

# Solidarity with the Oppressed, Conversions, Truth in Action Gregory Baum's Evolving Theological Horizons

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Hommage à Gregory Baum

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## Résumé de l'article

Gregory Baum n'était pas un grand théologien comme les géants systématiques du milieu du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Plutôt, dans un monde en évolution rapide qu'aucune personne, aucun groupe ou aucun discours ne peut pleinement saisir, il était un autre type de théologien, en dialogue avec des cercles en expansion d'altérités, explorant de nouvelles voies interdisciplinaires, forgeant un autre type de théologie témoignant de l'espoir qu'un autre monde est possible.

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# Solidarity with the Oppressed, Conversions, Truth in Action

## Gregory Baum's Evolving Theological Horizons

Lee Cormie\*

### 1 Introduction

In the opening, literally the second sentence, of his intellectual autobiography, *The Oil Has Not Run Dry* (2017), Gregory Baum, in the eyes of many the outstanding Canadian Catholic theologian for over half a century, from the early 1960s to the 2010s, confesses that he did not consider himself “an important thinker” like Karl Rahner or Edward Schillebeeckx (Baum 2017, 3). And in fond memory of him (d. October 18, 2017 at age 94), as a former MA student, fellow traveller across the still largely uncharted interdisciplinary terrain of theology and the social sciences, colleague, and friend for 50 years, I can think of no better way to honour him and his many contributions to theology than to take issue with this self-description.

On the one hand, it reflects Gregory Baum's deep humility and sense of gratitude to God, which he learned from St. Augustine, and which so deeply coloured his spirituality, self-deprecating modesty, personal relations, theological outlook, and method. He thought of himself, in Luke's terms, as a “useless servant” utterly dependent on God's mercy (Baum 2015b).

But I wish to suggest that this way of framing theological options also implies that there is one right way of doing theology, the highly

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abstract, philosophically-oriented, and rigorously systematic theology of the mid-20th century European theological giants, and their historical predecessors like Thomas Aquinas<sup>1</sup>. And this neglects the radically changing world and the shifting contours of heaven and earth, church and society, ignorance and knowledge, hope and faith, which he devoted his life to probing.

Back in the 1960s though “society” and “justice”, “world”, and “history” were only beginning to appear on the margins of theological discourses. And for the next 50 years, Gregory Baum was one of our most reliable explorers, probing the shifting horizons of hope and faith.

At the centre of these developments was insistence that “action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel”, in the words of the second World Synod of Bishops (World Synod of Bishops 1971, para 6). And, as all the “new” liberation theologies repeatedly affirmed, this turn involved far more than adding “justice” to existing theological frameworks. Rather, it involved a far deeper, more creative re-thinking – in Gregory Baum’s terms, a “new religious imagination” and radically new ways of doing theology (Baum 2017, 55).

In other words, far from attempting to produce a grand new abstract scholarly synthesis, Baum pursued a meandering theological pathway, striving for fidelity to the tradition and openness to the Spirit, privileging the voices of “others” outside “mainstream” theological circles (including especially the “option for the poor”), engaging other scholarly discourses, (re)reading the Bible and Christian traditions, addressing a radically changing world, and confronting new questions with faith-filled creativity.

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear that Gregory Baum deeply admired these philosophically rigorous systematic theologies. But he also came to see them as deeply reflective of their own contexts, and profoundly limited by their failures to recognize this fact. As he says: “The classical European-based theology, in which we were trained and which many of us dearly love, must [...] be understood as an important, brilliant, regional intellectual development that makes the dubious claim of universal relevance, thus failing to recognize its own contextuality” (Baum 1999, 247).

In my judgement, these are also the most promising hermeneutical keys for appreciating Gregory Baum's work and legacy in our new era of cascading eco-civilizational crises, looming apocalypses, and resurgent religious questions about humanity's roles in shaping and mis-shaping the future of life on Earth. With no illusions about the possibility of summarizing such a rich, productive, interesting, and long life, in the following pages I point to seven major turning points, "spiritual events" as he called them (Baum 2017, 189), which profoundly transformed his life, his theology, and our evolving theological conversations as our relationship grew over half a century.

## 2 Turning points

Baum's remarkably rich life was marked by many great challenges and an openness to new possibilities. A short list would have to include his early years, from birth (20 June 1923) into an originally Jewish, wealthy, socially unaware, secular bourgeois German family to legally imposed Jewishness in the gathering storms of rising fascism, the Holocaust (Nuremberg Laws 1935) and World War II. The list would also have to include his other major life experiences and transitions: to displaced person in his late teens (1939-1942 in Great Britain and Canada); to university student in Canada (1942-1946); to reading Augustine for insight and inspiration (1946); to baptism in the Catholic Church (1946); to MA student in mathematics in the U.S. (1946-1947); to entering the Augustinian order (1947) and ordination to the priesthood (1954); to doctoral student in theology in Switzerland (1950-1959); to appointment by Pope John XXIII as *peritus* at the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (1960) and participation in dialogues and drafting of Council documents during its four sessions (1962-1965)<sup>2</sup>; and to widely sought-after speaker and writer promoting Vatican II renewal in the years following the Council. And this list only hints at major challenges and deep changes he experienced in the first half

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<sup>2</sup> As he noted, "[...] working at the [S]ecretariat [for Promoting Christian Unity] before and during the Second Vatican Council was a dramatic happening, a spiritual experience, a theological adventure, an unmerited privilege, and an unforgettable time of intense living" (Baum 2017, 40).

of his life! But it also suggests the openness to new challenges and readiness to boldly move ahead which marked the second half of his life too.

### 2.1 *Ecumenical and Jewish-Christian relations*

Gregory Baum had not been formed in pre-Vatican II Catholicism with its central insistence that “outside the [Catholic] Church there is no salvation”. And his own multicultural experiences (in Germany, Canada, the U.S., and Switzerland), and in particular his experience of secular Protestant German culture along with appreciation of Protestant theology developed during his years of study at McMaster University, prepared him for far greater openness to other traditions, and for a pivotal role in forging a radically different Catholic approach to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

At a time when Catholic theologians “were still forbidden to attend ecumenical meetings” and were “unable to offer a positive interpretation of Protestant traditions”, he wrote his doctoral dissertation at Fribourg on the evolution of papal teaching and its impact on the ecumenical quest for Christian unity (Baum 2017, 27). After completing it in 1956, Baum was later embarrassed by this “unimaginative dissertation” written in “a conformist spirit” (Baum 2017, 28). Nevertheless, it put him on the path of radical change. For it pointed to a new way for Catholics to think about the commonalities and differences among Christian traditions, and new ways of relating ecumenically. More generally, in contrast to previously unquestionable claims of eternally unchanging truth, it contributed to seeing that Church teaching had changed radically in the past, not only in superficial matters but in core teachings. And this required new ways of seeing tradition and authority in the Catholic Church more generally.

