as a whole is the possessor of that ability. The mind is not a physical object like the brain. Chomsky, argues Kenny, confuses between capacities, namely the mind, and the vehicle of capacities, namely the brain:

Chomsky makes a distinction between capacities and their vehicles, as I have done. He describes the object of his study as "human cognitive capacities and the mental structures that serve as the vehicles for the exercise of these capacities." But in terms of the distinctions that I have drawn the mental structures that Chomsky is interested in are capacities, not the vehicle of capacities; it is the physiological hardware characteristic of the exercise of the relevant mental capacities that is the vehicle.⁵⁰

The clarification of these distinctions shows up a problem in Chomsky's use of the concept of linguistic knowledge, as Kenny shows: "Knowledge of a language is an ability: an ability that can be exercised in many different ways, for instance, by speaking the language, by understanding what is said to one in the language, by reading the

⁴⁹Anthony Kenny, *The Legacy of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984) p. 138.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 139-40.

language, by talking to oneself in one's head in the language."⁵¹ According to Chomsky, however, knowledge of a language is a mental state of affairs which is only deduced from manifested linguistic behaviour - it is a physical reality located in the brain.

Chomsky's main confusion, states Kenny, is his failure to distinguish between the criteria for a state of affairs and the symptoms of a state of affairs. This leads him to misidentify the location of the state of affairs, "knowledge of English". The criteria for a state of affairs constitute the state of affairs itself, while symptoms serve merely to indicate the existence of the said state. The use of English is criteria for the state of affairs, "knowledge of English", not a symptom of that state.

This distinction is important for us in trying to understand what kind of knowledge competence represents. In other words, it is a mistake to see actual linguistic expression as a corrupt manifestation or symptom of a perfect knowledge which exists intact elsewhere (i.e. in the brain). It is a mistake to describe the underlying structure as a static reality which is only ever imperfectly expressed in actual performance. Rather, as I shall argue later, both structure and content are in a constant state of growth and change.

Chomsky is led in his thinking to a position which Fred D'Agostino calls "methodological individualism" in his book *Chomsky's System of Ideas*. He writes: "Chomsky's programmatic statement about the nature of linguistics reflects or instantiates the philosophical thesis known as methodological individualism, according to which all social phenomena, such as language, are to be explained, ultimately, in terms of the characteristics of individual human beings."⁵² This individualist position, that the human mind is formed in large measure prior to and independently of human experience, and that this formation determines the scope of human knowledge, leads Chomsky to argue against the view that communication is the central or definitive purpose of language:

It seems either we must deprive the notion "communication" of all significance, or else we must reject the view that the purpose of language is communication. While it is quite commonly argued that the purpose of language is communication and that it is pointless to study language apart

⁵¹Ibid., p. 138.

⁵²Fred D'Agostino, *Chomsky's System of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) p. 11.

from its communicative function, there is no formulation of this belief, to my knowledge, from which any substantive proposals follow.⁵³

What we are left with, from this formulation, is the view that language is primarily part of our genetic endowment and its application in social contexts is a secondary matter not intimately connected to its structure. The sociolinguist Dell Hymes, who disagrees profoundly with this view, paints the following picture of Chomsky's world in his 1972 essay, *On Communicative Competence*:

Human life seems divided between grammatical competence, an ideal innately-derived sort of power, and performance, an exigency rather like the eating of the apple, thrusting the perfect speaker-hearer into a fallen world. Of this world, where meanings may be won by the sweat of the brow, and communication achieved in labor...little is said. The controlling image is of an abstract, isolated individual, almost an unmotivated cognitive mechanism, not, except incidentally, a person in a social world.⁵⁴

Of Chomsky's argument for the need to postulate an ideal situation, free from irrelevant data, Hymes replies that, "if one analyses the language of a community as if it should be homogeneous, its diversity trips one up around the edges. If one starts with analysis of the diversity, one can isolate the homogeneity that is truly there."⁵⁵ Hymes argues that the problem of language acquisition, the starting-point for Chomsky's work, is necessarily a problem of performance as well as of competence:

We have then to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others.⁵⁶

⁵³Noam Chomsky, *Rules and Representations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980) p. 230.

⁵⁴D.H. Hymes, "On Communicative Competence" in *Sociolinguistics*. J.B. Pride and Janet Holmes (eds.) (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1972) p. 272.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 277.

Hence, we are led to Jürgen Habermas's critique of Chomsky and to his insistence on communicative competence as a linguistic structure more fundamental to the one described in Chomsky's work.

Habermas's aim, as we have seen, is to demonstrate a universal structure of intersubjectivity inherent in language. This structure, he argues, provides a universal grounding for the values of truth, justice and freedom. On this view, particular differences (cultural, religious, political) are resolved through rational discourse which makes this underlying framework explicit. Communicative, as opposed to linguistic competence, denotes, not simply the ability to construct a well-formed sentence, but the ability to embed a well-formed sentence in relation to reality.

As we saw above, the propositional content of speech is always embedded in relation to reality through its illocutionary setting, thus, speech inherently comprises both a universal and a particular dimension. In being uttered, a sentence is placed in relation to the external world, the social world, and the inner world of the speaker. According to the use of language employed, one of these relations is made thematic: in the propositional use of language, relation to the external world is thematic and takes shape in the objectivating attitude of an observer; in the interactive use of language, it is relations within the social world expressed in the interpersonal exchange between speaker and hearer; and in the expressive use, relation to the inner world predominates in the self-disclosure of the speaker. The rationality implicit in this intersubjective structure resides in the fact that validity claims can be defended and redeemed through rational discourse if challenged.

As we have also seen, however, the type of defense required depends on which validity claim is at stake, and the kind of rationality called into play will correspondingly vary. In order to defend a truth claim one needs to prove that such and such really is the case and this requires an objective presentation and discussion of evidence and recourse to a theoretical discourse which moves towards a critique of knowledge. With a claim to rightness, however, which carries with it an obligation to justify, a defense can only be mounted in relation to the normative context in which the claim arises. In such a situation, taken-for-granted assumptions, practices, traditions and world-views, which comprise

what Habermas calls "the lifeworld", are subject to public scrutiny and must be justified in a practical discourse aimed at political will formation. This is an important distinction which forms part of Habermas's larger project, which we examine further in Chapter Four. For the moment, however, it is sufficient to note that the rationality inherent in this universal structure of intersubjectivity is made explicit through rational discourse, undertaken when ordinary communicative action breaks down.

The problem with this approach is with the idea that differences can always be overcome through an appeal to reason, and that differences, in fact, mask a common rational structure inherent in human exchanges. Rather than pursue this problem at greater length through Habermas, we turn to Lawson and McCauley to show how a supposedly rational reconstruction of the universal structure of ritual actually distorts the particular examples used as illustration.

Lawson and McCauley, as we have seen, divide religious from non-religious ritual on the basis that religious rituals are informed by peculiar conceptual commitments concerning beliefs in superhuman agents. As we explored in Chapter Two, however, the idea that rituals of any kind are the expression of beliefs is highly problematic. As Humphrey and Laidlaw remark: "This formulation makes it difficult for Lawson and McCauley to deal with cases such as Buddhism, where belief in superhuman agents may be absent."⁵⁷ To this, Lawson and McCauley reply that: "'Religions' without commitments to culturally postulated superhuman *agents* are (*at least*) extremely unlikely to have rich, highly constrained ritual systems. In fact, they are unlikely to have much ritual at all."⁵⁸ Humphrey and Laidlaw, however, reply, in turn, that: "The Jain *puja* is a demonstration of how wrong this statement is."⁵⁹

Lawson and McCauley's account fails because it invents a language divorced from the self-understanding of the participants in ritual itself. Where this account clashes with the evidence, they claim to have identified a deeper principle at work, as in the following analysis of the Eucharist:

⁵⁷Caroline Humphrey, James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A theory of ritual illustrated by the Jain rite of worship*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) p. 82.

⁵⁸Thomas Lawson, Robert McCauley, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

⁵⁹Caroline Humphrey, James Laidlaw, *op.cit.*

Undoubtedly, individual Christians gain solace from the repetition of this ritual act, especially in light of the interpretations of this ritual which the Christian conceptual scheme imposes. However, the present analysis suggests that its repetition can be explained on more basic principles underlying all religious ritual systems. Hence, although the theology of many religions hold that their gods typically need to do things only once, the religion's ritual practices sometimes embody deeper principles which are independent of and sometimes contrary to such doctrines. Such patterns of behavior are the surface manifestations of underlying universal constraints on the form of religious ritual systems.⁶⁰

Lawson and McCauley show no understanding of how an act becomes ritualized in a social and historical context. This is evident in their use of the Last Supper as an example of a Christian ritual. Although the Last Supper takes place in a ritual context - that of a passover meal - it is precisely the break that Jesus makes with this ritual setting that gives it significance from a Christian point of view. As Humphrey and Laidlaw write: "The Last Supper itself cannot possibly be seen as a ritualized act, but the subsequent commemoration of that supper did become so, and this can be said because it could now represent *various* and *symbolic* purposes and meanings."⁶¹

The problem with the idea of a universal rationality is the problem of finding a language that transcends differences without obliterating them. Lawson and McCauley's account of ritual does violence to the particular by insisting on a universal structure even when particular examples clearly do not correspond. They create an artificial language of superhuman agents which bears no relationship to the indigenous language of participants in actual ritual traditions, hence, their discourse seems addressed solely to other social scientists.

THE LITURGY AND CHRISTIAN COMPETENCE

What I want to suggest here, is that rather than see the liturgy as communicating beliefs and doctrines to participants, we understand its role in terms of the embodiment and transmission of a Christian competence. In particular, the purpose of the liturgy is to

⁶⁰Thomas Lawson, Robert McCauley, *op.cit.*, p. 134.

⁶¹Caroline Humphrey, James Laidlaw, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

offer the world a vision of the Kingdom, and through the Eucharist, to reveal the way to the Kingdom, which is Jesus Christ. Christian competence, then, may be described as the ability to discern this path in the world, and thus to bear public witness to the Kingdom. The presence of Christ, on this account, is mediated to the world through this public language of the Church, understood as an alternative medium.

The question which arises, however, is what kind of vision of the Kingdom is the liturgy offering, and how is Christ's mediation of this vision described? The old rite of the Eucharist, for example, as we saw in Chapter One, offers a vision of the Kingdom bound up with individual salvation, and the path to the Kingdom, Jesus Christ, made contiguous with obedience to the Church.

Our language, as Habermas shows, is not just a tool for naming objects in the world. Inherent in language are forms of relationship and categories of meaning which structure our knowledge and perception of the world at a primarily unconscious level. The whole approach which competence theory represents recognizes this unconscious formation and attempts to reconstruct the structures from which we engage with the world. I am arguing that the liturgy represents such a structure in the sense that it transmits to Christians, through a process of ritualization, a vision of the world and of the Kingdom at a primarily unconscious level. The problem is what to do when this underlying vision is itself distorted; how to engage in critique? This is one of the defining questions in the debate between modernists and post-modernists, which leads us into Chapter Four.

Competence, as we have seen, represents the mastery of a structure from which creativity is possible - the ability to create new sentences, new relationships, new rituals. What I am arguing here is that the liturgy transmits a Christian competence - the ability to create the Kingdom of heaven on earth - and that this competence depends, in turn, on the liturgy offering Christians a real vision of the Kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Limits of Modernity

At the end of Chapter One, we took up P.J. FitzPatrick's argument that the way forward in eucharistic theology and practice lies in understanding the Eucharist as a ritual. In Chapters Two and Three, we have been investigating this idea in terms of a whole philosophy of language. In this Chapter, we begin to situate our discourse historically, within the contours of thinking on modernity and post-modernity.

What we have seen so far is that human beings are linguistic animals, born at a particular time and place into a particular linguistically-structured world. Language is not simply a tool for naming objects, but rather, inherent in language are forms of relationship, networks of power and authority, and categories of meaning which we embody through our initiation into language, and which form the very conditions for our perception and experience of the world. The human body itself is a form of linguistic expression - a manifestation of a given historical moment.

We discover, furthermore, that our formation in language takes place primarily at a pre-conscious, pre-reflective level so that it is possible to embody an identity of which one is consciously unaware, to possess certain kinds of knowledge and abilities whose logic one cannot consciously articulate, and to have intuitions which one could not rationally justify. We discover, also, that language is inherently conservative - that through language we unwittingly pass on structures of power and significance, and reproduce visions of the social whole.

We asked at the end of Chapter Three, given this account, what can be done when these underlying structures are themselves corrupt, when the vision which our language implicitly expresses is distorted. In this Chapter, we search for an answer within the particular context of modernity. We explore the characteristics of modernity as a social pattern which emerges out of the rejection of a dominant but corrupt social vision, propagated by the Church and embodied through the liturgy. The need to articulate a new social vision necessitates a rejection of the Church's mediating role, and a deliberate distancing from the unconscious influence of the Church's symbolic language. The limits

of this development, however, become evident as a general, culturally pervasive alienation from embodied experience. The critique offered by post-modern writers uncovers the depths of this alienation, re-locating us in our bodies, at particular sites in time and space. From here, we are left in a state of fragmentation, aware of an infinity of particular perspectives, but unsure of how to articulate any shared point of view without the exercise of violent domination. Our need for a common social vision concludes this discussion and leads us back to the Christian narrative in Chapter Five.

We begin by examining a series of changes in the construction of public space, from the unitary social vision of the Middle Ages to its disruption at the Reformation, from the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere to its transformation in the social welfare state. This chronology sets the stage for an account of our present situation in the West as a crisis resulting from the loss of a genuinely public language. Only a renewed understanding of how human life is mediated by language will, in this situation, allow a shared language to develop which is not simply a new form of domination. This understanding, in turn, will depend on a renewed articulation of the relationship between God and humanity, mediated via human engagement in the world, in the ordinary course of sensuous, bodily life.

In Chapter One, we examined the process by which the Eucharist came to be an expression of the worldly power of the Church. Rather than an action which radically subverts the established order by bringing about the Kingdom of heaven on earth, the Eucharist came to be seen as a path towards individual salvation through obedience to the Church's commands. It is within this context that the Reformers reject the Church's mediating role. They reject the idea that it is possible to be saved simply by participating in the sacramental order which the Church provides. Against this, they place an unprecedented stress on personal commitment. As Charles Taylor writes: "One no longer belonged to the saved, to the people of God, by one's connection to a wider order sustaining a sacramental life, but by one's wholehearted personal adhesion."¹ As a result of this stress, a new type of subjectivity is opened up, elaborated in Martin Luther's distinction between inner and outer man: "Man has a twofold nature, a spiritual and a bodily one. According to the spiritual nature, which men refer to as the soul, he is called

¹Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989) p. 217.

a spiritual, inner, or new man. According to the bodily nature, which men refer to as flesh, he is called a carnal, outward, or old man."² Luther goes on to argue that the inner man possesses a freedom not subject to any outside influence or authority: "It is evident that no external thing has any influence in producing Christian righteousness or freedom, or in producing unrighteousness or servitude."³

Luther's emphasis on the freedom of the inner man, and the privacy of the relationship between the individual and God, emancipates the individual psyche from the spiritual control previously exercised by the Church. This does not mean that suddenly people are freed from any external influence, but rather, that a sphere of individual autonomy is recognized in a new way. Ultimately, the individual is alone with God, no third party or mediating authority intervenes.

Counterpart to the idea that the individual has an unmediated, inner relationship with God, is the belief that the outer, carnal self is not a vehicle for divine communication. The Catholic Church's emphasis on outward forms and manifestations is seen as the source of Her corruption, as Hegel writes in *The Philosophy of History*:

The corruption of the Church was a native growth; the principle of that corruption is to be looked for in the fact that the specific and definite embodiment of Deity which it recognizes, is sensuous - that the external in a coarse material form, is enshrined in its inmost being.⁴

It is this corruption that Luther exposes. Hegel continues:

Luther's simple doctrine is that the specific embodiment of Deity - infinite subjectivity, that is true spirituality, Christ - is in no way present and actual in an outward form, but as essentially spiritual is obtained only in being reconciled to God - *in faith and spiritual enjoyment*.⁵

This question of inward versus outward comes to a head in the doctrine of the Eucharist. As Hegel elaborates:

²Martin Luther, "The Freedom of a Christian" in *Martin Luther, selections from his writings*. Edited by John Dillenberger. (New York: Doubleday, 1962) p. 53.

³Ibid., p. 54.

⁴G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*. Translated by J. Sibree. (New York: Dover Publications, 1956) pp. 412-3.

⁵Ibid., p. 415.

The Lutheran doctrine therefore involves the entire substance of Catholicism, with the exception of all that results from the element of externality - as far as the Catholic Church insists upon that externality. Luther therefore could not do otherwise than refuse to yield an iota in regard to that doctrine of the Eucharist in which the whole question is concentrated. Nor could he concede to the Reformed [Calvinistic] Church, that Christ is a mere commemoration, a mere reminiscence: in this respect his view was rather in accordance with that of the Catholic Church, viz. that Christ is an actual presence, though only in faith and in Spirit. He maintained that the Spirit of Christ really fills the human heart - that Christ therefore is not to be regarded as merely a historical person, but that man sustains *an immediate relation to him in Spirit*.⁶

The rejection of externality at the Reformation completely overturns the mediaeval understanding of the sacred. "Along with the Mass", writes Charles Taylor, "went the whole notion of the sacred in mediaeval Catholicism, the notion that there are special times or actions where the power of God is more intensely present and can be approached by humans."⁷ This rejection of externality also subverts the place of the body in the mediaeval scheme of things, which Caroline Walker Bynum describes as follows: "Because they worshiped a God who became incarnate and died for the sins of others, they viewed all bodily events - the hideous wounds of martyrs or stigmatics as well as the rosy-faced beauty of virgins - as possible manifestations of grace."⁸ She continues: "Because preachers, confessors and spiritual directors assumed the person to be a psychosomatic unity, they not only read unusual bodily events as expressions of soul, but also expected body itself to offer a means of access to the divine."⁹

At the same time that a material channel to the sacred is rejected, an unprecedented emphasis is placed on participation in the world as the appropriate context for Christian life. Such participation, however, is not to be guided by desire for sensuous, bodily fulfilment, but directed to the glory of God through instrumental, rational control. As Rogers Brubaker writes: "Since the believer could not aspire to be the vessel of God he had to think of himself as an active 'tool of the divine will'."¹⁰ What results is a

⁶Ibid., pp. 415-16.

⁷Charles Taylor, op.cit. 1989, p. 216.

⁸Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Female Body and Religious Practice in the Later Middle Ages" in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*. Part One. Edited by Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi. (New York: Zone, 1989) p. 196.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Rogers Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984) p. 24.

paradoxical and ambivalent relationship to the world, described at length by Max Weber in his classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. He writes: "Those passionately spiritual natures which had formerly supplied the highest type of monk were now forced to pursue their ascetic ideals within mundane occupations."¹¹ The form of asceticism changes, however - the monastic stress on physical distance from the world, in the shape of poverty and sexual abstinence, is replaced by physical proximity coupled with spiritual abstinence from the fruits of material life. As Taylor elaborates: "Marriage and a calling are not optional extras; they are the substance of life, and we should throw ourselves into them purposefully. But all the while our hearts should be elsewhere."¹² The strongest element in the development of this-worldly asceticism is the Calvinist doctrine of pre-destination. Far from making the individual aloof from the world, since one's salvation can in no way be achieved through human endeavour, emphasis is placed on ascertaining one's state of grace through worldly success, which becomes an implicit sign of divine election. "Worldly asceticism - the disposition to work intensely and methodically in a worldly calling - is thus presented by Weber as the practical, psychological consequence of the theoretical doctrine of the Reformation, and more particularly of Calvinism."¹³ Worldly asceticism contributes, according to Weber, to the development of a bourgeois economic ethic - the spirit of capitalism. He writes: "The essential elements of the spirit of capitalism are the same as...the content of Puritan worldly asceticism only without the religious basis."¹⁴

The material world, including the human body, comes to be seen, not as a source of meaning or a vehicle for relationship with God, but as the object of rational, instrumental control. The body is a tool for doing God's will, but its spontaneous movements and desires are not to be trusted. Frank Bottomley writes: "The human body was not only an instrument for work, it was also an instrument apt for diabolic utilisation and therefore all its activities and manifestations required strict policing."¹⁵ He continues: "Certain words were proscribed, particularly those relating to fundamental activities of the body, and it was a logical development of this unnatural and artificially induced horror of anything associated, however remotely, with sexual or evacuatory activities, that led to the

¹¹Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. (London: Unwin Hyman, 1930) p. 121.

¹²Charles Taylor, op.cit. 1989, p. 223.

¹³Rogers Brubaker, op.cit., p. 25.

¹⁴Max Weber, op.cit., p. 180.

¹⁵Frank Bottomley, *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom*. (London: Lepus Books, 1979) p. 145.

