

Church and Culture: Protestant and Catholic Modernities

Anthony J. Carroll SJ

Abstract

This article reviews the church and culture relationship developed in *Gaudium et Spes* and *Lumen Gentium* and proposes a Catholic account of modernity as a way in which the contemporary mission of the church in today's culture can be creatively and faithfully carried forward. After an initial outlining of the definitions of church and culture proposed by the Vatican documents, I then go on to position my proposal of a Catholic modernity in relation to some important current accounts of the church and culture relationship that tend towards a rejection of secular culture. I argue that Protestant accounts of modernity have dominated in philosophical and sociological theories and draw on my previous work on Max Weber to illustrate the significance of this for developing a Catholic account of modernity. I conclude by sketching some of the important issues which would need to be addressed in formulating a systematic account of a Catholic modernity.

Keywords

Catholic, Protestant, Culture, Modernity, Vatican II

Introduction

The question of how church and culture should relate to one another is not a new one. Since the time of the New Testament the extent to which one owes loyalty to the social order within which one finds oneself has been a topic of fundamental concern for the church. One needs only to think of the debates in the first council of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15) about whether gentiles should be circumcised or not to realise that the relation between church and culture is a perennial issue for Christianity and needs to be continually re-thought. Today, as the church finds herself in an increasingly pluralistic and interconnected world with competing worldviews the church and culture relationship needs to be re-actualised for our time.

Whilst our age is a new one and demands that we re-think this relationship it would be a mistake to neglect the origins of our time in the past. The options and paths taken by our predecessors are sedimented in our present situation.¹ So, in order to see where we are, we need to be aware of where we have come from. In this article, I want to provide an account of how we got where we are in terms of our understanding of church and culture, but also reflect on how we might move forward in the fulfilment of the mission of the church in this present era. I shall do this by focussing on contrasting accounts of modernity that I will call Protestant and Catholic modernities.²

I begin by first sketching some preliminaries in terms of defining the notions of church and culture that I shall be using and reviewing some of the more recent interventions on the question of the relation between them. Then I shall outline the Protestant account of modernity provided by one of the founding fathers of sociology, Max Weber, as he, together with Émile Durkheim, has very much set the agenda for later secular accounts of modernity. I conclude by sketching the issues involved in giving a systematic account of Catholic modernity and suggest how this account is significant for the contemporary mission of the church in the light of Vatican II. Whilst, I have published a systematic account of Max Weber's Protestant modernity, my sketch here of a Catholic modernity is but one step towards working out a systematic account of a Catholic modernity in dialogue with important voices in the contemporary world.

Some definitions and understandings of the church and culture relation

The variety of definitions of culture provided by *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), and particularly from paragraphs 53–62 of that Constitution, are my starting point for thinking through just how Vatican II opens out the possibility of a Catholic modernity.³ Drawing on the basic distinction, though not separation, between nature and culture, culture

¹ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007) p. 29.

² Cf. Lluís Oviedo, 'Should we say that the Second Vatican Council has failed?', *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 49, No 5, September 2008, pp. 716–730.

³ For some background to the concept of culture and its relation to theology, see Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life, *On the Way to Life: Contemporary Culture and Theological Development as a Framework for Catholic Education, Catechesis and Formation* (London, CES, 2005) Part I; and Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1997) pp. 3–58. See also H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, Evanston, and London, Harper and Row, 1951).

is defined by GS as “cultivating natural goods and values.”⁴ In other words, culture is a human activity geared towards developing the gifts that we have been given. It is “everything through which we perfect and unfold our manifold spiritual and bodily gifts.”⁵ The world and all that is in it is part of the creation which has been given to us to cultivate so that it may bear more fruit. In this understanding of culture, the world is seen as a garden which we are called on by God to shape for the good of all.⁶ As the Constitution puts it, culture means “applying ourselves through knowledge and labour to bring the world itself under our control.”⁷ It includes the fact that by “developing customs and institutions we render social life more human both within the family and in the civic sphere as a whole.”⁸ So, one may consider culture to be an unfinished project and one that is oriented towards the common good. Again as the Constitution puts it, it is a medium though which “in the course of time we express, communicate, and conserve our works, great spiritual experiences and aspirations to contribute to the progress of many people, even the whole human race.”⁹ As a medium it is indispensable to us, so much so, that uncovering the full meaning of human culture and developing it for all are considered integral parts of our vocation as Christians.¹⁰ Even revelation is not separated from the medium of human culture. God communicates to us through the cultures of different ages and the spreading of the gospel is done through these cultures.¹¹ GS also makes important points concerning the legitimate autonomy of human culture. Following the teaching of Vatican I on the “two orders of knowledge,”¹² GS reiterates the doctrine that faith and reason, whilst not to be separated, represent distinct orders of

