

## Gregory Baum's "Effervescent" Hope in the Church Some reflections on the inclusivity of Gregory Baum's ecumenism and their bearing on the Church of the Future

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Hommage à Gregory Baum

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Résumé de l'article

Cet essai explore l'importance du dialogue dans les relations oecuméniques selon la pensée et l'écriture de Gregory Baum. Pour ce faire, il se concentre sur trois de ses écrits. Le premier est un entretien qu'il a donné en 2005 à A. Miller dans le *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*. Le second est sa discussion sur l'oecuménisme dans son livre de 2005, *Amazing Church. A catholic theologian remembers 50 years of change*. Le troisième est l'un des derniers écrits de Gregory Baum, rédigé en 2016 et intitulé «Interreligious Dialogue includes Listening to Secular Voices», dans le *Toronto Journal of Theology*. Ces trois écrits proviennent de son oeuvre antérieure sur le Concile Vatican II. Les trois documents auxquels il est fait référence sont *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate* et *Gaudium et spes*, ainsi que le document de 1991, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. L'essai explorera donc l'appréciation de Baum pour les trois formes de dialogue oecuménique, à savoir ce qui existe entre les confessions chrétiennes, l'interconfessionnel et le dialogue avec la pensée laïque. Ce ne sont pas des commentaires exhaustifs sur les documents précédents et ils ne sont certainement pas exhaustifs en ce qui a trait à la perspective théologique de Baum sur le dialogue oecuménique. Ils serviront plutôt de tremplin pour évaluer si ses perspectives sont toujours pertinentes pour l'église aujourd'hui.

# Gregory Baum's "Effervescent" Hope in the Church

## Some reflections on the inclusivity of Gregory Baum's ecumenism and their bearing on the Church of the Future<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 Introduction

In this essay I will be looking at Gregory Baum's ecumenical perspectives, which included those of other Christian denominations as well as other faiths, and I will briefly look at his engagement with secular thinkers, some of whom are referred to as none-faith holders. I do so not as an attempt to analyze these with the hopes of attaining a new perspective on ecumenism, but to indicate what an important role the Council of Vatican II played in Baum's thinking. What follows therefore are not exhaustive comments on

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<sup>1</sup> This essay is based on a paper I was asked to deliver by the organizers of a 2017 conference celebrating Gregory Baum's many contributions in certain theological fields. I was asked to write something about Gregory's understanding of ecumenism, specifically interreligious dialogue and whether or not this approach remains relevant for the churches today. I do so with great gladness, as I owe a deep gratitude to Gregory for having guided me across some rocky terrain early in my career at McGill. I do so, not as a student of his, nor even as a colleague in his many fields of study, but rather as someone who was sufficiently inspired by his writings to have spent some time in interreligious dialogue. By training I am a Hebrew Bible exegete and a historian of Ancient Israel.

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Baum's ecumenical interests. They are rather a means of understanding how it was that Gregory Baum addressed the many sometimes conflicting issues involved in ecumenical dialogue. Of particular note is his book about Tariq Ramadan, which I do not discuss but that contains the fruit of seeds that were planted much earlier in Baum's long career.

In a general sense, Gregory Baum's theological reflections regarding ecumenism consisted of ever-enlarging waves, which seemed to want to embrace all that the created order represented. Specifically, however, Baum's understanding of ecumenism follows the statements of the Vatican II Council. Working with these statements, Baum chose to highlight the work of the Council by enlarging its parameters using contemporary examples. Both ecumenism understood as between Christian denominations as well as what is sometimes spoken of as interreligious dialogue and finally dialogue with non/e-believers, are always for Gregory to be spoken of within the context of the Church's mission. This paper will therefore concentrate on the three documents of Vatican II, *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Gaudium et spes* as well as the 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation*, all of which, I think, give shape to his thinking on matters of ecumenism<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> For those interested in Baum's response to *Dominus Iesus* (Ratzinger 2000), a declaration handed down by the then prefect Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, please see Baum (2007b). In this article Baum presents the historical doctrine on the Church and religious pluralism and seeks to answer the question, How can believers adhere to the religious truth they have inherited while respecting other religious traditions?