Victorian concealment of even the legs of their pianos."¹⁶ This stance towards the world finds secular expression in the philosophy of René Descartes:

The new model of rational mastery which Descartes offers presents it as a matter of instrumental control. To be free from the illusion which mingles mind with matter is to have an understanding of the latter which facilitates its control. Similarly, to free oneself from passions and obey reason is to get the passions under instrumental direction.¹⁷

With Descartes, the unmediated relationship of the individual with God becomes an unmediated relationship with self. I have the sense of an inner self-transparency whose expression is limited by being trapped inside a body. "The Cartesian proof is no longer a search for an encounter with God within. It is no longer the way to an experience of everything in God. Rather what I now meet is myself: I achieve a clarity and a fulness of self-presence that was lacking before."¹⁸ While the self has immediate access to itself, it is alienated from the world and from other selves by being trapped in a material existence. The world is a phenomenon to be observed and explained from the perspective of a detached non-participant. It is this stance towards the world which makes possible the scientific method:

It is not only the stance which allows us to experiment and thus obtain valid scientific results. It is not only the stance which gives us rational control over ourselves and our world. In this religious tradition, it is the way we serve God in creation. And that in two respects: first, it is the stance we must assume to work in our callings to preserve ourselves and God's order; but second, it is also what protects us against absorption in things which would wrench us away from God.¹⁹

The result of this enforced distance from the world is that, in modernity, our experience shifts from the primary level of sensuous participation, to the secondary level of observation, reflection and discourse. Michel Foucault traces this change, in his two volume work, *The History of Sexuality*. The notion of sexual repression is inadequate, he argues, because it implies the existence of a sexual essence in need of liberation. What has, in fact, happened, is a shift in the location of sexual experience: "These deployments of power and knowledge, of truth and pleasure, so unlike those of repression, are not

¹⁶Ibid., p. 146.

¹⁷Charles Taylor, op.cit. 1989, p. 149.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 232.

necessarily secondary and derivative"²⁰, he writes. In other words, the secondary level of sexual experience has itself become the primary experience - sight rather than touch, desire rather than fulfilment, unveiling rather than nakedness:

Pleasure in the truth of pleasure, the pleasure of knowing the truth, of discovering and exposing it, the fascination of seeing it and telling it, of captivating and capturing others by it, of confiding it in secret, of living it out in the open - the specific pleasure of the true discourse on pleasure.^{21 22}

The turn to the self, however, as Charles Taylor demonstrates, isn't complete with Descartes. Adopting a stance of radical reflexivity leads, not only to an objectification of the self, but also to a process of self-discovery. Taylor attributes the origin of this development to Montaigne:

The contrast with Descartes is striking, just because Montaigne is at the point of origin of another kind of modern individualism, that of self-discovery, which differs from the Cartesian both in aim and method. Its aim is to identify the individual in his or her unrepeatable difference, where Cartesianism gives us a science of the subject in its general essence; and it proceeds by a critique of first-person self-interpretations, rather than by proofs of impersonal reasoning.²³

Another important aspect of this focus on self-discovery involves a changed attitude to nature. Nature is no longer seen as an external order to which we must conform, but as the voice within. Our fulfilment as autonomous individuals lies in faithfulness to this voice which is uniquely ours. Rousseau is credited with this further step: "Rousseau immensely enlarged the scope of the inner voice. We can now know from within us, from the impulses of our own being, what nature marks as significant. And our ultimate happiness is to live in conformity with this voice, that is, to be entirely ourselves."²⁴ This heightened sense of contact with nature leads to two further shifts in emphasis that have a bearing on our modern identity: the increasing importance of sentiment and of the

²⁰Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Volume One. Translated by Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) p. 73.

²¹Ibid., p. 71.

²²I am not arguing that this shift originates solely with the Reformation. Indeed, Foucault locates the confessional as a key center in the transformation of sex into discourse (Ibid., p. 21). What I am suggesting is that the this-worldly asceticism described above contributes to the intensification and dominance of this particular stance towards the world.

²³Charles Taylor, op.cit. 1989, p. 182.

²⁴Ibid., p. 362.

sensual. "Sentiments take on a moral relevance. For some it even becomes the key to the human good. Experiencing certain feelings now comes to be an important part of the good life."²⁵ It is not so much that people begin feeling things for the first time, but rather, that these feelings take on a new significance in the making of what is considered a worthwhile life. What is new is the emphasis on intimacy in personal relationships and the changes which this brings: the companionate marriage, the demand for privacy, and the family based on affection. Intimacy with nature, expressed as a depth of self-knowledge and self-discovery, and intimacy in personal relationships, also leads to a heightened sense of the importance of sensual fulfilment. "The good life comes to consist in a perfect fusion of the sensual and the spiritual, where our sensual fulfilments are experienced as having higher significance."²⁶

As we shall see, however, this rediscovery of sensuous, bodily life does not represent the return to a sacramental order. What is missing is the means by which the fruits of self-discovery can contribute to a shared vision of the social whole. In the Middle Ages the body was a central social and religious symbol, part of a total, cosmic world view. In modernity, by contrast, the significance of bodily experience is confined to the private sphere. Sensual fulfilment is a pursuit of private individuals. What is lost in the trajectory of the self, from the relative homogeneity of the mediaeval worldview to our present state of fragmentation, is a shared language by which personal experience takes on public meaning. What is missing, in other words, is public liturgy. The Church's liturgy is a language which appropriates the otherwise taken-for-granted experiences of bodily life - birth, sex, eating, drinking, washing, illness, death - which, through their incorporation, come to have meaning as events participating in the history of salvation. In this next section, we look at how the division between public and private in modernity relegates bodily life to the private sphere, precluding the development of a renewed liturgical life.

The idea of a public as opposed to a private space only becomes possible as a result of the privatization of religion at the Reformation. Jürgen Habermas traces the rise of public space and its change in form from the bourgeois public sphere to the social welfare state, in his book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. He writes:

The status of the Church changed as a result of the Reformation; the

²⁵Ibid., p. 294.

²⁶Ibid., p. 373.

anchoring in divine authority that it represented - that is, religion - became a private matter. The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy; the Church itself continues to exist as one corporate body among others under public law.²⁷

The idea of pluralism, namely of a plurality of value systems and traditions co-existing within a single society, originates with the privatization of religion. This plurality, however, is deceptive, for it is based on the understanding that values are confined to the private sphere.

We can think of bourgeois society as a series of concentric circles. The inmost circle is the intimate sphere of the conjugal family. The second circle is civil society - commodity exchange and social labour. These two inner circles make up the private sphere. The third circle stands for the public sphere, where private individuals gather to form a public, and which gains authority through what comes to be known as public opinion - the discussion of private individuals on matters of public concern. The public sphere develops in three areas: politics, literature and culture. It is embodied in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the salons of Paris and the coffeehouses of London, and comes about as culture enters the private sphere as a commodity. As cultural products are bought and sold on the market, they become accessible to a larger number of people. In the private hands of the bourgeoisie, culture is demystified, losing its previous aura of authority:

The private people for whom the cultural product became available as a commodity profaned it inasmuch as they had to determine its meaning on their own (by way of rational communication with one another), verbalize it, and thus state explicitly what precisely in its implicitness for so long could assert its authority.²⁸

While a plurality of cultural commodities becomes available, their production contributes to the elimination of cultural diversity. What formerly had been determined, under public and private patronage, by a variety of interests is increasingly determined by the single interest of profit.

²⁷Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Translated by Thomas Burger. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992) pp. 11-12.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 37.

The fourth and final circle is the domain of public authority - the state and the court. This authority now depends on receiving legitimation from the public sphere engaged in rational-critical debate.

Values, no longer legislated by the public authority of the Church, are relegated to the private sphere - explicitly to the intimate sphere of the bourgeois conjugal family. Implicitly, however, the bourgeois family, as a social institution, serves the private values of the free market by supporting its goal of maximum profit through consumption.²⁹ Other values are only allowed insofar as they do not threaten this underlying purpose. The private sphere, therefore, is cloaked in false consciousness. The intimate domain of the family is described as a realm of freedom, plurality and individuality, independent from the constraints of the market. The market, in its turn, is portrayed in value neutral terms as a seemingly autonomous realm operating according to objective laws. The reality, however, is that a plurality of values exist in the intimate sphere precisely because of the dominance of market interests. The function and power of values is limited. An infinite variety of private values emerge because they have no public purchase and do not, therefore, challenge the actual monism of consumer culture. Values that enter the public sphere remain private values - based explicitly on individual experience in the intimate sphere, which implicitly caters to the prevailing demands of the market place.

According to the ideology of bourgeois society, the market place is neutral and egalitarian - it favours no one and offers equal opportunity to all. It is presumed that all can eventually succeed in the market place, and, therefore, that through the market justice is served. The market functions to redefine the political values of freedom and equality as economic values. Similar assumptions are made about the bourgeois public sphere - that it is open to all private individuals regardless of social or economic status. In reality, however, access both to the market place and to the public sphere is limited. Success in the market depends on the ownership of property, while influence in the public sphere depends both on wealth and on education, namely, on the ability to take advantage of cultural commodities. The political public sphere operates on the same principle. The citizen is synonymous with the educated, property-owner. Although the vast majority of the population are therefore denied citizenship, the illusion of universality is created

²⁹Ibid., p. 47.

because equal opportunity to become an educated, property-owner exists for all in the market place. Since all may eventually acquire the criteria of citizenship, citizenship is regarded as universal: "If everyone, as it might appear, had the chance to become a 'citizen', then only citizens should be allowed into the political public sphere, without this restriction amounting to an abandonment of the principle of publicity."³⁰

By referring to the equal opportunity afforded to all in the market place, the bourgeoisie claim a universality for the public sphere which does not, in practice, exist. The public sphere is offered as a pluralist institution representing the whole society, while, in fact, it represents the interests of a particular class, a particular culture, and a particular set of values - those of the bourgeoisie. The rest of society remains, for the most part, voiceless, outside the defining categories of the bourgeois constitutional state. The illusion of universality which pervades bourgeois society, however, prevents those who find their identity within its terms from experiencing its limits, and therefore, from recognizing the difference of those who fall outside its boundaries. The sense of a limitless freedom and equality fosters, in bourgeois society, the notion of a universal humanity - in reality, a projection of bourgeois assumptions onto the rest of the world. As Habermas writes: "In the intimate sphere of the conjugal family privatized individuals viewed themselves as independent even from the private sphere of their economic activity - as persons capable of entering into 'purely human' relations with one another."³¹ Hampered by this false subjectivity, which makes "humanity" a mirror of themselves, the bourgeoisie are hampered in their ability to enter into real relationship with anyone outside their sphere of knowledge and experience. The first requirement of a genuine diversity, namely, to recognize the other as "other", is missing.

The bourgeois public sphere, despite its inherent contradictions and its implicit promotion of particular interests, nevertheless, holds out the promise of emancipation. However imperfectly it actually fulfills this promise, it suggests the possibility that domination can be overcome through reason, and that justice can be extended to all. Full emancipation itself, however, cannot be realized within the confines of the bourgeois constitutional state. As Habermas writes: "The bourgeois constitutional state, along with the public sphere as the central principle of its organization, was mere ideology. The separation of

³⁰Ibid., p. 87.

³¹Ibid., p. 48.

the private from the public realm obstructed at this stage of capitalism what the idea of the bourgeois public sphere promised."³²

Marx's critique of the bourgeois constitutional state focuses on the distinction between public and private. Only with the socialization of the means of production can the subjection of political domination to reason be realized. Furthermore, only then will there exist a real sphere of privacy, not structured to serve particular economic interests, that can allow a genuine freedom of the "inner man" to flourish. But Marx's route is not taken by Western, capitalist nations. A different sort of transformation occurs - the shift from the bourgeois constitutional state to the social welfare state. Without being structurally altered, the public sphere is extended - equal political rights are granted to all within the existing institutions of class society. The desire for justice, not found by the masses in the market place, becomes focused on the political public sphere, which turns into an "arena of competing interests".³³ In the public sphere, economic antagonisms based on class domination and the private ownership of the means of production are turned into political conflicts addressed to the public authority of the state. The authority of the public, as a rationally and critically debating constituency of private individuals, suffers as the state increasingly intervenes in the private sphere to maintain social equilibrium. While the intervention of the state appears to serve the interests of democracy by curbing the exploitation of the working people by capitalist property-owners, this intervention merely camouflages the basic and ongoing economic injustices perpetuated by the free market system.

The intervention of the state into the private sphere as a regulating force, compensates for, but does not fundamentally alter, the structural inequality of capitalism. In order to maintain the capitalist system, public support needs to be secured. What is required, however, is not a rationally and critically debating public, subjecting domination to reason, but a manipulated and controlled public convinced that the status quo is in their own best interests. The public sphere, once the domain of private individuals, is increasingly and deliberately used by the state and the media as a means of enforcing the status quo. Public debate is replaced by manufactured public opinion imposed on a depoliticized population. Habermas elaborates:

³²Ibid., p. 125.

³³Ibid., p. 132.

The political system produces mass loyalty in both a positive and a selective manner: positively through the prospect of making good on social-welfare programs, selectively through excluding themes and contributions from public discussion. This can be accomplished through a sociostructural filtering of access to the political public sphere, through a bureaucratic deformation of the structures of public communication, or through manipulative control of the flow of communication.³⁴

With its depoliticized population, a re-feudalization of the public sphere takes place, embodied in the production of mass media and the creation of a "mediatized" public. As in feudal Europe, the depoliticized public sphere focuses attention on the aesthetics of authority: the personality and appearance of political figures, the mass appeal of slogans and propaganda, the "human interest" element in news broadcasting. Politics becomes a commodity to be advertised and promoted like any other. Political debate is commercialized in the proliferation of talk shows and panel discussions. The public sphere as an arena in which to address substantive questions and come to consensus through rational-critical debate is eliminated in a process of public infantilization. Democratic processes exist only in a formal sense. Political agendas are marketed to influence voters subconsciously rather than to contribute to conscious will-formation. As Habermas argues: "This kind of consensus formation would be more suited to the enlightened absolutism of an authoritarian welfare regime than to a democratic constitutional state committed to social rights."³⁵

There is a shift in ideology from the bourgeois constitutional state to the social welfare state: "The ideology of free exchange is replaced by a substitute program. The latter is oriented not to the social results of the institution of the market but to those of government action designed to compensate for the dysfunction of free exchange."³⁶ This compensatory program leads to a collapse of the distinction between public and private spheres, as it is found in bourgeois society. This collapse is not brought about by a socialization of the means of production, however, but by the intermeshing of public and private functions.

³⁴Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Volume 2. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) p. 346.

³⁵Jürgen Habermas, *op.cit.* 1992, p. 219.

³⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*. Translated by Jeremy Shapiro. (London: Heinemann, 1971) p. 102.

The existence of the bourgeois public sphere depended on the separation of the state from civil society. The intervention of the state in civil society causes the separation to blur. Not only does the state take over functions previously performed by social institutions, but private corporate bodies also take on formerly public functions. Public and private law no longer remains distinct, and a new social realm emerges, "a repoliticized social sphere in which state and societal institutions fused into a single functional complex that could no longer be differentiated according to criteria of public and private."³⁷ The bureaucracy and administration of public authority gradually pervades more and more aspects of social life expanding this single, functional complex, dominated by an approach to the world directed by instrumental rationality.

The crisis of modernity, argues Habermas, is a crisis brought about by this invasion of the lifeworld by the system. This analysis represents an appropriation and elaboration of Max Weber's work distinguishing formal and substantive rationality. Rationality is not an inherent quality, according to Weber, things only appear rational from a particular point of view. The determination of formal rationality is from the perspective of means-end calculation. In other words, formal rationality is concerned with the most efficient way of achieving a particular end, regardless of the rationality of the end itself, from a substantive or value perspective. Substantive rationality, on the other hand, is concerned precisely with the rationality of the end in relation to certain values. The period of modernity is characterized by the gradual domination of formal over substantive reason.

Formal rationality comes to predominate as control becomes a value in itself. The material world seen, not as a vehicle of God's revelation, but as an instrument to be used with the greatest efficiency for the glory of God, privileges a certain objective stance towards the world which facilitates the growth of systems of rational control. The development of these systems - the production process, law and bureaucracy - is based on calculability: the calculability of the human and non-human means of production in the production process, and the calculability of the actions of judges and bureaucrats in relation to economic conduct. As Rogers Brubaker writes: "The fact that maximum calculability in economic (and other) organizations requires the disciplined control of some human

³⁷Jürgen Habermas, *op.cit.* 1992, p. 148.

beings by others is another instance of the antagonism - endemic in the modern social order - between formal and substantive rationality."³⁸ In law, explains Weber:

Judicial formalism enables the legal order to operate like a technically rational machine. Thus it guarantees to individuals and groups within the system a relative maximum of freedom, and greatly increases for them the possibility of predicting the legal consequences of their actions. Procedure becomes a specified type of pacified contest, bound to fixed and inviolable "rules of the game".³⁹

Likewise the bureaucratic order:

Bureaucracy develops the more perfectly, the more it is "dehumanized", the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal...and emotional elements which escape calculation.⁴⁰

The growth of formal systems of rational control creates an ever-increasing demand for specialized knowledge, which shapes the educational system away from the cultivation of the whole person towards the training of specialized experts. Knowledge becomes a form of intellectual control leading to the "disenchantment of the world" which, "erodes the belief that the world has a discoverable meaning."⁴¹ Control over other people, the material world and ourselves is the result of our society's developmental path. The constant search for more efficient means of achieving particular ends, or what Weber calls "technical rationalization", leads to a pervasive environment of control governed by the impersonal dictates of the system. The factory worker and the administrative official are but infinitely replaceable parts of a larger order. And control depends on calculability: "Industrial capitalism must be able to count on the continuity, trustworthiness and objectivity of the legal order and on the rational, predictable functioning of legal and administrative agencies."⁴² The result is bleak, as Weber writes at the end of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*: "For the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: "Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before

³⁸Rogers Brubaker, op.cit., p. 15.

³⁹Max Weber, *Economy and Society*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968) p. 811.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 975.

⁴¹Rogers Brubaker, op.cit., p. 31.

⁴²Max Weber, op.cit. 1968, p. 1095.

achieved."⁴³ Weber did not retain much hope in the promise of modernity. As Richard Bernstein writes: "Weber argued that the hope and expectation of the Enlightenment thinkers was a bitter and ironic illusion."⁴⁴

Jürgen Habermas, however, does not share Weber's pessimistic diagnosis of the modern condition. Where Weber's picture is incomplete, argues Habermas, is in his account of substantive rationality, based on an understanding of values as ultimately subjective. If values are ultimately subjective, an attribution of meaning by the individual, they cannot provide the basis for a shared account of reality, able to counter the increasing domination of the world by systems of rational control. If, however, values have an objective basis, then there is hope for a rational framework that can offer an alternative to the growth of instrumental reason. It is with this purpose in mind that Habermas elaborates his concept of communicative rationality, a rationality grounded in the very structure of intersubjective communication, which we explored in Chapter Three in terms of communicative competence. His aim is to show that values such as freedom, equality and justice have an objective basis in the structure of speech itself. By making this structure explicit, through rational discourse, we mobilize a common framework in which to resolve differences and achieve a genuine social consensus.

Habermas reinterprets Weber's concept of disenchantment as the breakdown of the socio-centric consciousness of a magical-mythical worldview to the decentered consciousness of a worldview which recognizes clearly distinguished spheres of reality - the natural, social and subjective worlds. As we saw in Chapter Three, each of these worlds has specific validity claims inherent to it, which define its logic, and each, therefore, operates according to a distinct process of rationalization. "It is this complex, multidimensional learning potential of modernity that Habermas wants to emphasize, not just the mastering of formal, operative modes of cognition, leading to the capacity to do science and technology."⁴⁵ These processes of rationalization develop through specialized forms of argumentation, called into play when taken-for-granted validity claims are challenged.

⁴³Max Weber, op.cit. 1930, p. 182.

⁴⁴Richard J. Bernstein, "Introduction" to *Habermas and Modernity*. Edited by Richard J. Bernstein. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1985) p. 5.

⁴⁵Stephen K. White, *The Recent Work of Jürgen Habermas*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) p. 95.

Habermas's project for modernity is to complete these rationalization processes in accordance with their distinct natures.

The spread of purposive rationality to more and more domains of life is not seen by Habermas as an inevitable part of the modern trajectory, but rather as an invasion of one kind of rationality - associated with the investigation of nature by science - into other spheres where it does not belong. In order to identify and analyze the development of different types of rationality, Habermas introduces the distinction between system and lifeworld. The lifeworld is,

the unthematized horizon of meanings that comprise the background against which particular items are thrown into relief. This background is not...constituted and unified by the intentional activity of a transcendental ego but consists rather of a preexisting stock of knowledge that has been handed down in culture and language.⁴⁶

In other words, the lifeworld refers to the implicit forms of knowledge and sources of identity which we have been describing in terms of competence. Rationalization occurs when the content and structure of the lifeworld is made explicit. The kind of rationalization that takes place, however, depends on what relationship to the lifeworld is adopted. In modernity, the perspective defined by a detached observation of the lifeworld has predominated against all others. This has resulted in a one-sided development of the rational potential of modernity. The lifeworld, through processes of exchange with nature, develops self-regulating systems. In traditional societies, these systems are subsystems of the lifeworld, which limits and controls them through social norms and values. "Traditional' societies exist as long as the development of sub-systems of purposive-rational action keep within the limits of the legitimating efficacy of cultural traditions."⁴⁷ In modernity, however, these subsystems become independent from the lifeworld and begin to expand grow and expand apart from the influence of common norms and values.

The lifeworld is characterized by communicative rationality, based on the goal of consensus and on the intersubjective recognition of common norms and values. The

⁴⁶David Ingram, *Habermas and the Dialectic of Reason*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) p. 116.

