

WHAT IS THE *OPUS DEI*?: CHRISTIAN HUMANISM ON THE EVE OF VATICAN II

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In 1953, John Courtney Murray published a somewhat famous and certainly influential essay, later reprinted in his classic *We Hold These Truths*. That essay's title, "Is It Basket Weaving? The Question of Christianity and Human Values," refers to an early monastic practice of weaving baskets one day, only to undo them the next. The weaving was merely a concession to human weakness, a way to keep occupied when unable to contemplate heavenly things; such work had no intrinsic worth or purpose: "Only the making of a soul was the true human value. For the rest, what did it matter whether one wove baskets or wrought whole civilizations?"¹ Is the work of grace, Murray asked elsewhere in the essay, the "contradiction" or the "transformation" of human activity and culture?²

With characteristic lapidary (and occasionally patrician) phrasing, Murray set out two main strands of Christian humanism, which sought to respond to that question about divine grace and human activity: "eschatological humanism" and "incarnational humanism." These two trajectories are doctrinally not mutually exclusive, he noted, but their different emphases do generate "distinct style[s] of life," each of which must be respected.³

The eschatological strand emphasizes discontinuity, sin, exile and pilgrimage, the supernatural over against the natural, receptivity over activity, and, above all, the Cross as the "inversion of all human values."⁴ Ultimately, "man not only may in fact neglect, but even should by right neglect, what is called the cultural enterprise [...] in order to give undivided energies to the invisible things of the spirit."⁵ Some Christians may well be called to "be God's witnesses to the oneness of the one thing necessary, by the completeness of their contempt for the world."⁶

The incarnational strand, by contrast, emphasizes continuity, grace as the perfection of nature, nature as open to grace, catholicity as the redemptive embrace of all peoples and worldly-cultural goods, human merit vis-à-vis divine grace, and a high valuation of history and human reason. Incarnational humanism holds that achievements in the earthly order are "never ideal; but they are human achievements. Their value is real, if limited, and is not to be undermined by any exaggerations of the Christian contempt for the world. In their humanism they are Christian achievements."⁷

In short, Murray posed the basic problem as "contempt of the world" versus "affirmation of the worldly." The incarnationists seek "participation" in the world, while the eschatologists pursue "withdrawal."⁸

¹ John Courtney Murray, *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1960), 187.

² Murray, *We Hold These Truths*, 182.

³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

Murray's framing—in its unacknowledged privileging of the incarnational and somewhat caricatured presentation of the eschatological—is inaccurate and slanted.⁹ But, these reservations notwithstanding, his words in 1953 were prophetic, for he had put his finger on what would emerge, a decade later, as some of the most persistently neuralgic issues at the Second Vatican Council and beyond: the Church's relationship to the world, and humanity's relationship to earth and to heaven.

In his opening address to Vatican II on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII said that the Council's "greatest concern" was this:

the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively defended and presented. This teaching embraces the whole human person, body and soul, and it commands us pilgrims, who dwell on this earth, to strain eagerly towards the heavenly homeland. This shows how this mortal life is to be ordered in such a way that, as we meet our duties towards our earthly and heavenly cities, we can reach the goal set for us by God.¹⁰

Pope John states here, unambiguously, that Vatican II would be concerned with the totality of human existence: body and soul, believers as pilgrims on earth and as dwellers in heaven. In its four sessions from 1962 to 1965, and in the sixteen documents that resulted from its deliberations, Vatican II addressed that "greatest concern" through what the Jesuit historian John O'Malley has called the Council's "style" or way of speaking and proceeding. Departing from the canonical genre typical of preceding councils, Vatican II adopted an epideictic rhetoric, which prioritized appreciation over clarification and worked more by persuasion than by coercion. This style, employing a "rhetoric of invitation,"¹¹ has a distinctive vocabulary: It uses "horizontal" or "equality" words (e.g., People of God, brothers and sisters), "reciprocity" words (e.g., cooperation, partnership), "humility" words (e.g., pilgrim, servant), "movement" words (e.g., development, progress), "empowerment" words (e.g., full and active participation), and "interiority" words (e.g., charism, joy and hope, conscience, holiness).¹²

Gaudium et spes is the document most typical of that conciliar style, its "rhetoric of invitation." From its opening words—"The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well."—to its repeated calls to dialogue and solidarity to its concern for matters of marriage and family, culture, economics, politics, and war and peace, GS is filled with "words of mutuality, friendship, partnership, cooperation—and dialogue. [...] *Gaudium et spes* is an

⁹ For a more comprehensive presentation of eschatological humanism, see Murray's own earlier "The Construction of a Christian Culture," originally delivered as three talks in February 1940 and later published in edited form in *Bridging the Sacred and the Secular: Selected Writings of John Courtney Murray*, ed. J. Leon Hooper (Washington, DC: Georgetown, 1994), 101–23.

