Theological Studies
66 (2005)

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. CATHOLIC SOCIAL ETHICS

KRISTIN E. HEYER

[The author clarifies two dominant methodologies that persist in U.S. Catholic social ethics as represented by J. Bryan Hehir and Michael J. Baxter. A comparative analysis of these reformist and radicalist approaches along with their theological foundations challenges contemporary perspectives on their coexistence, and it suggests ways in which the two might mutually inform one another. The author attempts to move methodological debates beyond rigid typologies and toward a more creative, dynamic tension between each model's distinct emphases.]

IN THE CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT of the United States, the dominant stance in Catholic social ethics remains a "public church" model, albeit with differing methodologies and a degree of internal pluralism. In the decades since Vatican II, the U.S. Catholic Church has generally understood itself as a "public church," for its basic understanding of pastoral responsibility includes participation in the wider civil society.[1] Despite the general postconciliar Catholic embrace of reformist social ethics, including liberal and neoconservative versions, critics on both the left and the right find collaborative models such as these insufficiently prophetic.[2] The witness of such groups constantly tests the dominant Church on what issues

KRISTIN E. HEYER received her Ph.D. in theological ethics from Boston College in 2003. She is currently assistant professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles. In 2003 and 2004 she contributed articles to *Political Theology*. Also published is a chapter on Catholic social ethics in the book *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy* (Baker Books, 2005). Georgetown University Press will soon publish her *Public Theology and Political Advocacy: U.S. Catholic Theory and Praxis*.

[1] J. Bryan Hehir, "Responsibilities and Temptations of Power: A Catholic View," *Journal of Law and Religion* 8 (1990) 71–83, at 77.

[2] Objections from the left often arise around the issues of war, capitalism, and consumerism, while critics on the right generally focus on issues like abortion, sexual standards in society, and secularism. Hehir, "A Catholic Troeltsch? Curran on the Social Ministry of the Church," in *A Call to Fidelity: On the Moral Theology of Charles E. Curran*, ed. James J. Walter, Timothy E. O'Connell, and Thomas A. Shannon (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 191–207, at 201.

and by what justification Christians engage.[3] In this article I aim to clarify these contemporary methodologies; challenge conventional ways of understanding the relationship of two major methodological approaches, essentially a collaborative and a more radically prophetic style, respectively; and suggest ways of moving beyond the mere coexistence of these divergent approaches in the light of their mutual clarification and critique. In so doing I map the theological differences that give rise to diverse ethical methodologies.

Catholic social ethics has historically exhibited various methodological tensions that are, in part, inherent in any human effort to relate the fullness of the Christian tradition to the realities of a social context. Such tensions reflect a degree of pluralism within the tradition as well as the nature of the relationship between faith and reason, religious vision and moral principles, and ethical directives and policy orientations. Generally speaking, the methodological tensions that characterize recent Catholic social ethics may be described as encompassing a reformist model of social ethics and a more radically prophetic witness model. Many argue on theological and sociological grounds that the Church should encompass pluralistic methods for vocation and witness.[4] Some Catholics have called the presence of those who feel a special call to witness to voluntary poverty, peace, or to life itself as keeping the larger church faithful and honest, but assert that by definition such groups will remain minorities.[5] J. Bryan Hehir has recently charged that understanding the Catholic Church in the United States as such—that is, as a public Church that simply tolerates a more radically prophetic minority—is becoming increasingly insufficient.[6] Here I develop this contention, challenging the idea that there simply exists an irreducible tension between diverse methods. I argue that the truth claims and theological foundations grounding each approach call for a creative combination of both, rather than living with substantive pluralism or relegating one to minority status.

The tensions exhibited by these reformist and more radicalist approaches must remain as constitutive of life "between the times," although some characterize such pluralism as incoherent split-personality[7] while oth-

[3] Ibid. 202.

[4] See Charles Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics: Twentieth-Century Approaches* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1982); David Hollenbach, S.J., *Nuclear Ethics: A Christian Moral Argument* (New York: Paulist, 1983) esp. 31–32; David O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1989).

[5] See Charles Curran, *The Church and Morality: An Ecumenical and Catholic Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993) 120–21.

[6] Hehir, "A Catholic Troeltsch?" 202.

[7] Charles E. Curran has recently noted that the papal documents that comprise the Catholic social tradition and the work of Catholic social ethicists exhibit on the

ers term it Catholic "genius."[8] The multifaceted nature of the basic public church posture helps guard against too optimistic or too pessimistic a view of the wider world and a disproportionate reliance upon a particular theological "canon within the canon."[9] Due to distinct emphases within the whole Christian canon and the ambiguities entailed in worldly activity, a range of approaches persists, some more prophetic than public, others aiming to impact the surrounding culture rather than legislation.

In the service of bridging the methodological divide in contemporary U.S. Catholic social ethics, my article focuses on two approaches that persist within the Catholic landscape as represented by J. Bryan Hehir and Michael J. Baxter, C.S.C. In the course of a critical examination of these stances, I attempt to move the methodological discussions in social ethics beyond the existing, rigid typologies toward a more dynamic tension between each model's distinct emphases. First I provide an overview of each theologian's method, theological foundations, and perspectives on govern-

---

whole a "methodological split personality." That is, in his view, they lack a well-integrated theological methodology in addressing ethical issues; for even post-Vatican II, the sections of documents that do on occasion treat the role of faith, grace, Christ, and the gospel are never well integrated into the ethical sections dealing with specific issues. See Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891—Present: A Historical, Theological and Ethical Analysis* (Washington: Georgetown University, 2002) 48–49. As another example, Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., has described the nature of the just war and pacifist moral claims made together in the bishops' "A Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" as "contradictory" rather than "complementary." See Himes, "Pacifism and the Just War Tradition in Roman Catholic Social Teaching," in *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge*, ed. John A. Coleman, S.J. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1991) 329–44, at 342.

[8] Ernst Troeltsch noted that the genius of the Catholic Church was the way it incorporated both "church" and "sect" types, co-opting the sectarian impulse into religious orders as a "sect" within the wider "church." See Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960).

[9] For while theological emphases on creation, incarnation, and mediation direct the Church toward engagement with the world overall, other theological emphases temper that public mandate and lead to these differences in how its social mission plays out. Discontinuities between this world and the next, the pervasiveness of sin, and the gospel call to peacemaking mitigate against an unequivocal embrace of the world and lead some to live out the social dimension of their faith in ways distinct from the dominant public church model (e.g. the Catholic Worker movement). See John Courtney Murray's distinctions between an "eschatological humanism" and an "incarnational humanism" on the ways in which one's operative canon significantly shapes its public ethic in distinct ways. Murray, "Christian Humanism in America: Lines of Inquiry," *Social Order* 3 (May-June 1953) 233–44; reprinted with only slight changes as chap. 8, "Is it Basket Weaving?: The Question of Christianity and Human Values," in Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1988; orig. ed. 1960) 175–96.

ment in order to probe the distinct approaches each one grounds in the Catholic tradition. Then I move to a comparative, critical analysis of each stance to identify significant norms and practices for contemporary social ethics. Finally, I explore how this analysis challenges contemporary perspectives on the coexistence of these divergent methods and suggest several ways in which they might inform one another. Due to each figure's distinct theological emphases, the ambivalent nature of different social contexts, and the risks inherent in either's stance, proper discernment emerges as a particularly important practice for contemporary social ethics. My efforts to probe the mutual clarification of both approaches suggest a constructive development beyond typical fault lines in social ethics methodology.

As a policy advisor to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops for many years, as dean and professor at Harvard Divinity School, and as recent president of Catholic Charities USA,[10] Hehir has exercised one of the most influential public roles in recent American Catholic history. Baxter, a Holy Cross priest and Catholic Worker trained by Stanley Hauerwas, draws a large following in his popular "A Faith to Die For" undergraduate course at the University of Notre Dame and at on-campus liturgies. The activities of Hehir and Baxter are not coequal in terms of influence in contemporary Catholic social ethics, nor would a survey of their work alone provide a comprehensive portrayal of the present landscape. Nevertheless, Baxter represents well the evangelical critique in American Catholicism exhibited, for example, by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement as well as certain aspects of the thought of Pope John Paul II. Surveying the stances and foundations of Hehir and Baxter side by side will help illuminate the persistent tensions within the Catholic Church's social mission and contemporary Catholic social ethics in the United States.

I explore evidence of some overlap in recent moves by Baxter and Hehir along with the complementary theological emphases in each. The two approaches need not remain merely competing ones. I suggest three areas where the two might mutually clarify and inform one another: by underscoring (a) the Christian call to both charitable and structural justice efforts; (b) the significance of discernment for any social engagement; and (c) prospects for joining liturgical or sacramental renewal to social justice efforts. These potential sites for constructive development suggest prospects for cultivating more of a creative tension rather than the destructive rhetoric that frequently characterizes this debate, along with the related tendencies to isolate considerations of charity from justice or liturgy from

[10] A priest of the Archdiocese of Boston, Hehir has recently been recalled to serve as cabinet secretary for social services, director of social services, and president of Catholic Charities of Boston beginning January 2004.

ethics. Inflammatory characterizations of reformists as "beltway accommodationists" or condescending depictions of radicalists as "admirable but irresponsible" are unconstructive in the service of our common efforts. In a recent contribution to his "Notes on Moral Theology," James Keenan signals the need for a respectful engagement of differing viewpoints: "Both by matter and by form, moral theologians need to improve the climate and tenor of doing fundamental morals." He points out the need for a "respectful style and radical but faithful reconstruction" in the new millennium.[11] My hope is that my methodological proposal will contribute to precisely such efforts in social ethics.

J. BRYAN HEHIR AND THE PUBLIC CHURCH

Hehir is perhaps best known for his work as policy analyst and advisor at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (1973–1992) where he was highly influential on the bishops' policy agenda.[12] He played a major role in formulating the bishops' policy proposals on the economy, on Central America, and on abortion, as well as influencing the overall direction of the bishops' social policy agenda in the 1970s and 1980s.[13] Hehir was also the principal author of the bishops' pastoral on nuclear weapons in 1983, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response."[14] He notes that he has lived his priesthood "overwhelmingly at the intersection of the Church and the political arena and the Church and the academic arena." Being engaged with the world has been a "major emphasis" all of his life, for he wanted to study politics and diplomacy even before he was sure about theology or the priesthood.[15]

Hehir's own approach to social ethics exemplifies a public Church,[16]

[11] James F. Keenan, S.J., "Notes on Moral Theology: Fundamental Moral Theology at the Beginning of the New Millennium: Looking Back, Looking Forward," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 119–40, at 140.

[12] When he worked at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Hehir served first as director of the Office of International Affairs, then secretary of the Department of Social Development and World Peace, and finally as counselor for Social Policy. For a recent overview of Hehir's work and legacy at the bishops' conference, see William J. Gould, "Father J. Bryan Hehir: Priest, Policy Analyst, and Theologian of Dialogue," in *Religious Leaders and Faith-Based Politics: Ten Profiles*, ed. Jo Renee Formicola and Hubert Morken (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001) 197–223.

[13] Ibid. 197–98.

[14] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

[15] Gould, "Father J. Bryan Hehir" 198 (see n. 12 above).

[16] Other contemporary Catholic social ethicists and theologians, such as Charles

accepting social responsibility for the common good and envisioning its teaching role as participation in the wider societal debate.[17] In his view, the Catholic Church should remain engaged with the wider society, and, while its role is distinct from that of the state, part of the Church's vocation entails collaboration with the state and other secular actors.[18] Hehir maintains that the Church enters the policy debate in the United States as both a social institution and a community of believers, with the challenge to "live with a vision which makes a difference for the world."[19] Entering into dialogue with the wider society by way of issuing pastorals on social issues or lobbying Congress on behalf of the vulnerable, the Church not only addresses specific political questions but also creates space for moral analysis and clarifies the human consequences of the technical and policy choices we make as a society.[20] Hehir allows that within the Catholic Church there should remain room for different models of engagement that may diverge from this dominant model, for such inclusivity is appropriate to the character of Catholicism. He admits there should be room for the type of prophetic or evangelical posture we encounter in Baxter's stance. Nevertheless, Hehir asserts that for the sake of institutional coherence there should be a dominant model, and that he is "absolutely on the side of a Troeltschian church type model."[21]

Hehir has been profoundly influenced by *Gaudium et spes*, calling it the church document that most "animates his work" and "symbolically represents it."[22] He highlights the document's balance between the Church's depoliticization and engagement and its emphasis on the Church's competence to address the religious and moral significance of political questions through its task of protecting human rights and dignity.[23] In line with *Gaudium et spes*, Hehir understands his role as engaging the world in "a

---

Curran, Michael Himes, Kenneth Himes, O.F.M., and David Hollenbach, S.J., support a similarly collaborative model of a public Church (with differing methodologies, to some degree). See Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics*; Himes and Himes, *Fullness of Faith: The Public Significance of Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1993); David Hollenbach, S.J., *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (New York: Cambridge University, 2002).