⁴⁷Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*. Translated by Jeremy Shapiro. (London: Heinemann, 1971) p. 95.

system, by contrast, is characterized by instrumental rationality, based on the technical concern of how to achieve a particular goal using the most efficient and effective means. With the expansion of the functional complex, in the social welfare state, the lifeworld is increasingly invaded and colonised by the system; communicative rationality is replaced by instrumental reason. This development affects the kind of social questions that can be addressed:

The modern thinkers no longer ask, as the Ancients did, about the moral conditions of the good and exemplary life, but about the actual conditions of survival. The assertion of physical life, elementary survival, is directly at issue. This practical necessity marks the beginning of modern social philosophy.⁴⁸

Politics is gradually taken over by technical problems and concerns alone. As the system invades and colonises the lifeworld, practical and ethical questions are translated into technical problems and resolved without reference to common norms and values. Politics, in its original sense, ceases, and society becomes such that certain types of questions simply cannot be asked:

Publicly administered definitions extend to what we want for our lives, but not how we would like to live if we could find out, with regard to attainable potentials, how we could live.⁴⁹

In the bourgeois constitutional state, access to the public sphere is limited to educated property-owners, who claim to represent the public at large. Education and property are seen as the marks of maturity, and those who have failed to attain them are considered incapable of exercising the responsibility of a public voice. With the expansion and depoliticization of the public sphere, the illusion of its universality becomes the illusion of consensus. Public debate is replaced by public relations management and public opinion polls which measure the public climate or mood - influenced, controlled and manipulated by the state, the media, and the market place. In this impoverished and disempowered public arena, the idea of a genuine pluralism is based on the illusion of consensus. The acceptance of different value systems, traditions, religions, cultures, is not the result of a serious grappling with the implications of these differences for a common life, but the result of an inability to address substantive questions in the public sphere. This inability

⁴⁸Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice*. Translated by John Viertel. (London: Heinemann, 1974) pp. 50-1.

⁴⁹Jürgen Habermas, *op.cit.* 1971, p. 120.

results from the invasion of the lifeworld by the system which eliminates such questions from public consideration.

The institutions of the system are oriented, not to politics, but to management. The system's primary function is to maintain stability and equilibrium in order to allow the uninterrupted functioning of the market and to compensate for its dysfunctions. The system is geared towards crisis management:

Insofar as government action is directed toward the economic system's stability and growth, politics now takes on a peculiarly negative character. For it is oriented toward the elimination of dysfunctions and the avoidance of risks that threaten the system: not, in other words, toward the realization of practical goals but toward the solution of technical problems.⁵⁰

The collapse of any distinction between public and private spheres and the colonisation of society by the system has serious consequences for the individual. In the social welfare state, many functions previously carried out within the conjugal family are taken over by the public/private functional complex. The bourgeois family loses its economic autonomy as salaried functionaries replace private property owners. Education and childcare are removed from the home. Leisure activities are increasingly passive, spectator entertainment provided by the mass media which transmit a sense of the inevitability of the status quo. The intimate sphere, once devoted to the cultivation of an inner life, is deprivatized. The function of the intimate sphere in social reproduction and individuation is threatened, calling into question the idea of the individual as such. "In our day", writes Habermas, "this domain, abandoned under the direct onslaught of extra-familial authorities upon the individual, has started to dissolve into a sphere of pseudo-privacy."⁵¹ It is replaced by an amorphous sense of familiarity, created by and reflected in the mass media:

The deprivatized province of interiority was hallowed out by the mass media; a pseudo-public sphere of a no longer literary public was patched together to create a sort of superfamilial zone of familiarity.⁵²

⁵⁰Jürgen Habermas, *op.cit.* 1971, pp. 102-3.

⁵¹Jürgen Habermas, *op.cit.* 1991, p. 157.

⁵²*Ibid.*, p. 162.

This pseudo-familiarity, however, lacks any real intimacy. It is incapable of supporting a genuine process of individuation, and cannot perform the role of social reproduction, because it lacks a common language which expresses the norms, values, traditions, religion and culture which form the substance of social reproduction. It is a zone artificially created by the expansion of the system, characterized by instrumental reason, and determined by the interests of profit and control. Combined with the problem of competing and irreconcilable differences, therefore, is the problem that real differences are systematically eliminated in the construction of a pseudo-culture. In contemporary Western society, we can observe two parallel and seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, we face an outbreak of national and factional conflict, society, in many ways, seems increasingly divided along religious, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and racial lines as individuals and groups strive to assert particular identities. On the other hand, we witness the gradual erosion of real differences through channels such as the mass media, and the proliferation of international corporate culture and advertising. As we achieve greater economic unity we are further and further divided in other respects.

Habermas's theory of communicative action suggests a way forward out of this situation by rejecting the idea that the common features of a pluralist society can be located only in the system. What defines us all, according to Habermas, are not systems of administrative and technical control alone, but structures of intersubjective communication which provide a framework in which common values can be made explicit, where differences can be rationally and publicly discussed, and, as a result of which, compromise, consensus and understanding become achievable goals. In other words, Habermas proposes the basis for a common language which does not have its source in any single tradition, religion or culture, but which makes the values inherent in different traditions, religions and cultures, publicly accessible through a common rationality. On this account, the rationalization of the lifeworld must proceed, not through the continuing expansion of instrumental rationality, but through communicative action aimed at mobilizing the contents of the lifeworld against the domination of instrumental control.

The problem with this solution, however, is that it depends on the idea that there is a structure of rationality that transcends linguistic, cultural and religious differences, and in affirming such a structure, Habermas comes up against the post-modern critique of

modernity. "At the heart of this debate", writes Andrew Cutrofello, in his book *Discipline and Critique: Kant, Poststructuralism and the Problem of Resistance*, "is a question of what it means to engage in critique."⁵³ He locates the difference between the two sides in this debate as that between a juridical as against a non-juridical model of critique. The first he traces through Immanuel Kant and the second through Michel Foucault. On the Kantian side, "critique is a juridical-style questioning of the claims of reason which seeks to establish universal standards of rationality."⁵⁴ Habermas is the contemporary heir to this tradition, and, despite his reformulation of rationality in communicative terms, he fails to escape the limitations inherent in the juridical model:

In Habermas, the Kantian tribunal is transformed into a public court governed by democratic procedures which are designed to let all rational agents participate in its deliberations. However the Habermasian court retains the basic Kantian framework of critique as some sort of juridically styled questioning. The trope of the court is meant to conjure the ideal of a common space for rendering differences commensurable in accordance with regulative assumptions about universal rationality.⁵⁵

The problem with this model for post-modernists is precisely that they, "question the assumption that differences can be "settled" in a court with universalist pretensions."⁵⁶ An alternative approach, according to Cutrofello, lies with the concept of discipline, found both in Kant and in Foucault. Cutrofello's aim is to elaborate the notion of a "discipline of resistance" as an alternative to the Habermasian model of resistance through discourse in the court of reason.

For Foucault, the act of judging is inherently linked with what he calls "disciplinary power":

Disciplinary power controls bodies by observing and classifying them, thereby reducing individual bodies to cases that can be uniquely manipulated. The mechanism of such control is a normalizing judgement that assigns individual bodies their proper places in a classificatory grid.⁵⁷

⁵³Andrew Cutrofello, *Discipline and Critique: Kant, Poststructuralism, and the Problem of Resistance*. (Albany: State of New York Press, 1994) p. ix.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 21.

Through his concept of disciplinary power, Foucault is led away from a juridical model of judgement. "Disciplinary judgements are not juridical laws or sentences, for their primary aim is not to repress...Rather, disciplinary judgements are productive. Instead of repressing, they exercise a control over bodies."⁵⁸ Through disciplinary power, bodies are trained to judge themselves - by acting upon acting subjects, discipline produces certain types of bodies:

For Foucault, one of the important differences between discipline as a means of correction and earlier forms of punishment is that the latter are primarily negative in the sense that they involve repression and restraint. Torture is the model for predisciplinary control of bodies. By contrast, discipline does not merely train by restraining or injuring. Rather, it is positive in the sense that it actively produces certain types of bodies.⁵⁹

Kant recognizes the emergence of disciplinary power and this leads him to distinguish between a discipline of domination and a discipline of resistance. Since, however, he continues to construe disciplinary power on a juridical model, he frames the struggle between domination and resistance primarily in terms of a battle of laws:

As the key to critical philosophy's struggle with disciplinary power, Kant invokes a new form of discipline. Thus, the juridical battle between power (heteronomy) and critique (autonomy) becomes a struggle between two sorts of disciplines - a discipline of domination (heteronomy) versus a discipline of resistance (autonomy).⁶⁰

For Kant, discipline and culture are intimately related: discipline extirpates bad habits while culture encourages good ones. Discipline, "functions as a type of leveling of instinct which prepares the way for a positive molding of a new set of instincts."⁶¹ Kant distinguishes between the discipline of reason and moral discipline. "The discipline of pure reason must take the form of a critical self-examination on the part of reason."⁶² This undertaking is characterized in explicitly juridical terms. Moral discipline, on the other hand, involves teaching the will to act independently of the faculty of desire, and moral culture is a positive molding of action in accordance with principles. Moral

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 33.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 35.

⁶²Ibid.

discipline and moral culture together make up what Kant terms "ethical ascetics": "The discipline of ethical ascetics seeks to extirpate the tendencies of our inclinations to lead us into moral error."⁶³ Kant makes a further distinction, between ethical and monkish ascetics: "While monkish ascetics involves the torturing of bodies, ethical ascetics involves the training of bodies...Kant describes the discipline of ethical gymnastics as a practice whereby we train our bodies to enjoy acting virtuously."⁶⁴ And acting virtuously means obeying the categorical imperative.

The categorical imperative, argues Cutrofello, provides the resources for distinguishing between two kinds of obedience - critical versus dogmatic obedience. "What it means to "obey" the categorical imperative is to resist - rather than obey - any law which runs contrary to our moral duty."⁶⁵ Kant fails to realize this potential, however, because his adherence to a juridical model of critique leads him to a valorization of obedience to law as such. As Cutrofello elaborates:

What we must understand is how Kant is led away from the categorical imperative to a valorization of obedience to law - and this we must trace to his seemingly uncritical embrace of the juridical in general. We also need to consider what alternative construal of Kantian ethics might result from a categorical imperative that bids us to develop a critical discipline of resistance instead of a dogmatic subservience to forces of domination.⁶⁶

The problem with Kant is that he construes the primary threat to freedom as emerging, not from external forces of domination, but from our own bodies: "Nature, of course, has designed us in such a way that we are constantly motivated to act on our desires, but the natural goal of humanity is to cultivate a good will. An effective care of the self must therefore defend the will from any incursion by its natural enemy - the desires of the body."⁶⁷ By seeking to suppress his bodily desires and impulses, subjecting them to the rule of law, Kant turns himself into a docile citizen:

The law-giving court of reason serves, in effect, as the instrument whereby Kant's body is colonized by forces that turn him into a docile citizen. His faculties, equipped with a predetermined set of categories and ideas, function as forces of significance. The strata of subjectification are those forces that

⁶³Ibid., p. 37.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 38.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 41.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 48.

turn Kant's situated body into a merely transcendental subject.⁶⁸

Kant ultimately fails to formulate a real discipline of resistance because, "he construes the problem of discipline as a way of overcoming nature, instead of as a way of overcoming the political forces of domination."⁶⁹ The idea of a "care of the self", as an alternative form of discipline, comes from Foucault:

Just as Kant contrasted ethical ascetics with monkish ascetics, so Foucault seeks to distinguish between an ascetical practice whereby a body would care for itself and a technique of the self whereby a body is trained to make itself docile.⁷⁰

It is this idea of a positive "care of the self" that Cutrofello uses to work out a discipline of resistance, combining, as he sees it, the complementary resources of Kant and Foucault put together. He recasts the problem of domination in political terms as the problem of how to escape from a disciplinary matrix. This strategy of resistance needs to provide the means for opposing, what Foucault calls, "techniques of the self" which, "work in tandem with techniques of domination, producing docile bodies that are enlisted in their own disciplinary domination."⁷¹ Cutrofello, however, wants to emphasize a third set of disciplinary techniques which Foucault never makes explicit, namely, "ways in which bodies are trained to isolate themselves from one another in the first place, thereby making an individualistic care of the self the only possible activity of resistance."⁷²

In contemporary Western society, the individual, considered apart from her relationship to the community, is a source of domination through what Cutrofello terms, "techniques of mutual betrayal". In other words, defining the interests of the individual, separately from the interests of the community, creates a situation where individual fulfillment becomes opposed to community solidarity. Techniques of mutual betrayal work to destroy community, "to break a community of resistance by training its members to betray one another, thereby causing the community to lose its sense of solidarity."⁷³ These techniques, however, do not simply train people to act in certain ways, but more

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 60-1.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 63.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 64.

⁷²Ibid., p. 65.

⁷³Ibid., p. 66.

significantly, train people to reason in certain ways. Cutrofello uses the example of the prisoner's dilemma from game theory as an illustration:

As is well known, the prisoner's dilemma specifies a set of rules whereby each of two prisoners is given an opportunity to cooperate with the other or to betray the other. If they both cooperate, then their sentence will be shorter than if they both betray each other. However, if one of them cooperates, and the other betrays, the one who betrays wins complete freedom while the other receives a longer sentence. Given these parameters, the dilemma arises because it would seem that, no matter what one prisoner does, it is always in the best interest of the other not to cooperate. Because each reasons in the same way, they both end up betraying each other.⁷⁴

The prisoner's dilemma demonstrates the way that, "victims of disciplinary control become accomplices in their own mutual disciplining"⁷⁵ by adopting certain modes of reasoning. The game-theoretical analysis, however, misses this dimension because it does not question the underlying framework of the dilemma itself:

Because game-theoretical treatments of the prisoner's dilemma take the only options to be those which amount to playing within the rules - rather than seeking to transform them, refusing to play, and so on - they tend to present the dilemma merely as a rational choice problem, instead of as a problem of how to confront those forms of power that place individuals in these situations in the first place.⁷⁶

We can see here the problem with Habermas. The difficulty with offering a universal structure of rationality as a framework for resolving differences, is that it fails to take into account how rationality itself is conditioned and constructed within particular social contexts. If, in the West, we are predisposed to reason in certain ways which isolate the individual from the community, then appealing to reason as a strategy for expressing a common sociality will prove insufficient as a means of resisting the status quo. Resistance will require that we uncover how our reason itself is implicated in perpetuating the status quo, that we examine our pre-conscious, pre-reflective formation in the categories of reason. Cutrofello describes a situation in which individuals are trained to reason themselves into mutual betrayal as a "disciplinary matrix":

A disciplinary matrix is a social construct with rules that encourage persons

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 67.

to reason themselves into becoming agents of domination...It is successful in the degree to which it trains its subjects to think that its rules are irresistible, that they must "play the game".⁷⁷

It is the categorical imperative, argues Cutrofello, that provides the means for escaping the prisoner's dilemma: "We can view the categorical imperative as the practical expression of a rationality that refuses to become docile, a rationality that has no 'price', to use Kant's term. For this reason, a disciplined adherence to the categorical imperative can never sanction betrayal in the prisoner's dilemma - one cannot universalize a maxim of betrayal."⁷⁸ From this perspective, the prisoner wins who refuses to betray the other no matter what the outcome. "Kantian ethics does not tell the prisoners how to win given the rules of the game. Rather it tells the prisoners to refuse to play the game...He or she wins by successfully resisting the act of becoming an accomplice of the disciplinary matrix."⁷⁹ Techniques which teach people how to play by the rules of the game, as if the rules themselves are immutable, create patterns of mutual betrayal which destroy solidarity and undermine the possibility of resistance.

Part of the success of techniques of mutual betrayal lies in convincing participants that the *summum bonum* is unattainable. "In Kantian terms, we could say that the prisoners are trained to think that they must act in a world where the *summum bonum* is unattainable that is, a world in which mutual cooperation could never occur. Once we are trained to think that the *summum bonum* cannot be achieved, we are more likely to reason selfishly."⁸⁰ Arguments against the possibility of the *summum bonum* function as strategies which trap people within the confines of the present, making any transformation of its terms seemingly impossible. "Arguments about human nature's being intractable and fixed are common ways in which people are encouraged to think of the rules - or, to go back to Foucault, the 'limits of the present' - as eternally fixed."⁸¹

Attempts to solve the prisoner's dilemma through alternative accounts of rationality ultimately fail because they formulate solutions which remain within the terms provided: "In Habermas, the rationality of consensus is stressed, and others have tried to

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 68.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 69.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 70.

⁸¹Ibid.

demonstrate the rationality of valuing community. These approaches continue to view the problem as being how to determine the best strategy for playing the game."⁸²

Habermas's discourse ethics, "fails to address the more radical question of what it might take to 'get out of the present' - that is, to let the prisoners escape punishment entirely."⁸³ Here lies the difference between a game-theoretic problem and a disciplinary matrix problem - "the rules of the former are taken to be fixed, while the rules of the latter are capable of being changed. Put otherwise, game-theoretic problems are structural; disciplinary matrix problems are historical."⁸⁴ In order to appreciate the power of a disciplinary matrix, it is essential to recognize the extent to which it involves a training of rationality, "a training of bodies to think in terms of the form of rationality upon which the matrix itself is predicated."⁸⁵

Escaping from a disciplinary matrix requires a radical rethinking of the relationship between reason and unreason because a matrix is constructed so that only moves defined in its own terms are considered rational. The rationality of participants is trained or disciplined to comply with the laws of the matrix as if these were the only choices possible.

If we take Cutrofello's analysis on board, then our approach in the contemporary situation, defined by competing and seemingly irreconcilable differences on the one hand, and increasing economic homogeneity on the other, cannot be simply to make an inherent structure of rationality explicit, but must involve discovering how our rationality itself is involved in constructing the very categories of our contemporary experience, so that these appear to be the natural and inevitable parameters of life. "By siding with reason against unreason", writes Cutrofello, "Habermas risks reinforcing an essential underpinning of disciplinary matrices."⁸⁶ In order to surmount the limits of the present, we must engage in genealogical critique of how the present comes to be. This brings us back to the original purpose of this Chapter, which is to ask what we can do when the social vision which our language is expressing is corrupt. In other words, what can we do when we ourselves are implicated in perpetuating a disciplinary matrix?

⁸²Ibid., p. 71.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 72.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 74.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 79.

This, we might say, is the question the Reformers faced in the sixteenth century. The changes brought about by the Reformation create the conditions for a whole series of developments which characterize the modern period: the rejection of hierarchical authority and the advent of democracy, the recognition of individual rights and freedoms, the spread of universal education, and the sanctification of work, to name a few. Along with these changes, however, is the privileging of a particular stance towards the world, as we have seen, made possible by the idea of an unmediated relationship to God, which plays an important part in the development of the modern self. The Reformers identified a deep and pervasive corruption in the Church's sacramental life, such that the liturgy was failing to be the language of the Kingdom. The vision embodied through the liturgy was itself distorted. Their reform became, however, not just the rejection of a corrupt vision, and the language expressing it, but the rejection of an implicit understanding of language as a mediation of human relationship to God, and of the material world as a vehicle for God's revelation. P.J. FitzPatrick's argument about the Eucharist as a ritual is made explicitly in opposition to the instrumental stance towards the world, articulated by Descartes, which is facilitated by this rejection, the illusion of self-transparency which accompanies it, and the denial of sacramentality which it entails. He writes:

For Descartes and the Cartesian tradition, the philosopher must seek an unshakeable point in knowledge, an element proof against all scepticism, and that element is to be found in the self-awareness of the individual thinker, an awareness of thought that goes beyond any doubts concerning the external world, the reliability of memory or the existence of the thinker's body. From this citadel of security, cautious forays can be made into what purports to be a world of objects, among which are other rational beings.⁸⁷

He continues:

The Cartesian divorce between matter and spirit, between the orders of extension and thought, needs mending; shared activity between human beings is not something in which inferences have to be made from gestures to meanings and thoughts, as if meanings and thoughts were of another, inner order, private to each individual. Inference is simply not in place here, nor is the body a window onto the soul.⁸⁸

⁸⁷P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: The Eucharist and Ritual*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp. 57-8.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, p. 58.

What we need, writes FitzPatrick, is to get back "to what [the philosopher Ludwig] Wittgenstein calls 'the rough ground', a life shared with others in the material setting within which we act and think."⁸⁹ In other words, we need to rediscover an account of our world as linguistically-structured and linguistically-shared, and of the material world as a whole, including our bodies, as the medium for that sharing. It is with this rediscovery of mediation that we move into the critique of modernity by post-modern writers. Fergus Kerr writes:

If the epoch of modernity may be defined, with such investigators as Heidegger, Foucault and (in his own sly way) the later Wittgenstein, in terms of the reign of the autonomous subject, which is an uncontroversial thought, then one decisive move in the making of post-modernity is surely the rediscovery of the fact that our experience is always mediated.⁹⁰

Working to elaborate Wittgenstein's thought for theology, Kerr observes: "We have no access to our own minds, non-linguistically. We have no access to the divine independently of our life and language."⁹¹ Our ability to communicate with ourselves, with others and with God is always mediated by the fact of our bodily existence. Indeed, our human identity cannot be separated from our identity as embodied creatures - it is in and through our bodies that we are human and that we relate to one another:

For Wittgenstein, it is our bodiliness that founds our being able, in principle, to learn any natural language on earth. In contrast to the metaphysical conception of the self, where our bodies supposedly get between us and prevent a meeting of minds, Wittgenstein reminds us of the obvious fact that the foundation of mutual understanding is the human body, with its manifold responsiveness and expressiveness. Paradoxically, it is not our bodies but our minds that get in the way of our understanding each other.⁹²

The idea of the self trapped inside the body, and the body as an object standing in the way of communication with others, fosters a false longing for unmediated relationship. "The picture of ourselves as isolated entities 'looking out from our heads' goes with a longing to communicate in some more direct way than by using symbols."⁹³ This

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Fergus Kerr, "Rescuing Girard's Argument?" in *Modern Theology*. (8: 4 October 1992) p. 388.

⁹¹Fergus Kerr, *Theology After Wittgenstein*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 147.

⁹²Ibid., p. 109.

