

condition of there being a genuine Christian mission is that there be a living Jewish faith which refuses to be assimilated into cosmic religions and spiritualities, which maintains its distinct commitment to the God of Israel. If this is so, then Christianity cannot overcome Judaism without destroying itself: it needs the core of star to be there. And so we Christians cannot regard Judaism as superseded by a single Christian dispensation without undermining our identity and mission.

Rosenzweig points to the ways in which mutuality and difference are not threats to the identity of Jews and Christians, but the very conditions of their identity. From being the "other" that we blindly reject, Jews might be the "other" to whom we need to relate in order to be ourselves and witness to God.¹⁸ Rosenzweig, of course, speaks as a Jew, but from a Christian perspective could his model of mutuality and difference as the condition of identity also apply to Christianity's relation to the range of other traditions and religions it has to deal with? Christianity is set between a Jewish root--never left behind, of course --and extra-Christian experiences (moral, spiritual, cultural) which it must engage and which will come to nourish it. Christian identity is formed from a positive relationship to extra-Christian sources because it depends upon them for what it needs to know about the *humanum* and the range of God's action within our nature. We cannot assume a unitary Christian source of cultural and social values: when was that ever true?

If these approaches are right, Christians can never be totalizing or panoptic in how we deal with otherness because we depend upon there being *others* who contribute to what we need to hear and know. I can be myself only because others are different and, by being themselves in their distinctiveness, give me permission not to be like them: so with Christianity and the traditions it deals with in the conversations in the human city. In these conversations, we listen and speak in response to what we hear; consolation in this ministry is inseparable from humble attentiveness to different voices. GC34 has a sentence that is rich in its implications for fundamental theology:

In the conceptions of the mind, in the habits of the heart, in the root metaphors and values of all cultures--even, we might say, in the very processes by which our physical bodies

become capable of intense spiritual experience--God is preparing the conditions in his creatures for the loving acknowledgement of his truth, making them ready for the transformation promised in Christ (GC 34, OMC 18 [102]).

Countercultural Paschal Christology

GC34 's general orientation towards these other traditions is, of course, positive: we are asked to put ourselves humbly in touch with what God and the Risen Christ are doing in the otherness of religions and cultures (GC34, Our Mission and Culture, 14-18). But as soon as you acknowledge the positive value of difference and otherness, you raise the question of the need for Christianity to retain its own sense of difference in order to witness effectively.

The program of correlations which I outlined earlier will collapse into a cultural assimilation between Gospel and culture--an accommodationism--unless there is sufficient distance and difference between Church and world. If the boundaries are indistinguishable between Christians and culture, between Christians and others, what good are we to anyone because we will simply repeat what they already know from within their own resources? You will see here an echo of the argument put forward by Avery Dulles on the need for countercultural, orthodox believers.¹⁹ This is where the second, Paschal, model of the relation between Gospel and culture shows its value: *the Word confronts and challenges human cultures by refusing to be assimilated by them.*

Let me approach this issue, again through listening to a Jewish voice, the Chief Rabbi in Britain, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.²⁰ In his view, the assumptions on which human cultures depend are transmitted through what we can call "moral communities": free associations of men and women which bear messages about human life and how it is to be lived. Meaning and purpose are not generated by the isolated individual, but they exist through shared communities of meaning, through communities which convey purpose, value, meaning to successive generations.

Sacks argues that while our contemporary secular culture extends a tolerance to every religion, it also so modifies each religion in a way that removes from it every distinctive



feature and weakens its internal source of energy. There takes place, he argues, the secular assimilation and absorption of disparate religious communities under pressure from the culture in which they live. Consequently, the religious faith of each community is modified by the liberal assumptions of secular culture: skepticism about distinguishing between 'right' and 'wrong' beliefs; the privatization of belief; a tolerance of all perspectives, all of which are treated as valid; the maximum freedom for individual choice; marginalization of faith from public life, etc. Secular society, in short, shapes religious communities more they shape society.

Sacks says that when society becomes aware of the breakdown of moral and spiritual values in its life, it then looks to the religious traditions to provide a basis of the moral and spiritual cohesion which society needs. But the religious communities have been rendered so weak that they cannot provide strong enough sources of religious and moral energy to provide the cohesion and inspiration, which would serve society effectively.²¹

A liberal culture, he argues, depends upon meanings borne by moral communities that bear messages about how to live and be, but it cannot draw upon the energies of these communities because it constantly weakens them in order to tame them. Hence the *aporia* or vacuum at the moment in which moral and cognitive relativism flourishes and in which religions become marginal and socially ineffective. For Sacks, only internally strong and distinct communities, who maintain their sense of difference, can act as the generative heart of cultural values.

