

Chapter 5

ROBERT BELLAH'S CATHOLIC IMAGINATION

Jeffrey Guhin

Robert Bellah became more Catholic as he aged, or perhaps it is more accurate to say he became more Catholic friendly. In an essay “On Being Catholic and American,” Bellah describes the influence of his Catholic (or at least Catholic-raised) coauthors in *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society*, as well as his recognition that Protestantism needs an analogical, which is to say *Catholic*, imagination to temper its dialectical edge. And when Bellah talks about Protestantism, he talks about America. The Catholic imagination, Bellah argues, is something America needs.

But what is Catholicism for Bellah? Why did he come to view the Catholic imagination as such a valuable resource? To answer that question, we'll have to examine how Bellah changed his views on *Protestantism* over time, especially its responsibility for the individualism that Bellah came increasingly to understand as desacralized and atomistic. For Bellah, the Catholic imagination is a powerful foil to the Protestant worldview, partially in the mutually supporting relationship Tracy describes in *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), and which Bellah cites approvingly, nodding also at Andrew Greeley's adaptation of Tracy's argument in *The Catholic Imagination* (2000). Protestants emphasize belief statements; Catholics emphasize embodied practices. Protestants emphasize the individual; Catholics emphasize the community. Protestants emphasize the risks of symbols; Catholics emphasize their necessity. Protestants emphasize, via their theology, the real possibility that God is beyond anything we could experience; Catholics emphasize, via the sacraments, the divine's continual immanence. Bellah knows enough to admit that these distinctions don't quite fit. Protestants can feel God acting in this world and in their very lives. Catholics do care about beliefs. Yet whether or not these differences capture every empirical nuance misses the point: for Bellah, the goal of these kinds of comparison is ideal typical rather than

taxonomic, and the ideal types are meant to reveal different *imaginations*, ways of approaching the world through which certain things simply make more sense and matter more than others, a point just as important for Greeley (1989). In that sense, it is obviously true that Catholics and Protestants are at once orthodox and orthoprax, simultaneously believing and practicing. Yet different imaginations give these approaches and actions differing weights.¹

While this chapter will engage with a wide variety of Bellah's writings, it begins and ends with two important essays written near the beginning and ending of his career. The first, his noted essay on religious evolution, manifests the important role Protestantism plays for him in the broader evolution of human religiosity and the second, his speech "On Being Catholic and American," shows what Bellah thinks is lost in a thoroughly Protestantized world. In moving between these essays, we will examine how Protestantism gradually comes to change for Bellah, especially in its relationship to American individualism. Along the way, we will consider how Catholicism functions in his worldview besides being, essentially, an *anti-Protestantism*. To what degree could any other religion Bellah classifies as "historic" (as opposed to "modern") have functioned just as well? While Bellah was quite committed to interreligious dialogue, I suggest that his "Catholic imagination" was deeply *Catholic* and not simply a response to Protestant overreach, and for two reasons (1) the importance for Bellah of sacramental life, especially the Eucharist and (2) the role of tradition and communal identity. Yet this second point reveals an important tension for Bellah, who seems to want the communitarianism of the Church without the coercion such communities almost inevitably require.

Who Were the Protestants?

Religious evolution was a central component of Bellah's work, seen most prominently in the magnum opus he published shortly before his death, *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011). That larger book did not contain anything on Protestantism as it ended with the completion of the "Axial Age" (Bellah 2005, Bellah and Joas 2012, Eisenstadt 2012). However, Bellah's earlier work on "religious evolution" extended all the way to the contemporary era, and Protestants played a key role in the account.

¹ Robert Bellah was both personally and intellectually fond of the Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor, and Taylor's work on social imaginaries is certainly worth acknowledging here, though the concept of "imaginary" goes back at least as far as Cornelius Castoriadis and, depending on how you understand the term's meaning, its genealogical roots extend to Hegel.

In all of his descriptions of evolution, Bellah insists he is not describing improvement or even, in the normative sense, growth. What he means, instead, “is the simple empirical generalization that more complex forms develop from less complex forms and the properties and possibilities of more complex forms differ from those of less complex forms” (1970: 21). Bellah defines religion “as a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his existence” (1970: 21). The influence of Paul Tillich (1959, 2000) on Bellah’s thought should be clear here, not least in the use of the word ultimate. It is also worth noting the similarity to Geertz’s famous definition (Geertz 1973), and its resultant potential deficiencies, paralleling Geertz’s (Asad 2009). Two of the most important criticisms of Geertz’s theoretical work—both of religion and otherwise—is its relative inattention to power and to diachronic change.

Bellah is much less susceptible to these charges, especially regarding the capacity of religion to change in reaction to the world around it. Like Weber, Bellah is interested in the role of priests in gaining and maintaining authority in particular religious systems, and, like Weber, he shows how socioeconomic changes can affect religious life (and vice versa). If, as Asad argues, Geertz is guilty of putting too much weight on how religion can affect the world rather than how the world affects religion, then Bellah can be safely cleared from these charges, at least in as much as he shows that religions do change and their changes are the result, like any evolution, of environmental stimulus. Even to the degree that Bellah argues certain religious developments (like that of a Protestant democratization) are the result of an almost teleological recognition of what was always in Christianity anyway, that recognition is nonetheless contingent upon other socioeconomic conditions and was not a guaranteed outcome in the sense of a true telos. Religions change because the world changes.