[17] Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World: The Ecclesiological Implications," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 41 (1986) 54–74, at 64.

[18] See Hehir, "A Catholic Troeltsch?" 196 (see n. 2 above).

[19] Hehir, "The Implications of Structured Pluralism: A Public Church," *Origins* 14 (May 31, 1984) 40–43, at 40–41.

[20] Ibid. 41–42. The Church also calls the state to a different standard. For example, "The Challenge of Peace" called for quite a different posture and policy than the United States was following at the time.

[21] Personal interview with J. Bryan Hehir, Alexandria, Virg., July 13, 2002.

[22] Gould, "Father J. Bryan Hehir" 201 (see n. 12 above).

[23] Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World" 58–59.

spirit of dialogue and service," in a reciprocal manner undertaken in what he has called "confident modesty," or mindful that the Church both teaches and learns from the world.[24] The document's emphasis on this respectful engagement with the world and its transformation by the penetration of gospel values drives Hehir's work in social ethics. Hehir describes his own approach in this way: "First of all to understand the world in all its complexity; second, to respect it in its secularity; third to be restless about its infirmities and limitations; and fourth, to feel driven to lay hands on it, which is what Catholic social ethics calls the world to do—to lay hands on a world you respect but are not ready to accept in its present form."[25] This sequence highlights a major difference between Hehir's approach and Baxter's. Starting with the world on its own terms positions Hehir on a different trajectory than do Baxter's suspicions about the world outside of the church community and his inclination to begin with Scripture and the Christian community it engenders.

Hehir's articulation of his vocation illuminates his particular methodology. While his stance has evolved somewhat over the years, he continues to favor a natural law mode when the Church is addressing those outside its own community. John Courtney Murray's manner of respecting secular disciplines on their own terms and of engaging the world in terms it can understand is apparent in Hehir's own work and style.[26] Hehir refers to Murray's approach as "ascetical about the use of theological terms in projecting the Catholic social vision," for Murray thought that on public issues the Church should speak a language that the state can understand.[27] Since Murray's death debate has ensued on the most faithful continuation of his work, Hehir maintains that the philosophical method at the heart of Murray's approach remains the one most appropriate for Catholic social ethics

[24] Gould, "Father J. Bryan Hehir" 201.

[25] Hehir, "Catholic Theology at its Best," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 27, no. 2/3 (1998) 13–14, at 13.

[26] It was Murray himself who advised Hehir to study ethics somewhere where he could get the international relations first, because his theology would be too rigid if he formed it ahead of time. He advised Hehir to "get immersed in the fabric of the problem, then work your way through it" (Gould, "Father J. Bryan Hehir" 199).

[27] Hehir points to the emergence of public theology as a reaction to Murray's asceticism, an insistence that such an approach "gives away too much" and the fact that it makes the state "normal" and bids the Church figure out a way to speak its vision to the state "even though it regards the state as a relative passing entity in history." Hehir, "Response to Stephen Pope's 'Catholic Social Teaching and the American Experience,'" Spring 2000 Joint Consultation, *American Catholics in the Public Square* initiative, Commonweal Foundation and Faith and Reason Institute (Annapolis, Md.: June 2–4, 2000). Available at *www.catholicsinthepublicsquare.org/papers/spring2000joint/pope/popeprint.htm* (accessed March 18, 2003).

today, given the facts of pluralism and increasing interdependence.[28] Hehir believes the Church's effectiveness and credibility at the level of complex policy recommendations depend upon its ability to understand relevant empirical data from disciplines outside of theology. He concedes that in pastoral letters or when otherwise addressing the internal Church, utilizing the full range of religious and philosophical resources and language is appropriate,[29] but not on issues directly impacting law and policy.[30]

Hehir notes that after Vatican II, a shift from the philosophical language that had dominated pre-Vatican II encyclicals toward a greater emphasis on public theology is evident in the documents of the Catholic social tradition.[31] Following upon the conciliar charge to dialogue with people of good will, many encyclicals address both internal and external audiences, and thus combine theological and philosophical argumentation. In the light of charges that the lack of integration between natural law and references to Scripture and the life of Jesus in pastorals such as "The Challenge of Peace" evidences a "methodological split-personality,"[32] Hehir denies any sharp distinction between an ethic of reason and an evangelical ethic in the pastoral. He insists, "the trade-offs made in shaping this letter are similar to those which have been debated for centuries in the Christian Church. To choose to speak to *both* the Church and the world is to lose some of the 'prophetic edge' of the scriptures."[33] Hehir admits that there exists a tension in the way the bishops shape their dialogue in the Peace Pastoral, but he insists that speaking to both the ecclesial and civil communities at once

[28] See Hehir, "The Perennial Need for Philosophical Discourse," in "Current Theology: Theology and Philosophy in Public: A Symposium on John Courtney Murray's Unfinished Agenda," ed. David Hollenbach, *Theological Studies* 40 (1979) 700–15, at 710–13.

[29] Hehir notes that colleagues like David Hollenbach, S.J., have convinced him of the value of using theological language (at least on the civil-societal level), and he notes that with church-society discourse there is plenty of room for religious language and symbols. He maintains, however, that when one gets into any church-state or policy issues that may use the coercive power of the state to enforce a policy or to prohibit action, "the religious tradition ought to explain, justify, and present their positions in terms that others who do not share our faith may be persuaded by our moral wisdom" (Hehir interview, 7/13/02).

[30] It is worth mentioning that the pastoral letters issued by the U.S. bishops, which utilized both theological and more natural law based and empirical modes of discourse, were, in part, attempts to change policy.

[31] Hehir, "Public Theology in Contemporary America: Forum," *Religion and American Culture* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2000) 1–27, at 23–24.

[32] See n. 7 above.

[33] Hehir, "From the Pastoral Constitution of Vatican II to *The Challenge of Peace,*" in *Catholics and Nuclear War: A Commentary on The Challenge of Peace, The U.S. Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter on War and Peace*, ed. Philip J. Murnion (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 71–87, at 80–81.

comes closest to their sense of pastoral responsibility.[34] Thus Hehir's social ethic embodies a public church model that highly values the mutual informing of Church and society by taking empirical data seriously and communicating in modes accessible to those beyond the faith community.

Although a natural law approach such as Hehir's maintains clear advantages for extra-ecclesial dialogue, some contend that it fails to highlight the central role of Jesus Christ in Christian morality and that "natural law optimism" fails to disclose or attend to the power of sin and evil in the world.[35] Critics maintain that even after Vatican II the use of Scripture and theology in social teaching has remained instrumental or not well integrated.[36] For many reformist social ethicists, the Sermon on the Mount remains an ideal or goal but not normative in a full-throated way for political morality or social justice.[37] In "The Challenge of Peace," for example, the bishops refer to eschatological peace mainly as something toward which we must urgently tend.[38]

MICHAEL J. BAXTER AND CATHOLIC RADICALISM

I turn now to Michael Baxter, a theologian whose approach reflects some of these very critiques of a natural law-based, reformist ethic. Baxter serves as assistant professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame and is a member of Peter Claver House, a new Catholic Worker community in South Bend. His formation took place at Notre Dame's seminary in the 1980s, and then under Professor Stanley Hauerwas of Duke University, and at a hospitality house which he co-founded in Phoenix. Baxter's social ethic, in large part, serves to challenge what he views as the "Catholics to the rescue"[39] mentality that the dominant strand of contemporary Catholic social ethics exemplifies. Baxter objects to Hehir's approach on the grounds that a public Church inevitably aligns itself with the interests of the state and drowns out the Christ-centered radicalism of prophetic movements within the Church. In addition to founding and expanding the André House of Hospitality and its satellite job service, St. Joseph the Worker, in Phoenix,[40] Baxter has worked extensively with draft counseling, educating

[34] Ibid. 81.

[35] Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891—Present* 29.

[36] In part, this lack of integration persists because Catholic social teaching generally focuses on changing structures and institutions, so that its principles remain less evangelical (ibid. 45).

[37] Curran charges John Courtney Murray with this, for example (Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 224–25).

[38] Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891—Present* 45.

[39] Baxter is currently working on a series of essays under this title.

[40] André refers to André Bessette (1845–1937), a member of the Holy Cross

young people in the military, teaching those in ROTC programs Army regulations when students had an awakening of conscience and became pacifists.[41] He has recently resurrected the Catholic Peace Fellowship, originally founded in 1964 to support Catholics committed to peacemaking (including draft resisters, anti-war activists, and conscientious objectors). Baxter's courses such as "A Faith to Die For" (organized around the parts of the Roman Catholic liturgy), "The Dynamite of the Church," and "The Rise and Fall of Catholic Social Ethics" focus on the development of Catholic radicalism in the United States as an alternative and point of resistance to the violent and acquisitive character of the modern state and market.[42] Baxter's past and present experiences opposing violence, enacting the works of mercy, and embodying and teaching Catholic radicalism contribute to a prophetic posture that calls the public church model into question and departs significantly from Hehir's approach.

Baxter's characterizes his own position, influenced by Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, as "radicalist."[43] He does not understand his position as "sectarian" or withdrawing from the world, but rather as rigorist discipleship that embodies Christian practices rather than translating the mandates of Scripture into accessible principles (or, worse yet, into political policies). Baxter's critique of a public church model focuses on several related objections: in his view, such approaches rest upon the false assumption of a fundamental harmony between Catholic and American interests that risks cooptation; furthermore they stem from an outdated nature-grace dualism that attempts to mediate Christian theology. Baxter's opposition to such mediation leads him to propose in Christian communi-

---

Congregation who had been beatified at the time of its founding. A few years after the house had been established, the St. Joseph the Worker job service was founded to help the poor find jobs as an alternative to the "day-labor" agents. I am indebted to Michael Lee at Fordham University for this background information.

[41] Personal interview with Michael Baxter, C.S.C., South Bend, Indiana, July 18, 2002.

[42] Baxter's courses have included texts from the Catholic social tradition as well. In his "The Rise and Fall of Catholic Social Ethics" he covers *Rerum novarum*, *Quadragesimo anno, Gaudium et spes*, *Centesimus annus,* and "The Challenge of Peace." That course syllabus also includes *The Fullness of Faith* by Michael and Kenneth Himes. Yet its course description notes, "it is the task of Catholic theologians in the twenty-first century to disclose how this violence and acquisitiveness is masked and reinforced by the modern discourse of 'Catholic social ethics.'" Baxter's recent syllabi are available at *http://www.nd.edu/~mbaxter/Classes.htm* (accessed February 25, 2005).