The reader is taken along a historical path which concludes not with the declaration but rather a subsequent document which Benedict XVI wrote in 2006 when speaking of Islam and which endorses the previous thinking on Islam and the other Great Religions. Baum thus concludes that the Catholic Church of 2007 defends and upholds the position of Vatican II vis-à-vis other beliefs. « Il n'y a pas de doute que le concile Vatican II a été un tournant redéfinissant la relation de l'Église catholique au pluralisme religieux » (Baum 2007b).

Baum did not engage the issues raised by *Dominus Iesus* at the theological level but rather chose to recount the historical process whereby these ideas receded into the background in 2006. This is in stark contrast to the Catholic theologian Philip Kennedy, who wrote that "*Dominus Iesus* regards religious pluralism as a worrying phenomenon. Yet religious pluralism is unavoidable because of the ineffability or complexity of God [...] Jesus Christ is not the complete revelation of God in history, but a partial manifestation of what God may be like" (Imbelli 2004).

In an interview given in 2005, Baum was asked a general question about the role the Church plays in the interpretation of Scripture and, conversely, the role Scripture played in shaping the Church (Baum 2005, 23-24). His approach was typical in that he began his response by making a reasonably innocuous statement in classical terms, and then continued to wind his way through the centuries of Christian doctrinal positions ending up in the contemporary moment with a quite radical statement.

In the same interview, he states:

So I think that the Church and Scripture belong very much together. When I say Church, I do not necessarily mean church authority at the moment, but just the believing community. The community reads Scripture, and the creativity of God's word is then revealed in the never-completed meaning communicated to the believing community throughout the ages. When the Church finds itself in a new situation, it re-reads the scriptures and, because it hears God's word addressing the new situation, it hears what its ancestors did not hear. (Baum 2005, 23)

He goes on to suggest that there are times when the scriptures can confirm what the Church does. However, when the interpretation of Scripture criticizes what the Church is doing, it is at these moments more than at other times that people must be able to listen to such criticism and be judged and confirmed by it. He then states:

This interests me particularly because in modernity we are confronted with all kinds of new questions that the ancients didn't have, and we trust that we are not without wisdom regarding these new questions because we read our scriptures, and we hear in Scripture what our ancestors didn't hear. (Baum 2005, 23)

Regarding Hans-Georg Gadamer, he reminds us that classic texts continue to address contemporary situations as they have a "surplus of meaning". He then goes on to give an example from the Catholic Church:

[...] we rejected modernity, we rejected human rights and personal liberties because we thought that Christ wanted us to proclaim the truth in order to rescue people from error. So we did not approve of religious liberty because it made room for people in error. This was our position in the nineteenth century. It was thought at the time that this was being obedient to Jesus and certain biblical texts. Later, Pope John XXIII was impressed by the universal declaration of human rights of the UN, published after World War II with its endless killing and its endless humiliation of humans. So he decided to

re-read the scriptures and found biblical texts that affirm the high dignity of the human being, both as image of God in the creation story in Genesis and as summoned by God according to the Pauline doctrine that in Jesus God acted on behalf of all humanity. (Baum 2005, 23)

Human dignity was grounded in the very orders of creation and redemption, which was what convinced John XXIII that such a dignity ought to be respected by those wielding authority in government as well as other secular institutions. Gregory concluded from this that John XXIII “found a theological foundation for human rights, not by compromise with the modern world, but by re-reading Scripture.” It was this principle that allowed Gregory and many others to enlarge the boundaries of the Church’s concerns and as such become truly universal while at the same time guarding people’s individuality. In this way, Baum refused to cut himself off from the Church and from the rest of humanity. The teaching of Vatican II was what propelled Baum’s thinking and writing into engaging with ever-larger circles of human endeavour.