Yet even if this is a tacit acknowledgment of power, it is not as explicit as Asad would like, at least if his critique of Geertz is any indication. Asad is interested in the micro-interactions of power, the processes of religious education and coercion through which a certain world comes to seem obvious. Religious practices, for Asad, are *constitutive* of social life itself, and they precede beliefs in both their ontological status and their causal power, a stark difference from the Protestant (and Cartesian) assumption that what I believe will determine what I do. As such, Asad argues, “Geertz’s treatment of religious belief, which lies at the core of his conception of religion, is a modern privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than the constituting activity in the world” (2009: 47). Asad contends that such a definition comes not only from a liberal positionality but also from a distinctly liberal *politics*: by keeping religion analytically separate from the microprocesses of power which reproduce it, religion

is able to be rendered liberal, or at least liberal-friendly: “This definition is at once part of a strategy (for secular liberals) of the confinement, and (for liberal Christians) of the defense of religion” (Asad 2009: 28). As we will see, throughout Bellah’s changing understanding of Protestantism, this discomfort with power will remain a consistent theme.

But before we get to Bellah’s understanding of Protestantism, it would be helpful to review the evolution that preceded it. Bellah suggests five stages of religious evolution: the primitive, the archaic, the historic, the early modern and the modern. He locates the primitive within, he claims, the only peoples not to have experienced the Neolithic, the Australian Aborigines, and his analysis here is broadly related to Durkheim’s study in *Elementary Forms* (1995). It is only in archaic religion that a “true cult” emerges, one marked by “a complex of gods, priests, worship, sacrifice, and in some cases divine or priestly kingship” (1970: 29). However, like primitive religion, archaic religion is more or less linked to society at large: there is no axial hinge to separate a person from the cosmos, and there is therefore no way to adjudicate what a human is or ought to be outside of a specifically circumscribed role. It is in historic religion that this “cosmological monism [...] is more or less completely broken through” (1970: 32), revealing a focus on world rejection as a newly general characteristic, as well as a now universal commitment to salvation (as opposed to this-worldly effervescence). It is only in this phase that humans, as we now understand them, exist at all: in historic religions, “a man is no longer defined chiefly in terms of what tribe or clan he comes from or what particular god he serves but rather as a being capable of salvation. That is to say that it is for the first time possible to conceive of man as such” (1970: 33).

What does Bellah mean by such a provocative claim? Surely ancient hunter-gatherers thought of themselves as people as well. It seems fair to argue that Bellah did not believe that earlier stages in religious history did not contain actual people (or men in his language). Perhaps here he simply means that the historical stage is the first in which we could recognize *modern*, or at least prototypically modern, humans. Yet it is worth noting the degree to which such modernity has a deeply Protestant sensibility: indeed, when Bellah elsewhere discusses the proto-modern nature of Islam’s early period, he is essentially describing how Protestant it used to be (1970: 146–66). To be human in the modern era, apparently, is to be a Protestant.

To be human, in this account, is to be autonomous, or at least relatively autonomous, as a person sets about her self-definition. And the reason for that autonomy is the role of salvation, which separates people from their context and holds them to a separate axial track. Now, historic religions still maintain what Weber would call a monopoly of grace (Weber 2009) and so the salvation itself is not autonomous, not in the way that would later be possible

for Protestantism. But the definition Bellah provides here makes the eventual rise of Protestantism appear all but inevitable: if autonomy and salvation are what matter, then why wouldn't salvation eventually become autonomous as well, linking the two great concerns?

Bellah says as much in his extrapolation of the early modern stage. He bases his stage on only one case "or at best a congerie of related cases: namely, the Protestant Reformation" (1970: 36). As hinted at earlier, salvation and autonomy become linked in the Reformation, "break[ing] through the whole mediated system of salvation and declar[ing] salvation potentially available to any man no matter what his station or calling may be" (1970: 36). As a result, the Reformation "reinforced positive autonomous action in the world" (1970: 37) and came increasingly to challenge hierarchy, often well beyond what was intended by religious elites. Democracy was not far behind, and it had necessarily Protestant roots.

The early modern stage's shift from the modern is much like the modern's shift from the historical: a move toward greater individualization, toward smaller and simpler moving parts that, as separate and autonomous, can come together to create what are ultimately more complex forms. Religion itself ceases to be important in this final phase, and the nature of existential, ultimate questions become recognizable as such and without any of the religious holdovers from previous eras. Bellah acknowledges contemporary Protestant theologians (Tillich included) trying to make sense of these changes, but he also acknowledges that such sense-making is ultimately out of Christianity's hands:

However much the development of Western Christianity may have led up and in a sense created the modern religious situation, it just as obviously is no longer in control of it. Not only has any obligation of doctrinal orthodoxy been abandoned by the leading edge of modern culture, but every fixed position has become open to question in the process of making sense out of man and his situation. This involves a profounder commitment to the process I have been calling religious symbolization than ever before. The historic religions discovered the self; the early modern religion found a doctrinal basis on which to accept the self in all its empirical ambiguity; modern religion is beginning to understand the laws of the self's own existence and so to help man take responsibility for his own fate. (1970: 42)

Protestantism's individualism has outgrown Protestantism itself.