⁴ “*bona naturae valoresque colendo*” GS 53. All quotes from Vatican I and II documents are taken (with minor modifications of the English translation) from Norman P. Tanner, SJ (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Vol. II (Trent–Vatican II) (London and Washington, Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990).

⁵ “*sensu generali indicantur omnia quibus homo multifarias dotes animi corporisque perpolit atque explicat.*” *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶ The development of an ecological awareness and of the term “ecological conversion” is one which has emerged after the Second Vatican Council especially in the conferences and writings of the late Popes Paul VI and John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. I am grateful to Peter J. Conley for making me aware of this increasingly important issue in papal social teaching.

⁷ “*ipsum orbem terrarum cognitione et labore in suam potestatem redigere studet.*” *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸ “*vitam socialem, tam in familia quam in tota consortione civili, progressu morum institutorumque humaniorem reddit.*” *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹ “*denique magnas experientias spirituales atque appetitiones decursu temporum in operibus suis exprimit, communicat atque conservat, ut ad profectum multorum, quinimmo totius generis humani, inserviant.*” *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰ Cf. GS, 57.

¹¹ Cf. GS, 58.

¹² Cf. First Vatican Council, Chapter IV., On Faith and Reason.

knowledge. Culture as part of our rational activity follows its own principles and methods and has a legitimate autonomy of its own.¹³ In other words, culture is ultimately ontologically dependent upon God as part of his creation but is epistemologically distinct from knowledge of revelation. An example may help to make this clearer. If I have a tooth ache, I naturally seek help by going to the dentist. The knowledge, skills, instruments and so on which the dentist employs to remove my pain are ultimately ontologically dependent on God. However, competence in using this dental technology is not dependent upon knowledge of revelation. Dentistry has a legitimate autonomy in terms of its particular knowledge domain and methods. Cultural domains of knowledge and their respective methods, as in the case of dentistry, have a natural good to which they tend and internal values which steer them towards this destination. These natural goods can be used to build up the human family, as in the case of the dentist removing the pain of a toothache. This raises an important issue in considering the relation between the church and culture because it gives a place for the legitimate autonomy of secular culture and its knowledge domains and methods. Failure to recognise this autonomy may result, as Oliver O' Donovan has argued, from a lack of the eschatological patience required to see the historical and theological value of the secular.¹⁴

In his *Christianity and the Secular*, Robert Markus notes that prior to the Constantinian settlement of the Church and the Roman Empire secular culture provided a common ground on which both Christians and non-Christians could collaborate to promote a better world. As this understanding of secular culture was lost by the time of Pope Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century, Christendom internalised this notion of a secular culture as a division of functions within Christendom and so lost the prior enrichment provided by the external classical secular culture.¹⁵ During Christendom the church became culture as the pluralistic society of St. Augustine gave way to a Christian society. Markus argues that it was the genius of Pope John XXIII and of the Second Vatican Council to have ended the spell of Constantinianism that held the church in its grip for sixteen and a half centuries.¹⁶ Whilst not embodying a fully developed theology of culture, GS clearly points in this direction and opens the way for a Catholic account of modernity.

¹³ Cf. GS, 59.

¹⁴ Oliver O'Donovan, *Common Objects of Love: Moral Reflection and the Shaping of Community* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000) pp. 24, 63.

¹⁵ Robert A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular* (Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006) pp. 65–66.