Whether he was aware of it or not, Gregory’s ability to see beyond the horizons of individual faith dynamics led him into dialogue with people and traditions that were not natural intellectual allies. For Baum, the concept of dialogue is a modern one, one which asked people to quite literally understand the other as though one were that person. This was for him a great affirmation of the Enlightenment. He recognized that the modern notion of dialogue was such that truth claims were bracketed out and what was important was that dialogue partners be able to understand why the other thought the way they did. Mutual understanding is what dialogue is about, a process which inevitably changed those involved. Indeed for Baum, the ecumenical dialogues of the 50s were one of his most exceptional experiences:

I discovered that Dialogue is a form of love because you are willing to shut up, put your convictions into parentheses, and listen carefully to what the other has to say. In dialogue, God is digging a new ear into the participants that allows them to learn and be transformed. Philosophy and theology can clarify the experience of Dialogue. (Baum 2005, 28)

## 2 Dialogue and the assumptions of postmodernity

As Gregory and others have pointed out, dialogue presumes that we share something in common with the other, a form of reason which allows us to understand what the other sees. The notion that the other was so other that one could not have a dialogue was for Baum a frightening prospect given his encounters with fascism.

So he was prompted to say:

In the present situation dominated by many structures of exclusion, I argue that every sentence that recognizes the otherness of others should be followed by a sentence that recognizes their similarity. Postmodern ideas in an empire are particularly dangerous! Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilization" is based on the false idea that the world religions are bearers of incompatible values and that, for this reason, the civilizations to which they gave birth will clash and war is almost inevitable. This is dangerous nonsense. A multitude of inter-religious councils and institutions have demonstrated empirically that this is not true: religions are living traditions capable of reacting creatively to new historical situations and engaging in a fruitful dialogue with one another. The postmodern thinkers are quite wrong when they think that others are totally others – but they do not recognize the political danger of their discourse. (Baum 2005, 30)

Baum's vigilance vis-à-vis philosophical movements was in line with the biblical text, which was always a compass for him. His ability to draw on the breadth and depth of the whole of the scriptural heritage was undoubtedly one of his many intellectual strengths, as was his propensity for drawing people into dialogue. It was as though he recognized the importance of the insights of the prophetic stance of Second Isaiah: "he [God] says: 'It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth'" (Isaiah 49:6). As the prophet of the exile spoke of a light to the Gentiles so Baum sought to build bridges between the Church and other faith communities as well as various and sundry marginalized groups. A voice whose theological perspective is one which takes seriously the Church as "humanity-as-touched-by-God's-grace," *Ecclesia ab Abel*, the Church beginning with Abel and including after him all who have been transformed by divine grace. It was this phrase, which was picked up, used

by Vatican II much to Gregory's satisfaction, and one which made him "very happy" (Baum 2005, 25).

This voice was not simply one which wanted to engage with other religions purely out of intellectual interest but wanted as well to engage with secularity itself as if to say that there was nothing that was beyond God's concern.

He preferred the dialectic method when arguing a point, which meant that he could take seemingly opposite positions and bring unity not by articulating a lowest common denominator but rather through a profound understanding of the "other" as being that which remained connected to other aspects of the created order.

Indeed Gregory's thinking about postmodernity and the situations of today led him to repudiate much of postmodern thinking on individuality. Not least because Gregory states many times that postmodern thinking misses the value of the concept of the other. Concerning Derrida's stated understanding "that not only is God wholly other but that every other person is wholly other", Baum states "I find this frightening". He understands this position to work against dialogue, that which for Baum is part and parcel of the reconciling love of God. In the same article, Baum goes on to reference Jean-François Lyotard who in 1980 wrote that dialogue was "the illusion of modernity" because dialogue presupposes that we share something in common with the other, some form of reason. Guided in his later years by the Frankfurt school of thought, Gregory maintained that it differed from 1980s forms of postmodern thought, in that while condemning what the Enlightenment had become it did not totally reject it. Rather the Frankfurt philosophers opposed conservatives, existentialists and fascists of their day who rejected the Enlightenment and its great achievements: democracy and human rights. Typically, Gregory argued that the Frankfurt School

[...] negated the Enlightenment "dialectically", which meant that they wanted to retrieve the substantive reason of the original Enlightenment. They called for a cultural conversion to solidarity. But since the moral resources of society were so limited, the Frankfurt School was near despair. Still, their passionate wish to recover universal solidarity makes them different from postmodern thinkers who repudiate the Enlightenment "non-dialectically", giving up justice and emancipation for the excluded as a dangerous modern illusion. (Baum 2005, 29)