Bellah is not necessarily cynical about these changes, and he sees great reason for hope. His writing about the counterculture in *Beyond Belief* (1970) is one of bemused support, somewhere between utopian trust and cynical

suspicion. Sympathetic as he is to the student movement, especially opposition to the Vietnam War and the fight for civil rights, he makes clear he has no faith in a grand vision: a disillusionment with both communism and the American way of life had disabused him of any totalizing plan. Yet Bellah nonetheless seemed confident enough that the idealism of the 1960s might produce changes that matter: note especially his hope at the end of his essay on civil religion for a “world civil religion” separated from Christian theology (1970: 186). Yet what would such religious life entail? The answer is complicated, not least because the Protestant impetus toward individualism makes the *binding* of religion much more complicated except inasmuch as people bind themselves to their own commitments. “The assumption in most major Protestant denominations,” he writes, “is that the church member can be considered responsible for himself” (1970: 43). Bellah views these changes less as evidence of secularization than as a movement of the source of ultimate meaning, from the Church to somewhere else. He makes much the same argument in a review of Norman Brown’s *Love’s Body*, freeing both Christianity and Buddhism from the “self-styled” Christians and Buddhists, releasing them to “play [their] role in the general psychic life of man” (1970: 233). Religion, in this sense, is not so much about specific beliefs or actions but rather a phenomenological approach to the ultimate, “a symbolic form for dealing with reality” (1970: 234) as Bellah said about Brown, but which he could just as easily have said about himself.

Yet if Bellah is showing the influence of Tillich in this, he is also opening himself to Tillich’s critics: if religion is really just connecting to the ultimate, then what is the purpose of talking about something called religion? Why can’t we just talk about the awe-inspiring, or the beautiful, or the profound? And more importantly, if religion does not hold us together, then what does? There is a sense, even if Bellah does not identify it, of Durkheim’s organic solidarity here, a group of separate individuals coming to identify their own individualism as a truly collective and communal process, one to which the whole community must be attached. And there is also a sense, as Asad might have pointed out, that power must maintain these connections, yet it is a power unacknowledged and quietly assumed.

Suspensions of Individualism

Things did not turn out as well as Bellah would have hoped. The fears Bellah outlined in the end of his essay on civil religion would become nightmares later on. In *The Broken Covenant*, Bellah warns that “the perils of late 20th-century America will not be overcome by everyone doing his or her ‘own thing,’ but through the discovery of cultural and social forms that can give

the disciplined basis for a new degree of moral freedom" (1975: 86). That moral freedom must be identified within America's tradition, and here is the first move through which Bellah begins to engage the Catholic imagination, even though he would not yet identify it as such. While tradition can matter more or less for Protestants, what is truly important is the scripture, and yet, if everyone can study scripture on their own, then even scripture becomes less important than the ultimate judge, which is each and every separate human heart. Bellah identifies this problem explicitly in his essay on being Catholic in America (2006: 462), yet it is not quite clear here yet. For his needs in *The Broken Covenant*, tradition serves as a resource through which Americans can find idealism in their mythology, building together a different kind of culture, for "culture is the key to revolution" and "religion is the key to culture" (1975: 162). Note how religion comes to mean something slightly different than it did in the religious evolution essay. It is no longer simply how people relate to the ultimate. It is also, *necessarily* how people relate to each other and bind together through time, relating both to a common future and to a common past.

The appeals to both tradition and *telos* in *The Broken Covenant* pave the way for MacIntyre's (1984) role in *Habits of the Heart* (1986) and *The Good Society* (1992), more explicit in the former but clear in both. MacIntyre, a former Catholic socialist and now Catholic Thomist, unites the varying stages of his career with an unceasing suspicion of liberalism, both as an economic order and, more importantly, as a moral impetus. The problem with the modern order, MacIntyre argues, is not so much that it is no longer moral. While that is true, it is less existentially troubling that it might appear: a sick person can go to the doctor, after all. No, the real problem with modernity is that we can no longer even recognize our problems. We lack the moral language to identify our deep moral flaws. The modern tools liberalism has left us—whether Kantian deontology or Utilitarian consequentialism—are unable to help us to recognize what ails us: our lack of community, of connection to tradition, of a sense of the internal goods of a practice. Without an ability to diagnose, we have no means of rehabilitation. We must therefore rediscover a moral language through which we can understand what human life is really about, and toward which all lives are intended.

If this sounds theological that's because it is, albeit not strictly. MacIntyre is influenced by the dean of Catholic neo-Aristotelian ethics, G. E. M. Anscombe (1958), yet his work is also deeply Thomist, a "natural law" commitment in tension with his Marxian roots. As a result, MacIntyre recognizes the contingency of any given social order even as he argues for a certain fundamental anthropology. Yet it is not outlandish to argue that Marx recognized certain fundamentals to anthropology as well, seen perhaps

most clearly in his arguments about alienation. In a similar way, even when MacIntyre acknowledges the radically different ways that virtues might be considered (MacIntyre 1981, MacIntyre 1988), he seems to still believe there are certain human fundamentals that people simply need, regardless of where or when they are (MacIntyre 1999). MacIntyre's anthropology is much more constructive than Tillich's, especially in his insistence that tradition is much more than simply an argument (though it is that as well): tradition is both a source of authority and a wellspring of constitutive practices that drive forward through time both particular human lives and the communities they maintain. No longer is the religious landscape best described by symbols that connect an individual to an ultimate meaning, but rather by a tradition that socializes people into practices through which the ultimate becomes intelligible.