¹⁶ Markus, *op cit.*, p. 91.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (LG) provides the Council's most developed understanding of the church. It presents the church as the people of God with a mission in the world to preach the good news of the coming of God's kingdom.¹⁷ Her special relationship with Christ makes her a sacrament, a sign and an instrument of the unity and union between Christ and his people.¹⁸ Yet, also conscious to locate the origin of the church in the divine will of the Father, the announcing and embodying of the coming of the kingdom of God in the Son, and the dynamic sanctifying action of the Spirit, it notes that the church is a Trinitarian mystery that cannot be reduced simply to sociological and historical categories.¹⁹ This dimension of the church as mystery is further accentuated in Chapter 7 on "The eschatological character of the pilgrim church and her union with the heavenly church".²⁰

The Constitution clearly presents a vision of the church in which all have their place and role within it. The chapters on the laity and religious are preceded by the chapter on 'The hierarchical constitution of the Church and in particular the episcopate',²¹ in which the collegial nature of the Pope and bishops is emphasised, retrieving a more patristic understanding of government than previous Conciliarist and Ultramontanist tendencies. No less significant in the understanding of the church is the emphasis on the universal call to holiness in Chapter 5 in which the general priesthood of all believers grounds apostolic action in the world. This helps to bring out further the dignity and vocation of the laity as called to sanctify the world from within and so to realise the kingdom of God in temporal affairs.²² As in the consideration on culture a complex and multi-dimensional account of church is presented in LG.²³

After this consideration of what is meant by church and culture, I would like briefly to situate my own position on their relation by referring to how I both share and disagree with some contemporary positions on this subject which tend towards a rejection of secular culture. My intention is very much to work out of the tradition of the Second Vatican Council and especially its opening out to modernity that the Constitution GS represents. Rather than adopting a "Christ against culture" attitude, to borrow a phrase from Richard Niebuhr,

¹⁷ LG, 5.

¹⁸ LG, 1.

¹⁹ LG, 2–5.

²⁰ "*De indole eschatologica ecclesiae peregrinates eiusque unione cum ecclesia coelesti*". LG, chapter 7.

²¹ LG, chapter 3.

²² See LG, 31.

²³ For an analysis of the various dimensions to the Vatican II understanding of the church, see Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (Expanded Edition, New York, Doubleday, 2002).

which I detect in some of current theological trends,²⁴ I am trying to steer a middle way between rejection of secular culture and simple accommodation to it, and I adopt this position for theological reasons which I will outline below. Where I share some common ground with these current theological tendencies is in their rejection of the prohibition of theological input into public discourse and accounts of life in our age. The presumed neutrality of the liberal public sphere is one which I have previously called into question in matters such as the wearing of religious symbols in state institutions and also in debates about the mention of the Christian heritage in the European Constitution.²⁵ The inbuilt bias against religion and religious language is sometimes ideologically motivated by secularism and sustained by a fear born of religious inarticulacy that is sadly dominant in significant parts of the Western world.²⁶ One of the current tasks of theology is to articulate how it contributes to issues of public life without colonising them. Consequently, coercion is not a valid theological option in the Church's mission in the world. Rather, in the spirit of GS, the church should adopt a dialogical stance with regard to the secular world in which both partners are in critical solidarity with one another and in which the mission of the church is to invite the world to know the risen Christ and the coming of His kingdom. I agree with Charles Taylor that the benefits of modernity's movement beyond Christendom's earlier fusion of the gospel and culture are ones that are not to be traded away in a return to the past.²⁷ I argue, on the contrary, that a Catholic modernity is both a forward looking and a faithful interpretation of the mind of the Second Vatican Council, and one which draws upon the great theological

²⁴ This seems to me to be the attitude behind Tracey Rowland's interesting account of Vatican II in *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London, Routledge, 2003). Even the political theology of Oliver O'Donovan, which attempts to provide a theological account of political authority, leaves insufficient theological room for secular culture, though, unlike John Milbank, he does find a positive theological place in his account of the Kingship of Christ for the secular as the place-holder for the necessary social space required for the church to accomplish its mission. See Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) p. 146. For a critical reading of O'Donovan's work, see James Gerard McEvoy, 'A Dialogue with Oliver O'Donovan about Church and Government', *Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 48, No 6, November 2007, pp. 952–71.

²⁵ See Anthony J. Carroll, 'Religious Symbols in Public Institutions', *The Way*, 43, 80–93; Anthony J. Carroll, 'Secularisation and European Identity', *Institute Series 1*, Heythrop, pp. 25–39.