⁹³Ibid., p. 45.

conception of the body alienates us from the world, denying what we are as human beings. "Once and for all, that is to say, we need to give up comparing ourselves with ethereal beings that enjoy unmediated communion with one another."⁹⁴ The anthropologist Mary Douglas takes up this theme in her analysis of contemporary Western society. "All communication", she writes, "depends on use of symbols, and they can be classified in numerous ways, from the most precise to the most vague, from single reference signs to multi-reference symbols."⁹⁵ She continues:

There is no person whose life does not need to unfold in a coherent symbolic system. The less organized the way of life, the less articulated the symbolic system may be...For it is an illusion to suppose that there can be organisation without symbolic expression. It is the old prophetic dream of instant, unmediated communication.⁹⁶

What has been lost in the West, argues Douglas, is a shared symbolic language. This lack of common symbols, and of common rituals to embody them, undermines our need for a shared expression of the social order. Describing the history of this loss, she writes:

Today, as much amongst us as the immigrant Irish, are the thriving numerous Protestant sects which each arose in turn by rejecting ecclesiology, and by seeking to return to the primitive purity of the Gospel message, speaking straight to the heart of the worshipper without intervening ritual forms.⁹⁷

The result of this rejection of mediation is that our common language places all its emphasis on personal, individual expression at the expense of social structure and position. She elaborates this point by arguing that, in the West, a certain form of speech, detached from the immediate social structure and geared to ever-changing social realities, has come to predominate, making it difficult for people either to understand or to participate in common symbolic and ritual forms. In order to make her case, Douglas borrows the concepts of an elaborated and a restricted speech code from the sociologist Basil Bernstein. A restricted speech code is a form of speech that reinforces the structures and institutions of society. Douglas associates the restricted speech code with what she terms, "the positional family" - a family structured around a set pattern of hierarchy and

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1973) p. 29.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 73.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 22.

authority. She writes: "The child in this family is controlled by the continual building-up of a sense of social pattern: of ascribed role categories. If he asks, 'why must I do this?' the answer is in terms of relative position."⁹⁸ An elaborated speech code, by contrast, seeks justification, not by appeal to fixed positions, but by appeal to reason and emotion. It is the code of "the personal family" whereby, "the child grows in a family system which is relatively unstructured, a collection of unique feelings and needs. Right and wrong are learnt in terms of his response to those feelings. Instead of internalising any particular social structure, his inside is continually stirred into a ferment of ethical sensibilities. We can immediately and from our own experience recognise this as the basis for the move from ritual to ethics."⁹⁹ The person reared in a personal family cannot function within the boundaries of a restricted code.

The irony, however, is that individuals who find themselves unable to function in a restricted code, nevertheless, long to do so. "These very people", writes Douglas, "who prefer unstructured intimacy in their social relations, defeat their wish for communication without words. For only a ritual structure makes possible a wordless channel of communication that is not entirely incoherent." She continues, "it is a paradox of this study that those who most readily despise ritual should not be exempt from the longing for non-verbal communication."¹⁰⁰

Post-modernity, as we have already noted, is a rediscovery that all our experience is mediated. In other words, it is a rediscovery of language, and of the world as linguistically-structured. The critique offered by post-modern writers takes the form of a relentless uncovering of limits, where the illusion of a perfect vision had previously reigned. This critique has introduced us to a new kind of self-consciousness, to the realization that anything we say has a history, comes from somewhere, reveals a particular perspective on the world. This vision, however, ultimately leads to the idea that whatever I say is simply my opinion, my point of view, that I can have no greater claim to truth than to offer a faithful account of my own situation. But this approach denies the world in another way, denies the fact that our existence is necessarily shared, that our common life demands that we make decisions affecting us all, transcending any single point of view. At the end of the day, the post-modern critique gives us no greater insight

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 45.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 75.

into how we might actively engage with the world, conscious of our limits but not paralysed by them. In order to see the contingent parameters of the present situation, described as a disciplinary matrix, we need an account of the relationship between the individual and the community which reveals their mutually constitutive construction. As Charles Taylor writes:

The community is not simply an aggregation of individuals; nor is there simply a causal interaction between the two. The community is also constitutive of the individual, in the sense that the self-interpretations which define him are drawn from the interchange which the community carries on.¹⁰¹

This account, as we shall see in Chapter Five, depends, in turn, on a revised articulation of the relationship between God and humanity, and is, therefore, a question of theology.

The Catholic tradition maintains the vision of a mediated relationship with God through the liturgy. In other words, an individual develops a personal relationship with God through participation in the common language of the Church. Where the Church fails, however, is in Her recognition of the authority of individuals so formed to appropriate this language, expanding the common linguistic palate of the whole Church through their unique contribution. The result is a language, stultifying and out-of-date, increasingly inward looking because unable to say anything of any interest or relevance to the world at large. The changes to the liturgy brought about by Vatican II fail because they are not based on any real understanding of how the liturgy works, or on what kind of changes in the Church are really required.

The Catholic Church is like a mother who refuses to let her children grow up, who keeps them under her skirts and hampers their ability to embark on an individual journey to God the Father, through a personal knowledge and love of Christ. The Protestant tradition, on the other hand, by according insufficient place to the Church's motherhood, to the way we are formed in community at a pre-conscious, pre-reflective level, leaves the children without a proper bodily formation, alienated from their physical bodies and unable to engage in a world mediated by linguistically-structured, bodily relations.

¹⁰¹Charles Taylor, *Human Agency and Language*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 9.

Oscillation between these two, now secular, extremes, as we have seen, characterizes the contemporary situation. The result is a state of competing differences - competing corporate identities on the one hand, and competing individual rights and expectations on the other, with little sense of how these differences might provide the basis for a common life. Underpinning this fragmentation is the increasing homogeneity of a global economic world order. A direct appeal to rationality, as a way of resolving differences and reaching consensus on a new form of social life, cannot provide a way forward, because such an approach fails to consider the extent to which our rationality is itself contingent and constructed. We must investigate, rather, the way our present situation is defined by a particular form of rationality that predisposes us to engage with the world in a certain way. This is the explicit task of John Milbank, in his book *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*¹⁰², which leads us into Chapter Five.

¹⁰²John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

CHAPTER FIVE

John Milbank: Reclaiming the Christian Narrative

In Chapter Four, we examined the transformation of public space from the Middle Ages to the Reformation, and from the bourgeois public sphere to the social welfare state. What we find, in the course of this trajectory, is that public space ceases to be governed by a homogeneous Christian vision of the world and the cosmos, and becomes increasingly dominated by instrumental rationality on the one hand, and competing private interests on the other. This change is made possible by a changed understanding of the relationship between God and humanity, articulated in Reformation theologies, namely, that each individual has a direct, unmediated relationship to God. This articulation enables the privatization of religious faith, creating the modern division between public and private, while this-worldly asceticism, as described by Weber, privileges a disengaged stance towards the world, leading to the spread of instrumental reason.

In the bourgeois public sphere, there develops the idea that competing differences can be mediated, and agreement reached, through rational discourse. Rationality comes to be seen as the foundation for a common vision of humanity. As the public sphere is extended, however, through the universalization of political franchise, this vision breaks down. What comes to light is the extent to which "universal rationality" is in fact the rationality of educated, male, bourgeois property-owners - a rationality promoting particular interests as those of mankind in general. The post-modern critique of modernity is an exercise in exposing particular interests masquerading as universal ones, and thus of relentlessly demonstrating the extent to which our rationalities are mediated by particular locations in the world, in time and space. This unmasking of reason leads to nihilism - the despair that there is no common basis on which differences can be reconciled, that reality is itself constituted by competing differences, and, therefore, essentially violent and chaotic, without ultimate meaning.

Narrative takes over from rationality as the medium in which an account of the world can be made. Whereas rationality proceeds by locating the particular within universal categories, narrative relates particular events and people as important precisely in their

difference from the norm. Without a common narrative framework, however, the result is a multiplication of competing narratives in the shape of competing individual and corporate identities, often, as in the Balkans, in violent relation to each other.

In Chapter Four, we explored, with Andrew Cutrofello, the idea of a disciplinary matrix - the idea that our rationality is shaped in particular social contexts in a way that limits our perception of the world, and, therefore, our ability to make choices outside a given range of possibilities. If we try to solve the problem of the disciplinary matrix from within, we lose because we remain caught inside its terms. The only way to escape is to reveal the limits of the matrix, so that a different framework, with different choices, is brought to light. This is what John Milbank tries to do, in his book *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*.¹ His aim is to expose the predicament of contemporary Western society as a disciplinary matrix problem based on our entrapment within the limits of secular reason. He exposes the futility of trying to solve this problem within the terms of secular reason itself, and offers a different framework altogether by retelling the Christian narrative as an alternative and better account of our present state. In this Chapter, we consider Milbank's account as a way out of the limits of modernity, concluding that the boundaries which he himself erects are such as to indicate the need for a different dynamics of engagement with the present, which we discover in Chapter Six.

Milbank writes:

The end of modernity, which is not accomplished, yet continues to arrive, means the end of a single system of truth based on universal reason, which tells us what reality is like.²

He continues:

In postmodernity there are infinitely many possible versions of truth, inseparable from particular narratives. Objects and subjects are, as they are narrated in a story. Outside a plot, which has its own unique, unfounded reasons, one cannot conceive how objects and subjects would be, nor even that they would be at all.³

¹John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).

²John Milbank, "'Postmodern Critical Augustinianism': A Short *Summa* in Forty Two Responses to Unasked Questions". *Modern Theology* (7: 3 April 1991) p. 225.

³Ibid.

The result of this multiplication of possible versions of truth is a picture of reality as flux, "a reality without substance, composed only of relational differences and ceaseless alterations."⁴ It is in interpreting the flux that nihilism and Christianity are distinguished. "For nihilism, the flux is a medium of perpetual conflict, a pagan *agon* where the most powerful rhetoric will temporarily triumph, only to succumb to an apparently or effectively more powerful discourse in the future."⁵ Christianity, on the other hand, does not recognize the priority of violence, but relates differences together in musical harmony:

Christianity is peculiar, because while it is open to difference - to a series of infinitely new additions, insights, progressions towards God, it also strives to make of all these differential additions a harmony, 'in the body of Christ', and claims that if the reality of God is properly attended to, there can be such a harmony.⁶

Christianity is, therefore, according to Milbank, in a unique position in relation to post-modernity, for it alone is able to imagine reality as difference without the corresponding notion that difference necessarily entails conflict. For Milbank, the limits of the present in the West must be described in terms of a choice between Christianity and nihilism. This choice arises because the post-modern critique of reason has exposed the unfoundedness of any claim based on universal rationality, making a liberal position untenable. We are left, therefore, either with the nihilist world of competing and incommensurable differences, or with Christianity, understood as an account of reality in which difference is not the necessary occasion of violence. This Christian narrative is itself, however, rationally speaking, unfounded. Proclaiming the Christian message is not an exercise in rational argument, but in rhetoric and persuasion - telling the better story.

Milbank's aim, in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, is to reassert Christianity as a metanarrative - a narrative that positions all other narratives - and Christian theology as a metadiscipline, ending what has become the positioning of Christian theology by the disciplines of secular reason. His method is to expose the arbitrary moments in the construction of the secular in order to extricate the Christian story from the story of what he describes in terms of an heretical departure from Christian orthodoxy.

⁴Ibid., p. 227.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

Secular reason is a form of rationality that takes for granted the idea that the social is a realm of competing and conflicting interests that must be managed by a permanent political force, whose objective is to maintain a balance of power and to contain the violence of incommensurable difference which always threatens to erupt. Self-interest is presupposed as the motivating norm for all human action. Christianity, by contrast, offers an account of reality in which differences are united, but not extinguished, through a common orientation to the Kingdom. This orientation precludes any ultimate recognition of human ownership and thus any resignation to a sphere of competing and incommensurable interests. Difference is construed, not as the occasion of violence, but, in the image of the Trinity, as harmonious sociality, which is at the same time unity. The eschatological vision of Christianity and its emphasis on communal salvation offer a vision of the social characterized by the operation of charity in an economy of forgiveness. Christianity refuses an ontology of violence in the name of a musical ontology of peace, which subverts and overcomes the secular order.

Milbank is concerned to expose social theory as theology in disguise - as an account of reality based on secular reason, which disseminates a false and heretical doctrine of the social. The Christian and the secular are distinguished as two modes of social practice arising from and perpetuating two distinct forms of sociality. Social theory engages, not simply in the description of society, but in the creation of a particular form of society - the secular. The task of Christian theology is to expose this contingency and to articulate the possibility of an altogether different form of social relatedness. "Exploration of Christian practice, the task of theology, tries to pinpoint the peculiarity, the difference, of this practice by 'making it strange'".⁷ Milbank's approach is to trace the sources of secular discourse, using an archaeological approach borrowed from Michel Foucault, which, he writes, "enables me to show how the genesis of discourse is intertwined with the genesis of a new practice; in particular this allows me to demonstrate that secular social theory *only applies* to secular society, which it helps to sustain."⁸ By uncovering social theory as theology, Milbank is at the same time exposing the nature of the community whose *logos* is articulated in secular discourse. The secular, therefore, is not only a theology,

⁷Ibid., p. 228.

⁸John Milbank, op.cit. 1990, p. 3.

but also a church in disguise, "but a theology and a church dedicated to promoting a certain secular consensus."⁹

Milbank's argument is that the choice which faces contemporary Western society is not a choice between reason and faith, but a choice between two faiths, two churches, two theologies, and two narrative traditions - Christian and secular. Arguments for either side are not arguments which can hope to reveal a rational foundation, but rather, arguments in the order of rhetoric and persuasion which seek to make explicit the nature and implications of distinct practices. "There can only be a distinguishable Christian social theory", writes Milbank, "because there is also a distinguishable Christian mode of action, a definite practice. The theory explicates this practice, which arose in certain precise historical circumstances, and exists only as a particular historical development."¹⁰ His argument is equally a call to Christian theologians to cease their collusion with the secular church, abandon attempts to offer a Christian gloss to secular readings of society and instead, reconceive Christian theology, "as a kind of 'Christian sociology': that is to say, as the explication of a socio-linguistic practice, or as the constant re-narration of this practice as it has historically developed."¹¹

This refocusing of Christian theology must be accompanied, according to Milbank, with a recognition of the utter uniqueness of the Christian narrative. Christianity is not simply one story among others, Christianity is the narrative which positions all other narratives; Christian practice is the measure of all human practices. The Christian narrative is thus a metanarrative, and Christian theology a metadiscourse positioning all other discourses. This meta-claim is made in relation to Christian practice seen as a completely original mode of action, subverting and transforming all previous and future human practices in relation to itself. "The logic of Christianity involves the claim that the 'interruption' of history by Christ and his bride, the Church, is the most fundamental of events, interpreting all other events. And it is *most especially* a social event, able to interpret other social formations, because it compares them with its own new social practice."¹²

⁹Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 380.

¹¹Ibid., p. 381.

¹²Ibid., p. 388.

The secular embodies an heretical departure from orthodox Christianity. "It is in the discourses of liberalism", writes Milbank, "scientific politics' and political economy - that the secular is first constructed."¹³ The origins of the secular, however, lie in Christianity itself, in a tragic failure of Christian practice which meant that, "the Church failed to bring about salvation, but instead ushered in the modern secular - at first liberal, and finally nihilistic - world."¹⁴ These Christian sources of the secular are found in a resignation to worldly *dominium*; a recognition of the political - a sphere for the balancing of competing interests - as a necessary and natural domain of social life apart from the imperatives of salvation. This resignation is evident even in Aquinas: "By beginning to see social, economic and administrative life as essentially natural, and part of a political sphere separate from the Church, Aquinas opens the way to regarding the Church as an organization specializing in what goes on inside men's souls".¹⁵ As a result, "firm lines of division arise between what is 'secular' and what is 'spiritual'".¹⁶

This division opens the way for the privatization of religion and the modern distinction between public and private which we examined in Chapter Four. The Protestant Reformation crystallizes what is already a secular theme within Christianity: "The protestant view of the Church, which understands it as an association of individual believers who possess, outside the social context, their own direct relationship to God, articulates more fully what was always latent within Christian self-understanding."¹⁷ The expanding influence of the secular, however, is by no means confined to the Protestant churches, for, "a Church more narrowly defined as a cure of souls is also a Church granting more power to the regular clergy"¹⁸ over both monastics and laity. And a Church which understands itself as having a particular sphere of interest will mimic the procedures of political sovereignty, and invent a kind of bureaucratic management of believers."¹⁹ The Christian Church thus gives rise to an anti-Church constituted and sustained by practices which both mimic and pervert genuine ecclesial practice:

Gradually...*ordo* became almost a goal in itself, and pastoral rule,

¹³Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 381-2.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 407.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 399.

¹⁸It would appear that by 'regular clergy' Milbank means 'secular clergy' - diocesan priests as opposed to religious. Thanks to Fergus Kerr for pointing this out.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 408.

concentrating on the minute regulation of bodies in time and space, fused with the return of formal legality...Gradually *ordo* got separated off from both true *usus* and ultimate *frui*, and pastoral rule became, within the secular state, a rule through the classification of populations in terms of medical, psychological, economic and educational canons of 'normality'.²⁰

The Christian Church itself, therefore, is responsible for giving rise to the secular order. "Insofar as the Church has failed, and has become a hellish anti-Church, it has confined Christianity, like everything else, within the cycle of the ceaseless exhaustion and return of violence."²¹ The theme of original violence provides a thread of continuity between antique reason and modern, secular reason. For this reason, Milbank is able to appropriate Augustine's critique of antiquity to a critique of the modern secular order. He writes:

Antique thought and politics assumes some naturally given element of chaotic conflict which must be tamed by the stability and self-identity of reason. Modern thought and politics...assumes that there is only this chaos, which cannot be tamed by an opposing transcendent principle, but can be immanently controlled by subjecting it to rules and giving irresistible power to these rules in the form of market-economics and sovereign politics.²²

Christianity interrupts this cycle of violence by insisting on the idea of an original peace. "Thus Christianity, uniquely, does not allow violence any real ontological purchase, but relates it instead to a free subject who asserts a will that is truly independent of God and others, and thereby a will to the inhibition and distortion of reality (so that, in a sense, the Cartesian subject only exists as the sinful subject)."²³

Unlike Aquinas, Augustine makes no distinction between a spiritual and a secular domain, but distinguishes, rather, between the narratives of two cities - the *Civitas terrena* and the *altera Civitas*. "The *Civitas terrena* is marked by sin, which means, for Augustine, the denial of God and others in favour of self-love and self-assertion; and enjoyment of arbitrary, and therefore violent power over others".²⁴ The peace of the

²⁰Ibid., p. 433.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., p. 5.

²³Ibid., p. 432.

²⁴Ibid, p. 390.

Civitas terrena is nothing more than the containment of force by counter-force. The *altera Civitas*, by contrast, enjoys "a real peace, which is a state of harmonious agreement, based upon a common love, and a realization of justice for all."²⁵ The vocation of the Church is to realize this peace, or more accurately, the Church simply is this peaceful society - this form of sociality is the meaning of Church. "True society implies absolute consensus, agreement in desire, and entire harmony amongst its members, and this is exactly (as Augustine reiterates again and again) what the Church provides, and that in which salvation, the restoration of being, consists."²⁶

Unlike the division between spiritual and secular, the two cities do not occupy two different spheres of interest, but embody, rather, alternative paths within the same world, and give rise, therefore, to different modes of being. As Milbank explains:

There is no set of positive objectives that are its own peculiar business, and the city of God makes a *usus* of exactly the same range of finite goods, although for different ends, with 'a different faith, a different hope, a different love'. For the ends sought by the *Civitas terrena* are not merely limited, finite goods, they are these finite goods regarded without 'referral' to the infinite good, and, in consequence, they are unconditionally *bad* ends. The realm of the merely practical, cut off from the ecclesial, is quite simply a realm of sin.²⁷

The total peace of the *altera Civitas* is never perfectly realized in this world, but imagining such a peace, and rejecting the ontological priority of violence, functions as a way of escaping from the cycle of violence in which we are otherwise trapped. As Milbank explains: "It helps, because it allows us to unthink the necessity of violence, and exposes the manner in which the assumption of an inhibition of an always prior violence helps to preserve violence in motion. But it helps more, because it indicates that there is a way to act in a violent world which assumes the ontological priority of non-violence, and this way is called 'forgiveness of sins!'"²⁸ If we consider the contemporary situation in terms of a disciplinary matrix, constituted in part by the idea that violence is the inevitable result of difference, then Milbank's strategy of escape becomes clear. By unthinking the necessity of violence, an alternative construal of difference is made imaginable, and this alternative - the forgiveness of sins - leads us into a new mode of being altogether. We do

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 402.

²⁷Ibid., p. 406.

²⁸Ibid., p. 411.

not solve the matrix in its own terms, but transform the terms themselves, and thus alter the whole structure of our present reality.