Inspired by MacIntyre's diatribe against liberalism, Bellah and his coauthors reject the "ontological individualism" (1986: 276) that had come to dominate American life, not only because they find it normatively distasteful but also because they find it empirically untenable: "we have never been, and still are not, a collection of private individuals who, except for a conscious contract to create a minimal government, have nothing in common" (1986: 282). What holds us in common instead is our traditions, traditions which we must rediscover so they "might help us find again the coherence we have almost lost" (1986: 283). The religious wistfulness in this line is striking, and it calls to mind again that Durkheimian sense of effervescence to which Bellah seems to be moving toward, as opposed to a more meaning-centered and individually rooted search for the ultimate. In *The Good Society*, when Bellah and his coauthors find a Protestant, Mary Hatch, to praise, it is precisely because she does not only focus on her own relationship to God, enacting it in her own idiosyncratic vocation. Mary is, in some ways, the anti-Sheila, and it almost incredible she has such a quintessentially Catholic first name. What the authors find "so moving" about her "is that her search for meaning is not a lonely existential quest but comes out of a deep engagement with other people, with a moral world" (1992: 219). This engagement with others is not simply the engagement of a Puritan businessman that Weber might have described, but rather a commitment to justice, to remedying suffering, to building a community with the Christian tradition as both its goal and its rubric:

The symbols and stories of the Bible give her a sense of a resonance not only with ultimate reality but with suffering and celebrating humanity everywhere. They orient the quest to create a world community in which individual dignity can be realized and not crushed by military, political, or market forces. (1992: 219)

Religion matters because it brings people together, and in two senses: uniting people in this time, now, and uniting the people of today with the people of the past and the people of the future.

Just as importantly, religion can accomplish these tasks because it provides a moral authority in its connection to the ultimate that other social institutions lack. Protestants like Mary Hatch are certainly capable of such actions, but the individualist essence of Protestantism pushes against it, and in so doing, it pushes people against what makes a human life its most essentially *human*. An interesting change can be noted here, in that Bellah's anthropology appears to have shifted from his religious evolution essay, in focus if not in full. No doubt the Bellah of *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society* would still have argued for the necessity of individual autonomy to mark the beginning of the modern human. Yet now that mark is less significant than other aspects of human anthropology: compassion, communality, meaning-making. And autonomy, it turns out, is as destructive as it is distinctive.

Yet note again how power is a hidden part of this story: what if people do not want to be part of a community? How will they be moved if we are not to use the very logic of individualism to convince them, as individuals, to be part of the group? In other words, how would a greater sense of the "good society" be not only created and encouraged but also *enforced*? Unlike certain other communitarians, the Catholic Church has never shied from the need for authority to maintain a robust sense of communal life, and in this sense, despite his communitarianism, Bellah remains very much a Protestant: people ought to be in a community, but they do so as individuals who have freely joined and could freely leave. That both *The Good Society* and *Habits of the Heart* are about adults is telling here: we find much less about the formation of the next generation into a moral order that would compel their actions. There are various institutions—marriage, therapy, religion—which could serve as such disciplining agents, but the authors seem hesitant to advocate so brazenly for moral coercion. They lament that commitments to community or tradition do not have more power, but they fail to recognize that such ideals often have power only because specific people *enforce* them, and they enforce them within other people's lives, other people's practices and other people's bodies.

On Catholics

Bellah later acknowledged that *Habits of the Heart* and *The Good Society* had "a Protestant-Catholic contrast, left implicit but perhaps evident to the discerning reader" (1999: 10). If it were not already clear, it seems that Bellah is increasingly disenchanted with the Protestant side of that argument, even if he is grateful for many of its productions. Bellah instead suggests that Catholicism has much

to add to America's residual Protestantism, not least because the common Christian heritage of both traditions makes them mutually intelligible in ways that other communitarian sources might not be.

He suggests that some elements of Protestantism—especially predestination—have had great historical power in, for example, forming the scientific premise of a universe understandable without God. Yet there is another Protestant insight still very much alive, and with disastrous effects. Bellah calls this the divinization of the self, something recognizable enough in *Habits of the Heart* and *Good Society*, though he later would emphasize much more forcefully its Protestant roots. Such divinization can take various shapes, perhaps most famously the *Sheilaism* that became totemic for the coauthors' argument in *Habits of the Heart*. Yet, for Bellah, it is American Evangelicalism that provides the theological thread from the already individualistic Protestantism to American atomism: "Some may think that Jesus-and-me piety is quite different from the individual as the preeminent being in the universe, but I am suggesting they are only a hair apart" (1999: 12).