²⁶ See Stephen Prothero, *Religious Literacy. What Every American Needs to Know-And Doesn't* (New York, Harper One, 2007) pp. 1–25.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor's Marianist Award Lecture*, edited and with an introduction by James L. Heft SM (New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 16–19.

renewal that helped to give birth to the Second Vatican Council.²⁸ This more positive approach to the world²⁹ is based on a theology of the Spirit active within history and society, and represents a shift from an extrinsic conception of grace to an intrinsic one which is characteristic of twentieth-century Thomistic theology.³⁰ This change of theological paradigm is one which now allows us as a contemporary Catholic Church to think through both the future possibility and historical reality of a Catholic modernity and to enact it in our lives as the people of God.

Prior to sketching some of the major issues involved in formulating a systematic account of a Catholic modernity, I would like to point out the way in which Protestant accounts of modernity have come to dominate. This is an important prelude to a Catholic modernity because it helps to explain just why it is that non-sacramental conceptions of society and action have become embedded in accounts of modernity and so have effectively blocked the development of a Catholic conception of modernity. I shall illustrate the dominance of Protestant accounts by sketching the Protestant modernity articulated in the works of Max Weber.³¹

Protestant Modernity

The pre-Vatican II rejection of modernity by the Catholic Church makes it hardly surprising that the dominant sociological accounts of modernity have been shaped within Protestant metanarratives. As one of the most important sociological influences for shaping our imagination about modernity, Weber's account represents a paradigmatic Protestant metanarrative that has dominated social scientific analyses of modernity, and so illustrates the significance of confessional specificity on theories of modernity.

A fundamental assumption that underlies much of Weber's sociological terms is that grace and nature are totally separate spheres. Grace for Weber is seen as foreign to nature and only made present

²⁸ For an excellent interpretation of GS and its prior schemas which argues that this document represents a paradigm shift in the relation between the Catholic Church to modernity seeing this new relation as one of dialogue rather than the former condemnation, see James McEvoy, 'Church and World at the Second Vatican Council: The Significance of *Gaudium et Spes*', *Pacifica*, 19, Issues 1, February 2006, pp. 37–57.

²⁹ For an analysis of the use of the term "world" in GS, see Antony Nirappel, 'Towards the Definition of the term "World" in "*Gaudium et Spes*"', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, Tomus 48, 1972, pp. 89–126.

³⁰ See Heythrop Institute for Religion, Ethics and Public Life, *On the Way to Life: Contemporary Culture and Theological Development as a Framework for Catholic Education, Catechesis, and Formation* (London, Catholic Education Service, 2005) pp. 39–41.

³¹ For a fuller discussion of this point, see my *Protestant Modernity. Weber, Secularisation, and Protestantism* (Scranton and London, University of Scranton Press, 2007).

in our experience through the preaching of the word of God. The Catholic understanding of the sacramental mediation of grace is rejected by him as a form of magic which the process of the disenchantment of the world has eliminated.³² He interprets Luther's conception of grace to be purely concerned with the forgiveness of sin. In Luther's formulation we are simultaneously sinners and righteous, (*simul justus et peccator*), and salvation is brought to us by faith alone (*sola fide*). This Protestant tradition of understanding grace and nature informs Weber's account of different types of action which he uses to investigate how the process of rationalisation has been able to proceed in the capitalism of Western modernity. His typology of action is so constructed that any form of sacramental mediation of grace is seen as blocking the rational power of human action to power forward the engine of modernity. Salvation can proceed either by means of mysticism or asceticism and these lead to mutually exclusive ends: either contemplation or action. Catholicism, as with the Asiatic world, privileged the passive contemplative life of monasticism embodied in the 'spiritual aristocracies' of the medieval monasteries and so did not put a premium on rational ascetic action within the world but rather on the passive mystical union of the contemplative who withdraws from the hurly burly of the market place to contemplate God in the interior of his or her soul behind the walls of the monastery. The Benedictine motto of medieval monasticism *ora et labora* (prayer and work) is re-defined in Weber's sociology of action as *ora aut labora* (prayer or work). Consequently, in this schema 'contemplative action' is an oxymoron and the Catholic conception of the relation between church and culture outlined above would be dismissed by Weber.³³