Especially for Gregory Baum these matters involved far more than abstract ideas about Church renewal. Having been baptized at age 23 (1946), they touched on his still-evolving identity, faith, and vocation as a theologian. And the questions only intensified with his growing awareness in the late 1950s of the deep stains of anti-Semitism throughout Christian history.

Against the background of World War II and the Holocaust, the attempted genocide of the European Jews resulting in the murder of six

million Jews (along with many Gypsies, gay men, communists, socialists, trade unionists, and Soviet prisoners of war), the long history of anti-Semitism was coming to light.

For him personally this meant confronting his “insensitivity” to his own Jewish background (Baum 2017, 34), and re-examining his Catholic identity. For

[...] as a youth I had told myself that Hitler defined me as a Jew, even though I had never been Jewish. Now the consciousness of my Jewish origin impelled me to wrestle against the church’s anti-Jewish rhetoric. (Baum 2017, 34)

Indeed, he “felt that the ground on which [he] stood was about to collapse” (Baum 2017, 33). And he wondered if he could even remain a Catholic (Baum 2017, 51).

In the end, he concluded that, yes, he could remain a Catholic and a theologian, but only if he committed himself to “working for the reform of the church’s preaching about Jews and Judaism” (Baum 2017, 34). In retrospect, his responses may appear to have been obvious and inevitable. At the time, however, they were challenging and risky since they required, in the words of historian John Connelly, nothing less than “a revolution in a church that claimed to be unchanging” (Connelly 2012, 7).

In a way that became characteristic of his way of doing theology, he plunged into the study of the history of anti-Jewish discourse, asking how the message of the life of Jesus, which he “believed was a story of love, had become a story of hate” (Baum 2017, 33). And he set about writing a book, *The Jews and the Gospel*, published in 1961 shortly before the opening of the Council. In it he drew on then-current biblical exegesis in making a distinction between the teachings of the New Testament, which he concluded were not anti-Semitic, and subsequent tradition which was so deeply marked by anti-Semitism (Baum 1961). And these insights, echoed by growing numbers of biblical scholars, church historians and theologians, opened the door to the renewal of mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century theology as more historically aware of the different strands of Christian tradition, sometimes clashing and sometimes changing dramatically. These developments helped to open the door to a radically new stage of Jewish-

Christian dialogue and solidarity, which Baum supported for the rest of his life.

More generally, these experiences with non-Catholic Christian “others” and Jews repeatedly confirmed that dialogue is a “spiritual process” that “transforms the consciousness of the participants” (Baum 2017, 28). Indeed, he came to see the ecumenical movement itself, filled with new questions, suspicions about certain strands of Christian traditions, and challenges to conversion, as a grace-filled experience, “the work of the Holy Spirit”, “a moment of grace, a *kairos*, a tryst of the Holy Spirit”, and a “turning point in the history of Catholicism” (Baum 2017, 29, 41).

In particular, Baum affirmed that his

[...] Jewish background gave me the will and the energy to become a critic of the church’s disdainful discourse with regard to all outsiders: dissident Christians, followers of other religions, and secular humanists. (Baum 2017, 35)

And he discovered the “critical function of theology”, which so deeply marked all his subsequent thinking. Indeed, as he later insisted, it was his encounter with anti-Jewish discourse, not Karl Marx, that taught him the pejorative meaning of ideology, understood as “the distortion of truth in favour of the interests of an institution”, which happens in the church too (Baum 2017, 39). And against this background, the next step in his theological journey was, not surprisingly, a turn to sociology.

## 2.2 *Interdisciplinary dialogue: sociology and the option for the poor*

The work of the Council was unfinished in many ways. In retrospect, at least, it is clear that the Council was not monolithic, that there were diverse, often conflicting tendencies, that many questions remained unanswered, that many debates remained unresolved, and that debates over the Council would continue long after<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, in the rapidly

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<sup>3</sup> As Baum noted about the politics of document writing,

[...] in order to obtain the approval of the majority of bishops at the council, certain conciliar documents that clearly expressed the new paradigm were modified by the

expanding world of mass media and air travel the Council was suddenly news for millions of people around the world, far beyond the limited circles of priests, nuns, and bishops of earlier times, now incorporating lay people who during Vatican I a century earlier (1869-1870) would have known nothing about it. Inevitably these expanding circles of informed lay people reflected their own cultures and contexts with their own convictions, concerns, and questions. To address this new Vatican-II-era Church in a rapidly globalizing and multicultural world, Cardinal Bea invited the members of the Secretariat “to publish articles, give public lectures, write to newspapers and speak on radio and television about the new Catholic openness to ecumenism” (Baum 2017, 43). Schools and universities were proliferating around the world, along with centres and programs, newspapers, journals, publishing houses. And Gregory Baum suddenly plunged into far wider, more diverse, swiftly moving dialogues and debates.

This was a tremendously exciting time of vast changes sweeping the post-World-War-II world, information explosions and knowledge revolutions, new technologies and great leaps forward in development along with growing gaps in income and wealth across the “first world” and the “third world”, Cold War conflicts and wars. In the spirit of Vatican II’s mandate in *Gaudium et spes*, Baum set out to read the “signs of the times” in the world and in the Church (Vatican Council II 1965, para 4). Of course, he sought to interpret these changes theologically. And doing so often required fundamentally revising familiar theological concepts, categories and frameworks.

Thus, he traced the breakthroughs of Vatican II to new perceptions of God, the world, and human nature being forged by thinkers like French philosopher Maurice Blondel, who also influenced Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, and other pioneers of Vatican II. In particular, he pointed to Blondel’s quest for a way beyond the existing binaries of heaven and earth, nature and supernature, church and world, overseen by a remote and judging God. For him, Baum noted,

[...] God was not an outsider to human life; rather, God was involved in people’s efforts to become themselves and to constitute their world. The

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insertion of passages that reflected the older paradigm. Thus, the conciliar documents are not free of internal contradictions (Baum 2017, 47).