The quotes in the previous paragraph come from an article in the Catholic magazine *America* (1999), and that article is itself a subtle reworking of lectures Bellah gave in the 1990s, with many passages exactly identical to an essay, "Flaws in the Protestant Code," published in *Ethical Perspectives* (2000) and reprinted in *The Robert Bellah Reader*. Yet perhaps because *America* is a Catholic magazine, Bellah is more specific in this version about "the resources of the Catholic tradition of the virtues and Catholic social teaching" (1999: 13). He emphasizes especially the importance of the sacramental life, particularly the Eucharist. The Eucharist is central for Bellah because it creates a moral connection that is more than simply individuals choosing to come together. Such choices remain altogether too cognitive, too aggregated as opposed to communal. Instead, the Eucharist is

the tangible, physical act of participating in the body and blood of the crucified and risen Christ. It is in that moment that we become members of one another, that we not only partake of the Eucharist but can actually become eucharist, ourselves completing "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions," as Paul says in Colossians, by self-giving love for the whole world. (1999: 14)

It is important to note here that the sacrament of the Eucharist is often also called the sacrament of communion. Note also the connection Bellah makes between embodiment and social justice, as opposed to symbolism and social justice, a significant change from his earlier work. Note finally how communities maintain themselves through *physical* rituals, developing a solidarity that empowers a broader sense of self, a self that is only intelligible with

and through others. It is this Catholic sensibility that Bellah advocates as a necessary corrective to a Protestant America. Indeed, it is precisely *because of Protestantism* that “it is so hard for Americans to understand the idea of the common good, much less engage in conversation about it” (9). In the same article, Bellah cites the work of David Hollenbach (1998) to suggest that Catholicism can not only provide a vision of the common good but can also do so in a way that is inclusive, committed to the good of all and not simply members of the local community.

That vision of the common good to which both Bellah and Hollenbach refer is best articulated in the modern tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, especially since Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* (1891). Catholic Social Teaching emphasizes the rights and duties of all humans, not only Catholics, insisting that concerns for the poor, the environment and the common good are necessary metrics for any society. The intellectual articulations of why solidarity matters both theologically and anthropologically have been important influences on various Christian (and non-Christian) intellectuals, not least Robert Bellah. Catholic Social Teaching both builds upon and magnifies the sacramental power of the Eucharist: it is an intellectual articulation of the felt sense of community presented in the sacrament of communion.

Someone could call all of this idealistic, and that someone would be right. The Eucharist, after all, does not always work, and neither does Catholic Social Teaching. There's a reason Catholic Social Teaching is sometimes called the Church's “best kept secret” (DeBerri et al. 2003). Part of the reason Catholic Social Teaching remains largely unexplored might well be that all Americans are Protestants, even the Catholics, something to which Bellah refers regularly in his writing on Catholics (even if Greeley disagrees). When Bellah and others drop quips like this, they might be referring to the individualism rampant in all Americans, even Catholics, or it might be a more specific acknowledgment of how the American Catholic leadership has tended to emphasize conservative issues that align with the interests of the Republican party, especially since the pontificate of John Paul II. Of course, there have been exceptions—namely the “radical” U.S. Bishops' documents of “The Challenge of Peace” (1983) and “Economic Justice for All” (1986). However, even these radical documents are now viewed as products of a different era: they prompted a backlash among conservative Catholic intellectuals that has lasted to this day and has had a feedback loop upon the bishops, who are generally much more forceful now on issues of marriage, abortion, birth control and “religious liberty.”

One of the conservatives who has helped to articulate and maintain a reinterpretation of Catholic Social Teaching roughly in line with Republican economic ideology has been George Weigel. Along with Michael Novak, Richard John Neuhaus and others, Weigel has been careful to insist he and

his colleagues share the *goals* of Catholic Social Teaching: the poor should be protected, the environment stewarded, the common good remembered. Yet they insist these goals are best met through economic action, through what some might call *neoliberalism*, that is, the opening of as much of society as possible to the market, allowing for “human creativity” to solve problems through competition. As such, Catholic goals can be maintained through emergent, individualist (and thereby Protestant) means.

These American neoliberals (who were also thought of as neoconservatives in reference largely to their foreign policy) found a ready ally in the Polish Pope John Paul II, whose childhood trauma growing up under both fascism and communism led him to suspect any overweening state. Yet even John Paul II had some harsh words for unfettered capitalism in *Centesimus Annus* (1991), written at the 100 year anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, even if his American fans tended to focus on his concerns about an overambitious state. As a result, Weigel et al. had difficulty with John Paul II's replacements, both Popes Benedict and Francis. The concerns about Francis have been abundantly clear, especially regarding his hostility to capitalism and his prioritizing of issues of global justice over the typical American Catholic concerns of abortion and marriage. Yet even Pope Benedict was a problem, seen most infamously in Weigel's claim that Benedict's *Caritas in Veritate* was written by Benedict and the Vatican group, Justice and Peace, and that we only need to pay attention to the parts written by Benedict. Of course it is only Weigel who can determine the parts truly written by the Pope, a noted academic and intellectual who seems entirely capable of writing an entire document on his own. And it just so happens the parts Weigel has identified as actually being written by Benedict are the parts that accord with his ideology. For example, he insists that “there is also rather more in the encyclical about the redistribution of wealth than about wealth-creation — a sure sign of Justice and Peace default positions at work” (Weigel 2009). It is simply unfathomable to Weigel that a Pope considered one of the finest intellectuals of his generation—in any field—might have thought something that couldn't have fit within the conservative American purview.

Conservative Catholics in the United States often accuse liberal Catholics of being “cafeteria Catholics,” simply picking and choosing what from the magisterium they would like to keep. Yet it is striking how much Weigel is very much a product of the cafeteria here. That cafeteria sensibility would only grow as Francis came to power, and even the current editor of *First Things*, the magazine founded by Richard John Neuhaus, acknowledged that conservatives under the Francis pontificate are often in a bit of a cafeteria Catholic position, even if he hedges a bit, pointing out there are more and less important matters of faith and practice, and that the real cafeteria Catholic is

the one who discounts the teaching authority of the Church completely (Salai 2015). The distinction does not quite work though: after all, it is easy enough to acknowledge the Church's authority when you agree with it, or when its priorities tend to match your own, not to mention that the question of scales of importance for different teachings has been a ready strategy for not-quite dissenters for centuries.