This fits neatly into Weber's Protestant account of modernity since for him modernisation occurs as a consequence of rationalisation at both theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, Luther's understanding of the *Deus Absconditus* removes any trace of God from creation and so frees nature to be simply nature and not in any sense revealing the Trinitarian trace of God in the created order. Calvin's doctrine of predestination provides a rational solution to the theodicy question and, together with Luther's conception of God, allows Weber to account for how the Western world was able to apply scientific rationality to the understanding and exploitation of the world and to the progress of Western capitalism.

At the practical level of rationality, two basic orientations structure the progress or regress of modernity. In order for the practical

³² The German word used here by Weber is "Entzauberung", which literally means 'de-magification.' It is used by Weber to signify the elimination of magic from the world by scientific rationality.

³³ See *Protestant Modernity*, pp. 107–12 and 167–76.

mastery of the world to progress, argues Weber, a change in the valuation of rational action within the world was necessary. In the medieval period, a premium was put on contemplative withdrawal from the world. This blocked the necessary affirmation of ordinary life that was required for modernity to progress.³⁴ This change was made possible through the Lutheran transformation of the concept of vocation or calling: into one's religious calling in a worldly activity and in ordinary family life. This democratisation of vocation, now echoed by LG, is a shift from a narrow understanding of the religious and secular priesthood and religious life as the only *loci* of vocation to a universal priesthood of all believers in which all life's activities are seen as the place in which we praise God. Now the scene is set for the rational mastery of the world and so for the progress of modernity and capitalism through the means-ends rationality of science and technology. For Weber, the summit of this is the ascetical action of the Calvinists within the world. Just as every minute of the day had been regulated in the monastery for the glory of God, now the Calvinist had a justification for slamming the door of the monastery and taking this same rational order of life into work in the market place. The siren of the factory replaced the bell of the monastery, as medieval feudalism had given way to modern capitalism.

This story is well known from Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and "Spirit" of Capitalism*. Yet, whilst the importance of Protestantism for the rise of capitalism has been clearly understood as Weber's position, it has not been seen as a theory that itself trades upon Protestant presuppositions, concepts, and categories. I have attempted in *Protestant Modernity* to show how these are present in his major works, from his study of *Ancient Judaism*, through his *Sociology of Religion* and his *Economy and Society*, to his Munich speeches on *Politics and Science as a Vocation*. He gained these Protestant theological concepts and categories from the major liberal Protestant theologians of his day: Matthias Schneckenburger's understanding of asceticism and mysticism in Lutheranism and Calvinism from his *Vergleichende Darstellung des lutherischen und reformierten Lehrbegriffs* of 1855, Julius Wellhausen's research on prophets in ancient Judaism which provides him with a model for the intellectual honesty of the scientist and politician in his Munich speeches, Rudolf Sohm's understanding of charisma which was important for Weber's political sociology, and Johannes Weiss's conception of eschatology as a purely future-oriented transcendent reality that frees up secular positive law to formalise worldly action whilst the gospel regulates heavenly jurisdiction.

³⁴ See Charles Taylor, *Sources of The Self. The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press, 1989) pp. 211–47.

No less significant for an understanding of the Protestant framework of Weber's work is some understanding of the historical context within which he wrote. The period of German history that encompassed Weber's life was framed by the rise of German nationalism, by cultural Protestantism, by the *Kulturkampf*, and by a confession-alisation of German scholarship. Weber's relation to each of these factors is complex and multifaceted. However, in *Protestant Modernity*, I have argued that Weber was deeply influenced by the liberal cultural Protestantism of his day as a way to bring German nation-building to completion, to preserve the freedom of the conscience of the individual against the interference of papal authoritarianism, and to preserve the exacting standards of objectivity in matters of scientific research.

Catholicism, during Weber's lifetime, was very much the poor relation to Protestantism and a reading of German philosophy from Kant to Nietzsche reveals that most of the great German thinkers came out of this German Protestant milieu. As the German historian David Blackbourne has commented: nineteenth-century German culture was Protestant.³⁵ That is to say, the German bourgeoisie equated progress, sophistication, and unification of the nation with cultural Protestantism. This survived in a secularised form amongst the German bourgeoisie, even though, as with Weber, this did not translate into regular church-going.