Gospel is not a message about a higher sphere: it addresses the challenge experienced by people in this world. (Baum 2017, 53)

Of course, there were many biblical and theological reasons underlying this profound theological shift, which in his writings and lectures Gregory Baum helped many to appreciate. And for him personally this new way of thinking also resonated with his evolving understanding of himself and his own psychodynamics. For he had joined the psychotherapeutic movement Therapeutics, where he experienced, again, that

[...] engagement in dialogue and communion allowed participants to come to greater self-knowledge, escape from their destructive impulses, discover new energies, and enter more deeply into their humanity.

In theological terms, Baum insisted that there is “a redemptive dimension in the therapeutic process” (Baum 2017, 57).

In his usual manner, he worked out his understanding of these shifts in conversations with friends and colleagues, researching, teaching, speaking, writing, and eventually publishing *Man Becoming* in 1975 (later noting, after his encounters with feminism, that he would have chosen another title).

The book is a testimony to the profound convergence Baum discovered between theological and social scientific approaches to human nature, freedom and destiny. In his words, the book is an

[...] application of psychologically-oriented phenomenology to show that ordinary human life is not ordinary at all but, in fact, highly dramatic, a field of conflict between forces of self-destruction and powers – unexpected powers – of creativity and new life [...] the process of growing up and becoming human is a great drama, a drama which the Christian interprets as a participation in the paschal mystery. (Baum 1970, xiii–xiv)

And in particular he re-confirmed earlier insights about the centrality of dialogue and communion in human life.

Through dialogue and communion, we learn to forget ourselves, serve the well-being of others, and promote the common good, thus entering more fully into our own humanity. This transformation is possible because dialogue and communion are sustained by the Word and the Holy Spirit.

In other words, human self-making is grounded in the triune God. (Baum 2017, 55)

This new, profoundly different theological perspective was warmly received by many (including me) in the church who had grown up with a far darker, more pessimistic view of human nature and sin, life on earth as a “vale of tears”, and despair over the prospects of progressive social change. It also opened the door to deeper appreciation of ordinary lay life, and the place of laypeople in the Church. It resonated, too, with the broader cultural and political optimism then reigning in the 1960s, especially in the U.S., reflected in growth psychologies, encounter movements, and widespread “cultural revolution”, and in celebrations of economic modernization and development, or simply “progress”. As we’ve seen above, this spirit was also clearly moving in the Church, powerfully echoed (with some significant reservations) in the Council’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965). Gregory Baum later reported that a Waldensian pastor friend considered this document “liberal stuff” since it “lacked a concrete analysis of the oppressive structures kept in place by the powerful of the world” (Baum 2017, 78). At that time, however, he “was not yet aware of the political dimension of the Gospel” or of traditions of critical discourse concerning the dark side of “modernity” and the post-World-War-II world (Baum 2017, 58). (And “liberation” theology voices were only just beginning to appear on the margins).

By the end of the Council in 1965, the clash of interpretations was becoming clearer, troubling all who had helped to forge what they understood as consensus on many fundamental issues. And this growing divide was increasingly visible at the highest levels of the Church. For example, shortly after the close of the Council, Pope Paul VI published *Humanae vitae*, declaring “artificial” birth control to be “gravely sinful” (Pope Paul VI, 1965). The document immediately provoked widespread resistance and denunciation. And in the process it became a powerful symbol for other constituencies in the Church who were forging another post-Vatican II project drawing extensively on pre-Conciliar theology: retreating from a more dynamic understanding of human beings as constituted through dialogue and communion and fully able to make such decisions; unwilling to trust lay people and the study commission appointed by the Pope; unwilling to trust even the bishops gathered at the

Council, who could have studied and debated these issues, perhaps finding common ground; retreating from the emphases on “collegiality” and “participation” of the whole people of God; and reasserting a “monarchical understanding of the papacy” (Baum 2017, 30).

In Gregory Baum’s view, then, the collegial process at the Council had “affected the self-awareness of the bishops and made them rethink their understanding of what the Church is”. He concluded, however, that many “were unable to persevere in the ecclesial consciousness that had emerged at the Council”, indeed that the “Church’s central bureaucracy was totally unable to open itself to the new spirit” (Baum 1975a, cited in Baum 2017, 66-67). And in desperation, as a theologian trying to understand these pathological institutional dynamics, he turned to studies in sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York City (1969-1971). And again he discovered more than he had anticipated, in the process changing his understanding of theology once again.

“Like most theologians and philosophers”, he noted, “I used to think that culture and human self-understanding were produced by the ideas and values originating in people’s minds” (Baum 2017, 68). In dialogue with psychology and psychotherapy, he had already begun developing a far more dynamic, open, creative, and loving picture of human nature (though also often troubled by powerful unconscious dynamics). From the sociologists, he learned that people are also deeply affected by interests and ideologies, institutions and structures, which also change in the course of history. In particular, following the classical European sociologists of the late 19th and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, like Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, he learned to think of societies as ensembles of norms, attitudes, practices, institutions, and structures. And he learned to see 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century intellectual currents in Europe from the Renaissance and Enlightenment as the driving forces of “modernity”, evident in increasing rationalism, science, new technologies, individualism, expanding horizons of human freedom, democracy, capitalist free markets, industrialization, and secularization (i.e., freedom from superstition and irrationality). Together (in this view) these forces were ushering in the “modern” world, appearing first in Europe and subsequently spreading around the world.

These developments were interpreted in different ways in the three great currents of modern European culture and politics: by “liberals” who

emphasized the magnitude of changes sweeping the world and celebrated them as “progress”; by “conservatives” who focused on the disruptive impacts of these developments and their corrosive effects on families, communities, traditional cultures, institutions, and authorities, and yearned for a return to the past; and by socialist and Marxist “radicals” who celebrated the development of science, technology, and modes of social organization (e.g., families, markets, states) but also pointed to class divisions, deepening inequalities and class conflict, and aspired to a radically different modern future.

There is no space here to trace these Eurocentric traditions and their impacts, or the great diversity of other “non-Western” civilizations and traditions, or the rapidly evolving debates about “modernity”, “globalization”, “post-modernity”, “capitalist world-system”, or more recently evolving “post-colonial” and “decolonial” (or “modernity/coloniality”) perspectives. (In my view, postcolonial and especially decolonial perspectives represent a new generation of critical thinking, aware of the limitations of earlier generations of critical thinking and revealing far more complex, nuanced readings of society, history, and possible futures, which are full of challenges and possibilities for theology and ethics.) Here, I can only point to the profound implications for theology of Baum’s turn to the social sciences in the early 1970s.