[43] See Baxter, "Notes on Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism: Toward a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics," in *American Catholic Social Traditions: Resources for Renewal*, ed. Sandra Yocum Mize and William L. Portier, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 42 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996) 53–71, at 53 and 69 n. 3.

ties alternative ways of cultivating a contrast society as a means of resisting such accommodation. One of Baxter's chief objections to the shape and focus of contemporary Catholic social ethics lies in its emphasis on precisely the approach we have encountered in Hehir, a commitment to a public Church that enters legislative debates and makes policy recommendations. Baxter finds this emphasis disproportionate, arguing "In the field of Catholic social ethics, 95 percent of the thought goes into what the policies should be, and 5 percent into doing the works of mercy in a personal way. It should be just the reverse. Our emphasis should be on what actual people can do."[44]

Baxter objects to what he terms the central assumption of the "Americanist tradition" in mainstream Catholic social ethics (neo-liberal and neoconservative versions alike): that is, the idea that "there exists a fundamental harmony between Catholicism and the political arrangement of the United States of America." He argues that this assertion "has been espoused by such a broad spectrum of theorists that it has become difficult to imagine an alternative to this Americanist tradition."[45] As such, the dominant reformist model limits its concern only to those aspects of Christianity that easily translate into principles that can be applied to an American policymaking agenda. Mainstream Catholic social ethics therefore generates a "domesticated version" of Christianity that too willingly conforms to conventional American political protocols. Paraphrasing political theologian Johann Baptist Metz, Baxter worries that the public Church does not transform American society but that rather, "U.S. society does not rest until the public church fits in with itself and with what it considers reasonable."[46] Baxter suggests that the only way to prevent such accommodation is "to conceive of the church itself as a culture, with its own languages, practices, conventions, and forms of life."[47] For in his view, the dominant Americanist model does not sufficiently attend to ways in which Christians are called to be far removed from some societies ("even liberal democratic ones"). He cautions that the ethics of discipleship should become public only through the witness of the church community itself, which serves as a

[44] Baxter, "In the World but Not of It," interview with the editors of *U.S. Catholic* 66 (August, 2001) 24–28, at 24.

[45] Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism" 53.

[46] Baxter, "Review Essay: The Non-Catholic Character of the 'Public Church,'" *Modern Theology* 11 (April 1995) 243–58, at 244. "Religion does not lay claim to the bourgeois; instead, the bourgeois lays claim to religion. Religion does not transform society; rather, bourgeois society does not rest until religion fits in with itself and with what it considers reasonable" (Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church: The Future of Christianity in a Postbourgeois World,* trans. Peter Mann [New York: Crossroad, 1981] 83).

[47] Baxter, "Review Essay" 246.

contrasting model to the state or secular citizenship.[48] Hence Baxter's concerns about the grave differences between the American polity and Christianity lead him to countercultural witness and practices of resistance.

In articulating his own theory of ethics, Baxter repeatedly defines himself against those following in the tradition of Murray.[49] Baxter narrates an historical account of American Catholics' desire to move (and success in moving) "from ghetto to mainstream," and ways in which this desire and transition have tempted Catholic social ethics into cooptation with national interests.[50] In particular, he decries Murray's efforts to demonstrate fundamental harmony between U.S. political structures and Catholicism.[51] Baxter criticizes Murray's distinction between the spiritual and temporal orders as the foundation for affirming religious liberty and American political structures, calling it a two-tiered understanding of nature and grace. Since the 1960s, Baxter notes, American Catholics have finally perceived themselves as capable of contributing to national public life, and as a result they have tailored social ethics to this undertaking.[52] The fact that the majority of Catholic social ethicists in the United States across the ideological spectrum point to Murray as a model reinforces the pervasive and

[48] See also John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) or Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1981) esp. part two, 89–154.

[49] See Baxter, "John Courtney Murray," in *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004) 150–64.

[50] On Baxter's account, those writing in Murray's tradition include most Catholic social ethicists today, whether they employ philosophical or theological methods and ranging from "neo-liberal to neo-conservative." He names, e.g., Charles Curran, Michael J. Himes, Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M., David Hollenbach, S.J., Dennis McCann, John Coleman, S.J., Richard John Neuhaus, and George Weigel. Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism," 68–69, note 2 (also J. Leon Hooper, S.J., and Todd Whitmore in his 7/18/02 interview).

[51] See Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends: An Evangelical Catholic Critique of United States Catholic History," *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (Fall 1996) 440–69, at 442. For a more in-depth look at what Baxter calls this "Americanist history," see William Halsey, *The Survival of American Innocence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1980), especially chaps. 3, 4, 8, and 9. Baxter also cites as the "most influential work locating Murray in the Americanist tradition," the work by Donald Pelotte, S.S.S., *John Courtney Murray: Theologian in Conflict* (New York: Paulist, 1976).

[52] Baxter, "In the World but Not of It" 25 (see n. 44 above). He notes that liberal or progressive Catholics have taken up this task by addressing issues of war, economic justice, and race, while neo-conservative social ethicists think we should introduce religious values into public discourse and provide the moral leadership that can return the U.S. to its founding vision.

ongoing significance of his "compatibility thesis" in Baxter's view.[53] Hence he charges that the social ethicists' contemporary attempts to provide an ethic for the nation subordinate the Church to the state's agenda. For in Baxter's view, while purporting to reform injustices, dominant Catholic social ethics simply serves to legitimate the dominant role of the state and capitalism by participating in the present social structures. To those who would suggest theologians and ethicists seek to reform precisely such inequities and injustices, Baxter replies that "this kind of reformist agenda only serves to reinforce the assumption that the only effective mechanism for implementing justice in the modern world is the modern state."[54]

Baxter charges that the nature-grace dualism at the root of Americanists' misguided attempts to seek consonance between American and Catholic values causes them to exclude theology or ultimate ends in public discourse. In his view, approaches such as Hehir's rest upon standard neo-Scholastic assumptions that segregate the natural from the supernatural, faith from reason, theology from politics, and therefore privatize faith. Consequently, he claims, these ethicists assume that only reason independently grounded from revelation ("autonomous reason") can gain currency amid religious pluralism. For Murray and his successors, this means religious beliefs and practices must be privatized, and that those associated with ecclesial practices such as liturgy are too tradition-specific to ground a public ethic for American society.[55] He laments that as a result, "theology is limited to functioning as a kind of conceptual reservoir providing ideals, principles, and themes to be applied to the policy issues facing the larger public called 'society.'"[56] Baxter objects to any such mediation of theology by social ethics, whether by the natural law approach one encounters in

[53] Baxter refers here to the compatibility between U.S. democracy and Catholicism. Baxter, "John Courtney Murray" 150–64, at 152.

[54] Baxter notes that a public church model is rarely sufficiently inclusive when "public" is understood in terms of the mechanism of the state—for it excludes those who live in economic depression, those uncounted in censuses, and the homeless. He criticizes the very notions of "freedom," "justice," "common good," and "civil society" as also concealing the dehumanizing world the bottom fifth of society inhabit. See Baxter, "'Blowing the Dynamite of the Church': Catholic Radicalism from a Catholic Radicalist Perspective," *The Church as Counterculture*, Michael L. Budde and Robert W. Brimlow (Albany: State University of New York, 2000) 195–212, at 207.

[55] Baxter, "Reintroducing Virgil Michel: Towards a Counter-Tradition of Catholic Social Ethics in the United States," *Communio* 24 (Fall 1997) 499–528, at 520–21. He notes that such privatization stems from the historical division of theology and social theory or religion and politics into two separate spheres, that then become mediated by the translations provided by social ethics in the postconciliar era (prior to Vatican II they were mediated by philosophical terms) (521).

[56] Ibid. 522.

Hehir, in more public theological approaches,[57] or in the very principles that pervade Catholic social encyclicals. Baxter believes that such "translation" only contributes to the false separation of theology and politics and fails to overcome this neo-Scholastic dichotomy between sacred and secular.[58] He rejects such separation of theological elements that disclose public truths and those that do not, and the consequent task of the social ethicist to make truth claims that can be tested in public discourse without the public signing onto the entire belief system grounding those claims.

Baxter is likewise suspicious of any standards for public conversation as put forth by theologians who call upon fellow Christians to respect rules for public discourse.[59] In stark contrast to Hehir's own methodology and belief that the absence of criteria for public discourse (such as technical competency, civil intelligibility, and public courtesy) constitutes an assault on pluralism,[60] Baxter rejects such rules and their standard justification. He disputes the rationale that allowing unmediated theological influence of politics amid pluralism is fundamentalistic or invites (dangers of) sacralized politics or theocratic claims. For Baxter, adherence to "rules for civil discourse" simply supports the liberal democratic state, which is itself responsible for equally deplorable moves to manifest destiny or religious wars, such as sustaining slavery, killing the indigenous of the Americas, and unleashing weapons of mass destruction.[61] Baxter criticizes theologians who play by such rules for their insistence on translating ecclesially specific

[57] In their *Fullness of Faith*, for example, Michael and Kenneth Himes "translate" theological concepts and commitments into principles to make explicit their social and policy implications. For example, the Trinity grounds an anthropology of mutuality and relationality, thereby theologically grounding a theory of human rights. See Himes and Himes, chap. 3, 55–73. See "Review Essay" for Baxter's critique of the Himes's approach.

[58] Baxter, "Review Essay" 248–51. As an example, Hauerwas charges that "justice as participation" (as endorsed by Dennis McCann and David Hollenbach, in this case) "turns out to be another way to say Catholics should be good Americans." See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Importance of Being Catholic: Unsolicited Advice from a Protestant Bystander," in his *In Good Company: The Church as Polis* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995) 91–108, at 105.

[59] Baxter asks: "What is Truthfulness? Intelligibility? Rightness? And so on." See his "Review Essay" 251–52. These echo others' objections that such standards for public discourse will inevitably be political all the way down or at least will unduly burden more evangelical or orthodox approaches that are more suspicious of reason or natural law.

[60] Hehir emphasizes that while "there is legitimacy to proposing a sectarian argument within the confines of a religious community . . . it does violence to the fabric of pluralism to expect acceptance of such an argument in the wider public arena" ("Responsibilities and Temptations of Power" 82).

[61] Baxter, "Review Essay" 252–53.

practices and beliefs into terms that a pluralism of groups can accept[62] (or, as Hehir would put it, terms they can understand). Baxter charges that the adoption of the liberal conceptual framework that would confer rules for civil dialogue as well as the mode of social ethics implicitly buying into the same framework's segregation of politics from religion further evidences how a public church stance necessarily falls too easily into uncritical embrace of the surrounding society.

According to Baxter the Church's task lies in formation and education; in other words, in appropriately Hauerwasian fashion, he holds that the most important task for the Church is to be the Church, to *be* a social ethic rather than adopt one.[63] Baxter himself notes that Catholic disciples should embody the teachings and the life of Christ in the world, as members of a body united in communion with one another in such a way that the world is able to see in its midst the actual life of Christ. He notes that such embodiment is how Catholics must understand politics, first and foremost. For when national allegiance trumps Christian identity and discipleship, the body of Christ "gets dismembered," and so "[t]he first task of the followers of Christ is simply to bring that life to the world."[64] Baxter emphasizes the importance of Catholics spending time with their families, reading the Bible and gathering for liturgy so that the Body of Christ is not dispersed and absorbed into American culture.

Hence in contrast to Hehir's aim to provide a public ethic for the nation, Baxter asserts social ethics should begin in contemplation, and the most important thing we can do is to invite the faithful to observe the Sabbath. Contemplation, he notes, is a form of seeing, and only then can we begin to imagine and to walk away from many of the things we should walk away from.[65] As concrete alternatives to the dominant approach he opposes, Baxter advocates enacting the works of mercy on local levels, embodying alternatives to the surrounding culture of violence and mounting social

[62] Baxter, "Catholicism and Liberalism: Kudos and Questions for Communion Ecclesiology," *The Review of Politics* 60 (Fall 1998) 743–64, at 745–46.

[63] See Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, part 2, and *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University, 1983) esp. 99–101.

[64] Baxter, "In the World but Not of It" 27.