The practice of forgiveness offers a new beginning in discontinuity with sin, ushering in the possibility of a new form of sociality. "Mutual forgiveness and bearing each other's burdens becomes the *modus vivendi* of the Church: an 'atoning' way of life."²⁹ The practice of forgiveness, rather than walls or gates, is what locates the *altera Civitas* in this world:

The city of God is in fact a paradox, 'a nomad city' (one might say) for it does not have a site, or walls or gates. It is not, like Rome, an *asylum* constituted by the 'protection' offered by a dominating class over a dominated, in the face of an external enemy. This form of refuge is, in fact, but a dim archetype of the real refuge provided by the Church, which is the forgiveness of sins.³⁰

As Milbank shows, Augustine links true justice and virtue with right worship, understood as the practice of forgiveness: "Augustine believes that the form taken by true worship of the true God is the offering of mutual forgiveness in the community".³¹ He continues: "Without 'mutual forgiveness' and social peace, says Augustine, no-one will be able to see God."³² Virtue, understood as the cultivation of a certain state of individual character is, "just vice for Augustine, unless 'referred' through forgiveness and the search for consensus to the absolute social harmony of heaven."³³ The economy of forgiveness is based on the recognition that sin is always shared: "We acknowledge that an individual's sin is never his alone, that its endurance harms us all, and therefore its cancellation is also the responsibility of all. Here we *do* echo God, not in punishing, but in suffering, for the duration of the *saeculum*, the consequences of sin."³⁴ The forgiveness of sins is the medium for our transition from the illusion of selfownership to the reality of community. As Milbank elaborates, "Augustine does not endorse, indeed utterly condemns, every tendency towards a view of personhood as 'selfownership', and of ownership itself as unrestricted freedom within one's own domain."³⁵ He continues:

²⁹Ibid., p. 397.

³⁰Ibid., p. 392.

³¹Ibid., p. 409.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., p. 412.

³⁴Ibid., p. 422.

³⁵Ibid., p. 401.

Augustine's real and astounding point is this: virtue cannot properly operate except when collectively possessed, when all are virtuous and all concur in the sequence of their differences; hence the actual, 'possessed', realized virtues which we lay claim to *least of all* resemble true, heavenly virtues. On the contrary, the only thing really like heavenly virtue is a constant attempt to compensate for, substitute for, even short-cut this total absence of virtue, by not taking offence, assuming the guilt of others, doing what they should have done, beyond the bounds of any given 'responsibility'. Paradoxically, it is only in this exchange and sharing that any truly actual virtue is really present. Thus Augustine contrasts Cain's name, 'possession', with Seth's name 'resurrection'. Only the bodies we have in common arise.³⁶

For Augustine, sin is not substantive but can only be understood in terms of lack or privation: "If nothing is evil insofar as it exists, then it is only evil in terms of its failure to be related to God, to infinite peace, and to other finite realities with which it should be connected to form a pattern of true desire. Evil becomes the denial of the hope for, and the present reality of, community."³⁷ The good is understood, not in terms of ownership, but rather, as being in right relation:

What makes something to be good, what makes it to be, is not any essence which it possesses (indeed self-possession is privation) but its existing (without any reserved 'surplus' of individuality, which is but a false freedom) entirely in particular patterns of desire, which remain open to, and whose beauty constitutes a path to, the unknown infinite. When we change we alter others, and the changes of others alter ourselves. Salvation is only in common: it is only the peace of the *altera Civitas*.³⁸

The *altera Civitas* is brought into being through the mediation of right desire so that there can be no ultimate distinction between the goal and the way - to desire the goal is to discern the path. Each, however, is, nevertheless, grasped in separate moments. "To be virtuous one must both 'refer' all to the infinite goal, *and* find the right path, the right perspective and sequence for desire - the path constantly laid out, redrawn, re-traced, by Jesus and the Church (all genuine Christian community) in history."³⁹ Discovering the path of right desire is not, therefore, the same as exercising a rational control over the body, but rather, is "the external relation of person to person in the community of peace,

³⁶Ibid., p. 411.

³⁷Ibid., p. 432.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., p. 431.

under God."⁴⁰ The Gospels draw us along the path of right desire by embedding us within a narrative sequence that leads towards and offers a vision of the ultimate goal:

We need the stories of Jesus for salvation, rather than just a speculative notion of the good, because only the attraction exercised by a particular set of words and images causes us to acknowledge the good and to have an idea of the ultimate *telos*. *Testimony* is here offered to the Good, in a witnessing that also participates in it.⁴¹

The account which Augustine offers us, of being as right relation, sin as non-being, and the unity of goal and way through the practice of forgiveness and the mediation of right desire, overcomes the dichotomous picture of reality that characterizes modernity, by demonstrating a different form of relationship between the part and the whole, the individual and the community, the community and the world. In Christian social ontology, in which all reality is seen to proceed from a single divine source, neither whole nor part are subordinated to each other. As a musical ontology, the whole is nothing more than the sequence of notes in relation to each other, yet, in right relation, the whole is infinitely more than any single part considered on its own:

Augustine's Christian ontology...implies both that the part belongs to the whole, and that each part transcends any imaginable whole, because the whole is only a finite series which continues indefinitely towards an infinite and unfathomable God. This series is *nothing but* a sequence of mediations between individuals, households and cities. The 'whole' is Christ, the mediator, and he articulates his body and conveys this mediation as an endless series of new mediations which interpellates human 'persons'.⁴²

The polarities, which in modernity are dichotomous, are related in Christianity through participation in the same infinite sequence:

In each of the three instances: soul/community, *oikos/polis*, and *polis/world*, there is, therefore, for Christianity, a kind of micro/macrocosmic relationship...Not only, therefore, is there a structural parallel between the 'whole' and the unit; in addition, the 'whole' is in some sense present within the unit, because the unit exists in a position fully defined by the unfoldings of an infinite sequence.⁴³

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 415.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 398.

⁴²Ibid., p. 405.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 404-5.

God simply is the infinite sequence: "God is the infinite series of differences, and what he knows is the infinity of differences...And as the reality which includes and encompasses in his *comprehensio* every difference, God is also the God who differentiates."⁴⁴ The image of the Trinity, which describes the life of God, offers us a picture of ultimate reality as infinite difference. "Infinite realized act and infinite unrealized power mysteriously coincide in God, and it must be this that supports the circular 'life', that is more than *stasis*, of the Trinity."⁴⁵ The Godhead, described as Trinity, is the unfolding of a dynamic and changing relationality. "The harmony of the Trinity is therefore not the harmony of a finished totality but a 'musical' harmony of infinity."⁴⁶

The created world of time participates in and is this differentiation emanating from the creative life of God. "Creation is therefore not a finished product in space, but is continuously generated *ex nihilo* in time."⁴⁷ Human beings participate in creation through charity, "to give in 'art' (all human action) endlessly new allegorical depictions of charity. Through charity, 'God' is both imaginatively projected by us and known, though with a negative reserve which allows that our initiative, precisely *as* an initiative, is a response, and a radical dependency."⁴⁸ This account of creation has implications for our idea of knowledge: "God is not something in any way seen, that we could 'refer' to. And as for the finite world, creation *ex nihilo* radically *rules out* all realism in its regard."⁴⁹ Instead, continues Milbank:

If we think seriously about time and creation, and follow in the tradition of Augustine, we shall conclude that knowledge is not a representation of things, but is a relation to events, and an action upon events...Augustine is basically right: truth, for Christianity, is not correspondence, but rather *participation* of the beautiful in the beauty of God.⁵⁰

One of the changes that characterizes modernity is the discovery that the cultural world is humanly constructed. Secular reason makes the mistake of assuming that this discovery reveals an arbitrariness in human culture that demands an ontology of violence - the

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 423.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 424.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 425.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 425-6.

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 426.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 426-7.

explication of human social life in terms of the containment of force by counter-force. Through an account of human participation in the creative life of God, Milbank seeks to demonstrate the non-necessity of this conclusion, to show, "that human construction does *not necessarily* mark out an autonomous human space."⁵¹ To assume that it does it to establish a divorce between humanity and God that occludes a sacramental understanding of the world. Christians have themselves participated in creating this dichotomy between the human and the sacred. "The great failure of modern Christian ontology", writes Milbank, "is not to see that secular reason makes the essentially Platonic assumption that 'the made' lies beneath the portals of the sacred, such that a humanly made world is regarded as arbitrary and as cutting us off from eternity."⁵²

The idea of a humanly constructed world explained without reference to the creative life of God establishes a context in which the discourses of secular reason position theology by purporting to explain religion in terms of social factors, seen as the categories of a supposedly more fundamental reading of human society. It is this positioning, which we find, for example, in the following passages from Max Weber, that Milbank vigorously rejects:

Since every need for salvation is an expression of some distress, social or economic oppression is an effective source of salvation beliefs, though by no means the exclusive source.⁵³

The salvation sought by the intellectual is always based on inner need, and hence it is at once more remote from life, more theoretical and more systematic than salvation from external distress, the quest for which is characteristic of nonprivileged classes.⁵⁴

The attitudes of a religion can often be explained on grounds of economic interest.⁵⁵

Explanation in terms of social factors presupposes secularity - the separation of the human and the divine; the political and the economic from the religious. Thus Milbank writes: "I wish to challenge...the idea that there is a significant sociological 'reading' of

⁵¹Ibid., p. 4.

⁵²Ibid., p. 425.

⁵³Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*. (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1922) p. 107.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 124-5.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 218.

religion and Christianity".⁵⁶ Sociology does not offer a more fundamental reading of the social, but is itself the promotion of a particular vision of society at odds with Christianity, such that, "secular social theory *only applies* to secular society, which it helps to sustain."⁵⁷ He continues: "I hope to make it apparent that 'scientific' social theories are themselves theologies or anti-theologies in disguise."⁵⁸ The post-modern deconstruction of secular reason, now leaves us with a radical choice between two alternative visions of reality, both unfounded - a nihilist ontology of violence and incommensurable difference, and a Christian ontology of peace. "Between the nihilistic promotion of dissonance, of differences that clash or only accord through conflict, and the Baroque risk of a harmony stretched to the limits - the openness to musical grace - there remains an undecidability."⁵⁹ The choice cannot be made through appeal to any rational foundation, but only by means of rhetoric and persuasion, of deciding who tells the better story. In this context, the task of Christian theology is not to engage in rational argument, but, "to tell again the Christian *mythos*, pronounce again the Christian *logos*, and call again for Christian *praxis* in a manner that restores their freshness and originality. It must articulate Christian difference in such a fashion as to make it strange."⁶⁰

Christian theology, however, is not simply one discourse among others struggling for ascendancy, but rather, a metadiscourse able to position and critique all other discourses. Likewise, Christianity is not one narrative among others, but a metanarrative positioning all other narratives. Milbank writes: "In this fashion a gigantic claim to be able to read, criticize, say what is going on in other human societies, is absolutely integral to the Christian Church, which itself claims to exhibit the exemplary form of human community. For theology to surrender this claim, to allow that other discourses - 'the social sciences' - carry out yet more fundamental readings, would therefore amount to a denial of theological truth."⁶¹

If we return to the image of a disciplinary matrix, then Milbank's avenue of escape is to reject the terms of secular reason, to end any collusion with the secular order, and, in its

⁵⁶John Milbank, op.cit. 1990, p. 3.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 429.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 381.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 388.

place, to choose the peaceful sociality of the Church. This solution, however, begins to reveal the problem with Milbank's whole approach, since, for many people, it raises the question, *What Church is Milbank talking about?* "What Church *is* this to which Milbank makes appeal?"⁶², writes Aidan Nichols. "A question is continually begged as to which Church does Milbank have in mind"⁶³, echoes Kieran Flanagan. To this question Milbank replies:

It was not the purpose of *Theology and Social Theory*...to imagine the Church as Utopia. Nor to discover in its ramified and fissiparous history some single ideal exemplar. For this would have been to envisage the Church in spatial terms - as another place, which we might arrive at, or *as this* identifiable site, which we can still inhabit. How could either characterize the Church which exists, finitely, not in time, but as time, taken in the mode of gift and promise?⁶⁴

Nicholas Lash suggests that Milbank confuses, in his discourse, the Church with the Kingdom. "All 'political' theory, in the antique sense, is relocated by Christianity as thought about the Church",⁶⁵ writes Milbank, to which Lash replies:

Might it not be more prudent to say: is relocated as thought about the *Kingdom*? That would remind us that, though Christ has come, although salvation has occurred, the classic Christian grammar of these things requires us also to say: salvation is occurring now and is still awaited eagerly in hope.⁶⁶

Gerald Loughlin shares this concern in his hesitation before Milbank's claim that the Church exhibits "the exemplary form of human community."⁶⁷ He writes: "On the contrary, it seems to me that Christianity can make no such *claim*, but only live toward the day in which such a claim can be made and its truth perfectly known."⁶⁸

⁶²Aidan Nichols OP, "Non tali auxilio!: John Milbank's Suasion to Orthodoxy" *New Blackfriars* (Vol. 73 No. 861, June 1992) pp. 329-30.

⁶³Kieran Flanagan, "Sublime Policing: Sociology and Milbank's City of God" *New Blackfriars* (Vol. 73 No. 861, June 1992) p. 336.

⁶⁴John Milbank, "Enclaves, or Where is the Church?" *New Blackfriars* (Vol. 73 No. 861, June 1992) p. 341.

⁶⁵John Milbank, op.cit. 1990, p. 406.

⁶⁶Nicholas Lash, "Not Exactly Politics or Power?" *Modern Theology* (8: 4 October 1992) p. 362.

⁶⁷John Milbank, op. cit. 1990, p. 388.

⁶⁸Gerald Loughlin, "Christianity at the End of the Story or the Return of the Master-Narrative" *Modern Theology* (8: 4 October 1992) p. 380.

The problem with Milbank's idea of a Church without site is precisely that it gives us no place to begin. Actual Church institutions, as he acknowledges, are deeply intermixed with the secular order. He writes that, "while Augustine is certainly at pains to stress that many true members of the city of God lie outside the boundaries of the institutional Church, just as many of the baptized are not true members at all, this does not mean that he regards institutional adherence as a secondary and incidental matter."⁶⁹ The reason such adherence is not incidental has to do with an emphasis, "on the Church as a historical community bound together by a historical transmission of signs, whose dissemination will necessarily be muddled, imperfectly coordinated with 'true belief', and not fully subject to prediction or control."⁷⁰ As an historical community, the Church certainly is a particular site, or many sites, located in time and space, but it is this very embodiedness, and therefore, the finitude and imperfection of the historical Church that Milbank's discourse cannot adequately address. Rowan Williams writes: "I am concerned that the specific process by which Christian distinctiveness became aware of itself is occluded by the rather ahistorical framework of this narrative of origins."⁷¹ He continues: "For the risk Milbank's exposition runs is, rather paradoxically, of slipping into a picture of history as the battlefield of ideal types."⁷² By failing to provide an adequately historical account of the Church, Milbank ends by offering an unreal and unworkable dichotomy between the Christian and secular orders. "It seems that we are confronted with something 'achieved', and left with little account of how it is learned, negotiated, betrayed, inched forward, discerned and risked."⁷³

The idea of a Church without a site also raises the question of how the Church relates to those outside her boundaries, for it is the very fact that we have boundaries that allows us to distinguish between ourselves and others, and therefore provides the basis for any relationship. Romand Coles is particularly insistent on this point. He writes: "I want to argue that far from moving towards a different relationship with Christianity's others, it is precisely this most important change that is lacking in Milbank's work."⁷⁴ He decries,

⁶⁹John Milbank, op. cit. 1990, p. 402.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Rowan Williams, "Saving Time: Thoughts on Practice, Patience and Vision" *New Blackfriars* (Vol. 73 No. 861, June 1992) p. 320.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., p. 321.

⁷⁴Romand Coles, "Storyed Others and Possibilities of Caritas: Milbank and Neo-Nietzschean Ethics" *Modern Theology* (8: 4 October 1992) p. 334.

the "thoroughly *negative* construction of his non-Christian others, in which they are drained of any different positive specificity".⁷⁵ Here, Milbank simply conforms to what Christians have done for centuries, namely, "struggled to articulate a notion of Christian diversity while insisting upon its singular legitimacy and hegemony with respect to the non-Christian."⁷⁶ He concludes, "I believe that Milbank's insistence on a singular narrative sovereignty undermines virtue, charity and difference"⁷⁷, and asks, "Can we really be confident that the Holy Spirit is entirely contained within the Church?"⁷⁸

Others voice similar concern. Gerald Loughlin writes: "Milbank's own narration of the difference between Christianity and other cultures remains entirely occidental, and does not even begin the linkages required for the rigorous espousal of his claim."⁷⁹ He suggests a different construal:

Rather than the monopoly of a master-narrative, which positions all other narratives, one could suggest an ever extending tradition of narrative linkages, in which now some stories, now others, function as the synchronic animators of the rest, so that there is always a 'buzz' within the tradition, a movement of story against story, a never stable positioning and an always possible indeterminacy with regard to new linkages, new stories.⁸⁰

There is a lack of engagement, in Milbank's account, with the contingent world of human action. Graham Ward asks: "How does the image and idea of the Church relate to contingency of churches and sects and even other faiths? And how does the soteriological dynamic of Godhead relate to the *imperium* of the Church and the various power-structures within particular churches?"⁸¹ Rowan Williams writes: "What I am concerned to keep in view is the danger of setting the common life of the Church too dramatically apart from the temporal ways in which the good is realised in a genuinely contingent world."⁸² And in the words of Richard Roberts: "It also fails to acknowledge, respect

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 335.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 338.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 349.

⁷⁹Gerald Loughlin, op.cit., p. 374.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 381.

⁸¹Graham Ward, "John Milbank's *Divina Commedia*" *New Blackfriars* (Vol. 73 No. 861, June 1992) p. 316.

⁸²Rowan Williams, op.cit., p. 323.

and enable the intention and actuality of human commitments made within the limits of the partial and imperfect knowledge implied by all real involvement in the world."⁸³

John Milbank, in the end, does not free us from the disciplinary matrix because his discourse does not locate us in the real world of human action, in history, in the Church, where real choices exist and are made. His Christianity is a wall to hide behind and an impenetrable vision to assert, but not a path to real engagement with the other - a path which is never certain, which always involves risk and which demands vulnerability. This choice he does not offer. He writes:

The short answer to where is the Church? (or where is Milbank's Church?) might be, on the site of the eucharist, which is not a site, since it suspends presence in favour of memory and expectation, 'positions' each and every one of us only as fed-gift from God of ourselves and therefore not to ourselves - and bizarrely assimilates us to food which we eat, so that we, in turn, must exhaust ourselves as nourishment for others.⁸⁴

It is here, I want to argue, that Milbank's rhetoric is most profoundly wrong, for the Eucharist is most definitely a site - the site which defines the Church's location in the world, the site where Christ is made incarnate, the site where the ordinary events that constitute the ongoing narrative of Christianity enter the common language of the Church. It is his failure to describe this site within the contemporary context that leaves Milbank's readers without foothold. In Chapter Six, we describe a contemporary eucharistic site with the help of the philosopher Gillian Rose, and of her metaphor of modernity: "the broken middle".

⁸³Richard H. Roberts, "Transcendental Sociology? A Critique of John Milbank's *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*" *Scottish Journal of Theology* (Vol. 46 No. 4, 1993) p. 533.

⁸⁴John Milbank, op.cit. 1992, p. 342.

CHAPTER SIX

Worship in the Narthex: Gillian Rose and the Broken Middle of Modernity

In Chapter Five, we examined John Milbank's argument that the only way out of the disciplinary matrix of the present, defined by the critique of modernity on the one hand, and the nihilist fragmentation of post-modernity on the other, is through return to an explicitly Christian vocabulary and practice. We concluded, however, that in the end his vision is insufficient because it fails to locate any real site for human action. His critics are left wondering what Church it is to which he continually makes appeal. Although Milbank describes how Christian and secular reason become intertwined, his argument ultimately rests on a dichotomy between Christian and secular, which gives the impression that there is such a thing as the Christian Church, uncorrupted by collusion with the secular order. Here, Milbank confuses the Church with the Kingdom of heaven. What Milbank does not do is show how we are to engage as Christians with institutions which are imperfect and corrupt. In other words, his account fails because it does not locate us in the historical present where real choices for action are made.

In this final Chapter, I want to take a different approach from that of Milbank, to argue that we understand our present situation in the West in terms of a human experience which has yet to receive adequate articulation. I seek to demonstrate that, not only is this experience not a deviation from orthodox Christianity, but that it embodies, rather, the struggle towards a fuller expression of the Christian vision, and must, therefore, be read in continuity with the Christian narrative. In particular, I want to describe a site, a locus of human action, which has become, in terms of our present experience, eucharistic - mediating between humanity and God through the agency of Jesus Christ. In doing this, I turn for help to the work of the philosopher Gillian Rose, and in particular, to her image of the "broken middle" of modernity.

First, however, we begin by exploring the idea that, from her inception and throughout her history, the defining problem for the Christian Church concerns the form of her relationship with the outside - initially with gentiles as opposed to Jews, then later with non-Christians and non-Christian cultures. While for the Jews, relationship to God is

mediated via obedience to the Law, for Christians, it is mediated via a particular form of personal encounter with the other. It is in understanding the form of this encounter that we understand the revolutionary breakthrough that Christianity embodies, as well as coming to recognize the Christian Church's continual failure to be Christian.