It is in this context that we gain an insight into Gregory's own thinking with regards to world religions when he remarks that

Hans Küng has argued that a new paradigm i[n] is emerging in the world religions making them see their sacred mission as a commitment to foster the reconciliation and pacification of humankind. (Baum 2005, 29)

Convinced that the rhetoric of "the other" contained in postmodern discourse when applied to empires is particularly dangerous, Gregory speaks of religions as

[...] living traditions capable of reacting creatively to new historical situations and engaging in a fruitful dialogue with one another. The postmodern thinkers are quite wrong when they think that others are totally others – but they do not recognize the political danger of their discourse. (Baum 2005, 30)

For example, he argues that "we want to respect the otherness of Native peoples, but also celebrate our common humanity". This is important as it allowed Gregory to move beyond what some might see as the particularity of his arguments on *Nostra aetate* in terms of Judaism, to embracing dialogue with the other great religious traditions of our day (something certainly mentioned in *Nostra aetate* but not elaborated upon) and finally with the secular voices of today's world.

The mission of the Catholic Church in Asia has become a hotly debated topic. Is the mission of the Catholic Church in Asia to preach the Gospel so that Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in order to have them abandon their religion and become Christians? Or is it the Church's mission to engage in Dialogue and co-operation with Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists in order to deepen the spirituality of all participants, each learning from the other, and together engage in the struggle for peace and justice in their societies? (Baum 2002, 89)

As one of the *periti* at the Secretariat of Christian Unity during Vatican II, Baum was given the task of preparing various drafts for three documents on ecumenism, religious liberty, and on the Church's attitude towards Judaism and other religions. For Baum, then, the Second Vatican Council convinced him that interreligious dialogue was part of the Church's mission of peace and reconciliation.



Interreligious Dialogue, [as I understand it], has two interconnected purposes: (1) to overcome ignorance and prejudice, fostering mutual understanding among the religions, and (2) to discover the values held in common by these religions, making possible cooperation in support of the common good. In today's world, interreligious Dialogue plays an increasingly important role – by offering resistance to the fundamentalist currents in the world religions and by generating solidarity to counter interreligious hostilities produced by political and economic power struggles. (Baum 2016, 363)

Baum was always grateful that he had had the opportunity to study sociology in the late 1960s, which is the moment he credits his discovery that

[...] listening to thoughtful secular thinkers enriched Christian theology, generating a more critical perception of the Christian tradition and a more truthful understanding of its present historical context. I was soon able to teach courses at St Michael's College in the University of Toronto on theology in Dialogue with the social sciences. (Baum 2016, 363)

It was precisely the experience of listening to and interacting with non-religious intellectuals that Baum

[...] became convinced that interreligious Dialogue must listen to thoughtful secular thinkers to achieve its aim and purpose more effectively. One result of Dialogue with the social sciences is the discovery of the non-theological factors that produce religious conflicts. This Dialogue also reveals the contextual character of theological theories and doctrinal statements. Still, many conservative thinkers in all the religious traditions resist Dialogue with secular scholars and pay no serious attention to their ideas. In today's deeply divided world, religious thinkers in all religious traditions are rereading the sources of their faith to find in them sacred grounds for respecting religions other than their own and for extending charity, care, and hospitality to all human beings. (Baum 2016, 364)


In the same article Gregory would go on to argue that the world takes its cue from those “Religious organizations attentive to the threat of war, such as the World Conference of Religions for Peace, which have come to recognize that interreligious Dialogue must include listening to secular voices” (Baum 2016, 364). Not least as all religions were susceptible to being hijacked by ideological movements, which could seriously warp and misrepresent the integrity of that faith's beliefs they should

always remain open to the critique of scripture as well as secular thinkers. To shore up this idea, Baum reminds his readers that the Quebec sociologist and theologian Fernand Dumont had argued:

Religions, like all social groupings, tend to create for themselves an ideology or symbolic presentation that legitimates their present institutional form and assures its stability. A religion that assimilates this ideology makes the thriving of its institutions the primary purpose of its mission, thus distorting the religious message it has received. Dumont held that all religions need Dialogue with critical reason to become authentic mediators of their truth. (Baum 2016, 364)

But these were not simply Baum's ideas. By 2016 he could write that there had been a progression of thought in Cardinal Ratzinger's thought that during the time after his becoming Pope Benedict XVI his thoughts on interreligious dialogue had so shifted as to now include the idea that "religious leaders and thinkers must be in dialogue with secular critical thought" (Baum 2016, 365).