[65] Baxter, "Rekindling the Spiritual Revolution: Merton and Company on Faith and Reason," address delivered to "New Wine, New Wineskins" Conference, Notre Dame, Ind. (July 22, 2002). In his plenary address at the 2004 annual meeting of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Baxter made this point with the example of the ongoing war in Iraq, arguing that because the discourse of Catholic social ethics is aimed at policymakers rather than pastorally directed at the Catholic laity, it fails to help Catholics consider in what parts of the war they should refuse to participate ("A Sign of Peace: The Mission of the Church to the Nations," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 59 [2004] 19–41).

criticisms from these alternate contexts alone. Thus Baxter's own methodology entails a substantial critique of mainstream social ethics that mediates fully theological visions of reality via theological and philosophical principles and dialogues with the wider society toward common goals.[66]

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PERSPECTIVES ON GOVERNMENT

Hehir's Theological Foundations

Hehir's understanding of the Catholic social mission in the world is grounded in incarnational, sacramental, and social principles. God enters humanity not just to accompany us, Hehir notes, but rather Christ transforms human nature, so that transforming the human and whatever is of human significance is part of the Christian vocation and continuing the ministry of the kingdom.[67] The sacramental principle complements this idea, confirming the conviction that the Incarnation is extended in time and the transformation of the human in the liturgical life of the community. Hehir's sacramental understanding also extends beyond the liturgical community, however, for "to be touched sacramentally is to see the incarnational principle at work in the world," and "the work of the kingdom being carried on in the midst of history."[68] The social principle points to the deeper meaning of public and political existence, setting the context for the "transformative ministry of the kingdom" that Hehir favors.[69] This prin-

[66] Baxter admits that his proposals call for a major shift that requires an "intellectual revolution" so that Catholics start to think more like Mennonites, who, he insists, engage the world as well (Baxter interview, 7/18/02).

[67] Hehir, "Personal Faith, the Public Church, and the Role of Theology," convocation address at the opening of the 180th year, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 26, no. 1 (1996) 4–5, at 5.

[68] Ibid. 5. According to Hehir, even the secular character of social service and advocacy should be understood as the extension of the scriptural and liturgical work of the church, in light of this sacramental vision.

[69] Ibid. 5. The work of Henri de Lubac has been foundational for Hehir's conception of this essential social character of Catholicism. According to de Lubac, Catholicism "is social in the deepest sense of the word: not merely in its application in the field of natural institutions but first and foremost in itself, in the heart of its mystery, in the essence of its dogma." The ways in which de Lubac highlighted the social character of Catholicism as expressed in its sacramental life, its conception of community, and its doctrine countered the isolation of theology from social issues, thereby placing Catholicism "at the center of the world" (See Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: A Study of the Corporate Destiny of Mankind* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1958) x). Hehir notes that according to de Lubac, "the faith and the church *are* social before they articulate a response to social needs and social questions." See Hehir, "The Church in the World: Responding to the Call of the Council," in

ciple grounds ecclesial public ministry in Christian convictions of common creation, human consecration through the Incarnation, and the expectation of a common destiny, such that the public Church's defense of human rights and dignity and pursuit of just institutions makes historically manifest God's creative and redemptive historical interventions.[70]

Hehir's theological foundations echo those outlined in *Gaudium et spes.* As he articulates it: "The structure of the conciliar argument is anthropological in its foundation, eschatological in its culmination, ecclesiological in it focus and christological in its content."[71] By grounding Catholic social teaching and social ministry in the service of the human person and relating social ministry to the eschaton, Hehir notes, Vatican II provides for the first time a theological foundation for Church-world engagement.[72] Hehir also adopts Yves Congar's eschatology, a transformative view that closely connects ecclesiology and eschatology and in which human efforts consecrated and transformed by the Holy Spirit help bring about the kingdom.[73] Hehir asserts that this perspective structures the Church-world problem:

> . . . [t]he kingdom is both present in history and transcends history: it is within us and ahead of us. The created world, while ambivalent and ambiguous in terms of its orientation toward the kingdom because of sin, provides the raw material for the heavenly Jerusalem. The work of human intelligence and creativity which perfects the created order points toward the culmination of history in the eschaton—hence the lasting value of human work. Both the Church and world are destined for the kingdom, both serve the purposes of the kingdom but using different means with different purposes in the overall design of God.[74]

Most of Hehir's work does not rely explicitly on biblical foundations, for, as I have noted, he favors philosophical and empirical approaches in the analysis and advocacy that comprise the majority of his own work. Hehir is far more likely to draw upon the tradition of Catholic social teaching and conciliar documents than he is to draw directly upon Scripture, even in his more theological moments.[75] This relative inattention to the use of Scrip-

---

Faith and the Intellectual Life: Marianist Award Lectures, ed. James L. Heft, S.M. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1996) 101–19, at 103–4.

[70] Hehir, "Personal Faith, the Public Church, and the Role of Theology" 5.

[71] Hehir, "The Church in the World: Responding to the Call of the Council" 113.

[72] Ibid. 114.

[73] See Yves M.-J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of the Laity* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1957) 81 as cited in Hehir, "The Church in the World: Responding to the Call of the Council" 109.

[74] Hehir, "The Church in the World" 109–10.

[75] Hehir does allow that there exist inherent tensions in biblical texts addressing God and Caesar or Christianity and the world (Hehir, "The Church in the World: Responding to the Call of the Council" 103). To name just one of his examples: "St. Paul's theology of history depicts the whole cosmos awaiting redemption ('. . . the

ture to inform the complex particulars of social problems stands in sharp contrast to Baxter's more evangelical approach. Baxter charges that for Hehir and others like him, Scripture does not have normative function, for it provides attitudes and directives without adequately informing concrete actions and decisions or "giving us a world to inhabit."[76] Baxter recently reiterated his criticism of this dominant phenomenon, the fact that Scripture informs ethics only paranetically in Catholic social ethics.[77]

Baxter's Theological Foundations

In contrast to these theological emphases on the goodness of creation, Baxter's own appropriation of the Christian story and liturgical tradition focuses upon the radical demands of Christian discipleship. Baxter's work is more scripturally grounded and is imbued with the supernaturalism and personalism of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement, the movement's theologian, Paul Hanly Furfey, and the work of Virgil Michel, O.S.B. These figures' emphases on the Sermon on the Mount and a perfectionist ethic in imitation of the life of Jesus have significantly impacted Baxter's methodology. Baxter summarizes the Catholic Worker Movement, begun by Day and Peter Maurin in 1933, as a "non-state-centered, theologically-informed, radicalist perspective."[78] His approach has been influenced by a Worker radicalism in the sense of grounding the roots of social construction in the work of Christ, and in refusing to conform to the (dis)order imposed by the modern nation-state.[79] Day rejects reformist agendas in collaboration with the state in favor of a localist understanding of government and politics grounded in the power of the cross.[80]

Baxter's ethic has also been influenced by Day's "supernaturalism." In contrast to those writing in the Murray tradition who, Baxter argues, prescind from consideration of final ends in discussing social ethics or politics, "[t]he Catholic Worker embodies an instinct within Catholicism against confining final ends to a sphere called 'the supernatural' and then divorcing them from 'the natural,' 'the social,' the 'political,' or 'the eco-

---

universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendor of the children of God,' Rom 8:21), but he warns the disciples not to be conformed to the pattern of the world (Rom 12:2)" (ibid.).

[76] Baxter interview, 7/18/02.

[77] Baxter, "A Sign of Peace: The Mission of the Church to the Nations" 30.

[78] Baxter, "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church" 200.

[79] Ibid. 207.

[80] Ibid. 207. See Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981) 268.

nomic.'"[81] Such supernaturalism permeates Day's writings,[82] as she articulates particular practices that constitute a "supernaturalized life" in her "thick descriptions of feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving hospitality to the stranger, instructing the ignorant (that is, picketing), growing food on the land . . ." Baxter notes that this reveals how Maurin's "new society within the shell of the old" where "it is easier for people to be good" is entirely attainable in the present via the power of the Holy Spirit and saints' intercession.[83] This approach directly informs Baxter's, though he explains that it has remained marginalized because such a new society is considered: " 'spiritual' rather than 'temporal,' 'supernatural' rather than 'natural,' 'ecclesial' rather than 'social.' It embodied 'charity' rather than 'justice.' " These terms are false oppositions, of course, produced by the separation of theology and social theory that dominated Catholic scholarly discourse in the preconciliar era, but the effect, as Peter Maurin saw so clearly, was to confine the power or the *dynamis* of Christ to an asocial sphere where it lay dormant.[84] The supernaturalist approach of the Catholic Worker movement has deeply impacted Baxter's own ethic in his attempts to integrate theology and politics. From this perspective, reformist attempts at structural change simply paint a veneer over the basic woundedness of social structures themselves, and Catholic workers typically understand their direct outreach as providing for those who never fit into such systems. A public church model "runs counter to the consistent claims of Maurin and Day that true society is rooted in the supernatural life of Christ and cannot be abstracted from the beliefs and practices of the Church."[85]

Like Day, another major theological influence on Baxter, Paul Hanly Furfey, presents a more integrated understanding of the relationship between the natural and supernatural. Furfey's radicalism is rooted in Scripture's "hard sayings"; he warns that we must have the courage to follow

[81] Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 465.

[82] Day bookends her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness,* with accounts of the sacraments of confession and communion.

[83] Baxter, "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church" 202. See Day, *The Long Loneliness* 170.

[84] Baxter, "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church" 202. See also Paul Hanly Furfey, *Fire on the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1936) 202.

[85] Ibid. 205. Further, Baxter notes that such an approach "fails to take seriously a contention that has been central to the life of the Catholic Worker from the beginning, namely that the modern nation-state is a fundamentally unjust and corrupt set of institutions whose primary function is to preserve the interests of the ruling class, by coercive and violent means if necessary—and there will always come a time when it is necessary" (ibid.).

Jesus and suffer as he did and not to water down the Lord's teachings.[86] Furfey insists that all Catholics are called to holiness and he distinguishes between two moral codes, the authentic Christian moral code based on the New Testament ideal and the popular code based on what is socially respectable.[87] In Furfey's view, Jesus summed up his entire message when he dared his disciples to be perfect even as the heavenly Father is perfect.[88] In his debates with Murray on intercredal cooperation,[89] Furfey criticized Murray's natural law approach for emphasizing only those aspects of Catholic teaching that are in concert with liberalism and downplaying distinctively Catholic, supernatural ("unpopular") teachings such as the significance of the Eucharist, the union of Church and state, or hell as a penalty for social evil.[90] Unlike Murray who excluded final ends from the realm of political activity, arguing that natural law could serve to carve out and achieve limited human goals amid the real situation of religious pluralism, Furfey found fundamentally deficient the depiction of any human activity that did not order it to our supernatural end.[91]

Furfey also advocates a Christian personalism motivated by charity that takes the form of the spiritual and corporeal works of mercy, including

[86] Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 138–39. For an example of this approach, see Furfey, "Five Hard Sayings Repugnant to Natural Man," *America* 56 (April 3, 1937) 604–5. Curran notes that when Furfey met Day in 1934 he found what he was searching for: the use of supernatural means to achieve the social ideal by taking the New Testament literally. See Curran, 134.

[87] Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 142.

[88] Furfey, *Fire on the Earth* 135.

[89] Furfey's charged that intercredal cooperation on the basis of natural law was an unacceptable form of "Catholic conformism." See, Paul Hanly Furfey, "Correspondence," *Theological Studies* 4 (September 1943) 467–72; "Intercredal Cooperation: Its Limitations," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 111 (September 1944) 161–75; "Why Does Rome Discourage Socio-Religious Intercredalism?" *American Ecclesiastical Review* 112 (May 1945) 364–74; "Are You Ashamed of the Gospel?" *Integrity* 1 (October 1946) 26–31. Baxter argues that this debate between Murray and Furfey, and Murray's distinction between incarnational and eschatological humanism prefigure the subsequent stances of James Gustafson and Dorothy Day. I would add that it anticipates underlying differences in the stances of Hehir and Baxter himself, much of reformist Catholic social ethics on the one hand and a more rigorist, radicalist approach in the tradition of Day, Furfey on the other.

[90] Joseph A. Komonchak, "John Courtney Murray and the Redemption of History: Natural Law and Theology," in *John Courtney Murray and the Growth of Tradition*, ed. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., and Todd David Whitmore (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1996) 60–81, at 72.