Basically, as he reports, he learned to see how deeply social dynamics shape and alter “the conditions of human existence”, in the process affecting “people’s understanding of the true and the good”, and changing “their vision of who they were as persons and collectivities” (Baum 2017, 70). In other words, human beings are profoundly social, and society is not external or secondary. Rather, humans are dual-natured, both biological and social. And human nature and societies are not simply God-given, natural, inevitable (either doomed to apocalyptic endtimes or enjoying endless progress on every front). Rather, they are shaped by social dynamics in different ways in different historical contexts. They change in shifting contexts. And, in various ways in different constellations in communities, movements and institutions, humans are actors shaping the contours of societies and shifting the course of history.

In many ways, these insights provoke rethinking fundamental theological categories and frameworks. They contribute to reformulating

basic theological insights, for example in Baum's development of the notion of "social sin". They contribute to understanding the institutional dynamics of the Church, as demonstrated in *Religion and Alienation* (1975b). They contribute to more richly contextual and nuanced readings of history, of biblical history and subsequent Christian history, and thus to (re)interpretations of sacred texts and traditions and their significance for us today. And they are indispensable today in charting the outlines and dynamics of emergent global civilization, and the horizons of possible futures, as Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* did in its time.

In the early 1970s, Gregory Baum also met Rosemary Radford Ruether who, in 1972, published her *Liberation Theology: Human Hope Confronts Christian History and American Power* (1972). As he noted,

I had faced evil in history in relation to the Holocaust, yet my conversations with Rosemary Ruether, during which I at first resisted her analysis, opened my eyes to the oppressive, structured inequalities of society and made me hear, in the promises of Jesus, the liberation of men and women from the institutional powers of darkness. (Baum 2017, 77-78)

And these conversations suddenly cast a new critical light on the naive optimism of *Gaudium et spes* and his own earlier theological horizons in *Man Becoming*.

Ruether also introduced him to Latin American liberation theology which, at the Latin American Conference of Medellín (1968) and elsewhere, was developing a decidedly non-Eurocentric interpretation of the Council as looking at "the world from its rich centre, the North Atlantic countries, while they, situated in Latin America, looked at the same world from its impoverished margin" (Baum 2017, 78). In conversations among bishops, scholars, pastoral agents, and social movement activists, Latin American Christians, also in dialogue with the social sciences, were: mapping new theological horizons insisting on the preferential option for the poor in all its dimensions, ethical, pastoral, and hermeneutical<sup>4</sup>; re-reading the Hebrew Bible as born from the testimony of slaves encountering God acting in history in the Exodus, and for Christians centered on the Jewish prophet Jesus executed by the Roman Empire in collusion with supportive Jewish elites; radically criticizing the

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<sup>4</sup> As Baum notes, this has also been called an "epistemological break" (Baum 2017, 82).

ideology of “development”; and forging solidarity with victims in social movements struggling for liberation and justice.

As Baum noted, this shift to seeing from below and its challenges, especially to the middle class, produced a “crisis of faith” for many Christians, literally a “dark night of the soul” turning their world upside down and calling for radical conversion (Baum 2017, 82). Many others though testified that conversion to God in solidarity with the poor and powerless gave them new meaning and hope. In Baum’s case, in particular, it involved conversion from the “hopeful liberal, trusting that present society could be reformed by the good will of the majority, making a structural transformation unnecessary”. And it meant transforming his theological horizons once again (Baum 2017, 78).

In other words, the turn to the social sciences was not just for empirical data about various facets of life, which can complement properly theological and ethical reasoning. Rather, it provoked much wider interdisciplinary theological dialogues expanding basic categories and frameworks, horizons, and methods, with a new focus on social movements as key actors in the struggles for social transformation, and re-readings of the bible and church history. And Baum came to think of his mission as “the dialogue of theology with the social sciences in the service of the church’s renewal and the reconstruction of society” (Baum 2017, 194). This interdisciplinary horizon-expanding quest, we might add, despite Baum’s path-breaking contributions, is still in its infancy.

### 2.3 *Human nature and sexuality*

These profound theological and ethical shifts Gregory Baum was helping to forge had concrete implications in the debates on many issues. As noted above, they pointed to radically new understandings of human nature, with profound implications for theological anthropology and moral theology.

In recent years the argument from nature has become somewhat problematic in Catholic theology [...] [W]hat is called human nature has a history and is, in part at least, created by people, their interaction and their symbolic language. Human nature is not simply a given. It is a given for the individual born into a specific environment, but looked upon historically

and collectively, human nature has been created by the actions of people bound together by institutions and a common set of symbols. (Baum 1974, 480)

And his early attention to the contextually specific, culturally conditioned, socially embedded, historically shifting character of each expression of human nature meant deep questioning of the official Church's position on gender and sexuality in general, and on homosexuality in particular.

As he reported in the early 1970s, the understanding of homosexuality in medicine and the social sciences was rapidly advancing, including in particular the devastating impact of homophobia on gays and lesbians.

Studying the effects of society on consciousness, we have become keenly aware that the radical rejection of homosexuality and the taboos surrounding it in religious and secular culture inflict unspeakable burdens on the men and women who discover themselves as homosexuals. People who are held in contempt by society, marginalized by custom, vilified by a vulgar or subtle language of exclusion, and judged as sick, as immoral, as perverts, will in one way or another internalize these judgments in the form of self-rejection and self-hatred. Homosexual men and women belong to the most oppressed of all groups in society. (Baum 1974, 480)

Accordingly, in Baum's expanding view, the grounds of official Church teaching must be fundamentally questioned.

Seeing a collective crime of such proportions and the violence inflicted on homosexual men and women, the theologian begins to suspect that the traditional arguments against homosexuality were not so much based on a sound concept of nature as summoned forth by God's call, as on a refusal to take a look at the foundations of our culture. (Baum 1974, 480)

Indeed, he credits Dignity, a U.S. group nurturing the self-affirmation of gay Catholics while insisting on the equality of men and women, for displaying "a greater sensitivity to the man-woman relationship than do most organizations in the Catholic Church" (Baum 1974, 482). And once again Catholics and the Church are called to conversion and renewal.