Indeed so convinced had Benedict become of the need to listen to and enter into dialogue with non-religious thinkers that in 2008 he asked the then president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, Cardinal Ravasi, to create an official space for dialogue with non-believers. Benedict named this space "the Courtyard of the Gentiles", an allusion to the courtyard of the second temple of Jerusalem that permitted non-Jews or gentiles. Baum adds that Cardinal Ravasi strongly supported this project and, so far as Baum was concerned, this new creation was an indication of a new positive attitude to dialogue not only with people of other religions but with non-religious people as well (Baum 2016, 365-367). Once the courtyard was created, Cardinal Ravasi commented that

[...] the Pontifical Council for Culture has decided to cooperate in the destruction of a wall that once erected, prevented an exchange of gazes and words between the two symbolic and different "Courtyards", We wish to broach a dialogue, maintaining ourselves sturdy in our territories, but respecting the identities.  is the place to search for common itineraries, without shortcuts or distractions or disturbances, in which listening becomes fundamental in spite of the differences. (Ravasi 2009)

Once again, we note Baum's careful articulation of the process of what is pronounced as a Vatican position to substantiate his own

theological thinking (Baum 2016, 368, footnotes 7-12). His theological perspective on the need for dialogue with non-religious thinkers is not only his view but also that of Benedict XVI, who is often regarded as a more conservative and traditional thinker (Baum 2007a, 121-144). Once again, Baum can reflect on the words of the leadership of the Catholic Church and see in them an expansion of the original broadening of the value of dialogue in the thinking of John XXIII. Baum used these to demonstrate that no field or area of thought is beyond the boundaries of ecumenical dialogue.

Keeping with this example of Ratzinger/Benedict, Baum points to Benedict's fearlessness in choosing to concentrate on what Baum refers to as the dark side of religion, namely how religion can promote violence. So for Baum, Benedict demonstrated in his convocation of intellectuals in 2011 at Assisi that Benedict himself was deeply committed to listening to "the post-Enlightenment critique of religion that has repeatedly shown that religion is a cause of division, hatred, and violence and for this reason, deserves to be resisted and opposed" (Baum 2016, 367). As proof of this commitment he quotes Benedict (2011) directly: "we also see religion as the cause of violence when force is used by the defenders of one religion against others" (Baum 2016, 367, quoted from Benedict XVI 2011).

Baum continues and ends the article by drawing the reader's attention to Benedict's firm belief that the non-believers are as much "pilgrims of truth and pilgrims of peace", as are believers and that they challenge atheists and believers alike:

They take away from militant atheists the false certainty by which these claim to know that there is no God [. . .] and they also challenge the followers of religions not to consider God as their property, as if he belonged to them, in such a way that they feel vindicated in using force against others. (Baum 2016, 367)

In a few brief pages, Baum once again enlarges the circle of those who should be dialogue partners of those in the Church. The net is to be cast ever wider in order to embrace the whole of the created order. Whatever the impulse may be to reconcile ourselves to God through Christ, it cannot reach fulfilment save through all of creation. As in the instance of ecumenical dialogue and interfaith dialogue, Baum's primary concern appears not to be theologically oriented. Instead, motivated by his

overarching concerns for justice and peace, Baum argues for the necessity of the Church's engagement with all intellectuals.

This is, of course, a delicate matter, as it is not an easy task to sit at a table with such divergences as are present among those of another faith and those of no faith and be expected to bring an awareness of each to the other. What had been for Baum a journey of ever-widening horizons was now the preferred path of the Church generally.