[91] See John Courtney Murray, S.J., "Correspondence," *Theological Studies* 4 (1943) 472–74; Wilfred Parsons and Murray, "Intercredal Cooperation" (Washington: The Catholic Association for International Peace, 1943); Murray, "On the Problem of Co-operation: Some Clarifications," *American Ecclesiastical Review* 112 (March, 1945) 194–214.

workers' cooperatives, projects promoting racial integration, and agrarian reform. Baxter supports Furfey's duty of bearing witness and technique of non-participation, efforts that call into question existing social orders and engender Christian alternatives to those orders.[92] Furfey contextualizes such strategies eschatologically, "thereby relativizing the demand for effective action, for immediate and wide ranging results," maintaining that the mystical body is largely hidden and its effects only "faintly traceable through the clamor of history."[93] Furfey's "supernatural sociology"[94] orders morality to the supernatural, as natural law morality (otherwise) "quickly degenerates to a minimalism that promotes conformity to the status quo. A supernatural morality, on the other hand, nourished by the life of the church, calls on Catholics to live heroic lives patterned after the example of Christ and the saints."[95] This operative eschatology stands in contrast to Congar's transformative eschatology that influences Hehir.

The personalist vision of Virgil Michel also influences Baxter's method. Michel's social theory similarly imagines a society that is not state centered, "one regenerated by the Christ-life, not through the bureaucratic organization of secular power, but through small-scale, practice-based communities."[96] Baxter emphasizes that Michel did not use theological ideas as symbols performing functions, but rather as virtues and practices to be embodied in particular ways.[97] Baxter contrasts Michel's vision (and his own) with those reformists who would find this "untranslated" understanding of justice too particularistic to contribute to the public discourse of a pluralistic society. Baxter has been influenced by this call for "the creation of an alternative space from which the body of Christ can mount a critique of the debilitating life-forms produced by capitalism and the nation-state and at the same time generates forms of life exemplifying the true nature

[92] Furfey, *Fire on the Earth,* chaps. 6 and 7 as cited in Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 464.

[93] Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 464. See Furfey, *Fire on the Earth* 92–97 and 46–50.

[94] Paul Hanly Furfey, *Fire on the Earth* (New York: Macmillan, 1936) 32, 51, 1–21.

[95] Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism" 62.

[96] Ibid. 525.

[97] As Baxter articulates it: ". . . for Michel, human dignity, community and participation are not mere 'themes' to be extracted from ecclesial symbols and then applied to 'social' problems; rather, they are to be embodied in specific ways as exemplified in the liturgy itself. And . . for Michel, it is not necessary to make a connection between faith and justice; that connection is already made in and through the action of the liturgy. . . . In short, for Michel, 'justice' is not *derived* from the Christ-life. It is *embodied* in the Christ-life" ("Reintroducing Virgil Michel" 523).

and purpose of God's creation."[98] Such a liturgy-cast social theory, Baxter argues, would allow Christians to discern all that exists beyond the liturgy and distinguish all that advances human flourishing from all that diminishes it. He admits that this does not preclude reading the signs of the times, but he does insist that the liturgy itself is indispensable for reading them correctly.[99] Baxter's appropriation of Michel's liturgy-cast social theory[100] reinforces Christian distinctiveness and departs from Hehir's sacramental principle, which yields a transformative methodology of engagement with the world; the potential that liturgy and Christian community hold for cultivating such discernment of the signs of the times, however, presents a potential point of convergence to which I shall return below.

View of the Government and its Role

While Hehir often emphasizes that his public church posture does not imply complete identity of Church with society or culture, his is an embrace of the world on its own terms and an openness not only to collaboration with governmental structures, but also to learning from secular society. Hehir frequently reiterates that, despite inevitable debates about the precise nature and scope of the state's role, the fact that the government has an active positive role to play is beyond question in Catholic social teaching. His stance reflects a Thomistic perspective on the necessary connection between law and morality and the role of the government in helping secure minimum demands of justice, fundamental human rights, and the common good. In the "consistent ethic of life" framework he worked out with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, Hehir articulates a particular conception of the state, one that is activist but not totalitarian, and whose activism is

[98] Ibid. 525. Liturgical theologian Mark Searle pointed out that, on the other hand, "the liturgical assembly reflects, not the justice of the Kingdom, but the divisions of social groupings," which he said represents a tension rather than an achievement, something given yet always to be realized. See Searle, "Serving the Lord with Justice," in his *Liturgy and Social Justice* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1980) 13–35, at 25.

[99] Baxter, "Reintroducing Virgil Michel" 525. Baxter likens Michel's understanding of the liturgy's function here to George Lindbeck's concept in his *Nature of Doctrine* of "absorbing the universe into the biblical world." Similarly, the liturgy functions as "a complex set of gestures, rituals, texts, and images that discloses the destiny of the universe and moves it toward that destiny" (Baxter, 526; Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984] 135).

[100] For a different understanding of the legacy of Michel with respect to liturgy and social justice, see Mark Searle, "The Liturgy and Catholic Social Doctrine," in *The Future of the Catholic Church in America: Major Papers of the Virgil Michel Symposium* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1991) 43–73.

limited by the concepts of public order and subsidiarity.[101] Hehir calls for the Church's engagement with the state and wider society both as an institutional presence in civil society and as an advocate in policy-making.[102] Thus Hehir's views on the potentially positive role of government and opportunities for the ecclesial engagement made possible by the pluralism of power in the United States directly inform his social ethic, encompassing church-society and church-state collaboration on the levels of public debate, policy analysis and advocacy, and institutional contributions.[103]

In rather stark contrast to Hehir's Thomistic view of the state as a vital instrument in helping to achieve the common good, Baxter views the state as a tool of violent coercion, an impersonal bureaucracy likely to denigrate human dignity, and a danger to Christians who choose to engage it as a competing object of loyalty. In Baxter's words: "We have to remember that Christ died at the hands of the state—and that drama is being reenacted, one way or another, again and again."[104] Baxter warns that the kind of civic participation affirmed by the bishops in their quadrennial "Faithful Citizenship" documents is a risky business for Christians. According to Baxter: "We should be very careful to identify ourselves as Catholics first and as American way down the line. And we should remember that our very catholicity, the universal character of our church, calls into question the local allegiance of any nation-state."[105] Activities of a public Church fail to sufficiently attend to Christians' status as aliens in this life and their citizenship in "another *patria*."[106] Rather, in his view, "A truly Christian

[101] Hehir, "The Consistent Ethic: Public Policy Implications," in *Consistent Ethic of Life*, ed. Thomas G. Fuechtmann (Chicago: Loyola University, 1988) 218–36, at 224–26.

[102] In Hehir's view, addressing domestic issues today requires both advocacy on the public policy level and seeking just investment of public funds (e.g., for housing or health care needs) and matching efforts by "a clear strategy of how Catholic institutions are prepared to play a larger role in concert with public institutions" ("The Social Role of the Church: Leo XIII, Vatican II and John Paul II," in *Catholic Social Thought and the New World Order: Building on One Hundred Years*, ed. Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C., and John W. Houck [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993] 29–50, at 45).

[103] Hehir also notes those who emphasize the culture-shaping role of the Church (often as opposed to a legislative role) are important, because you can exhaust the legislative agenda and an activist church must retain more long-term goals than that. However, this has not been his own emphasis (Hehir interview, 7/13/02).

[104] Baxter, "In the World but Not of It," 28.

[105] Baxter, "Is This a Just War? Two Catholic Perspectives on the War in Afghanistan," interview between editors and Baxter and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *U.S. Catholic* 66 (December 2001) 12–16, at 14.

[106] Stanley Hauerwas uses the term "resident aliens" to refer to Christians in the world. See Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989).

politics, one that resists accommodation to the nation-state, can be fostered only by an account of the incarnation that draws on the specific practices taught and exemplified by Christ."[107] In a recent address Baxter nuanced a view of total dissonance between Church and state to argue that the Church teaches the legitimate nature of the state "in principle but not in fact," warning that the actual state can veer from natural law, misuse reason, fail to protect the universal common good and thereby lose legitimate authority.[108] Baxter notes that the major difference between a radicalist approach like his and an "Americanist" one like Hehir's lies in different understandings of the nature of the *polis* in social ethics: "[In] the Americanist tradition, the *polis* is identified with the modern state, in particular with the United States of America, and as a result, the state is seen as the primary mechanism for the implementation of justice. In the radicalist tradition, by contrast, the *polis* is identified with Christ and the church, and with smaller, practice-based communities whose forms of life are closely patterned after the body of Christ and the church."[109] The theological foundations and perspectives on the state undergirding Hehir's and Baxter's approaches further elucidate their dissimilar methodologies. I turn now to a comparative analysis of the two approaches in an attempt to clarify each in light of the other.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

I have now observed two fairly divergent approaches in contemporary Catholic social ethics. Does Hehir's natural law approach give away too much of Christian distinctiveness or does Baxter's stance risk irresponsibility to the range of social problems in a pluralistic environment? What may we conclude amid the inherent limits of any one approach? I turn now to a comparative analysis of each model's conception of politics, paradigm of social responsibility, and inherent risks in order to shed light upon their insights and limits.

As the preceding overview suggests, Hehir and Baxter conceive of politics differently, something that significantly impacts their distinct stances. Baxter charges that reformist models presuppose that theology is not inherently political, and consequently perceive a need to rely on political structures that are non-ecclesial and use modes of mediation (natural law, social principles, public theology). His own approach reflects a Christian

[107] Baxter, "Review Essay" 255.

[108] Baxter, "A Sign of Peace: The Mission of the Church to the Nations." This distinction was made in the context of a nation such as the United States engaging in a preemptive war with Iraq.

[109] Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism" 53–54.

understanding of politics that must be "presented through historical texts and images which have no permanent, transcendental place apart from the practices and forms of life that produce them."[110] In contrast to the institutional and theoretical separation of theology from politics out of which Hehir operates, the Catholic radicalist tradition "promotes interaction between theology and politics and economics based on its claim that philosophical reason becomes too easily distorted when it is not elevated and corrected by the truths of revelation."[111] Thus unlike Hehir who perceives points of contact between the American national project and Catholicism that enable fruitful engagement (e.g., commitments to justice, equality, and participation), Baxter finds no such harmony between Catholic and the U.S. agendas. Baxter fears American politics relegates religious truth claims to a separate sphere such that in Augustinian terms American politics is not genuine politics at all. He writes: "A genuine politics, by contrast, is grounded in the service of 'true religion' from which flow 'true justice' and 'true peace' as embodied by the citizenry, not of any earthly city but of the pilgrim City of God."[112] This difference in conception of politics, related to different ecclesiologies, underlies significant disparities between a public church and radicalist model.

In fact, Hehir and Baxter each charge the other's stance with segregating faith and reason or theology and politics, Baxter maintaining that his own supernaturalist view does not separate either at all and Hehir arguing that our faith itself compels us to participate in the public sphere. According to Hehir supernatural concerns impel us to have a concern for a wide array of temporal matters, and action in the natural realm remains implicitly supernatural (e.g., advocacy for just wages reflects the concern for human dignity rooted in *imago Dei,* the Incarnation and in the prophets' call to enact justice for the poor and marginalized). For Baxter, the supernatural should not be distinguished from the natural in this way, and such media-

[110] Baxter, "Review Essay" 256. Thus, underlying differences in approach, in part, reside in these theoretical differences about the anti-foundationalist challenge. Baxter and those he writes against represent two different routes, in his view, beyond the neo-Thomist dichotomy between the natural and supernatural: "one way seeks *rapprochement* with the Enlightenment and with autonomous secular order through a reconstrual of the 'natural,' while the other finds in Christian tradition resources generating, in counter-Enlightenment fashion, a *theology* of politics grounded in 'the supernatural'" (Baxter, "Review Essay" 256). The distinctions between antifoundationalism and the conflicting claims of experiential-expressivist and cultural-linguistic approaches reveal the depth of the differences between the two emphases. See Kristin Heyer, "How Does Theology Go Public? Rethinking the Debate between David Tracy and George Lindbeck," *Political Theology* 5 (July 2004) 307–27.

[111] Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism" 60–61.

[112] Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 447.

tion dilutes the richness and fullness of the Gospel's call—as well as its radicalism. On his view, such advocacy bypasses the urgency of meeting workers' needs on a direct, personal level and risks complicity with the capitalist system and nation-state, structures antithetical to Christian values.