Perhaps the profound empathy with gays and lesbians reflected in this article<sup>5</sup> hints at Gregory Baum's own homosexual orientation, which he reports having realized when he was 12, but only widely disclosed much later in his life, instead hiding from public view for fear, certainly justified, that coming out would reduce his influence as a critical theologian (Baum 2017, 208-209). I wish Baum had written more about this aspect of his life and its significance for him as a theologian. For my part, it is difficult to avoid thinking that being gay and closeted must have involved disconcerting, painful, and challenging moments, difficult choices, and probably wrenching adjustments over time. Indeed, perhaps like his belatedly-discovered Jewishness, it was also a root of the sympathy and concern for the "other" and "outsiders", which so deeply marked his adult life and vocation as a theologian.

#### 2.4 *Intercultural dialogues: Germany, Canada, Palestine and Israel, and Quebec*

Though he was no specialist in interreligious dialogue, Baum was profoundly intercultural, in part because of living for sustained periods in different contexts, encountering people of different traditions, and taking them and their ways of thinking seriously. He was born German, proud of his background with happy memories of his early life in Berlin (1923-1939). After his early experience as a refugee and displaced person, he settled in Canada but also worked at continually reweaving his connections to Germany through visits, study of German scholarship, avid following of German news, friends, visiting lectures, publications in German, etc. (Baum 2017, 8, 217). He also lived for substantial periods in Switzerland (1950-1959), English-speaking Canada (1940-1950, 1959-1986), and Quebec (1986-2017); and he was fluent in German, English, and French.

He never lived in Israel/Palestine, but flowing from his own wrestling with his Jewish identity and Catholic anti-Semitism, he participated in Jewish-Christian dialogues, and, committed so deeply to justice, he seriously studied debates about Israel and Palestine. And only

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<sup>5</sup> Gregory Baum considered this article to be the first by an established Catholic theologian publicly defending the ethical status of homosexual love (Baum 2017, 114).



deep commitment and great persistence finally led to the publication of a book on these issues (Baum 2003).

He avoided posturing as an expert with the best analysis. Rather, he pointed to the limited awareness in North America of the intense debates in Israel/Palestine concerning the plight of the Palestinians, the policies of the Israeli government, and the prospects for peace. He identified a number of Jewish groups and individual Jewish voices offering both strong support for the State of Israel and criticism of its policies toward the Palestinians. He found himself “greatly impressed by the statements of their ethical principles, their analysis of the political situation in Israel and their practical engagement in demonstrations against government policies and actions of solidarity with Palestinians”. So he collected a series of reports and statements, planning to publishing them in a small book, with an introduction and conclusion by him. In other words, his method was to listen to the most marginalized and those in solidarity with them, and to support them in making their voices heard, in the hope that this would contribute to more informed debate among North Americans, Jews, and Christians and Palestinians and others, broader solidarity, and collaboration in pursuing justice and peace. However, the manuscript was considered too radical and controversial by six publishers, and it was rejected. And only with great persistence did he later find a publisher willing to publish it, not in North America, its intended audience, but in Germany (Baum 2017, 151; Baum, Frankenmölle and Münz 2002).

Reflecting a similar method, Baum published a book addressing another intense local conflict with far broader implications, in this case the East German Protestant peace movement (Baum 1996). The movement was largely unknown in North America and much of Europe. And it was deeply critical of both East German communism and West German capitalism, aspiring to a different, democratic socialism. The movement played an important role in the fall of the East German government and tearing down of the Berlin wall, though it was subsequently marginalized in the capitalist euphoria which swept reunited Germany. In any case, the book confirmed Baum’s commitment to listening to marginalized voices and supporting them in reaching larger audiences.

Moving to Quebec also turned out to be another “amazing adventure” in cross-cultural dialogue. He discovered many affinities,

plunged into study of the Quiet Revolution and its heritage of secularism, discovered a very different reading of Vatican II, studied influential Quebec thinkers and debates, especially concerning secularism and the sovereignist movement. And, in his usual style, he devoted himself to presenting these voices to new English-speaking audiences outside Quebec who knew little or nothing about them (see, for example, Baum 2014; 2015a).

In the end, then, without a theory of interculturality, Gregory Baum was deeply intercultural. As he noted,

I have no conflict in being a Berliner, a German, a Canadian, and a Québécois. Because these identities are in constant dialogue with one another, they do not tear me apart but, rather, stimulate new thinking and enrich my life. (Baum 2017, 218)

And, in an increasingly globalized world, his corpus of works on many debates in specific contexts but also with wider appeal over half a century confirms the unavoidable challenges and the great promises of cross-cultural and intercultural theology today.

### 2.5 *Interfaith dialogues*

Christian-Jewish dialogue was Gregory Baum's first interfaith experience, in terms of learning to listen to the "others", to confront one's own sins and the historical sins of past tradition, to convert one's own and one's institution's outlook and behaviour, and to take concrete steps to remedy historic injustices. This outlook coloured Baum's approach to Islam too, in the context of widespread Islamophobic ignorance and hostility, when discrimination against Muslims was rampant, in particular, in Quebec with its lingering suspicions of "religion" and resentment against the authoritarian and corrupt Catholic Church of earlier generations, before the Vatican Council and the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. This reminded him of his own earlier struggles against anti-Semitism in church and society. So in his eighties and nineties, against the backdrop of "increased prejudice against Muslims and contempt for their religion", especially in the U.S. but also in Canada, he felt "called to wrestle against anti-Muslim prejudice and the lack of respect for Islam" (Baum 2017, 155). In particular, he decided to participate in public meetings of *Présence musulmane*, formed in Montreal in 2003, where "Muslim men and women

listened to invited speakers and then discussed among themselves how to remain faithful believers in Islam and, at the same time, become responsible citizens of Quebec”. In his ears, this resonated so deeply with Catholic struggles in Vatican II and since, seeking to be faithful to the tradition while creatively adapting to a changed and changing world.

At one of these events, Baum was especially impressed by the scholarship and wisdom of the speaker, Swiss-born Muslim activist and theologian Tariq Ramadan. In his usual fashion, he turned to careful study of the development of Ramadan’s theology and critical reading of the modern Western world. Surprisingly perhaps, despite many differences between them, in age and cultural and religious backgrounds, he also discovered remarkable parallels.

In the first place, Ramadan also sees religion, in this case Islam, as internally diverse:

[...] Muslims cannot, or should not, deny that among the diverse currents within Muslim-majority countries and communities – literalist, traditionalist, reformist, rationalist, mystical and, even, purely political – dogmatic and excessive interpretations can be found. (Ramadan 2010)

In particular, he recognizes “fundamentalist” currents within Islam, but argues that these badly distort interpretation of core Muslim texts and the basic thrust of mainstream traditions. And in contrast he offers another reading of historic Muslim traditions, which sets the stage for rethinking Islam today. In his view, Muslims in modern societies, like France and Canada, are fully capable of engaging modern Western intellectual traditions<sup>6</sup>, preserving fidelity to core Muslim traditions, renewing Islam, and fully contributing to the modern societies in which they live. As he frequently insists, Islam is a Western religion.