### **3 Baum's response to the early beginnings of the ecumenical movement**

Gregory Baum's interests in ecumenism were first roused in the 1950s when he met other Catholic theologians who were positively inclined to the ecumenical movement and who "believed that the [then] official attitude was a mistake" (Baum, 2005, 103-104). He remembers that at this time the writings of Yves Congar played a particularly strong influence on him and his friends, especially Congar's book *Chrétiens désunis. Principes d'un oecuménisme catholique* (1937). Baum goes on to suggest that it was held in such esteem largely because of its sympathetic rendering of other non-Catholic Christian belief systems and because of its positive rendering of the ecumenical movement itself. Baum viewed Yves Congar a most influential theologian of Vatican II. However, of even greater importance are Baum's reflections on why the Catholic Church became open to the ecumenical movement:

In my opinion, it was the emergence of a new ethical horizon, associated with democracy and pluralism and sustained by a commitment to freedom, equality and participation. [...] in the new ethical horizon produced and later betrayed by modernity the Church was obliged to reread Scripture and Tradition in order to articulate in a new way the ethical imperatives of the Gospel. (Baum 2005, 106)

The roots of the movement were cultivated in no small part by the solidarity between many Catholics and Protestants in their opposition to the Nazi regime of World War II. However, more than this was the Church's recognition in *Unitatis redintegratio*, that the Holy Spirit was alive and working from within the confines of the "separated brethren" to reunite the churches and thus lessen the hostilities between them. These other churches should now be seen as Christian where once they were not,

mediating certain salvation from within their communities to their members through word and sacrament. On the other hand, this revelation was incomplete, and the true heir of the fullness of the divine revelation in Christ was understood to have been given to the Catholic Church alone. Nonetheless, the Catholic Church was enjoined to seek out ecumenical endeavours on an equal footing with other Christians.

[...] Catholics must gladly acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren. It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in His works and worthy of all praise. Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ and the Church. (Second Vatican Council, "On Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*", 1964, sec. 4; hereafter cited as UR)

For Baum, the most stunning feature of the document is its boldness in decreeing what sister churches ought to be doing to foster unity, which sometimes resulted in what Baum refers to as "antithetical principles". The example he refers to is that of common sacramental practice. On the one hand, it symbolizes perfect unity, and on the other hand, such practice offers a "grace that leads to greater unity". Regarding the first principle, the Council is not to share in common worship since "perfect unity does not exist". Regarding the second principle, such common worship is favoured as it fosters unity. The Decree, however, goes on to say that in terms of every Sunday practice common sacramental practice does not take place because people worship within their church communities but that on special occasions in order to foster the spirit of ecumenism the sharing of the sacraments was to be recommended (UR, sec. 15).

The following is a quote from the document which Gregory acknowledges as being a favourite of his:

Christ summons the Church to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth. The Church is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth. Thus if in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in moral conduct or in church

discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated – to be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself – these can and should be set right at the opportune moment. (UR, sec. 6)

Again we see Baum eager to recognize the reforming intent of a singularly vital document to emerge from Vatican II.

It is precisely this reforming intent that guides him when speaking of *Nostra aetate* and its statements on Judaism and the Jews. Also included are the document's reflections and reforming statements regarding the Church's attitudes to other religions. It is these statements that will be what guides Baum in one of his final pieces of writing discussed above when tackling the need to allow for dialogue with non-religious intellectuals.

This mission of the Church was complex and articulated in different documents which were themselves difficult to reconcile. Was her purpose of proclaiming Christ to convert them to Christianity or was it her mission to engage them in dialogue in order to promote justice and peace? In the document *Ad gentes*, mission was understood primarily as proclamation, yet in *Gaudium et spes* the Church's mission is seen to be the promotion of love, justice, and peace in the "service of the Lord's approaching reign" (Baum 2005, 115). In *Nostra aetate*, mission was understood in terms of dialogue and cooperation. It was only in the much later document *Dialogue and Proclamation* that an attempt was made to clarify the issue. In this latter document are found the theological principles that should guide the Church in her openness to other religions, principles which were but hinted at in *Nostra aetate*. Baum summarizes paragraphs 19-28 as follows:

According to the ancient doctrine, grounded in Scripture and developed by certain Eastern church fathers, God's eternal Word incarnate in Jesus enlightens every human born into this world, and God's eternal Spirit dwelling in the church is at work in the human world and the cosmos preparing the ultimate reconciliation in Jesus Christ. The Church alone proclaims and is grasped by the mystery of redemption that is operative in a hidden Way in the entire universe and in particular in the religious and sapiential traditions of humanity. (Baum 2005, 116)

In terms of the section on dialogue, the document emphasized the importance of trust and mutuality suggesting that dialogue was not simply the exchange of information for dialogue prompts a specific attitude that

purifies the participants from prejudice so that shared spiritual insights can be exchanged. Furthermore, Baum paraphrases no. 48:

Dialogue does not hide the universal claim of the Christian Gospel, yet it excludes any initiative to make converts – i.e., to persuade a dialogue partner to change his or her religious affiliation. (Baum 2005, 116)

Clearly, for Baum, the document's understanding of dialogue is essential, and so he quotes the four distinctions that are offered, namely the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange, and finally the dialogue of religious experience. Whereas Baum discusses each of these as sometimes being in conflict with the notion of proclamation and discusses in some detail an example of just such a conflict articulated by Church authorities (Baum 2005, 117-124), he nevertheless ends by referring to Pope John Paul II's address in 2002 in Assisi which focused on "religious pluralism as part of God's wonderful plan" (Baum 2005, 124). What is more, he states:

The theological grounds for praising religious pluralism are not explained by the Pope. The Logos Christology implicit in *Nostra aetate* and clearly spelt out in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, allows us to rejoice in the spiritual rites and values that we share with followers of other religions.

This theology permits us to

[...] honour the world religions because of their similarity with the Christian religion, yet not because of their difference. Is religious difference part of God's design? Certain statements of John Paul II suggest a theological appreciation of otherness, yet the question regarding the Church's mission in the world has not yet been fully resolved in the Church's official teaching. (Baum 2005, 124)

Gregory remained unconvinced by the notion put forward by at least some philosophers that world religions use different metaphors and symbols to proclaim the same divine being and are therefore equivalent to one another. Gregory's thinking, however, suggested instead that

The Church proclaims the Gospel to spiritual seekers to the confused, to people without faith and hope, and to people caught up in destructive ideologies but that its mission to followers of the world religions is simply Dialogue, co-operation, and witness. (Baum 2005, 129)

On the other hand, the Logos Christology that Baum points to as being implicit in *Nostra aetate* and explicit in *Dialogue and Proclamation* is thought by some theologians to be an inadequate theology of otherness, as it does not wholly embrace the otherness of each religious tradition. Still, other theologians question the assertion by the Church that Jesus Christ is God's final revelation. Yet Baum goes on to argue:

It seems to me impossible to remove from the biblical message the idea that disclosed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus is God's merciful action that rescues humanity from all alienating powers and reconciles the world with its creator. I see the doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity not as foreign paradigms imposed upon the Scriptures, but as the sacred symbols that clarify and unify the biblical message of universal salvation. (Baum 2005, 132)

#### **4 Relevance of Gregory Baum's thought for today**

I do think that the concerns of proclamation and dialogue remain as deeply relevant today as ever precisely because so much is at stake in terms of global warming trends and the effect these are having on various regions around the world. No longer is it possible to deflect such concerns as being but aberrations. The impact that such trends are having on the well-being of some of the most vulnerable of the world is too great. More than ever, the Church needs to dialogue more earnestly with the scientists of this age in order that the issue of climate change be addressed by the faithful in systematic terms that align with Gospel values of justice and peace. The integrity of creation and its preservation is one of those aspects of prophetic faith which is at the core of our biblical faith. Yet it would seem that we have grown deaf to the cries of the many now being devastated by the greed of those whose market interests are all-consuming. In this context what is needed is a Church that embraces the divine *kenosis* precisely in order to celebrate the divine image in all of creation, and which is, therefore, prepared to support the integrity of creation even if a financial portfolio suffers. This then is the same Church whose gaze is transfixed on the need to dialogue but not at any cost – one which takes seriously religious differences and rejoices in religious pluralism not for the sake of dialogue but because of dialogue. For it is in the dialogue that bridges are constructed between intellectual traditions so that the earth can be the focus of our attention.