A more localist approach such as Baxter's is frequently charged with being ineffective or irresponsible to wider society, in contrast to models that engage in ecumenical and interreligious cooperation or wider-scale advocacy.[113] Amid the complexities of the contemporary global situation, the impact and scope of smaller-scale efforts will pale in comparison to the effects that federal budget priorities, laws, and programs will have on the lives of the majority of those in need. This is not to say that both charity and advocacy do not comprise our call as Catholic Christians. Rather, amid the problems posed in a globalized economy, local efforts alone (or nonparticipation alone) may not advance justice (or, arguably, peace) as effectively as structural forces can.

Baxter would counter, however, that this critique misunderstands radicalism. He notes those who praise the worker movement as an inspiring example yet condemn it as ineffective or irresponsible institutionally restrict its significance to the realm of "individual witness."[114] Baxter objects that such critiques emanate from this dominant paradigm rather than looking to gospel imperatives as standards of judgment. He writes:

> . . . the [Catholic] Worker *is* effective, once it is clarified that effectiveness must be measured not in terms of public policy making but in terms of achieving the good as displayed in the incarnate life of Christ. . . the Worker *is* responsible, precisely because "responsibility" should be construed not in terms of participating in the political machinery of the United States, but in personalist terms of serving the Mystical Body of Christ. True Christian responsibility means performing the works of mercy on behalf of the poor, the homeless, and others of the least among us who are Christ in our midst.[115]

Thus Baxter insists that meanings and standards of "success" must be determined not by national politics but by the politics of our supernatural end. Yet how do the two interact? It seems that at their best, both models entail bringing the consequences of our supernatural end to bear on our

[113] Curran has raised the charge of ineffectiveness against Furfey's approach (and by extension, that advocated by Baxter). See Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 167.

[114] Baxter adds in "equally condescending and misleading ways." See his "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church" 204–5. Baxter analyzes George Weigel's depiction of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker in his *Tranquilitas Ordinis* (New York: Oxford University, 1987) 148–73 and Charles Curran's portrayal of Day and Furfey in his *American Catholic Social Ethics* 130–71.

[115] Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 465.

shared life together in different ways (rather than an inevitable selling out of gospel distinctiveness by anyone who engages structures) amid de facto pluralism. Further, these same government structures that Baxter dismisses out of hand as tools of violence or impersonal bureaucracy can serve as tools of distributive justice, and it seems we should characterize them as ambivalent. Baxter contests the Catholic tradition's efforts to characterize certain governmental institutions "natural" or "divinely ordained," yet it is difficult to deny amid the complexities of modern life that, in some cases, at its best, the government serves as a means to accomplish together just and charitable measures we cannot accomplish alone.

Hehir concedes that Christians could easily arrive at Baxter's position, that there should remain room in the Church for that model. He grants that prophetic critiques offered by someone such as Baxter positively serve to test the motives and tactics of a public church. Hehir notes that he does not think it necessary for Christians to arrive at Baxter's position, however, for it is not necessary theologically, ecclesiologically, or morally to conclude that there is little common ground between Church and society or nature and grace.[116] Conversely, Baxter notes that "theologically, scripturally, sacramentally, from the Acts of the Apostles and patristic writings, we are clearly called to a distinctive Christian ethic."[117] Hehir is quick to emphasize, however, that there is no simple identity between the two methods and that "someone in a collaboration stance does have the responsibility of constantly testing that collaboration: on what issues, with what stance, by what justification." He ultimately maintains, however, that Baxter's stance draws too great a chasm between the traditions of reason and revelation, and between the Church's witness to the kingdom and its participation in helping shape history in the direction of the kingdom.[118]

While Baxter's concerns about accommodation and the complete lack of harmony between Church and culture may be overdrawn as Hehir rightly suggests, Baxter's instruction about the dangers of some parts of culture to Christian identity and the need for constant discernment are well taken. Hehir sometimes errs on the side of insufficient hesitation and a related insufficient attention to sin. For example, Hehir rarely speaks of dangers associated with public engagement. On the one hand, Hehir's warnings against overdrawing the divisions between the sinfulness of secular society and the saintliness of the church community are important. Sharp line drawing between Church and society in such a manner is increasingly untenable. Nevertheless, Baxter's insights illustrate that at the least a public church model must install mechanisms to prevent overly optimistic par-

[116] Hehir interview, 7/13/02.
[117] Baxter interview, 7/18/02.
[118] Hehir interview, 7/13/02.

ticipation or accommodation. Hehir's hesitations to focus on the dangers to Christianity of an activist Church highlight this risk.

Hence both methodologies present particular risks, and these dangers point to the importance of maintaining mechanisms of self-critique that guard against both distortion from within—mechanisms for internal self-critique and structures of participation—and distortion from without—mechanisms for discerning what type of engagement or resistance is required. While Baxter's reservations about the sinful character of the state and secular society leave him well positioned to critique Hehir and others on grounds of accommodation, an approach such as Baxter's that focuses on ecclesial formation as witness entails risks of its own. A self-contained model risks vulnerability to a type of distortion from within by virtue of remaining relatively isolated from critique on the part of other modes of construing reality. In James Gustafson's terms "doctrine becomes idolatry," and such a model may be inattentive to limits or sin within the Church and God's activity in the wider world.[119] Hauerwas has responded to such critiques with the defense that a model such as Baxter's and his own entails sufficient "reality checks," for ". . . one of the tests of the truthfulness of Christian convictions cannot help being the faithfulness of the church."[120] The extent to which such assessment sufficiently ensues in groups that generally construe the influence between religious and nonreligious worlds unidirectionally or whose critiques typically focus upon the outside world remains debatable.

Catholic Universalism and Sectarian Temptations

Roman Catholic understandings of mediation, creation, and the limits of human understandings of God pose several fundamental challenges to a radicalist approach such as Baxter's. Yet dismissing a radicalist approach as morally attractive yet socially irresponsible or isolationist may miss its nuances and integrity. I shall briefly explore these challenges to radicalism and its unequivocal rejection as a "sectarian temptation" to further assess the mutual critique each stance offers the other.

The Catholic emphasis on mediation highlights a greater continuity this world and the kingdom of God (without denying some discontinuity) than we encounter in Baxter.[121] In contrast to a Catholic emphasis on mediation

[119] James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 40 (1985) 83–94, at 84, 86.

[120] Stanley Hauerwas, *Christian Existence Today: Essays on Church, World*; and *Living in Between* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 1988) 11.

[121] Curran rightly points out how Catholic radicalism's division between sin and grace or church and world "fails to give enough importance to the reality of the goodness of creation which is present in the world, overestimates the presence of sin in the world, fails to recognize that grace is already present and to a limited

and its social and ecclesiological consequences, the radicalism of an approach such as Baxter's risks ecclesiological sectarianism. Hehir advocates a characteristically Catholic complementarity over dialectical tension: grace and nature, faith and reason, Church and world. Yet the mediation that ensues, as borne out in natural law language in encyclicals, attention to the search for coherence with outside knowledge, or overt engagement in American public life, risks compromise in Baxter's view. As we have seen, Baxter contends the specificity of "untranslated" Christian realities cannot be removed in such ways without "compromising authentically Christian convictions."[122] Yet it is difficult to deny this emphasis on mediation remains central to a Catholic approach.

In addition to this tradition of mediation, God's creation and redemption of all humanity and God's transcendence of human communities' comprehension (even Christians') challenges an "excessive ecclesiocentrism." As David Hollenbach puts it, the same God in whom Christians believe is the God of all creation, and "for this reason it is possible to hope that the Christian story as told in the Scriptures is not entirely foreign or strange to those outside the church. It can raise echoes and perhaps recognition among all who share in the quest for the human good."[123] A more self-contained model (that Baxter's approach at least risks) contradicts catholicity, as the God we believe in is God of all that is. Whereas our status as pilgrims leads Baxter to call for distancing ourselves from the fleeting earthly community beyond the Church and its temptations, it leads Hollenbach to conclude that we are always "on the way" toward an adequate understanding of the full human good and therefore we should seek to "articulate the meaning of biblical faith in dialogue with other traditions' answers to the ultimate questions about the human good," which cannot adequately ensue in closed communities.[124]

This provisional quality of our grasp on the fullness of God's revelation and its directives for how we should live between the times suggests that it is not only collaboration with the state or secular forces that risks idolatrous tendencies. Baxter assumes that such collaboration rests in Catholics' desires to become relevant on secular terms (vis-à-vis the state, the acad-

---

extent redeeming the present, and sees only discontinuity between the present and the eschatological fullness" (Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 168).

[122] Scott H. Moore, "The End of Convenient Stereotypes: How the *First Things* and Baxter Controversies Inaugurate Extraordinary Politics," *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (Winter 1998) 17–47, at 30.

[123] Hollenbach, "The Common Good in the Postmodern Epoch: What Role for Theology?" in *Religion, Ethics and the Common Good*, ed. James Donahue and M. Theresa Moser, Annual Publication of the College Theology Society 41 (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1996) 3–22, at 16.

[124] Ibid. 20.

emy), to continue to move from ghetto to mainstream in a way that he implies compromises Christian distinctiveness and purity. Risks remain equally inherent in a model such as Baxter's, however, such as spiritual pride. Insofar as Baxter's stance reflects Furfey's triumphalist ecclesiology, Catholic understandings of salvation and the pope's own affirmation that each human is included in the mystery of Redemption challenge its implications for the status of other religions.[125] For Christians do not have a monopoly on grace (or salvation).[126] In short, it risks an exclusivity challenged by Catholic universalism.

In his recent discussion of religious radicalism in public life in the wake of the terrorist attacks in the United States on 9/11, J. Leon Hooper suggests that true radicalism involves inclusivity, not bright line-drawing to distinguish groups and stake exclusive claims.[127] He calls Dorothy Day most radical not when she was actively demonstrating against nuclear bomb shelter drills or committing to live with the poor and encounter Christ there, but "when she would not allow her religious values to exclude anyone from God's redeeming presence."[128] He argues that, "We are learning that any faith that traps the God of love, God compassionate and merciful, within our moral and doctrinal commitments, is a form of idolatry."[129] Although his reflections are made with respect to Day and Murray in the wake of terrorist attacks in the name of Islam, his sentiments regarding exclusivist temptations speak to methodological tensions discussed here as well: "To claim only the full realization of justice, or only the full realization of mercy, is always an attempt to play God, and thus to deny the God who continues to create and reveal . . . The corrective to this idolatry is not abandonment of our hard fought moral discriminations, but lies in a willingness to live with them while simultaneously we acknowledge that God's embracing love reaches beyond them."[130] The type of public engagement Baxter decries might serve to help resist such ideological distortion from within.[131] Radicalist claims that realizations of mercy and justice will occur only within Christian communities (particularly when they come

[125] See Vatican II, *Nostra aetate (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)*; Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* no. 53.

[126] Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching 1891–Present* 43.

[127] J. Leon Hooper, S.J., "Religious Idolatries and Absolutist Claims," Woodstock forum on the topic "Being Radically Religious in Public Life," *Woodstock Report*, June 2002, 8–9.

[128] Hooper implies this was perhaps easier for Day to do for the poor than for capitalist managers.

[129] Hooper, "Being Radically Religious in Public Life" 8.

[130] Ibid. 8–9.

[131] In a somewhat analogous critique of a George Lindbeck's approach, David Tracy rightly fears that if theology does not engage critically and self-critically in the global, interdisciplinary conversation—which his own model embraces—it will

together as the Body of Christ rather than when they engage "outsiders") at least risk the idolatry that Hooper signals.

In a recent address Baxter signaled renewed attention to each of these risks, arguing that his approach need not imply ecclesial narrowness and underscoring the fact that grace perfects nature rather than destroys it.[132] Baxter noted that belief in the divinity of Christ need not lead to the denial of creation or ecclesial narrowness; rather, the fact that all things are made through God should open us up to other cultures. He referred to a dialectical task in which recovering our true nature entails letting go of our false natures, citing Aquinas, yet reminded his audience that grace sometimes disturbs (false) nature. This approach seems to depart from his characteristically operative grace/sin dichotomy (rather than a nature/grace interaction) which works only to the extent that "the world" is sinful. Yet Baxter noted that a mode like that of Anthony of the Desert does not necessarily suggest mere withdrawal, but rather "the desert becomes the city."[133] This conception is suggestive of how Baxter understands the responsibility of a radicalist approach in contrast to accusations of sectarian withdrawal.