Catholic Modernity: Historical and Systematic Aspects

Historians of the early modern period are still debating how to describe Catholicism in this period. As John W. O'Malley notes in his survey of the historiography of the period, the name given to Catholicism by a scholar betrays their implicit questions and categories of interpretation.³⁶ Names such as "Counter Reformation" and "Catholic Reformation" each carry with them an implicit interpretative framework. "Catholic Reformation" implies that Catholicism was in the process of renewal during the early modern period and "Counter Reformation" focuses more on the theological, political, diplomatic and military measures that Catholics took against Protestants during the early modern period.³⁷ O'Malley notes that in historiography one is involved in philosophical and hermeneutical issues every step of the way.³⁸ There is simply no neutral name for Catholicism in the

³⁵ David Blackbourne, *The Long Nineteenth Century. 1780–1918*, London (Fontana Press, 1997) p. 293.

³⁶ John O'Malley, *Trent And All That. Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000) p. 3.

³⁷ See O'Malley, pp. 126–34.

³⁸ O' Malley, p. 15.

early modern period. This is important in developing an understanding of a Catholic Modernity as the distinction between the normative and descriptive levels of analysis is not as clear cut as it might at first glance seem.

For most of the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, the serious historical research on the early modern period was done by Protestants and to a large degree from a Protestant point of view. Historians of the period took modernity to be the break with the Middle Ages and so a break with the Catholic Church.³⁹ Catholic historians of the time tended to react against this Protestant reading of the early modern period, which often pictured Catholicism to be reactionary and repressive. It is not an exaggeration to say that the dominant scholarly reading of Catholicism in the early modern period was equivalent to anti-modernism. However, there has been a growing sense amongst historians of the period that the picture painted of Catholicism was excessively determined by an anti-Catholic bias.⁴⁰ Scholars such as the German historian Wolfgang Reinhard have questioned the association of Catholicism with anti-modernism in the early modern era by suggesting that there were significant features of Catholicism that were forms of modernisation. In his 1977 article, Reinhard suggested that one could detect aspects of modernisation in Catholicism such as its growing bureaucratisation, its rationalisation procedures, its social disciplining, and in the spirituality and practices of the Jesuit order.⁴¹ Though this modernisation was not an intentional process of the Catholic Church, for Reinhard, it did contribute to the modernisation of the Western world in significant ways.

My interest in this consideration of Catholicism in the early modern period is to highlight an aporia that has significantly influenced our standard accounts of modernity in the social and historical sciences. At the descriptive level many of the actual practices and spiritualities of early modern Catholicism have not been considered to have had any role in modernisation. Consequently, theories of modernity, following Weber to a large extent, have tended to see modernisation as resulting from Protestant sources and eventually moving away from

³⁹ See O' Malley, p. 27.

⁴⁰ The more recent theories of "confessionalisation" and "social disciplining" have done much to recast some of these one-sided views of Catholicism. See, for example, Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prologomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters', in *Archive for Reformation History*, vol. 68, 1977, 226–52; and 'Was ist katholische Konfessionalisierung?' in *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformgeschichte*, 1993, (ed.) Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling (Gütersloher Verlagshaus and Münster, Aschendorf, 1995) pp. 419–52. See also O' Malley, *op cit.*, pp. 108–17.

⁴¹ See Wolfgang Reinhard, 1977, pp. 231, 240. Here Reinhard is drawing on earlier work produced by the English historian H.O. Evennet in his *The Spirit of the Counter Reformation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1951) pp. 3, 20.

and beyond Protestantism to a secularised modernity. Influenced by such historical accounts social theories of modernity have taken little account of Catholicism in their portrayal of modernity. In effect, due to an overly biased account of the early modern period, the Catholic influence on modernisation has not been taken into account in sociological and philosophical theories of modernity.⁴²

Yet, it would be short sighted not to consider that some of the responsibility for this rests with the Catholic Church itself. Marginalisation of the Catholic influence in modernity was also due to the anti-modernism spirit in the Catholic Church in the nineteenth-century, typified by popes such as Pius IX (1846–1878). His suspicion of the modern world is well documented. Moreover, with the excommunication of the Catholic historian Johann Joseph Döllinger the Catholic intelligentsia of the nineteenth-century was further weakened which played into the hands of those who felt Catholicism and intellectual honesty could not go together. At the height of the *Kulturkampf* in Germany, Catholicism was seen as authoritarian, divisive for national unity, and backward.