You may agree or disagree with Jonathan Sacks' argument, and its possible application to the identity of the Christian community--you may think, with good reason, that it is more Jewish than Christian, or that it is more suitable to a model of the Church as sect, rather than to the Church as a school of sinners--but his analysis of the pressures in modern societies to dissolve the religiously and distinctively different seems to me right.²² He offers, I think, an alternative vision of *a community of religious communities* which, precisely by being different from one another and from the dominant consensus, can be generative towards the wider culture.



In my view, the central question which GC34 raises for the Jesuit mission is the question of how we deal positively with the phenomenon of otherness in its different forms: atheistic, agnostic, post-Christian sensibility, non-Christian religious traditions, fragmented societies in spiritual and cultural decline, narratives of secularity and the range of culturally privatized alternatives that have emerged in the Western world. Implied in this question is how we Christians configure our own *otherness* as a contribution to the shared, lasting human good. It is perhaps only by developing our understanding of the human and religious aspects of *otherness as a condition of witnessing to the shared, lasting human good* that we will be able to foster a deeper evangelical engagement with the cultures taking shape in the human city.

Endnotes

1. [\[back\]](#) I draw this image from Michel de Certeau. Cf. F.C. Bauerschmidt, "The Abrahamic Voyage: Michel de Certeau and Theology", *Modern Theology*, 12 (1996), pp.1-26.
2. [\[back\]](#) M. J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (Yale University Press, 1987). I use Fergus Kerr's summary: "Theology, itself, since the Enlightenment, has striven to construct an interpretation of Christianity acceptable to the exigencies of reason alone as if human reason were somehow outside of the history of fallen and redeemed humanity--independently, then of moral and religious presuppositions... The 'death of God', as one might have expected, was an inside job, the result of two or three centuries of 'natural theology'. By shifting to supposedly neutral religion--free ground to mount proofs of the existence of God, these theologians inaugurated a whole tradition of philosophical theology which dialectically generated its own negation. Historically, atheism would thus be the product of a certain kind of theism." (Fergus Kerr, OP, "Aquinas After Marion," *New Blackfriars* (1995),354-64)
3. [\[back\]](#) Pascal diagnosed the problem of Cartesian theism at its inception: "I cannot forgive Descartes: in his whole philosophy he would like to do without God; but he could not help allowing him a flick of the fingers to set the world in motion; after that he had no more use



for God". (Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (Penguin, 1995), 330.

4. [\[back\]](#) Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (Harper & Brothers, 1951) still offers a helpful taxonomy: "[Niebuhr] significantly reinterpreted Ernst Troeltsch's typology of 'church' and 'sect', expanding it into a typology of five types. Over against the 'sect' type that withdraws from the world and situates itself 'against culture', he proposed an opposite 'of culture' type that completely accommodates culture. Troeltsch's 'church' type he then divided into the three forms of the 'church of the centre': the 'above culture' types or 'synthesists' (Thomas Aquinas and Roman Catholicism), the 'paradox' types or 'dualists' (Martin Luther and Reinhold Niebuhr), and the 'transformationists' (Augustine, Calvin and F.D.Maurice). It was the transformationist perspective to which Niebuhr himself aspired." W .S.Johnson, (ed.), *H.Richard Niebuhr: Theology, History and Culture: Major Unpublished Writings* (Yale University Press, 1996), xviii.

5. [\[back\]](#) "Chocorua to Its Neighbour", *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Alfred A.Knopf, 1980), 300.

6. [\[back\]](#) "[T]he question of the truth of Christianity cannot be enquired into without also enquiring into the question of the truth of all areas of human experience...theology must go beyond Christianity in its description and interpretation of Christianity. It must go beyond Christianity as a religion among and beside other non-religious areas of culture and also beyond Christianity as a revealed religion in contrast to natural human life. As soon as Christianity's appeal to God's revelation is taken seriously, then the subject of theology cannot be confined to a particular subject side by side with other subjects of other disciplines. Theology must then broach many other subjects as well as its particular concern with religious experience and Christianity." (W.Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (DLT, 1976), 264.

7. [\[back\]](#) *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. M.D.Morelli & E.A. Morelli (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 414.

8. [\[back\]](#) Raimundo Panikkar is the distant source of GC34 's treatment of the correlation between the doctrine of the Trinity and contemporary spiritual currents: The Trinity and the



Religious Experience of Man (Orbis/Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973),77-82. A more immediate influence on Paragraph 21 is J. McDade, "George Eliot's Religion", *The Month* (April, 1994), 161-2.

9. [back] E.Sillem, *Ways of Thinking about God: Thomas Aquinas and Some Recent Problems* (Darton, Longman & Todd), 99.