Gustafson and others have depicted an approach such as Baxter's as necessarily setting the Church over and against the world or succumbing to a "sectarian temptation."[134] Many reformists refer to theological and ethical sectarianism as a seductive temptation, since it provides Christians with clear distinctiveness in behavior and an unambiguous identity, yet falls short on social responsibility or commitments to universality and mediation. Gustafson worries that it limits Christians' participation not only in the ambiguities of moral and social life but also from global patterns of interdependence.[135] He doubts the possibilities of internal or external critique on such a model, as I have indicated, for "it isolates theology from any correction by other modes of construing reality."[136] Yet Baxter believes that the term "sectarian" is invoked as a way to dismiss the very

---

not escape ideological distortion from within and without. Tracy notes that a self-enclosed model risks disregarding "religion's own suspicions on the existence of those fundamental distortions named sin, ignorance, or illusion" (*Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987] 112).

[132] Baxter, "A Sign of Peace: The Mission of the Church to the Nations" 35.

[133] Ibid. 34.

[134] See James Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation" 83–94 (see n. 119 above).

[135] Ibid. 84.

[136] Ibid. 86. Gustafson rightly argues that "[t]he theologian addressing many issues—nuclear, social justice, ecology, and so forth—must do so as an outcome of a theology that develops God's relations to all aspects of life in the world, and develops those relations in terms which are not exclusively Christian in a sectarian

claims he and other Catholic radicalists make: "that Christian discipleship entails a form of life that is embedded in the beliefs and practices of the Church and therefore cannot serve as the basis for universal, supra-ecclesial ethical principles that are then applied in making public policy."[137] Moreover, Hehir has shown signs of understanding the gravity of what Baxter proposes more sympathetically than some of the (other) "Americanists" who, Baxter repeatedly claims, misunderstand or dismiss his approach. While Hehir seems to sympathize with Gustafson's concern that such sectarianism "isolates Christians from taking seriously the wider world of science and culture,"[138] he asserts that Gustafson fails to appreciate fully the sectarian perspective. Hehir writes that Catholic and Protestant advocates of a sectarian position would likely respond that Gustafson does not address their fundamental insight: "Dispelling the ambiguity surrounding military service on a nuclear submarine or medical practice in a university hospital where abortions are performed is necessary because ambiguity masks unacceptable compromise. Legislators whose voting records on war or abortion legislation depict a pattern of *sic et non* are not regarded as holding the moderate middle but having a misguided sense of tolerance and a flaccid conscience."[139] He similarly challenges those who, like Charles E. Curran, characterize Baxter's stance as a necessarily minority position in the Church that the larger community should tolerate but not incorporate. I now turn to this suggestion that the mere coexistence of dominant and minority methodologies such as those already outlined remains inadequate.

BEYOND COEXISTENCE: PROSPECTS FOR MUTUAL CLARIFICATION

In the end, then, does there simply exist an irreducible tension between the two approaches that Hehir and Baxter exemplify? Is such tension and coexistence theologically necessary given the character of life between the times? Some perceive the Catholic Church as a "big Church" that must include room for such divergent approaches to social ministry and public

---

form." His controversial assertion that follows, "Jesus is not God," lies in sharp contrast to the Christocentrism of Catholic radicalism; the phrase is used in service of Gustafson's argument that "Theology has to be open to all the sources that help us to construe God's relations to the world; ethics has to deal with the interdependence of *all* things in relation to God . . . God is the God of Christians, but God is not a Christian God for Christians only" (93–94).

[137] Baxter, "Blowing the Dynamite of the Church" 205.

[138] Gustafson, "The Sectarian Temptation" 84.

[139] Hehir, "Church-State and Church-World" 71. Space here does not permit a thorough analysis of the sectarian temptation charge and attempts by Hauerwas and Baxter to respond to such accusations.

life. Others such as Hehir charge that understanding the Catholic Church in the United States as a collaborative, public Church that simply tolerates a more radically prophetic minority is becoming increasingly insufficient.[140] Rather, the truth claims and theological foundations grounding each call for the mutual clarification or creative combination of each, rather than polarizing the two approaches, relegating one to minority status, and living with substantive pluralism.

Some understand this coexistence as sociologically and theologically inevitable—that is, inclusion of both modes is functional for a Catholic Church,[141] and their coexistence ensures the full content of Christian hope is made present in history,[142] though each is by nature incomplete. While the coexistence of both approaches may remain inevitable between the times, their complementary insights and strategies suggest possibilities for mutual clarification. David O'Brien has similarly argued that Catholicism is at its best when republicanism and evangelicalism are held in creative tension,[143] and finds this most successfully the case in bishops' pastorals of

[140] Hehir acknowledges that this model of a church type encompassing a sect minority group is "creative and functional," in that "a big church [Curran's term] needs pluralistic choices for vocation and witness." Yet Hehir notes that Curran fails to acknowledge that such prophetic Catholic groups "often define their position as the minimum the church should adopt. They seek not simply a seat at the table but a chance to define the agenda of the meeting." Further Hehir thinks we cannot simply invoke a big church model on sociological grounds, i.e., the majority of members will not adopt sectarian stance; rather we must have normative reasons why the ecclesial and ethical modes of a big church model are grounded in the Christian tradition ("A Catholic Troeltsch?" 202).

[141] Curran refers to Catholic prophetic minorities on the left and right who embody the approach Baxter advocates as "prophetic shock minorities"; he argues that while such Christians who feel a "special call to witness to peace or to voluntary poverty or to life itself" may "help keep the larger church honest and faithful," they will by definition remain minorities (Hehir, "A Catholic Troeltsch?" 202; Curran, *The Church and Morality* 120–21). Curran borrows the phrase "prophetic shock minorities" from Jacques Maritain who used it to describe groups in civil society (Maritain, *Man and the State* [Chicago: University of Chicago 1951]).

[142] Hollenbach argues that such coexistence is not only sociologically inevitable but also theologically necessary. Just as tensions between justice and nonviolence will never be fully overcome in history, total reconciliation of divergent methodologies remains an eschatological reality. Only the simultaneous presence of both ensures the "full content of Christian hope is to be made visible in history," for each "bears witness to an essential part of the Christian mystery" (Hollenbach, *Nuclear Ethics* 31–32).

[143] In his *Public Catholicism* O'Brien advances his hope that the "responsibility" of the Republican type, the "effectiveness" of the Immigrant type, and the "integrity" of the Evangelical type "will foster creative interaction whereby a better, richer theoretical framework and a more effective pastoral style might emerge" (O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* 244–52).

the 1980s.[144] Despite their significant differences, hints at some overlap emerge in recent moves by both Baxter and Hehir,[145] and we have encountered complementary theological emphases in each approach. At their best the two methodologies need not be competing ones, and in at least three areas the two might mutually clarify and inform one another: by underscoring (1) the Christian call to *both* charitable and structural justice efforts; (2) the significance of discernment in any social engagement; and (3) prospects for joining liturgical or sacramental renewal to social justice efforts. I turn now to a brief exploration of each of these potential sites for constructive development.

Any adequate social ethics calls for both a change of heart and a change of institutions.[146] In like manner, with respect to the actions advocated by Hehir and Baxter, each one's emphasis alone remains somewhat one-sided, whether elevating personal conversion or institutional change. Catholic social ethics as a discipline engages in systematic analysis of social issues in light of Christian theology, whereas peacemaking and works of mercy are related but distinct (and not competing) endeavors. Yet Baxter would likely reply that such differentiation is untenable and precisely the problem. Given the scale and complexity of social problems in today's world, however, pitting localist, individual practices against structural change falls short, and Baxter's approach alone remains too limited in its ability to address global issues adequately. Similarly, it is not sufficiently evident how

[144] Baxter would likely contest the success of the bishops' pastorals as combing the two approaches in a balanced manner. In his words: "Public Catholicism never seriously considers a scenario in which the United States of America proves incapable of adhering to the teachings of the gospel, or to the precepts of natural law, or even to the watered-down natural law principles regularly churned out by the N.C.C.B. in the form of public policy recommendations. This is because O'Brien's narrative is structured in such a way that its resolution can be found only in the marriage of Catholicism with the United States, and it is on this score that his narrative, like [John Tracy] Ellis' and [Jay] Dolan's narratives, should be read as a neo-Constantinian narrative" (Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends" 462).

[145] Hehir has admitted that some public policy issues entail "premoral questions" that his preferred methodology cannot address, but that religious traditions can and do: convictions about the ties that bind us, our responsibilities to one another, rights and duties grounded in the prior reality of our shared humanity. See Hehir, "Personal Faith, the Public Church, and the Role of Theology" 5. Hehir has also recently suggested that some social issues are in fact divided precisely along the lines of theological conviction. He points to abortion and assisted suicide, and wonders how to build moral consensus if believers' positions on such issues are directly impacted by such Christian tenets as belief in afterlife, an acceptance of suffering as having religious significance, or a profound sense that our lives are in hands of larger mystery or the full human status of the embryo. See Hehir, "Response to Stephen Pope's 'Catholic Social Teaching and the American Experience'."

[146] See Curran, *American Catholic Social Ethics* 167; and *Catholic Social Teaching 1891–Present* 45–47.

local efforts "disrupt" an entire political system via non-cooperation or how they escape reinforcing the status quo by such non-participation. Baxter's suggestion that five percent of the efforts of Catholic social ethics should focus on structural change ignores the fact that civic responsibilities are the concerns of every disciple in the Catholic tradition, not simply hired lobbyists, as the bishops are correct to point out.[147] Given the impact of social policies and budget priorities on the lives of the poor (relative to discrete local actions), Catholics are all called to *both* personal and structural activism. Discipleship-informed active citizenship need not be jingoistic or unduly compromise our Catholic identity.[148] Thus Baxter's position, as it stands, risks political apathy which de facto serves to reinforce the status quo.[149]

Further, depending on the issue, the Church's public witness may be understood as countercultural rather than risking cooptation (on such issues as abortion, universal health care coverage, capital punishment). Just as we cannot simply correlate grace and sin to "Church" and "world", so we cannot easily conclude that if one advocates on a structural level then one necessarily becomes co-opted by the nation-state. Baxter is right to warn that political engagement in a culture that contradicts Christian values in many ways (or that prefers the privatization of religion) *risks* corruption if one does not continually guard against cooptation or form oneself in the Christian tradition. His and others' warnings about conforming Christian ethics in language and approach to a liberal paradigm that seeks to privatize religion (at best) are also important. Yet structural advocacy on behalf of the poor or unborn, it seems, offers a way of responding to the gospel call in an age of complexity, rather than an inherent desire to be respected by or become accommodated to the nation (or liberal paradigm) in the majority of cases. Certainly the Christian call demands attention to both charity and justice, embodiment and advocacy. Thus the Church not

[147] Episodic lobbying alone ignores the role Catholic engagement plays in keeping normative questions alive in the public debates on a ongoing basis.

[148] See Heyer, "U.S. Catholic Discipleship and Citizenship: Patriotism or Dissent?" *Political Theology* 4 (May 2003) 149–74.