Yet regardless of whether these conservatives are in fact cafeteria Catholics, what is important about their discontent is how it manifests the real problem of authority in the Catholic Church. Simply because you have Catholic Social Teaching as an intellectual resource does not mean that it will be *used*, and neither does it mean that, even if it used, it will not be interpreted in ways that run counter to their intent.

So much for Catholic Social Teaching. Yet we run into much the same problem with the Eucharist. While it is true that the Eucharist is one of the most powerful means through which Catholics show unity with each other, it is important to remember that this power is also a source of the Church's coercive capacity. Throughout its history, the Church has "denied communion" to those it deems unworthy of or unready for the sacrament. In centuries past, the Church required dramatic public displays to regain the Church's good graces, and today it still requires a sincere confession and commitment to sin no more. In the case of an abortion, the sin is considered so grave that the wrongdoer could not receive communion until receiving absolution from a bishop, though Pope Francis gave any priest the ability to provide this absolution in 2015. In U.S. politics, the Eucharist has been a powerful weapon with which to challenge American politicians, though almost only on issues friendly to Republican politics: pro-choice politicians have been warned they could not receive the Eucharist in various churches and dioceses. Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics is increasingly becoming one of the central flash points in a cold war between conservatives and liberals under Francis's pontificate. All of which is to argue that the Eucharist divided as much as it unites, and the power of its division comes precisely because of the potential of its unification. Bellah identifies the Eucharist as a powerful source of communion; yet that communion is linked to a power system which might not choose to use its leverage in ways that Bellah find ethically amenable. Bellah is surely right that there is no communion without community; yet he seems to forget there is also no community without coercion.

Of course, such coercion might all be implicit, the result of shared internalized norms rather than any specific person forcing another person to act or think in a particular way. Yet such discrete, interpersonal force *does* happen, and, indeed, it usually *has to happen* for a community to work. The Church has a variety of tools available to it, with excommunication its most

extreme. And, of course, when the Vatican was a real state with citizens, it had even more coercive tools in its box. Yet for the Church to enact the social justice goals that Catholic Social Teaching describes, it must ask for governments to use coercion in the Church's place, taking resources from certain people in the form of taxes and compelling others to change their lifestyles in the form of laws. Whether it is the Church doing the coercing or the state doing the coercing as inspired or encouraged by the Church, the point is the same: moral life doesn't just happen. The good society needs power to enact its goodness.

The response from cafeteria Catholics is generally that they agree with the generic goals of the Church but disagree with certain *interpretations* of those goals. For example, supporters of unfettered capitalism insist the poor's needs can best be helped by opening as many markets as possible. Supporters of gay marriage insist that the Bible's real teaching is for committed loving relationships, not *necessarily* heterosexual ones. And on and on. Throughout its history, the Church has chosen its battles on these sorts of interpretations, and it has varied as much parish by parish, diocese by diocese and country by country as it has year by year, century by century and era by era. Yet what has tied the Church together through all of this is the willingness to use power that Asad recognized in his article on Geertz. Much of that article was an extended reflection on Augustine, especially Augustine's recognition that virtue does not magically appear in the lives of a community. It must be compelled. Virtue is itself a form of power, and such power comes to exist because of the power of others, the forming of lives into the kinds of lives others want them to be.

Bellah is too optimistic to believe such coercion is necessary, or, at least, he is too realistic about the nature of the liberal order to believe it is possible. In his discussion of the ideal Catholic university, he writes that "the Eucharist is the heart of our common life and the celebration of mass ought to be at the center of the Catholic university. It is there that the analogical imagination takes over our consciousness and makes all things real" (2006: 472). However, he goes on, these "liturgical practices must, of course, be voluntary; we are beyond the stage of coercion" (2006: 472). He instead calls for efforts at "*persuasion* as to why a Catholic presence in the university and our lives make sense" (2006: 472, italics in the original). Such efforts should not be coerced because "we are drawn to the good by love" rather than power (2006: 473). Yet a quick reflection might reveal this is not necessarily true: civil rights might be motivated by justice, which according to the theologian Cornel West is "what love looks like in public" (West 2011: 210). Yet that love-motivated justice is nonetheless enforced by laws, and it is society's hope that these laws will be not only coercive but also *educative*, that they will compel socialization into certain commitments people would not have had without an authority to oversee their

transformation. There is no necessary reason to assume Mass is dissimilar, which is why Mass is so often *required* rather than recommended in Catholic schools.

Earlier in that same essay, Bellah argues that the habit of critique so common in university faculty is itself a descendant of Protestant theology. Yet that emphasis on criticism—whether Protestant attacks on Catholic superstition or secular attacks on religion writ large—has no purchase on a postmodern sensibility, one coming to college with no sacred cows left to kill.