In the service of this renewal, Ramadan regularly criticizes those Muslim leaders, thinkers, and activists claiming to represent Islam for distorting the tradition, failing to see the opportunities before them in Western societies, or shrinking from addressing society-wide challenges<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> Ramadan has an MA in Philosophy and French Literature, and a PhD in Arabic and Islamic Studies from the University of Geneva.

<sup>7</sup> As Ramadan notes,

Rather, he insists that a profound “intellectual revolution” is necessary, “a different mindset concerning the ethical benchmarks by which we live”. And he calls for a renewed Islamic ethics that can provide the “basis for shared values with other traditions, and ultimately universal values” (Ramadan in Ramadan, McRobie, and Bechler 2012). In this spirit, Ramadan also strongly and consistently condemns the use of violence against civilians by anyone claiming to be struggling for social justice or defending Islam or Christianity<sup>8</sup>, and supports free speech<sup>9</sup>.

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We are living in free spaces and we're at the forefront of new challenges. How do we deal with, for example, new technologies, the new economic order, new discoveries? To this day, we're still looking for answers from the East. The ulama [Muslim scholars] are not in Europe. They are still living in so-called Islamic countries. In this transitory period we must learn to build our critical minds and come up with new answers. My intellectual project is based on finding solutions from our own [Western] societies. We could even help the Islamic world find ways to deal with things like democracy, freedom, pluralism and a state of law. (Ramadan, in Al Malky 2004)

<sup>8</sup> Thus Ramadan insists:

Nothing can justify the killing of civilians, whether in Manchester and London, Kabul or Baghdad. It is important for us to be consistent in our condemnation of these criminal acts, and to maintain our support for all the victims, whoever they are, wherever they live. While the strategy of groups like Islamic State and individuals who commit these horrific attacks is to divide our societies, and to push us towards the perception that it is impossible to live together, it is critical for our leaders to resist sensationalist and divisive rhetoric.

Rather than targeting the so-called “Islamist-inspired terrorists”, we should be bringing people together and I mean all people, those with or without faith, in a united front against all senseless acts of violence against civilians, here or abroad. (Ramadan 2017)

<sup>9</sup> Ramadan also voices concerns about ways the “free speech” agenda can also be manipulated, for example concerning publication of the “Charlie Hebdo” cartoons and terrorist attacks killing twelve people including the director and several cartoonists (2015).

One sees difficult days ahead as yesterday's dramatic events in France showed; and there is the issue of media organisations intent on publishing the most offensive Charlie Hebdo cartoons, claiming that it would strike a blow for free speech.

I support free speech, but I would urge them to desist, for what they plan to do is not courageous and will do nothing to afford people dignity. It will be another example of targeting all Muslims. It would say that if our fellow Muslim citizens are not part of the equation, we will target not the extremists – but Islam itself. It would hand the extremists a victory they could scarcely have achieved for themselves. (Ramadan 2015)

He also argues that renewed Islam is compatible with expressions of secularism which recognize diverse religious traditions and do not discriminate among them. He even urges acceptance of *laïcité* in France when it protects the religious freedom of all – though he also protests that it often disguises a double-standard stereotyping and stigmatizing Muslims, discriminating against them, and relegating them to the economic and political margins.

More generally, Ramadan argues that Islam calls the faithful to support the struggles of everyone everywhere for justice and a dignified life<sup>10</sup>. This requires Muslim leaders to criticize their own societies, to recognize and oppose the sins committed in their names, and to advocate renewal.

At the same time, like Baum, he sees “the West” as in crisis, echoing critical perspectives in expanding progressive circles around the world (including proliferating “liberation” theologies), including deep criticisms of capitalism, or capitalist globalization and the austerity policies of many Western governments, drawing especially on critical European perspectives on the “dark side” of modernity<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, as happened to many Latin American liberation theologians, and to Baum too, many

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<sup>10</sup> Thus, Ramadan argues that

[...] there will also be no end to these crimes if we do not consistently promote justice abroad, which is a condition for peace. This includes ensuring the safety and security of citizens in states that western countries have helped destabilise. But it also means truly standing up for economic and social justice abroad, as opposed to pillaging other countries for their resources and securing our own interests. (Ramadan 2017)

<sup>11</sup> Ramadan, like other critical thinkers and activists, is constantly under enormous pressure to forget so much of the history of his people, and their place in world history:

We must forget what we learned about the conspiracies that have left their mark on the history of Latin America and Africa (from the assassination of Salvador Allende to the elimination of Thomas Sankara); we must overlook the lies that led to the invasion of Iraq and to the massacres in Gaza (both presented as legitimate defense); we must say nothing about the West’s alliance with and support for the literalist salafis of the Gulf sheikhdoms; close our eyes to the benefit for Israel of regional instability and of the most recent coup d’État in Egypt. We must remain naïve and credulous if we are not to notice that the United States and Europe on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other, have agreed to disagree on Syria, and that the 170 Syrians who die each day count for nothing against the strategic and economic interests of the Great Powers. (Ramadan 2013)

critics of Ramadan appear motivated more by economic and political differences than by theological concerns (though, in the end, all of these theologians insist that economic and religious concerns are deeply intertwined and ultimately inseparable).