10. [back] "For Schleiermacher, it is precisely the world of 'normal' experience which mediates the 'religious experience'. The sense of being utterly dependent is given in and with this experienced world of relatedness. It is a world in which we feel partly, but never wholly, free as personal agents. It is a world, in which we feel partly dependent in relation to many objects (other persons, family, nation, nature and so on). But further, in and with all this, is our openness to what is other to us, we have a sense of ourselves and all else being utterly dependent on--what? There is no item in the finite world to which such feeling is appropriate. It can only refer to the Infinite. God is the correlate of this religious consciousness." (K. W.Clements, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Pioneer of Modern Theology* (Collins, 1987) at 38)

11. [back] The subtlety of Schleiermacher's analysis of the feeling of absolute dependence, God and the self is well discussed in H.R. Niebuhr, *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion* (SCM, 1965),181-96.

12. [back] Philip Clayton, *Explanation from Physics to Theology: an Essay in Rationality* (Yale University Press, 1989), 163ff.

13. [back] In this same vein, Karl Rahner tried to frame a 'searching Christology' beginning from the implicit existential understanding, available to everyone, of an orientation towards brotherly love, hope for the future, acceptance of death, a desire not to be defined by evil, a desire for unlimited peace, fulfilled in Christ.

14. [back] The relevant Lonergan sources come from his treatment of faith in *Method in Theology* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 117f; reprinted in *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. M.D .Morelli & E.A. Morelli (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 479.

15. [back] *The Lonergan Reader*, p.479: "Faith is linked with human progress and it has to



meet the challenge of human decline. For faith and progress have a common root in man's cognitional and moral self-transcendence. To promote either is to promote the other indirectly."

16. [\[back\]](#) "...possessiveness, chauvinism and the manipulation of power have to be challenged by communities grounded in religious charity, the charity of the Suffering Servant, the self-sacrificing love shown by the Saviour." (GC34, SCM 13 [38])

17. [\[back\]](#) Langdon Gilkey identifies a secular "salvation history" of unrestricted progress spawned by the post-enlightenment West: "It is, I would suggest, the disintegration of this secular myth--not that of the traditional Christian mythos--that constitutes the present religious crisis of American society. For now our questions about the meaning of our work and our lives, of the significance and insignificance of what we are and do, of good and evil and the ultimate result of their encounter, that is, of the victory of the good and the conquest of the evil in history, have no framework in which to find an answer. Above all, our confidence in our own history and so ourselves as a community have been badly shaken: that confidence was based on the assurance that our science and technology were establishing the grounds for a fuller humanity everywhere. Of this hope in the future we are now much less sure. Science and technology seem to be capable of making the world demonic, inhuman, soulless; and freedom seems ever anew subject to some mode of historical fatedness and possibly in the end, helpless". (Langdon Gilkey, *Society and the Sacred: Toward a Theology of Culture in Decline* (Crossroad, 1981),24.

18. [\[back\]](#) "Before God, then, Jew and Christian labour at the same task. He cannot dispense with either. He has set enmity between the two for all time and withal has most intimately bound each to each...The truth, the whole truth thus belongs neither of them nor to us...And thus we both have but a part of the whole truth. But we know that it is in the nature of truth to be imparted [*zu teil zu sein*], and at a truth in which no one had a part would be no truth...The 'whole' truth is truth only because it is God's part [*Gottes Teil*]. This both of us, they as much as we, we as much as they, are creatures precisely for the reason that we do not see the whole truth. Just for this we remain within the boundaries of mortality.



Just for this--we remain [*bleiben wir*]" (F.Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. W.W. Hallo (New York, 1970), 415-6; quoted in D.Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (Oxford University Press, 1970) at 100-1).

19. [back] Avery Dulles SJ, "Orthodoxy and Social Change", *America*, Vol. 178, No.21 (June 20-29, 1998), pp.8-17 ."The world has no need of a religious body that simply mirrors the dominant values of the society ...A religion that firmly adheres to its sacred heritage can make itself a sign of hope and beacon of truth to the multitudes who are repelled by the easy relativism and cheap hedonism of popular culture. For these reason I am convinced that orthodoxy rather than accommodationism offers greater promise for the future".

20. [back] Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith: Religion, Morality and Society in a Secular Age*(Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1991).

21. [back] If I may refer specifically to Europe for a moment: the European experience is characterized primarily by a diminishment of the sense of God, the disintegration of values and a lack of purpose towards the future: we are no longer clear about *how* we should live and why, except to consume and compete. The narrative of secularity--the dominant narrative in our culture--cannot tell us why we are and how we should be.

22. [back] Sacks' argument is close to that of Pope John Paul II: Christianity must resist assimilation to Western capitalist mores, and that clear boundary lines must be drawn between what is Christian and what is secular if the Church is to have anything to say to societies which assume they have gone beyond Christian faith. *Veritatis Splendor* and *Evangelium Vitae* are deliberately counter-cultural, assuming that only an internally strong religion can be the generative heart of cultural values and present a moral counter-challenge to the disarray of modern life. The theme of "convicting the world of sin" is strong in the Pope's treatment of the Holy Spirit (*Dominum et Vivificantem*), but he also sees it as part of the role of the Church and the Petrine Ministry.