At the first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descends on the apostles in tongues of fire, and they begin preaching the Gospel in foreign tongues:

Par'thians and Medes and E'lamites and residents of Mesopota'mia, Judea and Cappodo'cia, Pontus and Asia, Phryg'ia and Pamphyl'ia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyre'ne, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God. (Acts 2: 8-12)¹

Thus the Church is born in an event marked by the ability of the apostles to speak the Gospel in many different languages. The radical nature of what is involved, however, in spreading the Gospel to other peoples and nations only becomes clear when the apostles face the question of their own relationship to the Law. In the Acts of the Apostles, we find the story of the gentile centurion Cornelius, who is told in a vision to send for the apostle Peter, staying in Joppa. Meanwhile, Peter, as he is praying, goes into a trance and sees,

...the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "No, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has cleansed, you must not call common." This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. (Acts 10: 11-16)

When Peter comes out of the trance, Cornelius's men are waiting to bring him to their master's house. He accompanies them and when he arrives, says to the company of gentiles assembled there:

You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit any one of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. (Acts 10: 28-29)

¹Biblical passages are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

When Peter then hears the account of Cornelius's vision, he replies: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him." (Acts 10: 34-35) He begins telling them the story of Jesus Christ and, while he is speaking, the Holy Spirit descends on them. "And the believers from among the circumcised who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles." (Acts 10: 45) When Peter returns to Jerusalem and tells the apostles and brethren there what has happened, they glorify God saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance unto life." (Acts 11: 18)

It becomes clear to the apostles that their mission is to the gentiles as well as to the Jews, but still, the form of this relationship is not easily understood. Should the gentiles be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses? This debate goes on among the elders and apostles of the Church in Jerusalem. They decide, in the end, that the gentiles should not be circumcised, and should only observe those dictates of the Law considered absolutely essential. As they write:

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. (Acts 15: 28-29)

In previous Chapters, we have seen that language is not simply a tool for naming objects in the world, but rather, that language embodies forms of relationship and patterns of significance, not easily translatable from one tongue to another. Language forms the perceptions of its speakers in such a way that each language creates a whole new world. What gradually becomes clear to the apostles is that the Christian Gospel is not limited to one language, but is a gift offered to all. This realization in itself, however, does not solve the problem of how to communicate this gift outside the Law, outside the language which defines Jewish identity, and in terms of which Jesus is recognized as the Messiah.

One solution, namely, that gentiles should enter the covenant by being circumcised and obeying the Mosaic Law is rejected. What is proclaimed instead is a new covenant, not

bounded by Jewish observance. Here begins the long and often painful history of how Christianity is spread throughout the world.

How do you tell a story to someone whose language you do not speak? This is not a simple problem to do with finding words that correspond to what I want to say. For how do you translate the weight of words - create an impact? The meaning of a story is not wholly contained in the story itself. Meaning exists, rather, in the difference which the story creates against the backdrop of a common context. Irony, sarcasm, or parody for example are only effective when the listener is already familiar with the status quo, with accepted norms and taken-for-granted meanings, then humorously (or biting) called into question. If there is no common context between speaker and listener, the story falls flat because there is nothing against which to measure difference, no impact can be made.

Whether or not they accept that he is, proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah has meaning for the Jews. The coming of a Messiah is an idea shared through a common history and tradition, foretold in scriptures and prophesies. The question for the Jews concerns whether or not Jesus is he. Outside the Law, however, this shared anticipation of a Messiah does not hold. The news, therefore, that the Messiah has come simply cannot make the same impression. In other words, being able to recognize the significance of Jesus' words and actions, depends, in the first instance, on understanding the context in relation to which he speaks and acts, in particular, his relationship to the Law. Outside this common tradition, how to convey the significance of who Jesus is and of what he offers to the world? By deciding that gentiles who enter the Church will not be circumcised, nor obliged to obey the Law of Moses, the apostles are in effect deciding that the history and tradition which they share, which enables them to recognize Jesus as the Christ, is not a necessary context for belonging to the new covenant which Jesus brings. If not the Law, what then will unite Christians across different languages and histories?

This question is not dissimilar to the one we face at present in the West, which we have been exploring in terms of the discourses of modernity and post-modernity. Crudely put, modernity offers the hope that differences can be overcome through a common rationality, while in post-modernity, the claims of universal reason are unmasked in their particularity, and the incommensurable difference of particular subjectivities is asserted.

Gillian Rose, however, rejects this dichotomous approach because both sides neglect the real difficulty involved in actual engagement in the world. On the one hand, we find the Law, unchallenged by its own outside - an order which has forgotten how to fail. On the other hand, are particular subjectivities with no sense of how they emerge out of and are constrained by the Law, by a common context against which real difference can be heard. The result is a failure to engage, a failure to work in the limited and contingent world which is the setting for all human action, a failure of genuine politics.

In the face of this failure, Rose proposes the idea of the "broken middle", introducing a missing third term into the dichotomy of modernity and post-modernity, universal and particular - the hidden person of the Trinity. This third term is the work itself, the fruit of encounter, as well as the distance and the spaces which separate and join in real relationship. It is the unknown which defies closure, yet which only exists in tension with the Law. The middle is broken because in modernity we are made aware of the limits of our actions, of our role in creation, and this self-consciousness makes human action a new kind of thing altogether. We are implicated in a new way - no longer innocent, yet not relieved of the obligation to act, despite limits which we cannot help but acknowledge. Thinking and acting in relation to the middle entails risk because the outcome is unknown and outside our sphere of ownership. It is the fear or refusal of this risk which is the failure of contemporary discourse, the desire to escape involvement in the admixture of truth and error, love and violence which comes with real political engagement. Rose writes:

Post-modernity disallows itself any conceptuality or means of comprehension for investigating its own implication and configuration within *the broken middle*. Whereas post-modernity remains dualistic and pits its others against domination, the broken middle is triune. It will investigate the breaks between universal, particular and singular, in individuals and in institutions. Reconfigurations of this trinity, nevertheless, pervade our common sense as oppositions: between inner morality and outer legality, individual autonomy and general heteronomy, active cognition and imposed norm.²

In this Chapter, we explore the broken middle in three parts: anxiety of beginning, equivocation of the ethical, and agon of authorship. The idea of the broken middle, I shall argue, leads out of the disciplinary matrix of the present by helping us to locate a real beginning for action. With this discussion, we return to the Christian narrative, to the

²Gillian Rose, *The Broken Middle*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992) p. xii.

question of how to reconcile a mandate to spread the Gospel throughout the world with the problem of how to relate with those outside the Law. Here, we find a different thread of continuity from that of John Milbank. Rather than argue for the strengths of Christianity in battle with the secular, we find a beginning in the chronic failure of the Christian Church to live the Gospel. It is, therefore, from the perspective of the Church's need, seen in relation to the needs of the world, that we begin to imagine the possibility of a renewed Christian witness in the contemporary context.

Gillian Rose discusses different interpretations of the *Akedah*, the story of the binding of Isaac, at some length. We take this story as paradigmatic for our own attempt to explicate the broken middle:

God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Mori'ah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."
(Gen. 22: 1-3)

According to Kant, Abraham should be condemned as a murderer for his obedience, not hailed as Father of the faith:

Abraham should have replied to this putative divine voice: "That I may not kill my good son is absolutely certain. But that you who appear to me are God is not certain and cannot become certain, even though the voice were to sound from the very heavens"..."[For] that a voice which one seems to hear cannot be divine one can be certain of...in case what is commanded is contrary to moral law. However majestic or supernatural it may appear to be, one must regard it as a deception.³

What Kierkegaard tries to establish, in his account of the *Akedah*, by contrast, is the element of paradox. As Rose writes - "that life must be risked in order to be gained; that only by discovering the limit of life - death - is 'life' itself discovered, and recalcitrant otherness opens its potentialities and possibilities."⁴ Abraham is condemned to silence because his actions cannot be explained within the terms of an already available framework of meaning. "Abraham cannot be mediated, which can also be put by saying he cannot speak. The moment I speak I express the universal, and when I do not no one

³Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*. Translated by Mary J. Gregor. (New York: Abaris Books, 1979) p. 63.

⁴Gillian Rose, op. cit. 1992, p. 16.

can understand me."⁵ Rose appropriates the paradox of Kierkegaard's account to explicate the paradox of the broken middle:

The silence of the paradox is the witness of participation in the command to love and in the love which commands. It acknowledges the violence in love and the love in violence because the law is in both: the violence in love - Abraham's exclusive, violent love of Isaac; the love in violence - his willingness to bind Isaac with faith not with resignation, not with the prospect of loss, but a free offering, freely given - oblation not sacrifice. It is *this witness alone* - this always already knowing yet being willing to stake oneself again - that prevents one from becoming an arbitrary perpetrator or an arbitrary victim; that prevents one, actively or passively, from acting with arbitrary violence. Such witnessing is always ready - it is therefore the beginning in the middle: the middle in the beginning - holding itself alert in the anxiety and equivocation of each.⁶

We use the story of the binding of Isaac, and its respective interpretations, as a way of moving beyond the dichotomous modes of thinking that characterize modernity and post-modernity. As Rose argues: "In both the world of politics and in the intellectual world, there seems to be a low tolerance of equivocation. The result of this intolerance and unease is the reproduction of dualistic ways of thinking and of formulating public policy."⁷ According to Kant, the voice which Abraham hears cannot be God's voice, because what he commands is contrary to moral law. The moral law stands as an absolute which cannot be disobeyed. Kierkegaard, on the other hand, is concerned with the suspension of the ethical (the moral order) in a leap of faith by which the ethical is itself restored. As Rose explains:

*To posit that the ethical is 'suspended' is to acknowledge that it is always already presupposed. It grants a momentary licence to hold the ethical fixed and unchanging. But once this is granted, the moment will be imperceptible, for the movement of faith does not take place in time, or, it takes place in every moment of time; whereas, if the ethical is abolished, then a time outside time, or a social reality outside social reality, must, illogically, be posited.*⁸

⁵Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric*. Translated by Alastair Hannay. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985) p. 89.

⁶Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1992, pp. 148-9.

⁷Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 2.

⁸Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1992, p. 148.

It is this tension between the ethical and the movement of faith that is lost in ways of thinking that perpetuate the dichotomies of universal/particular, law/love, individual/community that characterize our present situation. In Kant there is no tension, no paradox, because faith cannot call the moral law into question. Likewise, in much post-modern discourse, there is no tension with the ethical because the relationship of particular subjectivities to the law is posited solely in terms of a liberation from domination. As Rose writes: "When a monolithic or plural character is attributed to power, conceived, for example, as patriarchal, this attribution perpetuates blindness to the reconfiguration of power which we may be assisting by our unarticulated characterisation of it."⁹ She continues that, "to oppose anarchic, individual love or good to civil or public ill is to deny the third which gives meaning to both - this is the other meaning of *the third city* - the just city and just act, the just man and the just woman."¹⁰ It is the mutually constitutive character of individual and community that we are failing to describe. "Intellectually, the political spectrum is divided between these alternatives: between the arbitrariness of the 'libertarian' individual and the arbitrariness of the 'communitarian' interest group."¹¹ The broken middle, by contrast, locates us in the tension and paradox of relationship which both joins and differentiates individual and community, through the movement of faith by which each is continually restored.

The anxiety of beginning refers to the difficulty of beginning in the middle, aware of the prior determinations which always already constrain us. As Rose writes:

How to proceed, how to begin, when law precedes desire and intelligibility: desire and intelligibility do not precede law; when anxiety defines sin, not sin anxiety; when will to power as risk or *ressentiment* lords over will to life, mere self-preservation; in short, when existence is always already invested - conceptual and commanded.¹²

Of Kierkegaard she writes: "The Kierkegaard authorship is ethical because of its premise that law is always already given. Anxiety, therefore, has an origin, a beginning: 'being given'; and it is always already there or posited: 'law'."¹³ Rowan Williams, in his exposition of Rose, explains the anxiety of beginning as follows:

⁹Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 21.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

¹¹Ibid., p. 4.

¹²Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1992, p. 86.

¹³Ibid., p. 87.

Thinking is afraid to begin; or rather, it looks for a beginning that is not a risk, a beginning that already controls or contains its goal. It is therefore constantly in flight from the recognition of the 'already' that locates all our putative beginnings in an unsought and uncontrolled middle. The only honest beginning is with difficulty; that is to say, we cannot 'start thinking', but 'begin' only with the acknowledgment that what we say is already put in question.¹⁴

We constantly try to escape from the anxiety of beginning, either by refusing to begin, to risk, or by denying the always already of prior constraint. We are afraid to begin because our awareness of prior determinations is also a knowledge of what it is to fail. As Williams continues:

It is the constraining 'already' of such determination, the whole of what Rose conceives as 'law', that in fact defines what power we really possess; the failure to acknowledge this imprisons us. But this liberating awareness of an imperative actuality prior to, and powerful in respect of, our specific desire is also a 'beginning of anxiety', the moral and conceptual source of how we understand what it is to *fail*.¹⁵

If the possibility of failure is curtailed, however, the goal controlled or contained in a beginning without risk and without anxiety, there ceases to be any tension with the ethical, and action loses its power. As Rose explains:

Learning in this sense mediates the social and the political: it works precisely by making mistakes, by taking the risk of action, and then by reflecting on its unintended consequences, and then taking the risk, yet again, of further action, and so on.¹⁶

When there is no real risk, "the agent is left poised unhappily between an external order which, because it has forgotten what failure is, ceases to be a source of power, and an internal critical self-perception, an anxious self-perception, that likewise has no access to power, no resolution of its own impotence. What Kierkegaard called the suspension of the ethical has its place in this context."¹⁷

¹⁴Rowan Williams, "Between Politics and Metaphysics: Reflections in the Wake of Gillian Rose" in *Modern Theology* (11: 1 January 1995) p. 11.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Gillian Rose, *op.cit.* 1996, p. 38.

¹⁷Rowan Williams, *op.cit.*, pp. 11-12.

The suspension of the ethical is opposed to the fantasy of abolishing the ethical altogether. Suspending the ethical is necessary when the external order has forgotten what it is to fail. It is a move which restores power through risk. Abolishing the ethical, by contrast, posits a world outside time which, by virtue of its unreality, confirms our powerlessness. Expounding Kierkegaard, Rose writes:

In *Fear and Trembling*, the ethical is bracketed for the sake of the test of faith, the test of the risk: if the leap is taken then the ethical is instantaneously resumed - this is the meaning of 'the knight of faith' who lives the sublime in the pedestrian. If the leap is not taken because of the preference for infinite pain and resignation, then the ethical is lost to the suspended soul - this is the meaning of 'the knight of resignation', who dwells in the romance of the non-ethical.¹⁸

To understand the dynamic involved in the equivocation of the ethical is to grasp the paradox implied in intelligible acting. I cannot act in such a way as to effect change without being aware of the prior constraints which already bind me. At the same time, however, this self-consciousness does not exempt me from the imperative to act, rather, it "requires that we stand over against the ethical as *order*, recognizing that the action we inaugurate is not in advance specified as successful, well-formed or orderly. It is involved with 'violence'."¹⁹ Violence enters because in acting I inevitably, to some extent, misrecognize the nature of the interests of others, and therefore, create a new imbalance of power and justice. As Rose explains:

The struggle for recognition is a drama in which the good (full mutual recognition) and the means (the varieties of misrecognition) engender each other and may be negotiated but only by acknowledgement of mutual implication in the violence of misrecognition.²⁰

This discussion of action is a discussion about the form of mediation between particular interests on the one hand and the collective or general interest on the other. "The modern pattern", writes Williams, "is the steady removal of intermediate institutions, local corporations, in such a way that the fundamental conflicts of interest are between two abstractions, the state and the individual."²¹ The risk involved in acting in the middle is that of acting in relation to the general interest from a particular site, knowing that in so

¹⁸Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 111.

¹⁹Rowan Williams, op.cit., p. 12.

²⁰Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 98.

²¹Rowan Williams, op.cit., p. 13.

doing one inevitably misrecognizes the interests of others. "Politics", explains Rose, "begins not when you organise to defend an individual or particular or local interest, but when you organise to further the 'general' interest within which your particular interest may be represented."²² She continues: "Politics does not happen when you act on behalf of your own damaged good, but when you act, *without guarantees*, for the good of all - this is to take *the risk* of the *universal* interest."²³

The agon of authorship is to remain faithful to the anxiety of beginning and the equivocation of the ethical, and in so doing, to renounce ownership over the outcome of my action. "The action taken in the moment of suspending the ethical is an act not of self-assertion but of self-dispossession or even self-*gift*."²⁴ The fruit of such action is inherently unpredictable, defying closure - the third term which cannot be reduced. "To act in the equivocation of the ethical is to renounce the finality of my judgement on myself - which is, of course, what I do when I initiate any kind of communication, any speech."²⁵ Rose writes: "Agon of authorship emerges from this separation and convergence of natural and philosophical consciousness, failing towards and out of a third which cannot itself be posited."²⁶ Elsewhere she argues: "All dualistic relations to 'the other', to 'the world' are attempts to quieten and deny the broken middle, the third term which arises out of misrecognition of desire, of work, of my and your self-relation mediated by the self-relation of the other."²⁷ Rose's discourse emerges out of her work on Hegel, as Williams explains:

According to Rose, the most spectacular misunderstanding we could have of Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to suppose that it is an account of how consciousness absorbs its objects, overcomes the duality of knower and known so that consciousness is left with no 'outside'. To read the *Phenomenology* adequately we have to enter upon a process that will show us that we have not yet understood the nature of thinking; thinking the thoughts of the *Phenomenology* is discovering the ways in which 'natural consciousness' repeatedly undermines itself and by so doing advances - not towards a conclusive theoretical reconciliation, but towards a practice of scepticism that, so far from inducing despair or withdrawal or apathy, empowers us to attempt transformative action in the clear recognition that any liberation from the distortions of 'natural'

²²Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 4.

²³Ibid., p. 62.

²⁴Rowan Williams, op.cit., p. 12.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1992, p. 175.

²⁷Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 75.

thinking is a necessary step to the removal of those social relations that reflect and intensify untruthful consciousness.²⁸

The problem with so much contemporary discourse lies in its refusal to engage in the difficult work of mediating the particular and the universal, individual and state interest, and, as a result, discourse remains trapped in dichotomous modes of thinking. The temptation is to abandon the broken middle and to assert particular interests over against collective domination, or else, collective interest against particular subjectivities. In both cases, the real work of politics is relinquished.

How do we move beyond a state where particular interests are simply competing against each other? This is the question John Milbank answers by arguing that only the Christian metanarrative offers an account of difference without violence. Milbank, however, claims that his discourse exists on the level of rhetoric and persuasion, of telling the better story, not of arguing for what is actually the case in relation to a reality outside itself. Milbank creates what Rose calls a *holy middle*. She writes:

Without violence or arbitrariness, yet with difference, non-totalization and indeterminacy, without representation, the Augustinian 'Other City' is 'advocated' as 'the continuation of ecclesial practice', 'the imagination in action of a peaceful, reconciled social order, beyond even the violence of legality.'²⁹

Rose echoes the question of other critics, who ask what Church Milbank is talking about, when she comments on his account of the City of God as a city on pilgrimage through this world. She writes:

This explication of pilgrimage and inclusivity effectively destroys the idea of a city: its inclusive appeal deprives the city of limit or boundary that would mark it off from any other city with their different laws; while its task of salvation deprives it of site.³⁰

Rose wonders, "with Milbank's latinity of 'sociality' and 'charity', how could 'peace' bequeathed as 'harmonious' arise without acknowledgement of the polis intruding into such vapid sociality, and without acknowledging *eros* and *agape* intruding into such

²⁸Rowan Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

²⁹Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993) p. 41.

³⁰*Ibid.*

tamed 'charity'?"³¹ Milbank, according to Rose, creates a middle mended as 'holiness' - "without that examination of the *broken* middle which would show how these holy nomads arise out of and reinforce the unfreedom they prefer not to know."³² She continues: "Post-modernism is submodern: these holy middles...bear the marks of their unexplored precondition: the diremption between the moral discourse of rights and the systematic actuality of power, within and between modern states."³³ This form of thinking, "overlooks the *predominance* of form, abstract legal form in civil society separated from the state, which figures the unfreedom *and* freedom of modern states. Hence it falls into the trap, not of positing another totalitarian ideal, but of presenting a holy middle which arises out of and will be reconfigured in the prevalent broken middle."³⁴ Holy middles corrupt because they draw us away from the task of real political engagement which implicates us in both violence and love, error and truth. "Before we reorient our theology," writes Rose, "let us reconsider the relation between the city and philosophy. Neither politics nor reason unifies or 'totalizes': they arise out of diremption, out of the diversity of peoples who come together under the aporetic law of the city, and who know that their law is different from the law of other cities."³⁵

The problem with Milbank, as we saw in Chapter Five, is that he fails to locate a real beginning for action. This is a question that concerns the form as much as the substance of his discourse. Milbank sees that the only way to overcome the violence of competing interests is to articulate these interests in relation to a common vision which unites without eliminating difference. Christianity, he argues, provides such a vision. By putting the case in this way, however, Milbank cannot deal adequately with the failure of Christianity to realize this vision, with the legacy of violence and intolerance that constitutes the history of the Church. He circumvents this problem through his account of the City of God, on pilgrimage through this world, but not located at any particular site. In so doing, he creates a holy middle, a resolution outside space and time, which cannot, as a result, enable action for change. The real difficulty for Christians, namely, that Christian institutions fail to embody the Christian vision, is not addressed. In Milbank, there is no suspension of the ethical. He does not allow the failure of Christianity to call

³¹Ibid., p. 46.

³²Ibid., pp. 46-7.

³³Ibid., p. 47.

³⁴Ibid., p. 48.

³⁵Ibid., p. 50.

Christian self-understanding into question in a way that creates space for a radical departure - a leap of faith able to restore the possibility of Christian witness.

If, by contrast, we begin with the failure of Christianity and of Christian institutions, we find a different beginning from that of Milbank. Why, we must ask, despite these failures, does it make sense to continue telling our history in continuity with the Christian narrative? Here, our answer is not that Christianity is the best story we can tell, but that Christianity embodies a revolution in what it is to be human, and in the form of human relationships. Something is revealed in Christianity which is true despite our continual failures to live this truth, and these failures, in turn, must be read as judgements upon the adequacy of our attempts at articulation. In other words, we are arguing here about the nature of reality as such.