What the students need above all is substance, is metanarratives, that will give them some sense of who they are and what kind of world they live in. Only that would counter the incoherence that surrounds them and give them a context in which the skills of critical thinking would make sense. (2006: 470)

MacIntyre's influence should be clear here, as well as that of Charles Taylor (Taylor 1989, Taylor 2007). And indeed, Bellah lists both of these authors as examples of the kinds of Catholic faculty that Catholic universities should recruit and encourage: scholars with "substance" rather than simply critique, capable of a positive vision of what a Catholic modernity would resemble, as well as what it would require. Interestingly, neither of these authors has been especially sensitive to power either. And so we are left with the same questions: such metanarratives are well and good, but what are the enforcement mechanisms through which they gain their authority? What happens if our children disagree? While Asad was deeply influenced by MacIntyre's conception of tradition, it was his addition of Foucault to his theoretical apparatus (and his use of Augustine as an empirical example) that allowed him to demonstrate how tradition does not move forward on its own. Power is always a piece of the story, something the Church has never forgotten, but which it can sometimes forget to mention. And sometimes its friends, like Robert Bellah, can forget to mention power as well.

Conclusion: Back to Tillich

In his essay on Catholic universities, Bellah cites Tillich a few times. He first draws attention to Tillich's own warning that the Christian church must not confuse *the word* with *the sacrament*, lest the word come completely to replace sacraments, which, in much of Protestantism, it has: to the extent there is a source of grace in this world, it is only to be found in God's words in the Bible and nowhere else (2006: 461). Bellah also returns to David Tracy, who, as we recall, suggested the concept of the analogical imagination that formed the basis of both Greeley's and Bellah's conception of the Catholic imagination.

Let me take another look at the contrast between dialectical and analogical thinking. David Tracy cites Paul Tillich as suggesting that the Protestant principle, with its critical and prophetic impulse, which Tracy equates with the dialectical imagination, must always be complemented with Catholic substance. In other words, there must be something affirmed for there to be criticism of it. (Bellah 2006: 467)

It is worth noting here that Tracy's reading of Tillich is somewhat more complicated than this. While it is not unusual to read Tillich as ultimately critical, that is not the only way in which Tracy reads him. Tracy writes that Tillich's theological language "attempt[s] to retrieve the strength of the analogical traditions: a strength retrievable only through a contemporary appropriation of the necessary and constantly corrective truth in all the negative dialectical moments, in both situation and message" (1981: 419). Tillich, ever the fan of paradox, seeks to regain the analogical through the dialectical, just as he seeks to regain the affirmation of God through various forms of negation.

Tillich recognizes the importance of the sacraments, of community, of tradition. His problem is not with those things in themselves but rather the complacency with which the bourgeois church has taken them, and while Tillich would ultimately differ substantially with Kierkegaard, Barth and Bonhoeffer, they all shared this Protestant criticism motivated more by love of the ultimate goal than a nihilistic desire to burn everything down. In this sense, Tracy is surely right that all Christian theology is a tension between the analogical and the dialectic. We have focused more in this chapter on the problem of the dialectic, but too analogical of an order would be just as much of a problem, preventing any possibility of growth. After all, if everything is a sign of the sacred, just as it is, then nothing is ever allowed to change.

Yet it is also important to note here that Tillich's difference is not simply his dialectical nature but also his individualism, and, as a result, his inattention to the role of coercion as a constitutive part of communal life. This is not to say that Tillich was insensitive to power: indeed, he wrote a book titled *Love, Power, and Justice*, in which he extensively discusses the intersections of the three terms. Tillich primarily thinks of power in individualist and Heideggerian terms:

The power of being is its possibility to affirm itself against the non-being within it against it. The power of a being is the greater the more non-being is taken into its self-affirmation. The power of being is not dead identity but the dynamic process in which it separates itself from itself and returns to itself. The more conquered separation there is the more power there is. The process in which the separated is reunited is love. (1960: 48)

Tillich here outlines a process that is explicitly dialogical, rooted in a synthesis of Heideggerian ontology and a Christian theology of love: "Love," he argues, "is the foundation, not the negation of power," and "the basic formula of power and the basic formula of love are identical: Separation and Reunion or Being taking Non-Being into itself" (1960: 49). Because of this link, sometimes "love must be united with power, and not only with power, but also with compulsory power" (1960: 49–50). Tillich examines the experience of Martin Luther and his unapologetic use of coercion: "Love, through compulsory power, must destroy what is against love" (1960: 50). Power and love come together in the question of justice, and through that synthesis, Tillich is able to argue that "it is not compulsion which is unjust, but compulsion which destroys the object of compulsion instead of working toward its fulfillment" (1960: 67). Tillich compares this kind of compulsion to the uncaring power of a totalitarian state, insisting that compulsion alone does not violate justice, but rather "a compulsion which disregards the intrinsic claim of a being to be acknowledged as what it is within the context of all beings" (1960: 67).

One can see the tension between the analogical and dialectical Tracy describes in Tillich: there is, at the same time, a recognition for the need for justice, which is necessarily a communal process, instituted by people upon other people, yet within that same process there is a need to recognize the ontological priority of individuals, especially their capacities for being, and affirming that being against nonbeing. Such a self is a central priority of Tillich's theology, and returns us to Bellah's conception of the first truly modern human, the person who recognized herself as axially independent from the world around her. True love—and therefore true justice—is never a complete surrender to another's power, or to the power of a group. Tillich wants to find a middle ground between radical potential and self-discipline, suggesting that justice toward oneself "means to actualize as many potentialities as possible without losing oneself in disruption and chaos" (1960: 70). While Tillich is by no means a radical individualist, he remains centrally concerned with a very Protestant, and ultimately individualist, question: how is a Christian able to exist in the modern world? Even to the extent Tillich engages ecclesiology (which is not altogether common), the central ecclesiological question for him is the relationship between church discipline and the self.