Such was the context in which the foundational theories of modernity in the social sciences were laid. Similar to the patristic fathers in theology, those early social theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel) provided the basic frameworks for understanding modernity for the later generations of social theorists. The role of Catholicism was already left out of the picture. Protestantism alone would be anchored to the trajectory of modernity as one of its causal agents and to the heritage that would be later abandoned in the secularisation of society. This is the first issue to consider in a Catholic theory of modernity. In seeking to develop a Catholic Modernity it is necessary to consider the nature and function of Catholicism in the early modern period and to consider in what ways Catholicism should be considered to be a causal agent in modernity and modernisation.

The second issue to consider in a Catholic theory of modernity is that of the opening out of the church to the modern world and its critically positive relation to culture in the Second Vatican Council. The sociologist of religion José Casanova has called this opening out of the Catholic Church to the modern world an event of religion becoming public in the modern world and I referred to this above as a paradigm shift in the self-understanding of the church.⁴³ The consequences of this are enormous given the geographical extension

⁴² It should be noted that there has been some interest in the Baroque period in the social sciences, however this has been mainly to compare crises in the late seventeenth-century with crises in late modernity, rather than to consider the importance of Catholicism as a confessional influence on modernity See Christine Buck-Glucksman, *La raison baroque, Baudelaire à Benjamin* (Paris, Galilée, 1984).

⁴³ José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1994).

of Catholicism in the world and the sheer quantity of numbers involved. These sociological facts of Catholicism present the sociologist of religion with a very varied picture of Catholicism at the global level. Europe is considered by some sociologists of religion to be the exception rather than the rule in terms of the ongoing process of secularisation in modernity,⁴⁴ and one has to be very careful in making global predictions about the decline of religion in the modern world.⁴⁵ In fact, some contemporary commentators are actually predicting that the twenty-first century will be more Christian than ever.⁴⁶

One might consider Vatican II's understanding of the church and culture relation and especially of GS to be an overcoming of the nineteenth-century anti-modernism within the Catholic Church that reinforced an anti-Catholic feeling amongst many scholars of the time.⁴⁷ In *On the Way to Life*, James Hanvey and I have sketched the theological vision involved in this adaptive change within the Catholic Church. The question posed by Vatican II and its opening out to the modern world is: to what extent this transformation in the Catholic Church represents a new relationship of Catholicism with modernity. The acceptance by Vatican II of a legitimate autonomy for the secular realm is in many ways a traditional position grounded in St. Thomas Aquinas's understanding of natural law.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, in coming to accept the legitimacy of liberal democratic government, human rights and other religious traditions, Vatican II ushered in a new rapprochement with the modern world.⁴⁹ In developing the idea of a Catholic modernity it will be important to assess the historical continuity and discontinuity of Vatican II in ushering in a new epoch for the Catholic Church in the modern world.⁵⁰

The third issue facing a systematic account of Catholic modernity is that of charting the trajectory of the origins of Catholic

⁴⁴ See Grace Davie, *Europe The Exceptional Case* (London, Darton Longman and Todd, 2002).

⁴⁵ See Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ See Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ See M.A. Drury, 'Anti-Catholicism in Germany, Britain, and the United States: A Review and Critique of Recent Scholarship', in *The American Society of Church History*, vol. 70, No. 1, March 2001, pp. 98–131.

⁴⁸ See Ludger Honnefelder, 'Die ethische Rationalität des mittelalterlichen Naturrechts. Max Webers und Ernst Troeltschs Deutung des Mittelalterlichen Naturrechts und die Bedeutung der Lehre vom natürlichen Gesetz bei Thomas von Aquin', in Wolfgang Schluchter (ed.) *Max Webers Sicht des okzidalen Christentums* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1988) pp. 254–75.