Post-modernity, however, does not allow such an argument, for it contradicts, "the contemporary axiom of so much of our speaking about reflection and method - the axiom that language cannot, ultimately, have any 'matter' but itself."³⁶ Against this view, Gillian Rose argues, through her metaphor of the broken middle, that in order to act we cannot but stake ourselves on what is real and actual, while at the same time recognizing that our vision of the real is continually called into question by our engagement with others and by the fruits of our actions which bring to light the limits of our particular perspective.

Intelligible action, writes Rowan Williams, is action that can be recognized by other agents, "action that can be criticised and defended, understood and misunderstood."³⁷ Such action is not owned by the actor alone, "the sense I make is not under my control. Thus to speak at all about action as open to critique, to understanding and misunderstanding, to the possibility or impossibility of its being 'followed', is at least to raise the question of what is 'seen' in respect of the environment, especially the human environment."³⁸ And this is to raise a metaphysical question, "concerning the character of reality as known by agents."³⁹ If human action is understood as work or production, and production construed as the forming of something, "whose identity is not internal to the

³⁶Rowan Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁹*Ibid.*

agent's definition"⁴⁰, then questions about the environment, (material, conceptual or imaginative), must be tackled as questions distinct from the particular interests of the producing agent:

What is here being affirmed against the general idiom of postmodernity is that what human beings do is characterized by the kind of difficulty that arises when the effects of action or decision are open to the judgment and interpretation not only of other finite agents as individuals or clusters of individuals, but of what is discerned as the order or structure of a reality not determined by anyone's decision. To 'produce' or to engage in work that issues in the changing of the environment, material or conceptual or imaginative, is to accept conventions or standards, communicative and evaluative conventions, outside the power of the producing agent, if what is produced is to 'count' as a recognizable production, an entity capable of being described and discussed with reference to more than the producer's will in itself.⁴¹

While post-modern discourse affirms the independence of the product from the producer, it adopts the other extreme: "If the product is intelligible in entire abstraction from the conditions of its production (including the motivation of the producer), it ceases to be either risky for the producer or difficult for the interpreter."⁴² What Williams is suggesting, rather, is that, "the producer's dispossession is a move in a collaborative (at least potentially collaborative) project, the construction of a meaning, a set of signifiers systematically organised, not determined by any individual decision or project, challenging agents to reconceive their goal and interest *in* what is other."⁴³

"Ethics and metaphysics", writes Gillian Rose, "are torn halves of an integral freedom to which they have *never* added up. It is this classical reflection on the analogies between the soul, the city and the sacred," she continues, "that I try in this work to renew and reinvent for our time, call it 'modernity' or 'post-modernity'."⁴⁴ The consequence of post-realism, of a refusal to stake oneself on the real and the actual, is a failure of genuine engagement and negotiation with the other. Williams writes:

The discourse of metaphysics and politics is one that is faithful to 'the difficulty of actuality'; both registers of reflection, when they are doing

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 7-8.

⁴²Ibid., p. 8.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Gillian Rose, op.cit. 1996, p. 9.

their job, properly leave us stranded in history, which is where we ought to be. Both, by insisting on a universality of perspective, hope, or communicative intent *and* upon the inalienable capacity for the empowering of specific action that is contained in the thinking of thinking itself, acquaint us with our situation in time.⁴⁵

The thinking of thinking involves staking a claim on the nature of the non-negotiable, a staking which opens us to error and judgement, and which relies on a reading of the past as empowerment, in the sense of understanding that we are empowered by what has already been said and thought. "This is ultimately to return us to Hegel's fundamental insight: history is how we do our metaphysics, how we reflect on what we non-negotiably are and what are the conditions of our concept-formation."⁴⁶ What we become aware of, in this thinking of history, is the constancy of what can be described as 'dispossession': "At each stage of reflection, we are made aware, if we do not run away from the contradictions and difficulties; of the impossibility of *thinking* reality in terms of individuals 'owning' selves, ideas, property in a fixed and uncontended way. We are always redistributing, never timelessly sure of our 'interest'. Thought unsettles any definition of my interest of our (specific group) interest, and it does so largely through the tracing of the changes of consciousness in history."⁴⁷ This awareness emerges, "as also a story of power and its distribution, since the possibility or otherwise of recognition or intelligibility is a profoundly political issue."⁴⁸ It is from this political vocation of thinking that post-realist discourse shrinks:

The price of post-realism is 'post-political' withdrawal, itself an unquestionably political strategy refusing to know itself. The authentically political, the project of continually challenging localised and incommunicable discourses about human interest, arises out of a commitment to thought in a certain mode, thought aware of its own production, its own vulnerability and its own commitment to risk. This carries an account of reality-as-such, not in the sense of talk of unreal objects or invisible but discussable entities, but in the sense that it uncovers what we cannot but do if we are concerned with truthfulness.⁴⁹

It is this commitment to 'thought in a certain mode' that raises a religious question - "not the facile and tempting question of law's relation to grace, but the harder one of how the

⁴⁵Rowan Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 15-6.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*

very experience of learning and of negotiation can be read as something to do with God."⁵⁰

The philosopher Donald MacKinnon offers an account of parables as a form of metaphysical discourse which, by their very method, disrupt our sense of our own interest. "A metaphysical statement", he writes, "is not offered as an essay in self-revelation; it is offered as an account of what is the case."⁵¹ He continues of the metaphysician that while, "the form of his discourse may be profoundly different from that of the nuclear physicist, and the theoretical chemist, of the paleontologist and the archaeologist; yet still he claims that what he says, properly understood, is true."⁵² It is within this context that he arrives at a discussion of parables, for, he argues, "it is of the nature of the parabolic, not simply to disturb or break the stale cake of long-ago baked moral custom, by pointing to unnoticed possibilities of well-doing, but to hint, or more than hint, at ways in which things fundamentally are."⁵³ Parables hint at the way things fundamentally are by continually subverting and undermining the way we assume them to be. If a parable fails to have this disturbing quality, one may speak of it being false:

A parable may, indeed, be false; false by reason of the fact that, spoken as it is by one individual to another, he may inevitably, being the man he is, find in it the suggestion that a particular way of life to which he is already prone, is in accordance with the nature of things. So his image of himself is confirmed, not disturbed or challenged. The ambivalence of parabolic discourse rests in the fact that it lends itself to exploitation by those who seek confirmation for their prejudices, rather than to the enlightenment of those for whom the cake of established moral and intellectual custom must be broken.⁵⁴

Parables confront the individual in his or her particular situation, but this very directness is paradoxical, for if the parable works, the familiar is made strange. "In this form of discourse there is something intensely individual, and this intense individuality effects the peculiar sort of indirection which characterises the parable's reproduction of what it affirms to be the case."⁵⁵ As instruments of metaphysical representation, parables, "have

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 9.

⁵¹Donald MacKinnon, *The Problem of Metaphysics*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) p. 73.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 81-2.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 80.

the unquestioned advantage of focussing in completely concrete terms the central metaphysical concern - that of reaching through the familiar to its alleged transcendent ground, without evacuating that familiar of its own proper dignity."⁵⁶ The familiar setting of the parable makes it immediately accessible, the parable itself, however, reveals something about this setting which transforms our perception of it. "We are dealing with the familiar; yet it is made to suggest the ultimate and in the manner of its suggestion to disturb our sense of the proprieties."⁵⁷ The aim of the parable is not to convey a simple or straightforward message, but to invite the listener to enter a new perspective on a familiar situation, and in so doing, to see things more as they really are:

In suggesting a case where the parable, as received, should be rejected as false, we seem to find that falsity focussed in the ethical beliefs which its mistaken reception encouraged. At first sight this might be thought to imply that the truth of parables resided in the profundity of the edification which they made possible. But if they edify, they do so through what they suggest of the ways in which things are, through their fulfilment of a claim to enlarge perception, indeed to provide in themselves the instrument and expression of such enlargement, so that the man who has assimilated their lesson, and through them learned to see the world anew, is more effectively seeing things as they are.⁵⁸

This sense of constantly disturbing our perception of the familiar, of calling our taken-for-granted understandings into question, which MacKinnon evokes in his discussion of the parables, is the kind of process of learning and negotiation which Rowan Williams, I would suggest, means, when he says it tells us something about God. Implied in this mode of thinking is dispossession - the constant questioning of interests, the abandonment of self in gift: "The metaphysical tradition we have been discussing and working with here would indeed agree that, if thinking is ineluctably a pattern of self-displacement, the fundamental category that operates in speaking about the final constraints of reality, the constants in language, is self-displacement."⁵⁹

How do we come to think of thinking in terms of dispossession? It is here that we find our point of continuity with the Christian narrative: "The Jewish and Christian narrative is one in which the absolute is bound: by covenant for the Jew, by covenant and incarnation

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 82.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 84.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 83.

⁵⁹Rowan Williams, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

for the Christian. That is to say: the concrete articulation of divine (founding, creating) action is *in* what is other to the divine, in the life of the covenantal nation, in the life of the human agent who carries the divine meaning."⁶⁰ The disinterestedness of God is mediated through the interest of a human community - "a profoundly dangerous moment, since the interest of the community can then easily be elevated into a pseudo-independence of history."⁶¹ There is a temptation to lose the paradox involved in standing for the interest of a disinterested God, and to lose the paradox is, "to lose the *political* vocation implicit in the paradox, the task of realizing a corporate life whose critical practice constantly challenges sectional interest and proprietorial models of power or knowledge."⁶² As Williams explains:

The point is that in this narrative and reflective tradition, the most fundamental reality that is (in some sense) thinkable requires to be spoken of in terms of dispossession or, to use the overtly theological word, *kenosis*. This is not an emptying of God without remainder into the otherness of history or contingency: what is enacted in history *is* the divine life, but living in its other, realizing its 'interest' in its other. If, in simple terms, this is how God is, this is how God's creation also is, its very otherness to God the occasion of something like *work*, in the transformation of the contingent not out of its contingency but into the quest for a convergence always 'real' and always elusive.⁶³

At the beginning of this Chapter, I said that my aim was to identify a contemporary human experience, a locus of human action, that can be defined as eucharistic - mediating the relationship between God and humanity through Jesus Christ. This experience is constituted, as we have seen, by a self-conscious awareness of the limits of action. The locus I am describing is one in which it is possible to act, aware of these limits but not paralyzed by them. Let me summarize thus far.

Anxiety of beginning comes from an awareness of the prior determinations which have gone to make up our present situation. This awareness is both a source of power and a cause for anxiety. Without it we are helpless because we have no sense of the contingency of the present and therefore no way of overcoming its limits. At the same time, however, it is a source of anxiety because this awareness also brings with it the

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 19.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 19-20.

knowledge that we might fail - that to act involves risk. Think of the anxiety of an actor preparing to go on stage. She has been in rehearsal for a number of weeks and knows her part. She has spent the day preparing calmly for the performance and has a number of friends in the audience. Perhaps there has also been a slight disagreement with another actor, or perhaps she is suffering from menstrual cramps. Going further back, she has trained at a good drama school and has a supportive family, although she is the first of her kin to go into the theatre. It is a super-competitive industry and there is always the vague worry that this job might be the last. All these circumstances and considerations, as well as others, go to making up the present moment in which this actor is preparing to go on stage. She is influenced by these factors in the sense that they go into making up who she now is, and the situation in which she finds herself, but they do not in themselves determine what kind of performance she will give. It would not in the least help for her to bring all these limits to the level of consciousness, or to begin a rational reflection on her situation, as she is about to perform. She, at this moment, is who and what she is and her performance will have to come out of her own resources, as limited or as rich as these might be. She will have to temporarily abandon the limits which define her in order to act.

The equivocation of the ethical happens in relation to an order that has forgotten how to fail - in which there is no anxiety. Here, a radical departure may occur that may seem entirely out of keeping with the order being abandoned. Again we may take an example from art - the move from ballet to contemporary dance for instance. If this departure is simply judged by the standards of the old, then it will be impossible to see what is taking place. Yet, at the same time, there are no established criteria for talking about or considering what is new apart from what already exists. The kind of reaction one might expect from those who want to see what is being done might be along the lines of, "Yes, I think I see what he is doing", "It works", or, "It doesn't work", or such comments which express whether or not it is possible to recognize the departure even though it is a departure. As yet, however, there is no real vocabulary to elaborate the change. The vocabulary develops when the departure itself begins to be an order, to be understood, to acquire a logic or rationality of its own. Furthermore, it is simply not possible to decide the significance of what has taken place except over a course of time, when it becomes clearer what the impact has been. Some events which it seems will be of great importance amount to nothing, while others which hardly anyone noticed to begin with have an

enormous influence. The criteria for judgement in the end has to do with whether or not the change has been recognized, has taken hold, and what effects it has had.

The agon of authorship lies in being faithful to the anxiety of beginning and to the equivocation of the ethical. This means being willing to act in dispossession - aware of the limitations of one's self and of one's position, and of the risk of failure, while at the same time accepting that the meaning of one's action will be decided by time and by others and ultimately by God, but not by oneself. The temptation is always not to act, but simply to exist within the already established order where there is a vocabulary to articulate the meaning of things, and one is saved from the incomprehension and hostility that accompany any radical departure.

CONCLUSION

Why is the kind of action I have been describing eucharistic? Here, we return to the Introduction in order to review, in conclusion, the argument outlined there. I repeat this argument, now illuminated by the context created in intervening Chapters, and not, therefore, simply a repetition of the same. I quoted from Herbert McCabe, who writes:

A revolution is never intelligible in terms of the society it supersedes; but that society must be intelligible in terms of the revolution. Adult life cannot be understood in terms of childhood, but it is part of maturity to understand and accept one's childhood.⁶⁴

Each creative change is a break with the past, while, at the same time, being a fulfilment of the very possibility which the past terms afforded. In other words, the fulfilment of a potential, imagined within a certain framework of understanding, creates a break in which the framework itself is superseded, and a radically new beginning is inaugurated in which a new framework altogether begins to be imagined. McCabe continues:

A creative, revolutionary change, then, even though it is not a mere advance along the old lines of continuity, but a discovery of new lines, does not fully realise itself until it can be seen as in a new kind of continuity with the past. The revolution is not consolidated until it sees itself as the 'natural' fulfilment of the aspirations of the people.⁶⁵

⁶⁴Herbert McCabe, *Law, Love and Language*. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968) p. 27.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, p. 29.

We begin relating this argument to the Eucharist with the recognition that a truly catholic understanding of Christian life has been lost, and that, as a result, there is no taken-for-granted context, no common language, from which a picture of the liturgy, or of the Eucharist in particular, can be readily drawn. In order to talk about the Eucharist and the liturgy, it is necessary to begin by reclaiming a common context in relation to which these practices have meaning. From the perspective of the West, this common context is the Jewish-Christian tradition understood as the gradual articulation of a particular historical relationship between humanity and God. We cannot, however, return to a previous understanding of this history, but must find the lines of continuity through engaging with the limits of our present situation. Herbert McCabe suggests an understanding of this history as a series of revolutionary changes, each of which alters the whole framework of human action in the world, superseding the previous terms and categories of human existence. The direction of this historical progression, for human beings, is away from a state of union with nature towards a state of union with God.

The first such revolutionary change is language. Language represents a creative, revolutionary break from other forms of animal life, and constitutes human life as different in two important respects: First, language places human beings in a new relationship to time. It enables us to articulate an imagined world, either in the past or in the future, other than the one which exists in the present. As a result, the present becomes contingent: Human beings can change the conditions of the present by acting to bring about a state of affairs other than the one which presently exists. Through language, human beings become masters of their own environment.

The second important implication of language for human life as distinct from animal life, is that for human beings maturity is contingent. In animals, adulthood is a fact of biology marked by sexual life and reproduction. Maturity, for human beings, is marked, not only by biological maturity, but by position within a linguistically structured community. Creative life is not constituted by the reproduction of the species alone, but by the reproduction of the world of human meaning. The passing on of human life, therefore, is not guaranteed, but by language is made contingent and problematic. Our entry into the present, and therefore our ability to act in the present, is contingent upon our successful entry into a linguistically structured world through education and socialization.

In Chapters Two and Three, we examined the implications of understanding our reality as linguistically-constructed through an investigation into notions of ritual and competence. Our discussion of ritual demonstrates how an individual body takes on an historical shape by acquiring the language of a particular place and time. By describing someone as a 'Victorian' or a 'Thatcherite' for example, we are not simply referring to consciously-held beliefs, but to an entire culture reflected in the person's whole manner and way of life. The person themselves, however, may not be fully conscious of the identity which they nevertheless embody. Having self-knowledge, therefore, does not consist in an interior search for hidden depths, but in coming to understand the outward circumstances by which one's identity has been constructed.

The linguist Noam Chomsky, as we have seen, elaborates the idea of a pre-conscious level of knowledge using the term competence, which refers to an individual's ability to speak their mother tongue, irrespective of any conscious grasp of the rules of grammar. We appropriated this idea of competence to describe the way a person comes to embody the culture of a given place and time, irrespective of their conscious understanding of the historical circumstances in which this culture has arisen. Our surrounding culture forms us at a pre-conscious level in a manner mostly beyond our power to control.

The second revolutionary change that follows language is the discovery that God communicates with human beings not via nature, but via history, via the linguistically-structured world of human relationships. The Law, which governs how human beings live with one another in this world, becomes, at the same time, the means by which we live and communicate with God. Again, as Herbert McCabe writes:

In Exodus the revelation of the ten commandments occurs in the context of a theophany, a manifestation of God, and they are essentially concerned with the difference between Yahweh and the other gods. The decalogue is part of the general demystifying of the divine that lies at the centre of the Jewish-Christian tradition. The other gods, the ones that Israel has beyond everything else to shun, make their demand in terms of special religious cults, but the demand of Yahweh is that men should have a certain kind of relationship with each other in the secular world.⁶⁶

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 57-8.

Unlike the pagan and fertility cults which surrounded them, Israel was called upon by Yahweh, above all else, to obey the Law. The Law distinguishes Israel as different from other peoples, and gives the history of this people a special meaning. The telling of this history becomes, at the same time, the telling of the relationship between God and humankind, a story marked by disobedience and anger, repentance and forgiveness, faithfulness and love. Unlike the pagan and fertility cults, tied to the cycle of nature, the history of Israel has a linear direction. The present is constituted by the remembrance of a particular past and the anticipation of a particular future. The future that comes to be imagined is one in which Israel is liberated from oppression by a Messiah who brings about the New Jerusalem, the restoration of the Temple, the fulfilment of the Law, and the coming of the Kingdom at the end of time.

Christian history begins, therefore, with the conviction that Jesus is this long-awaited Messiah. This is the next revolutionary step in our progression, for Jesus, as it turns out, is not the kind of Messiah generally expected. He is not a warrior Messiah bringing about the Kingdom through a military defeat of the enemies of Israel. Jesus, rather, is a Messiah who preaches a different kind of gospel altogether, a gospel which supersedes the Law as the medium of God's communication to humanity, a gospel of love. This gospel has to do fundamentally with a call to be in relationship with those outside the Law, and love is offered as the medium of this relationship. Discerning the nature of this love, therefore, becomes the paramount task for Christians.

For the most part, Christianity - the history of people calling themselves Christians - has failed in this task. Rather than supersede the Law with love, Christians have simply substituted one law for another, and with terrible results - insisting that this law be applied universally throughout the world. This form of Christianity has been justly criticized and rightly rejected by large numbers of people. At the same time, however, this kind of Christianity is not the whole story. What I am arguing here, in fact, is that in order to illuminate our present situation, we need to draw certain other lines of continuity with the Christian narrative that can help restore, here and now, the possibility of meaningful and creative action in the contemporary context. This demands that we examine more closely Jesus' relationship to the Law, and the radical departure which he himself embodies.

The Law serves, at the same time, to govern relations between people within Israel, and to distinguish Israel from other peoples. Jesus, throughout his ministry, causes scandal by associating, first, with outcasts who fail to keep the Law - prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners of all kinds - and then, with people completely outside the Law - Samaritans and gentiles. By relating to these people, Jesus questions and challenges the boundaries which the Law imposes.

The Law is a vehicle for maintaining differences - the difference of the people of Israel from other peoples, and the difference, within the Law, between the righteous and sinners, clean and unclean. These differences are maintained through judgement about what falls within the categories of the Law and what falls outside them. Judgement, however, is an essentially static form of relationship because it provides no means by which differences can change the categories of the Law themselves. Love is another kind of relationship with difference, and one, which, in Christ, supersedes judgement. We find this shift from judgement to love, from the Law to Christ, demonstrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, told within the context of a conversation between Jesus and a lawyer.

A lawyer tests Jesus by asking him, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asks in return, "What is written in the law? How do you read?" The lawyer produces the reply which the law provides: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." Jesus replies, "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." But the lawyer doesn't leave it there. Desiring to justify himself he asks, "And who is my neighbour?"

Now the lawyer knows the answer to this question just as well as to the first one - obligations to one's neighbour are defined in the Law. He is not asking Jesus for information, he is challenging his orthodoxy. Jesus is known to associate with people with whom the Law forbids contact. Given this fact, the lawyer wants to know how Jesus will defend himself. But Jesus does not try to defend himself, instead, he tells a story about a man who is mugged on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho and left for dead

by the side of the road. While a Priest and a Levite both pass by without stopping, a Samaritan comes to the injured man's aid and takes care of him.⁶⁷

When he has finished telling the story, Jesus turns to the lawyer and asks, "Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" The lawyer answers, "The one who showed mercy on him." Jesus says, "Go and do likewise."

At first glance, the answer to the lawyer's question seems clear: Your neighbour is whoever most needs your help. Many Christians would certainly recognize this interpretation and the command to assist the poor and suffering which it entails. I want to argue, however, that this reading of the parable fails to grasp its significance. This parable is not about helping those in need, but about how love exists in the recognition of need, and how our own need is the medium for our encounter with the other who is different, and in the other, with Christ.