Tillich similarly engages the question of power throughout the third volume of his *Systematic Theology*, though here he is even more explicitly "ambivalent" about the role of power, particularly when such power is institutionalized via law and other ethical codes. "The many forms of ethics without Spiritual Presence are judged by the fact that they cannot show the power of motivation, the principle of choice in the concrete situation, the unconditional validity of the moral imperative" (1964: 292). Much of Tillich's focus on power in

both *Systematic Theology* and *Love, Power, and Justice* regards how to think about governmental power and the state's necessary coercion of its citizens, arguing that "the fight against 'objectivation' of the personal subject is a permanent task of the church" (1964: 412). What Tillich means here is clear enough: he is concerned about a totalitarian state forcing people to give up their own wills entirely, rendering them into objects of a broader totalizing entity rather than subjects of their own lives. Yet surely this is something of a false dichotomy. How do people become socialized into subjects if not by sometimes being objects? The Catholic Church obviously has a radically different theology of formation, much less embarrassed or ambiguous about coercion and the need, sometimes, to impose its will upon others. In so doing the Church hopes that its impositions will bloom, not as the alienated, estranged actions of some communalist drone but rather as the intentional actions of a vibrant individual, an individual who happens to share the commitments and goals of the community at large.

Bellah never quite makes this shift. He did change considerably from his essay on religious evolution to his work on Catholicism, moving from a more existential emphasis on the ultimate to a more sacramental focus on social justice. He came to blame Protestantism more and more for America's radical individualism, and he sought within Catholicism the resources for a communitarian answer to America's atomism. Yet even if Bellah came increasingly to change his understanding of religion away from Tillich's focus on the individual's relationship to the transcendent, he never quite shook Tillich's discomfort with power. Bellah developed quite the Catholic imagination, but he could never quite imagine power as unapologetically as the Catholic Church often has. Still, such a distinction is by no means a limitation, and sociologists, Catholics, Protestants and people of any other imagination would benefit greatly from Bellah's engagement with Catholicism as both a human resource and a source for hope. It's powerful stuff.

References

- Anscombe, Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret. 1958. "Modern Moral Philosophy." *Philosophy* 33(124):1–19.
- Asad, Talal. 2009. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. JHU Press.
- Bellah, Robert N. 1970. *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*. University of California Press.
- . 1975. *The Broken Covenant*. The Seabury Press.
- . 1999. "Religion and the Shape of National Culture." *America* 181(3): 9–14.
- . 2000. "Flaws in the Protestant Code." *Ethical Perspectives* 7(4): 288–99.
- . 2005. "What Is Axial about the Axial Age?" *Archives Européennes de Sociologie / European Journal of Sociology / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie*: 69–89.

- . 2006. *The Robert Bellah Reader: Duke University Press*. (Edited by Robert N. Bellah and Steven M. Tipton)
- . 2011. *Religion in Human Evolution: Harvard University Press*.
- Bellah, Robert N., and Hans Joas. 2012. *The Axial Age and Its Consequences: Harvard University Press*.
- Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton. 1986. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life: University of California Press*.
- Bellah, Robert Neely. 1992. *The Good Society: Vintage*.
- DeBerri, Edward P., James E. Hug, Peter J. Henriot and Michael J. Schultheis. 2003. *Catholic Social Teaching: Our Best Kept Secret: Orbis Books*.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1995. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by K. E. Fields: Free Press.
- Eisenstadt, Shmuel N. 2012. *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations: SUNY Press*.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Vol. 5019: Basic Books.
- Greeley, Andrew. 1989. "Protestant and Catholic: Is the Analogical Imagination Extinct?" *American Sociological Review*: 485–502.
- . 2000. *The Catholic Imagination: University of California Press*.
- Hollenbach, S. J. 1998. "Is Tolerance Enough? The Catholic University and the Common Good." *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* 13(1):3.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1981. "The Nature of the Virtues." *Hastings Center Report* 11(2): 27–34.
- . 1984. *After Virtue: Notre Dame University Press*.
- . 1999. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues: Open Court*.
- . 1988. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?: University of Notre Dame Press*.
- Salai, Sean. 2015, "'First Things' Editor R.R. Reno Responds to Pope Francis' Visit to the United States" *America*. (<https://www.americamagazine.org/content/all-things/hes-disruptor-interview-first-things-editor-rr-reno-pope-francis-us-visit>).
- Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity: Harvard University Press*.
- . 2007. *A Secular Age: Harvard University Press*.
- Tillich, Paul. 1959. *Theology of Culture: Oxford University Press*.
- . 1960. *Love, Power, and Justice: Oxford University Press*.
- . 1964. *Systematic Theology. Vol. III: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God: James Nisbet*.
- . 2000. *The Courage to Be: Yale University Press*.
- Tracy, David. 1981. "The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Plurality of Cultures": Crossroad.
- Weber, Max. 2009. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology: Routledge*.
- Weigel, George. 2009. "Caritas in Veritate in Gold and Red." *The National Review*, July 7. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2009/07/caritas-veritate-gold-and-red-george-weigel/> (Accessed April 24, 2019).
- West, Cornel. 2011. *Hope on a Tight Rope: Hay House*.

UNCORRECTED PROOF COPY