It is easy to see why Baum felt called to defend Ramadan, for he saw remarkable parallels with his own theological journey in the profound renewal of Catholic tradition, turn to social justice and expanding dialogues with “others”. As he concluded, “[t]he effort of [...] Islamic thinkers [like Ramadan] is similar to that of the Catholic theologians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who tried to reconcile Catholicism with the humanistic values of modern society” (Baum 2017, 157). As he further elaborated:

As a committed Muslim he holds that Islam provides a spiritual as well as socio-political vision for human life on this earth. This sounds disquieting. Yet when he interprets what this means in the present historical context, he arrives at something that looks like social democracy and religious pluralism, grounded not in secular values, but on Islamic revelation. This sounds reassuring. Catholics committed to the social teaching of their Church will have spontaneous sympathy for Ramadan’s religious project. (Baum 2004, 5)

As we have seen above, simple binaries – like “premodern” (or “traditional” or “conservative”) versus “modern” (or “liberal”), “religious” vs “secular” – are increasingly becoming recognized as hallmarks of modernist thinking, and deeply misleading in interpreting religious and cultural traditions, since, as we know from our own experience, traditions and communities are always more internally polycentric, diverse, dynamic, contested, and changing<sup>12</sup>. But Baum’s conclusions about Ramadan’s theology and project of renewal confirm how deeply he identified with these reforming Muslim theologians and their struggles internally against both “conservative” or “fundamentalist” Muslims and overly “liberal” or modernizing Muslims as well as against external secularist critics, how

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<sup>12</sup> For example, reflecting the profusion of “other” voices in the liberation and social justice movements around the world since the 1960s, Benhabib points to “the radical hybridity and polyvocality of all cultures; cultures themselves, as well as societies, are not holistic but polyvocal, multilayered, decentered, and fractured systems of action” (Benhabib 2002, 25-26).

seriously he listened to these religious “others” and studied their writings, how deeply he appreciated their struggles to forge their own places in a changing world, and how seriously he promoted solidarity with them by providing accessible introductions of these thinkers and traditions to wider audiences.

Since the publication of Gregory Baum’s book on Ramadan’s theology in 2009, incidents of violent terrorism by those claiming to act in the name of Islam have multiplied, like the attacks on the offices of *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris killing twelve (2015)<sup>13</sup>. Islamophobia, persecution and violence against Muslims are also expanding. In particular, hijabs, burkas and niqabs have become highly-charged symbols for self-styled defenders of Western traditions in what they interpret as the “clash of civilizations”, fueling conflicts in France and Quebec especially. Wars continue killing and maiming thousands of Muslims in conflicts around the world. And orchestrated campaigns demonize Islam, urge the prosecution of Islamic activists and scholars alleging their hostility to “Western civilization” and support for violent terrorist groups, and condemn them.

In the last three years another kind of accusation against Ramadan has surfaced: charges of sexual abuse by two women (2017). Ramadan strongly denied the accusations. He negotiated a leave from Oxford University where he had been teaching. And in his defence he pointed to ideologically-motivated campaigns to discredit him and the critical and progressive Islam he represents.

The picture is complex and rapidly shifting. Initially denying sexual relations with the two, he subsequently admitted having sexual relations with them – but insisted that they were consensual. Several other women also subsequently charged him. But some later withdrew their charges. The Paris Criminal Brigade also dropped some charges for lack of sufficient evidence. And meanwhile a group of prominent academics and journalists, including Noam Chomsky, Charles Taylor, and several other Canadians, signed a public letter questioning his treatment in French courts (Defenders of Due Process for Tariq Ramadan 2018).

Most importantly, the signatories acknowledge that “[i]t is not for us to judge Tariq Ramadan’s guilt or innocence” regarding charges of

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<sup>13</sup> See Ramadan’s response (Ramadan 2015).

sexual abuse. They urge respect for the plaintiffs: “We fully recognize the rights of the plaintiffs to have their case heard without prejudice and without injury to their honour”. But they also insist that “[r]espect for a person’s fundamental rights, irrespective of his origins, his religion or his political opinions, constitutes the very foundation upon which democracy is built”, in France especially. And they worry that Ramadan’s treatment demonstrates “one form of justice for Muslims in France and another for everyone else”.

Their letter “expresses deep concern with the inhuman treatment that Tariq Ramadan has been subject to at the hands of French justice”. And it points to extended solitary confinement, inadequate treatment for his multiple sclerosis, limited family visitation rights, the denial of access to his case file as evidence of prejudicial treatment. It also points to the far more sympathetic and lenient treatment enjoyed by high-ranking French officials. And in conclusion the signatories

[...] ask our French friends: should it truly come to this?

We, the signatories of this letter, endorse France’s commitment to uphold the values of *liberté, égalité et fraternité* threatened today around the world.

We trust that your response to our appeal will prove these sentiments to be well placed.

This scandal erupted shortly after Gregory Baum died; so he was not troubled by these allegations against a theologian whom he so admired and respected, or their impact on the movement for reforming Islam, or on broader interfaith dialogues and solidarities. It is difficult though to imagine his avoiding comment; it is much easier to imagine him plunging into another round of research and dialogue. Of course, we cannot know how he would have responded in the end. But we can easily imagine that he would have made substantial contributions to untangling the tightly-woven threads of religion, sexuality, and politics so evident in the debates within and about Islam, and within and about Catholic and other Christian traditions too.



## 2.6 *Amazing Church (2005) and Catholic social teaching*

In 2005, deeply aware of the hostility during the papacies of Pope John Paul II and Benedict XVI to his understanding of the mainstream of Vatican Council II, Baum published *Amazing Church: a Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half-century of Change* (Baum 2005). As we know, he had long considered the matters of justice and peace to be at the heart of Catholic faith, not as the secondary, marginal, largely-neglected sub-discipline they are still widely considered to be. And in this book he reviewed the development of key teachings and their appearance in important Church documents, which together he considered to point to nothing less than a new form of Catholicism. Surely this reflected his own experiences in the Church, his participation in the momentous transformations of Vatican II, and his enthusiasm for the global spread of liberation, social justice, and peace theologies, their expression in proliferating Church offices, programs, and networks around the world. In these experiences of the Church, he continued to experience great joy, openness, and promise for the future. And, following his close readings of so many important texts, it is difficult to argue with this interpretation.

In typical Baum fashion, however, he notes only in passing other important facets of this story, in particular that the Church has not always lived up to this ideal, and that the church is still deeply divided about them! We know that throughout his life he cultivated a personal discipline that deliberately “de-dramatized the painful experiences in his life to be free to appreciate the good and promising events” (Baum 2017, 217)<sup>14</sup>, which may explain this tendency in his theology too. In any case, as insightful as he could be about the Spirit of renewal in the church, he was less reliable concerning the dark side of the church, its relentless grip on power, and the prospects for renewal.

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<sup>14</sup> See also Baum (2017, 211). Notably, it is only at the end of his intellectual autobiography that he mentions that “as a child in Nazi Germany I was surrounded by Jews ready to commit suicide rather than be arrested, humiliated, tortured, and very possibly killed in a concentration camp.” His stepfather carried a cyanide pill; and an uncle took the pill he also carried ending his life (Baum 2017, 236). Surely these traumas marked him more deeply than these passing references suggest. In another place he did refer to the “repressed unhappiness of my refugee experience” (Baum 2004, 22). But we hear nothing more about them or other painful episodes, or their lingering impacts.