[149] While his position sketched above on the dangers of Christian involvement with the nation-state led him to give a talk on "The Politics of Unholy Indifference," Baxter notes that his thinking has changed somewhat. Rather than indifference (or a Furfeyan non-participation) which, in my view, simply reinforces the status quo, John Cavadini has helped convince Baxter that indifference does not work. Cavadini points out that for Augustine, the virtue of *apatheia* is supplanted by the practice of forgiveness. Baxter now agrees that perhaps it is not enough to be apathetic (like Stoics), but rather we are called to actively seek the refuge of the forgiveness of sins for self and others, to actively seek reconciliation by embodying the works of mercy (Baxter interview, 7/18/02). Still, however, this does not supply a robust warrant for structural action.

only serves the world by making policy recommendations, but "... by being the sign of God's salvation of the world and by reminding the world of what the world still is not."[150]

Because we are called to engagement on these distinct levels and yet such interaction does entail risks, a crucial aspect of any Church-world engagement is proper discernment. This proves to be a particularly promising site for mutual clarification of Hehir's and Baxter's approaches. For either approach taken to its extreme is problematic, and each draws upon different theological strands of the tradition to varying degrees.[151] Their distinct theological emphases and understandings of political society make clear the importance of discernment as well as a responsibility to the fullness of the tradition that neither captures on its own. Understanding which approach is appropriate to given situations will depend upon discerning the demands of the given moment. Citing the Barmen Declaration and *Dignitatis humanae* as examples of situations calling for distinct Christian responses, Hollenbach notes that "an assessment of just what the larger culture is up to is essential to authentic Christian identity. There is no *a priori* way to determine whether resistance or learning is called for."[152] Reflecting Baxter and Hehir's distinct theological emphases, Hollenbach frames this task of discernment as understanding "... *when* the affirmation that 'Jesus is Lord' should lead to countercultural resistance and *when* 'God is creator of heaven and earth' should lead to cooperation with non-Christians in pursuit of a universalist agenda."[153] Thus prudential discernment can tap into the complementary resources that Hehir and Baxter's approaches offer, enabling us to determine when each emphasis is appropriate, and it bridges some of the concerns of Baxter (uncritical embrace of culture) with the engagement Hehir favors. Since the everyday dilemmas of Christian engagement will be more mundane and perhaps less straightforward than the cases of religious liberty or Nazi Germany, attention to formation and discernment becomes even more important.

[150] William T. Cavanaugh, "Church," in *Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, ed. Peter Scott and William Cavanaugh (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004) 393–405, at 404.

[151] David Hollenbach in his unpublished "Response to Robert Gascoigne's 'Christian Identity and the Communication of Ethics,'" given at the CTSA Convention, San Jose, Calif., on June 9, 2000, offers an analogous argument.

[152] He does, however, insist that this excludes the possibility of viewing the Church as a self-contained narrative community, for it would bypass this necessary effort to discern and distinguish "cultural wheat from cultural chaff." Yet he admits uncritical appeals to natural law, the universal human community and reason are unacceptable as well. Hollenbach perceives this task as constitutive of life between the times. See Hollenbach, "Response to Robert Gascoigne" cited in n. 151.

[153] Ibid.

In fact, Baxter has recently granted that such questions entail discernment and casuistry, conceding that sometimes one cannot determine in advance which approach will be more Christian—and whether the Church is "for or against America" in certain cases—but that a more useful approach is to focus on practices of discernment in making one's way through moral dilemmas. He nuances Furfey's strategy of withdrawal to argue that one has to determine the relative wisdom of participation and withdrawal on a case-by-case basis.[154] Similarly Baxter contends that Virgil Michel's social theory does not call for an in-principled rejection of all social activity external to the Church, for it sets the Church only against the world in a sectarian way, if by "world" one means the social networks produced by advanced capitalism, the "world" of autonomous individualism, mass culture, economic oppression, and the rule of secular power.[155] For example, Baxter has delineated certain practices sponsored by the nation-state as unproblematic, such as "obeying traffic laws, putting out the garbage, and using the postal service" and others as "a matter of judgment, voting in elections, for example, or supporting certain political action groups." He insists on actions to be resisted, however, such as "paying federal taxes for war or abortion, and refusing conscription."[156] Thus even if various reformist lists would look different, Baxter's affirmation of discernment suggests a promising site of convergence.

Finally a related point of potential overlap entails prospects for the role of liturgy in this formation for discernment. Drawing upon the work of Virgil Michel, Baxter holds that liturgy serves as a site for helping Christians to embody the Christ-life, and while faith and justice are connected in and through the action of the liturgy, justice is not to be "applied" to social problems, only embodied. Some have argued that such tendencies to disassociate social engagement from the liturgy are reinforced by the very natural law argumentation in social teaching to which Baxter objects.[157] This separation, however, seems to deny the Catholic belief that sacra-

[154] Baxter interview, 7/18/02.

[155] Baxter, "Reintroducing Virgil Michel" 525.

[156] Baxter, "Catholic Americanism and Catholic Radicalism" 64–65.

[157] See Walter J. Woods, "Liturgy and Social Issues," in *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter Fink (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1990) 1198–1201, at 1199. Woods suggests that when the liturgy's promotion of justice, peace, and charity through prayer and personal conversion predominate, they "can eclipse the historical and public dimensions that are also proper to liturgy." Further, the social teachings' natural law argumentation leads some to believe it is "tangential to the church's faith and worship," leading them to question the substance of such teachings and the legitimacy of public engagement (1199).

ments point beyond ritual practices out into the world, and it falsely opposes embodiment and engagement.[158]

While Hehir, too, grounds his work in sacramental principles,[159] he insists that sacraments commend Christians to help carry on the work of God's reign in history beyond the liturgical community.[160] As John Paul II contends in *Sollicitudo rei socialis,* the Eucharist strengthens our commitment to and gives meaning to our work for development and peace in the world.[161] Thus an understanding of liturgy that aids in formation of conscience and educates to action for justice and peace may serve as a point of contact between Baxter's and Hehir's approaches. While formation through the liturgy and other sacraments assist us in discerning when and how to engage the wider world, however, social, political, and theological analyses remain essential parts of our task, if the imagination is to be informed by the realities not only of Christian faith but also of our social environment.[162] For as the late liturgical theologian Mark Searle put it, while the liturgy provides a basis for discernment and social criticism, "it neither dispenses with the need for policy planning and programs of social action nor provides us with any specific guidelines for setting about such undertakings."[163]

Ideally proper formation for discernment and mechanisms for guarding against distortion will enable us to better call both Church *and* world to account, and to purify our efforts from distortion from within and without. As Searle framed the task in terms of the role of liturgy,

> Celebrating the liturgy should train us to recognize justice and injustice when we see it. It serves as a basis for social criticism by giving us a criterion by which to evaluate the events and structures of the world. But it is not just the world "out there" that stands under the judgment of God's justice, sacramentally realized in the liturgy. The first accused is the Church itself, which, to the degree that it fails

[158] See Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace and Human Rights: American Catholic Social Ethics in a Pluralistic Context* (New York: Crossroad, 1988) 197. For an analysis of the potential contribution of the Catholic sacramental imagination to the Church's prophetic and social mission, see Hollenbach, "A Prophetic Church and the Catholic Sacramental Imagination," in *The Faith that Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*, ed. John C. Haughey, S.J., Woodstock Studies 2 (New York: Paulist, 1977) 234–63.

[159] In fact, in a forward to *Liturgy and Social Justice*, Hehir calls for a systematization and integration of the church's liturgical and social ministries: "For if, as John Paul II stated at Puebla, the Church's 'evangelizing mission has as an essential part action for justice,' then such action surely must be rooted in the liturgy that Vatican II called the summit and source of Christian life." See *Liturgy and Social Justice*, ed. Mark Searle (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1980) 9–11, at 10.

[160] Hehir, "Personal Faith, the Public Church, and the Role of Theology" 5.

[161] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* no. 48.

[162] Hollenbach, *Justice, Peace and Human Rights* 201.

[163] See Searle, "Serving the Lord with Justice," in his *Liturgy and Social Justice* 13–35, at 30.

to recognize what it is about, eats and drinks condemnation to itself (1 Cor 11: 29).[164]

If, as I have argued, discernment is fundamental to determining one's proper response in light of different contexts, then liturgy may serve as a significant locus and means of formation for such discernment.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

On balance, my investigation suggests that Baxter too starkly separates discipleship and citizenship and that Hehir does not allow discipleship to be sufficiently normative. The comprehensiveness of the Catholic call entails a universality and integrity that demand the dynamic, mutual correction of each incomplete approach. The distinct Catholic methodologies profiled here reflect longstanding theological differences and distinct presuppositions. For example, an approach such as Hehir's generally stems from an appreciation of humans' ability to reason, reflecting a Thomistic commitment to a reasonable moral order knowable in principle by all humans. On the other hand, a more Augustinian approach such as Baxter's focuses upon the divine basis of order and its disruption by sin.[165] My emphasis here focuses on ways to bridge and mutually inform both strands, for Catholics are committed to several related propositions: faith and reason are complementary not contradictory; the Church is the Body of Christ and a human community; and the Incarnation does not merely confirm human nature nor does it destroy nature, but rather it transforms nature. For one's destiny, union with God through knowledge and love, fulfills natural human capacities while elevating them to a qualitatively different level.[166] Amid life between the times, then, while inherent tensions persist, one must seek ways to temper Hehir's optimistic "already" with the complexity and hesitancy appropriate to Baxter's "not yet." One must find ways to allow Hehir's integrated understanding of believer and citizen to challenge the potential dualism of Baxter's outlook.

A radicalist embodiment of Christian faith severed from any external communication or advocacy limits its witness efforts in the face of internal challenges, just as reformist advocacy severed from embodiment of the norms and practices one promotes significantly undermines credibility. A

[164] Ibid. 29.

[165] For a useful discussion of these underlying differences (in the course of his discussion of the conciliar debates related to the drafting of *Gaudium et spes*), see Joseph A. Komonchak, "Vatican II and the Encounter between Catholicism and Liberalism," in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Philosophy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (New York: Cambridge University, 1994) 76–99.

[166] See Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Love Your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism and Just War Theory* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 82–83.

unidirectional mode of witness (Church as teacher but not learner) also discounts the interreligious and ecumenical cooperation to which the post-Vatican II tradition calls Catholics. A commitment to strengthening the connection between embodiment and engagement of Christian norms, principles, and practices will enhance the integrity of Catholic social ethics.

A methodology that is more theological than Hehir's approach and more public than Baxter's may serve to critique and round out each stance. Hehir's natural law approach risks relinquishing Christian distinctiveness; Baxter's stance risks irresponsibility to the range of social problems in a pluralistic setting amid globalization. A more fully theological and fully public approach will help to avoid a false opposition between charity and structural justice and between embodiment and advocacy; utilize liturgical resources for formation and discernment as well as education for justice and social outreach; and ensure mechanisms of self-critique to safeguard against distortion from without and from within.[167] Mutual clarification of reformist and radicalist approaches along the lines I have suggested should allow for a move away from rigid typologies and toward prophetic, critical engagement that models gospel values and engages the wider world on issues that touch human life and dignity.[168] This theological and ethical investigation makes clear that the Catholic tradition contains a richness and integrity that neither methodology captures on its own. Their mutual clarification will better ensure that Catholic social ethics remains at once faithful to the fullness of the tradition and responsible to the signs of the times.

[167] A public theological approach such as Tracy's models of "classic" and "conversation," Hollenbach's "intellectual solidarity," or Michael and Kenneth Himes's method in *Fullness of Faith* in some ways both unites and moves beyond Baxter and Hehir. Such tactics help ensure that Catholic social ethics remains firmly grounded in Catholic identity and takes seriously the empirical or worldly on its own terms.

[168] Christine Firer Hinze has offered analogous proposals of a "radical-transformationist ethics" in her work bridging the approaches of liberals and liberationists. She recently applied this hybrid proposal to reformist and radicalist methodologies in Catholic social ethics in responding directly to Baxter's plenary address to the Catholic Theological Society of America. Firer Hinze noted that: "[a] radical-transformationist Catholic social ethic would seek, for example, to bring radicalist witness *into dialectical solidarity with* reformist policy initiatives; to hone a nuanced natural law language *overtly anchored in and accountable to* scripture and liturgy; insert Christians into secular society to serve their neighbors *in response to and as witnesses of* the love of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit" (Christine Firer Hinze, "A Response to Michael J. Baxter," *Catholic Theological Society of America, Proceedings* 59 [2004] 42–49, at 46). For her earlier proposals see Firer Hinze, "Christian Feminists, James Luther Adams, and the Quest for a Radically Transformative Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21 (Fall 1993) 275–302, and "James Luther Adams and U.S. Liberationists: Mutual Pedagogy for Transformative Christian Ethics," *American Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 17 (January 1996) 71–92.