⁴⁹ See Giuseppe Alberigo (ed.) *History of Vatican II*, vol. V, 'Transition to a New Age' (New York, Orbis Books, and Peeters, Leuven, 2006) pp. 573–644.

⁵⁰ On this issue, see James McEvoy, 'Church and World at the Second Vatican Council', and Antony Nirappal, 'Towards the Definition of the Term "World" in "Gaudium et Spes"' *op. cit.*

modernisation from Trent to Vatican II and beyond. This is a matter of tracing pathways through modernity that provide a coherent and heuristically fruitful account of modernisation as it has been influenced by Catholicism. There are many possible ways to approach this task. In the area of spirituality, for example, it would be interesting to see how the Spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola was a real impetus to modernisation. The Spiritual Exercises and Constitutions of the Society of Jesus have been well researched in recent years and could provide ample material for one area of investigation into Catholic modernisation. Furthermore, the missionary strategies of religious orders which issued out of this new spirituality also provide a wealth of material for analysing just how Catholicism in the early modern period was an agent of modernisation. In the codification of the encounter of the individual with the Lord, the Spiritual Exercises effectively created the institution known as a retreat.⁵¹ This novelty of the retreat had far reaching consequences in the areas of decision-making, social disciplining and styles of ministry, and all could be fruitful areas to pursue. Louis Dupré in his study of the origins of modernity considers the Spiritual Exercises to be a particularly modern synthesis of freedom and grace, much more effective than the medieval theology of the time and one that contains an ontotheological synthesis of nature and grace which is untypical of the Reformation understanding of grace.⁵² Whilst being prior to the legitimation of a Catholic modernity provided by GS, these pathways of modernity have existed historically and have clearly played a significant role in the formation of modernity.⁵³

These issues about the origins, entry points and pathways of modernisation raise important philosophical questions concerning just what is meant by the term “modernity” that would have to be dealt with in a systematic treatment of Catholic modernity. Comparison with existing Western theories of modernity and postmodernity such as those of Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, and Charles Taylor, together with attention to alternative accounts of modernity generated by other parts of the world,⁵⁴ would be a way in which a Catholic theory of modernity could be systematically formulated through a

⁵¹ See John W. O’ Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994) pp. 46–47.

⁵² See Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity. An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993) pp. 224–26.

⁵³ On this point, see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, especially Part I, ‘The Work of Reform’ in which he describes Protestant and Catholic sources of reform and discipline contributing to the emergence of our secular age of modernity.

⁵⁴ For a critique of Charles Taylor’s *A Secular Age* that argues in neglecting other accounts of modernity beyond the “North Atlantic World” he is unable to formulate even a Western account (as these have been shaped by other non-Western societies), see Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, *Political Theory*, vol. 36, June 2008, pp. 490–91.

critical reconstruction of existing frameworks of modernity, post-modernity, and alternative modernities. This assumes, of course, that in the formation of a Catholic modernity other accounts of modernity and postmodernity are not simply to be put aside. To simply reject these accounts seems to me to be against the spirit of Vatican II which chose to enter into dialogue with the modern world, not simply to condemn it but also in order to find God in it. Moreover, it is also against the spirit of pre-Constantinian Christianity, in thinkers such as Justin and St. Augustine who, rather than ignoring the secular wisdom of the age, entered into serious dialogue with the best of it in order to formulate their own Christian ideas.

Conclusion

The critically positive relationship of the church to modern culture as developed by the Second Vatican Council provides a legitimate basis for conceiving a Catholic account of modernity. With some justification, dominant historical and sociological Protestant narratives have equated Catholicism with being anti-modern and reactionary and so have obscured this account. In beginning the process of articulating a Catholic account of modernity, I am attempting to work out the ecclesiological and sociological consequences of the post-Vatican II church at a time when some seem to be losing confidence in the achievements of the Council, of the place of the church in the modern world, and indeed of the capacity of reason to ever deepen its understanding of the mysteries of the faith and of our God-given world.

Dr Anthony J. Carroll SJ
Lecturer in Philosophy and Theology, Heythrop College,
University of London.
Heythrop College,
Kensington Square,
London W8 5HQ
Email: t.carroll@heythrop.ac.uk