The lawyer, to whom Jesus is speaking, cannot imagine loving a Samaritan. The Samaritans are a people despised by the Jews. If Jesus simply said to the lawyer, "the Samaritans are your neighbours", this would accomplish nothing except to confirm the lawyer's worst fears about Jesus as an apostate, because it would not engage with the lawyer where he really is. What Jesus does instead is to take the lawyer on an imaginative journey. Jesus tells the story from the perspective of the man who is left beaten on the roadside. This is the character with whom the lawyer will identify, and the situation is one that he can reasonably imagine. Watching the scene from this position, two men pass by who have an obligation, according to the Law, to help the man in distress. These two men, formally speaking, are the man's neighbours, yet, they do not stop.⁶⁸ The man who stops is a Samaritan, someone whom the lawyer would shun in normal circumstances, and a person who falls outside the legal definition of neighbour. Nevertheless, it is the Samaritan who has compassion.

⁶⁷Luke 10:25-37.

⁶⁸See footnote 19, p. 9.

Through this story, the lawyer is enabled by Jesus to make an imaginative leap. It becomes possible for him to imagine a situation in which he would recognize the Samaritan, his enemy, as his neighbour; a situation in which his own vulnerability and need are made explicit. In answer to the question, "Who is my neighbour?", the lawyer identifies the Samaritan, and it is to the Samaritan, therefore, that the beaten man owes the obligation of love.⁶⁹

The present crisis in Western society can be described in these terms: On the one hand, there is an unprecedented awareness of the extent to which we are influenced by factors beyond our control - our upbringing and education, the influence of the media, our particular genetic endowment. On the other hand, this awareness makes it difficult for us to agree on any common perspective from which to examine the construction of the present with a view to changing it, because we are also aware of the contingency of any perspective that we may adopt. We are conscious, as never before, of the differences dividing people, but we cannot find any basis for a unity transcending difference, which isn't at the same time a form of domination. As a result, we are made helpless victims of our environment, and of the current structures of power and authority. In Chapter Four, we looked at this crisis in more detail, concluding that in order to escape being victims of history, we must locate a non-arbitrary site from which to articulate a renewed vision of the social whole.

It is within this context that the theologian John Milbank argues for a renewed commitment to Christianity as a metanarrative. As we saw in Chapter Five, Milbank argues that we can only make sense of our present situation by redefining it in explicitly Christian terms, because it is only Christianity that offers an account of how differences can be related without violence; an account able to rescue us from the nihilism of competing and irreconcilable particularities. Milbank, however, is like a man who, in response to the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbour?", replies, "the Samaritan is your neighbour". In other words, he does not engage in the difficult work of leading the lawyer to see the truth for himself.

⁶⁹I am grateful to Zenon Bankowski, Professor of Legal Theory at Edinburgh University, in conjunction with whom I reached this reading of the Good Samaritan.

With the philosopher Donald MacKinnon, we saw that the truth of a parable lies in its very form, in the way it leads the listener, through an imaginative journey, to see things more as they really are. It is this form of engagement with the truth that has something to do with God, as our discourse on Gillian Rose and Rowan Williams has hopefully shown.

After arguing that a failure in Christian practice, a failure on the part of the institutional Church, leads to the development of the secular, Milbank's discourse switches to an opposition between the Church and the secular, in which Church comes to be used in a manner indistinguishable from the Kingdom. Milbank fails to situate us in the historical present because the Church which he describes is not a real place located in space and time, and is not, therefore, a site from which action for change is possible. Even if we agree with Milbank that Christianity offers the only non-arbitrary perspective on the present, this does not mean that there is a language readily available in which the Christian story can be told. Milbank ignores the real dilemma caused by the Church's failure to be Christian, which is that there is no contemporary Christian language at hand. The choice is either to adopt a Christian language, already rejected by the world, or to recognize the failure of Christian practice as our point of departure, the basis for any renewal of Christian life, and out of the silence of this new beginning, to wait for a contemporary language to emerge. Milbank's discourse is lacking in love. Rather than take the risk of engaging with the real limits of the present, he judges the world from the perspective of a Christian language which expresses an order that has forgotten how to fail.

Love surpasses judgement because judgement requires only that I see the lack in the other, I perceive the other only within pre-established categories of meaning, and judge him either in or outside the Law. Love is a relationship in which I perceive the other from the perspective of my own need. It is my own lack whose fulfilment I seek in the other, to whom I am thus drawn. Love is a creative form of relationship in a way that judgement is not. Judgement is static because it allows no means by which the categories of meaning can themselves change. Love, by contrast, is a constant movement outward from the categories of the present, seeking, through the recognition of need, the fulfilment of what the present lacks. By imagining his own need made explicit, the lawyer transforms

his understanding of the category of neighbour in such a way that he can identify his enemy, the Samaritan, as someone he might be called upon to love.

The idea of love, here, is inextricably bound up with the recognition of need - not the recognition of the other's need, but the recognition of my own need for the other. It is only when this need is made explicit that I come to know Christ in my neighbour. This need, however, is an unknown, an empty space, precisely because it cannot be accounted for in present terms. How, then, do I find a language in which to express this need, a language wherein my relationship to Christ is made manifest? The answer Jesus gives is that the only way to approach the other, and in the other to find him, is as a servant.

A servant is not a person in a position to impose judgement on another. A servant is one who enters the world of another and ministers to their needs as these are defined by the person themselves. It is this test of service that becomes, in Christ, the criterion for distinguishing the righteous from the cursed, as we see in the parable of the Last Judgement: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."⁷⁰ The paradoxical dimension to this parable, what prevents its interpretation as a straightforward injunction to help the poor, is that neither the righteous nor the cursed know who they are. Both must ask the Christ when they ministered or failed to minister to his needs.

The poor are those who cannot be accounted for within the present framework of society except in terms of lack. Their need is defined in relation to criteria for success which the present framework affords, and they are found wanting. If society's relation to the poor is one of judgement, whether punitive or benevolent, it tries to bring them, either coercively or persuasively, within the Law, within the terms of its own self-understanding. Christians, however, are not called upon to judge the poor, but to love them, to be one with them in Christ.

The Christian revolution is inextricably bound up with the problem of relating to difference, because Christ's teaching is that salvation is not simply within the Law, within Israel, but that all people are chosen by God, and through Christ, can come to the

⁷⁰Matthew 25:31-46.

Father. The coming of the Kingdom is an imaginative vision which is extended to encompass the whole world; nothing in the world falls outside the vision offered by Christ. This does not, however, mean that everyone is obliged to participate in the cult of the Roman Catholic Church, or of any institutional Church, it is a statement, rather, about what one cannot help but do if one wishes to be in relationship with someone who is different from oneself - someone outside the Law. It is a teaching about the only way it is possible to create a unity across differences which is not simply a form of domination. This is a teaching which, in the contemporary context, applies equally to Christians as to Jews.

If we relate to the poor only through judgement, then we do not face the limits of our own imagination, and cannot, therefore, recognize any path towards growth. If, however, we adopt the perspective of the poor and look at our society from the vantage point of those who are excluded, then the limits of the present come into focus and it becomes possible to see the direction that growth must take. The task of the Christian, therefore, is not to help the poor - to draw the poor into the limits of our present vision - but to live with the poor so as to see these limits more clearly in such a way that our vision is expanded, and our own poverty - our need for God's love - is revealed in our need for those we would otherwise exclude. As long as anything or anyone is excluded, it is a sign that the Kingdom has not yet come. The poor, therefore, are a sign of our own lack.

Let us say that service is the form of entry into relationship with those with whom one has no common language. Language, as we have seen, is a specifically human mode of interrelationship; it provides the structure for a common social life. Those who are excluded from the common life, therefore, are excluded linguistically - their existence is only negatively defined. It is only by entering the world of the poor, truly as a servant, listening in silence, that our language is extended, and thus the boundaries of our world. In the description of the Last Supper in the gospel of John, Jesus washes the disciples feet:

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have

done to you.⁷¹

It is only by entering the world of the poor in silence, as a servant, that the Christian learns to articulate a perspective truly outside the language currently spoken, and so to extend the horizon of possible relationship. This is the creative work involved in bringing about the Kingdom of heaven on earth. By articulating the perspective of the poor, and of our own poverty, the Law's outside is brought into communion, not through judgement, but through love - the articulation of a need for what has, until now, remained outside the limits of our vision. It is in this way that the Body of Christ is gradually made incarnate in society as a whole, and a new language for the whole comes into being which is not reducible to any one of its parts.

Worship refers to the communal work involved in extending our imaginative horizon from the perspective of those who are excluded. The Eucharist, in particular, is a re-telling of the story of the incarnation of Christ in such a way that this incarnation is made a present reality. This work is about where the Church must be situated in order to gain the vision necessary for eucharistic worship.

The liturgy is the public and communal language of the Church. It is not a language addressed to the Church, but to the world. "A liturgy of Christians", writes Aidan Kavanagh, "is thus nothing less than the way a redeemed world is, so to speak, done."⁷² What makes the liturgy different from the language spoken by the world is not an esoteric strangeness, but the fact that it is a language uttered from a perspective beyond the present limits of the world's self-understanding. In order to speak this language, therefore, the Church must, in practice, live outside the world. Outside, here, however, does not refer to an utopian retreat, but to a life of poverty, with those whose lives have, as yet, no positive meaning within the present terms of the world's collective imagination.

If, however, the Church is not poor, then the language that she speaks will be no different from the world's language. And with no perspective from which to challenge the limits of the present, the Church will have no greater vision to offer. The language of

⁷¹John 13:12-15.

⁷²Aidan Kavanagh, *On Liturgical Theology*. (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984) p. 100.

the liturgy exists in order to describe a distance - the distance between the present conditions of human life in the world, and the conditions that will prevail with the coming of the Kingdom, the second coming of Christ. The only reason that the Church is able to describe this distance is because she is already living in the Kingdom, in communion with Christ. And Christ is living with the poor, always outside our present horizon of vision, drawing us ever forward to the Father. If this real distance does not exist, however, then the Church is just as blind as the world.

After the death of Jesus, the disciples receive the gift of tongues at Pentecost and are sent forth to preach the Good News to all the world. This is an extremely problematic mission, however, for all the world does not share the language and history which have made it possible to recognize Jesus as the Messiah in the first place. In the absence of this common ground, how on earth to explain who Jesus is and why it is so important to be in communion with him. This question arises, as we have seen, in discussions of the early Church about whether or not gentiles who wish to become Christians should be circumcised. The issue at stake here is central to understanding the revolutionary transformation of the world which Christ embodies. Is the world to be brought within the boundaries of the Law, to enter the covenant marked by circumcision, or does the covenant of Christ supersede this Law, and if so, how is it transmitted? The final decision of the Church is that the gentiles should not be circumcised, nor are they called upon to obey the Law of Moses.

What this decision means, in effect, is that Christianity has no language of its own. Think of the problem of translating a story into a foreign tongue. The problem resides in the fact that two languages are never simply equivalent; the meaning of something in one language does not correspond exactly to the meaning it has in another. Think of the image of Jesus as the lamb of God. What will be the meaning of this metaphor in a country without sheep? Yet, Christians do have a story to tell. How, then, will it be possible to tell this story outside the boundaries of a single linguistic world? This is the problem the disciples face.

If, as we have argued above, what Jesus offers is a form of relationship that leads us to the limits of our linguistic world, and this relationship, as he teaches, is not limited to a single language, then we have some insight into how to tell this story in a foreign

context. For what is found at the limits of any linguistic world, as we have seen, are the poor. The poor are those who cannot be contained within the present vision of the social whole. By entering the world of the poor as a servant, in silence, and learning the native tongue from this perspective, it is possible to come to the limits of any linguistic world, and from these limits, to tell the story of Christ. This story, then, becomes, not the imposition of a new language and a new culture, but the transformation of a culture and a language from within, in its own terms. The way forward in our present context lies not in re-asserting Christianity as a metanarrative, as John Milbank suggests, but in re-articulating, in contemporary terms, this mode of encounter with the outside by which Christ is made incarnate, for the encounter itself changes the story. In other words, in any real engagement something new is born - Gillian Rose's third term, or the third person of the Trinity. A new language arises out of relationship which cannot be reduced. For this reason, it is appropriate to speak of the love of Christ as an erotic love - one that creates a new bodily union. Gillian Rose describes the movement of erotic love as follows:

L'amour se révèle en se retirer. If the Lover retires too far, the light of love is extinguished and the Beloved dies; if the Lover approaches too near the Beloved, she is effaced by the love and ceases to have an independent existence. The Lovers must leave a distance, a boundary, for love: then they approach and retire so that love may suspire. This may be heard as the economics of Eros; but it may also be taken as the infinite passion of faith: *Dieu se révèle en se retirer.*⁷³

In this Chapter, we have looked at Rose's account of the present, and in particular, at her location of the broken middle as a site for eucharistic worship. Action in the broken middle creates a distance from the language of the world, not through alienation from or objectification of the world, but through a deep engagement with reality which constantly leads us forward through desire, revealing to us the shape of our own needs in relation to the other.

David Morland, in his document *The Eucharist and Justice*, writes:

The Church sees as one of its main functions the provision of the sacraments, and especially the Mass, to its members. But this is seen less as a revolutionary celebration of a new heaven and a new earth here and now present in the world and rather as satisfying the religious needs

⁷³Gillian Rose, *Love's Work*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1995) p. 133.

of Catholics understood in a very narrow manner.⁷⁴

He describes the lack of vision from which the Church is suffering:

One of the most basic needs is for a vision, a Christian vision of faith which is at once true to the tradition we have received, to the worship we celebrate and also responsive to the demands of contemporary life. Worship, in particular, requires a vision which forms those who participate, so that what they celebrate really gives heart to their whole life.⁷⁵

This vision only comes, he writes, to a Church living the gospel of Christ in practice:

Failure in practice means that our worship becomes alienated, ritualised, domesticated. It is infected by a sort of collective hypocrisy which does not stem from the ill-will of its participants but rather from a massive misdirection of the whole system of worship...It is a deep theme of the prophets that worship turns into idolatry and misses the mark of praising God when the style of life of those who participate is unjust...This can render the worship ineffective, closed in on itself, a source of false comfort and security. It can give the impression of holiness, of justification, while in fact it is merely legitimating or at least leaving unchallenged an unjust state of affairs. For us to discover the meaning of our worship, to re-enact the symbols so that they give light and life, requires us to re-tell the true story of Christ. We have to discover how he is the sacrament of God.⁷⁶

And we only discover Christ as the sacrament of God among the poor:

One crucial aspect of the incarnation is that Jesus designates the poor as the privileged members of the new order, the kingdom; He takes their side, identifies His own mission and life as belonging to them...The Church is **of** the poor, not primarily to provide assistance to them, not **for** the poor, but because there the action is God's action among men, where true history is being made.⁷⁷

The only way to renew the Church's worship is for Christians to be with the poor as servants:

⁷⁴David Morland, *The Eucharist and Justice: Do This in Memory of Me*. (London: Infoform, 1980) p. 5.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 25-6.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 10.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 11-12.

If the Church is to celebrate the Eucharist authentically, it has to be stripped of its power where that is merely for itself. It has to be a suffering servant unconcerned for its own survival in worldly terms, but rather 'washing men's feet', taking its agenda as Christ did from the poor.⁷⁸

In Chapter One, we examined how the Church has come to be in her present predicament, relying on P.J. FitzPatrick's account of the present situation, and setting this within the context of work by Henri de Lubac and others on the historical development of the Eucharist, and its relationship to increasing clericalization and centralization of power within the Church. What we discover is that the language of transubstantiation in which the Eucharist comes to be described, in the absence of any real distance between the Church and the world, creates an artificial distance by turning the Eucharist into a symbol that cancels the meaning of human language. Transubstantiation is not a real discovery of the limits of our linguistic world, it is an abuse of human language justified by an appeal to divine intervention, in the interests of defending a very worldly kingdom. FitzPatrick suggests that the way out of this language of mystification is to understand the Eucharist as a ritual. What this accomplishes, as we have seen, is to situate us firmly within the arena of human language and action as the medium of our communication with God. David Morland, commenting on the celebration of the Eucharist, writes:

There is a basic passivity on the part of the laity in the performance of the rite despite some moves towards greater lay participation. This legitimates and reinforces the broader passivity of the laity in the life of the Church as a whole. The hierarchical structure of the Eucharist is both a sign and also a cause of the particular model of authority and power in the life of the Church generally.⁷⁹

At the Second Vatican Council, the liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church was extensively reformed while her political life remained essentially unaltered. The effect of these changes has been equivalent to adopting Esperanto - the creation of an artificial language. The vision of Church expressed in the new liturgy is democratic - all present, both clergy and laity, are called to active participation. The Church, however, is an undemocratic institution - the laity have no authority of any kind in Church affairs, and the clergy are subject to a strictly top-down form of government. The liturgy, here, is not

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 15.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 4.

the language of the Church, it is the language of the world spoken badly. The Church is not leading the world forward, the world, in its language and vision, is ahead of the Church, and the Church is struggling to catch up and stay abreast. Many Christians, sensing this reversal, have left the Church and joined the world, and even among those who remain are many who can't help but wonder what the Church is offering that is not better expressed elsewhere.

It is no surprise that an hierarchical and authoritarian Church should produce an hierarchical and authoritarian liturgy, or that changing the liturgy without changing the Church should create a language that communicates this discrepancy itself. The laity's reaction to the new liturgy bears this out: On the one hand, are those dissatisfied with the Church because she clearly does not conform to the vision which the new liturgy expresses, and on the other hand, are others dissatisfied with the new liturgy because it no longer expresses their vision of the Church. On both sides, we find a desire for the liturgy and the Church to be reconciled. The Church's ritual, we conclude, cannot be artificially distinguished from the life the Church is actually leading. The liturgy's irrelevance for the contemporary world is not addressed in endless discussions of ritual form, but by a Church committed to living the Gospel.

It is significant that in their document on the common good, published prior to the last general election in Britain, the bishops of England and Wales make no mention of the liturgy, or of the Eucharist in particular. The idea of the liturgy as the Church's public work is entirely absent.

In the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* from Vatican II, the Eucharist is described as "the fount and apex of the whole Christian life"⁸⁰. In the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, explaining why reform of the liturgy is so important, the Council Fathers write:

For it is through the liturgy, especially the divine Eucharistic Sacrifice, that "the work of our redemption is exercised." The liturgy is thus the outstanding means by which the faithful can express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the Church.⁸¹

⁸⁰"Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" in *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966) p. 28.

⁸¹"Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy" in *The Documents of Vatican II*. Edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher. (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966) p. 137.

According to this vision, the Church is understood as the sacrament of God's relationship to humanity through Christ. In the Eucharist the real presence of Christ is made manifest in such a way that the Church as His Mystical Body becomes incarnate. The bishops are in a special sense, through the apostolic succession, the stewards of the Eucharistic celebration by virtue of which they receive the means to preach the Good News to all the world. Given this Christian faith, it is noteworthy that in a document such as *The Common Good*, designed by the bishops to offer a vision of the just society, no mention is made of the liturgy or of the Eucharist in particular, as the means by which such justice is brought about.

One might reply that the document is offered to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and therefore, that any appeal to the Eucharist as the source of creative change for society's transformation is likely to alienate and divide rather than unify. But is this reply not in itself a judgement upon the Church?

If the practice of the Eucharist is so obscure outside the boundaries of the institutional Church that no language is available in which to offer it as a path for others, is the Church not failing in her vocation of true catholicity?

David Morland writes:

If the Church is defined as the sacrament of the world's salvation, then it must be engaged in a practical way in liberating human beings from every form of oppression. This sense of practice has come to be seen as just as important as being a member of a eucharistic community. But what is the connection between eucharistic worship and action for justice?⁸²

He continues:

There is little sign...that the performance of the liturgy and the Eucharist in particular is an evident instrument of change in raising the consciousness of those who participate and in showing them how their worship is related to action for justice.⁸³

⁸²David Morland, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁸³*Ibid.*, p. 3.

The Common Good document is a symptom of the Church's confusion over her public role in a pluralist society, and evidence of a lack of faith in the liturgy as the medium of her public work. It is through the liturgy, above all else, that the Church can offer the world a vision of the just society. There is a need for liturgical renewal, but renewal that comes about only indirectly through a re-articulation of the Christian life as a whole.

The Church is called, at the present time, to worship in the narthex - to engage in a real encounter with the world, and through this encounter, to articulate the limits of the present in such a way that a new way of life becomes possible for all. P.J. FitzPatrick writes:

The narthex is not a part of the building in the intimate way the nave and sanctuary are (at one time, penitents were relegated to it), and yet it is not alien to the building; it both joins the church to the street and the market-place, and yet it keeps the church distinct from them; it is a route by which we pass into the church, and yet the passage itself shows that the origin of our route is not its terminus. The narthex does not *polarize*, for it is open to both street and church; but its very openness is not to be taken as a reduction of either of them to the other; it both links them and keeps them apart.⁸⁴

The liturgy of the Church is, potentially, a revolutionary vehicle for the transformation of the world. This potential can only be realized, however, by a Church actively committed to living the Gospel - living outside the world, among the poor - because it is only from this perspective that the liturgy becomes a language that expresses a new imaginative vision of the world, able to inspire real political change. The Church can only truly celebrate the Eucharist as a servant, offering up to God the needs of the world, for it is only by articulating the world's lack, that the Church creates a space, in the Eucharist, which can be filled by the presence in love of the risen Christ.

⁸⁴P.J. FitzPatrick, *In Breaking of Bread: the Eucharist and Ritual*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) p. 286.

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