## 5 Conclusions

Baum's deference to the Church in her deliberations with regards to ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and dialogue with non-religious intellectuals was guided by the insights of the theology of the documents of Vatican II. Having worked on so many of the drafts of the three documents on ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, and the mission of the Church, Baum would spend much of the rest of his writing career in articulating the meaning these had for the Church today. He did this, however, not for the sake of Vatican II but rather for the sake of the people of the world, a world which seems so intent on hiding from its moral duty to uphold the needs and fight for the rights of the world's disenfranchised.

If ecumenical and interreligious dialogue can help bring justice and peace to a part of the world that was at war, or if interfaith dialogue and faith and non-faith dialogue bring can peace to economically impoverished communities, then the Church's mission is not in vain. If a better understanding of the faiths of the many refugees and immigrants within our borders can help to bring peace to the minds of those threatened by diversity then the processes of dialogue no matter how fractured are still worth maintaining. They are worth maintaining not for dogmatic reasons alone but for reasons which include the well-being of humanity. Such reasons draw humanity together, break down the walls of division, serve as a bridge to understanding the humanity of the other, and draw us closer to God, the source of our creation<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> I mention here Gregory Baum's Introduction to Rosemary Reuther's *Faith and Fratricide* (Baum 1974, particularly 15-19) as an early indication of Baum's commitment to the process of dialogue.

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## Abstract

*This essay explores the importance of dialogue in ecumenical relations in the thought and writing of Gregory Baum. To do so it focusses on three of his writings. The first is an interview he gave in 2005 to A. Miller in the *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*. The second is his discussion of ecumenism in his 2005 book *Amazing Church. A Catholic Theologian Remembers a Half Century of Change*. The third is one of the last writings of Gregory Baum written in 2016 entitled « *Interreligious Dialogue Includes Listening to Secular Voices* », in the *Toronto Journal of Theology*. All three of these writings stem from his earlier writing on the second Vatican Council. The three documents which are referred to are *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate*, and *Gaudium et spes* as well as the 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation*. The essay therefore explores Baum's appreciation of all three forms of ecumenical dialogue, namely that which exists between Christian denominations, inter faith and dialogue with secular thought. These are not exhaustive commentaries on the previous documents and they are certainly not exhaustive in terms of Baum's theological perspective on ecumenical dialogue. Rather, they will serve as a springboard when asking if his perspectives are still relevant for the church today.*

## Résumé

Cet essai explore l'importance du dialogue dans les relations œcuméniques selon la pensée et l'écriture de Gregory Baum. Pour ce faire, il se concentre sur trois de ses écrits. Le premier est un entretien qu'il a donné en 2005 à A. Miller dans le *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture*. Le second est sa discussion sur l'œcuménisme dans son livre de 2005, *Amazing Church. A catholic theologian remembers 50 years of change*. Le troisième est l'un des derniers écrits de Gregory Baum, rédigé en 2016 et intitulé « *Interreligious Dialogue includes Listening to Secular Voices* », dans le *Toronto Journal of Theology*. Ces trois écrits proviennent de son oeuvre antérieure sur le Concile Vatican II. Les trois documents

auxquels il est fait référence sont *Unitatis redintegratio*, *Nostra aetate* et *Gaudium et spes*, ainsi que le document de 1991, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. L'essai explorera donc l'appréciation de Baum pour les trois formes de dialogue œcuménique, à savoir ce qui existe entre les confessions chrétiennes, l'interconfessionnel et le dialogue avec la pensée laïque. Ce ne sont pas des commentaires exhaustifs sur les documents précédents et ils ne sont certainement pas exhaustifs en ce qui a trait à la perspective théologique de Baum sur le dialogue œcuménique. Ils serviront plutôt de tremplin pour évaluer si ses perspectives sont toujours pertinentes pour l'église aujourd'hui.