## 2.7 *Election of Pope Francis (2013)*

After so many setbacks and defeats during the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the election of Pope Francis was shocking. In Gregory Baum's terms:

The election of Pope Francis in March 2013 revealed itself very quickly as an extraordinary event, a total surprise, a miracle in the biblical sense, and as a turning point in the church's self-understanding and its mission to the world [...], a major spiritual event, a redemptive happening, a leap in the church's history.

And he had a strong sense of gratitude for being allowed to participate in this shift, which filled him with gratitude (Baum 2017, 174, 176).

He also argued that Francis' teaching both revived and moved "beyond conciliar teaching" in two important respects: in repudiating as "idolatrous today's globalized capitalist economy" (a long-standing claim in Latin American liberation theologies); and in promoting "humility before truth", recognizing the limits of our capacities to know other people from other cultures and circumstances and to interpret texts from other historical times and places. And he appreciatively cites the Pope:

If a Catholic has the answers to all the questions—that is the proof that God is not with him [...] The great leaders of the people of God, like Moses, have always left room for doubt. We must be humble [...] If the Catholic is a legalist or restorationist, if he wants everything clear and safe, then he will find nothing. (Pope Francis I, quoted in Baum 2017, 175, citing Spadaro 2013)

As Baum noted, "[t]his humility before truth is not yet present in the documents of the Second Vatican Council"; and, he insisted, before Francis it "has never before been respected by the magisterium" (Baum 2017, 176, 175).

Most fundamentally, this openness requires recognizing the limitations of our capacities to understand people and texts, especially across religious and cultural contexts, and other differences of time and place. This is a hermeneutical and also a deeply theological option. As Baum wrote, "the unexpected' is a theological category: God's action in

the world is often a surprise, and unexpected mercy, and unforeseen breakthrough, an unpredictable turn of events” (Baum 2017, 180). And this humility is a prerequisite for a deeper, broader, more generous, more creative theological visions for the future.

Of course, this story is far from over. And there are many signs of deepening darkness. In the Church the list of challenges seems overwhelming; endless rounds of sexual abuse scandals (both the abuse itself, and the gross mismanagement of response by Church officials); virulent public opposition and even condemnations of Pope Francis by some bishops; Pope Francis’s own scandalously wrong response to the victims of priestly abuse in Chile<sup>15</sup>; the confusion and controversies at the Vatican summit on sex abuse (February 21-24, 2019); along with continued discrimination toward women; Vatican bureaucratic failures; Vatican Bank corruption; questionable alliances between some bishops and cardinals and far right, authoritarian governments, etc.

Meanwhile, in the world at large, human capacities to act are expanding on previously unimaginable scales. On the one hand, knowledge breakthroughs and new technologies are proliferating, and there appear to be many opportunities for great progress on many fronts, almost new heavens for the privileged few. But on the other hand, we also see proliferating signs of eco-civilizational crises, cultural and political turmoil, declining biodiversity, mass extinctions, and climate change matters far exceeding 20<sup>th</sup>-century debates about “capitalism” versus “socialism” and pointing, in many places literally, to a new hell on earth.

Until the end of his life Gregory Baum was deeply troubled by these darkening horizons in the world and in the Church. But he also continued to point to “the movements of resistance and reconstruction on the ground [...] [that] give him hope”.

And he also continued to affirm that “the Catholic tradition is alive, creative, ready to respond [to] new challenges, and capable of

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<sup>15</sup> As one of the whistleblowers, Juan Carlos Cruz, later reported from a private conversation with the pope concerning his role in the sex abuse scandal in Chile, “I was part of the problem” (Pope Francis on Chile sexual abuse scandal: “I was part of the problem” [2018]).

communicating the Gospel to the contemporary world” (Baum 2017, 190, 207).

### 3 Conclusion

So the issue is not whether Gregory Baum was a more or less great individual thinker in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century sense of the term<sup>16</sup>, but that in a rapidly changing world which no one single group and no single discourse can fully grasp, he was another kind of theologian in dialogue with other historically marginalized and silenced voices, in the spirit of Vatican II and pushing beyond its limits, exploring other traditions and scholarly discourses, addressing the cascading series of challenges provoked by new voices in theology and new issues, helping to forge another kind of theology, for another kind of church, witnessing to hope for another kind of world. In other words, his expanding and continually evolving horizons represent not just another theological doctrine or system, but a shift in theology as a mode of discourse, a different experience of God, a different anthropology in a different, increasingly globalized world with different ways of understanding planetary dynamics (in dialogue with natural and social sciences, popular and indigenous knowledges too), a different conception of the mission of the church in this divided and radically changing world, a different epistemology with different relationships among ignorance and knowledge, hope and faith, and a different kind of authority.

Surely Gregory Baum was right in seeing these developments as the movement of the Spirit at the heart of Vatican II and its legacy today.

And his repeated insistence on dialogue, openness to conversion, solidarity across differences, creativity, and truth in action (praxis) are the most promising hermeneutical keys in interpreting his legacy to us, and in our thinking about our next steps in theology too.

Perhaps we should think of Baum not only as leaving us in death, but as being invited to a higher plane of dialogue. Certainly, the God of

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<sup>16</sup> With the irruptions of so many new voices, other new developments, and globalization of dialogues such encyclopedic perspectives are really no longer even imaginable; see Curran (2005).

the Bible, who is so profoundly invested in Creation and human destiny, continues looking for dialogue partners and collaborators in the cosmically significant religious and theological debates today concerning the fate of the earth and all its creatures.

As we hear regularly in Latin American circles commemorating departed comrades, Gregory Baum: !Presente!

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## Abstract

*Gregory Baum was not a great theologian like the systematic giants of the mid-20th century. Rather, in a rapidly changing world which no one single person, group or discourse can fully grasp, he was a different kind of theologian, in dialogue with expanding circles of others, exploring new interdisciplinary pathways, forging another kind of theology witnessing to hope that another world is possible.*

## Résumé

Gregory Baum n'était pas un grand théologien comme les géants systématiques du milieu du 20e siècle. Plutôt, dans un monde en évolution rapide qu'aucune personne, aucun groupe ou aucun discours ne peut pleinement saisir, il était un autre type de théologien, en dialogue avec des cercles en expansion d'altérités, explorant de nouvelles voies interdisciplinaires, forgeant un autre type de théologie témoignant de l'espoir qu'un autre monde est possible.