¹⁰ John XXXIII, Opening Address to the Second Vatican Council, available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html (accessed on July 30, 2018).

¹¹ John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap-Harvard, 2008), 47.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46–51.

instruction but also an invitation writ large.”¹³ The Council Fathers had hoped, in part, to overcome the estrangement and conflict between Church and world that had arisen especially in the wake of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment;¹⁴ *Gaudium et spes* was one of the pillars—along with *Dignitatis humanae* (the Declaration on Religious Freedom) and *Nostra aetate* (the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions)—of that conciliar project of rapprochement. Writing ten years after the Council’s close, one German theologian went so far as to call *Gaudium et spes* a “kind of countersyllabus”¹⁵ to Pius IX’s 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*; that theologian’s name is Joseph Ratzinger.

The open, confident vision set forth in *Gaudium et spes*—of a Church that was, according to Rowan Williams, “strong enough to ask itself some demanding questions about whether its culture and structures were adequate to the task of sharing the Gospel with the complex, often rebellious, always restless mind of the modern world”¹⁶—cannot mask the tensions, though, that arose throughout GS’s drafting during the second half of the Council. Joseph Ratzinger, while deeply appreciative of the achievements of *Gaudium et spes*, nonetheless expressed concern in 1966 that the Council Fathers, still marked by earlier struggles over the Council’s direction, failed to engage with sufficient depth the differences that had emerged between proponents of “incarnational” and “eschatological” theologies, and that the scandalous necessity of the Cross was in danger of being obscured or put aside.¹⁷ Similarly, Henri de Lubac’s memoirs and conciliar journal both manifest similar concerns—even during the Council itself.¹⁸ Commenting on a draft of *Gaudium et spes*, for instance, he warned that “The mystery of the Cross does not appear there in full relief. Nor does one feel enough of the great breath of Christian hope. [...] Silence or timidity in the schema about the eternal vocation of man would be exploited as an encouragement to turn away from the realities of the faith.”¹⁹

Joseph Komonchak and Giuseppe Ruggieri have thus argued that the most significant divide at Vatican II was not the clichéd, “Cowboys vs. Indians” one between a “liberal majority” and a “curial-conservative minority,” but one within the so-called

¹³ Ibid., 267.

¹⁴ See Hermann Pottmeyer, *Towards a Papacy in Communion: Perspectives from Vatican Councils I & II*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Herder & Herder, 1998), esp. chap. 3, “The Three Traumas of Rome on the Eve of the First Vatican Council.”

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, “Church and the World: An Inquiry into the Reception of Vatican Council II,” in *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology*, trans. Mary Frances McCarthy (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1987 [1982]), 378–93, at 381.

¹⁶ Rowan Williams, “Archbishop of Canterbury Addresses World Synod of Bishops,” *Origins* 42 (October 25, 2012): 330–33, at 330.

¹⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, “Catholicism after the Council,” *The Furrow* 18 (1967): 3–23, at 16–20.

¹⁸ Henri de Lubac, *Vatican Council Notebooks*, 2 vols., trans. Andrew Stefanelli and Anne Englund Nash (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2015, 2016 [2007]). See Jared Wicks, “Further Light on Vatican Council II,” *Catholic Historical Review* 95 (2009): 546–69, esp. 555–62; Giuseppe Ruggieri, “Delusioni alla fine del concilio. Qualche atteggiamento nell’ambiente cattolico francese,” in *Volti di fine concilio: Studi di storia e teologia sulla conclusione del Vaticano II*, a cura di Joseph Doré e Alberto Melloni (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000): 193–224.

¹⁹ Henri de Lubac, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993 [1989]), 341.

majority itself.²⁰ That division emerged especially in the second half of the Council, and *Gaudium et spes* was a key flashpoint. Much was at stake: the relationship of Church and world, of dialogue and proclamation, of humanization and Christianization, of Incarnation and the Cross, of the here and hereafter, among other issues. We cannot understand recent pontificates or the past fifty years of Catholic life apart from those tensions.

I want now to look more deeply at one root of that ongoing conciliar and ecclesial tension: the nature of Christian humanism. The theme of this year's convention is "Grace at Work in the World," and Christian humanism bears directly on the value of human activity in the world, on the relationship of heaven and earth. More provocatively, it raises the question, "What is the opus Dei?" Is it liturgy, as the *Rule of St. Benedict* famously says? Is it the acknowledgment and transformation of the secular world, as those ecclesial cousins Josemaría Escrivá and Paul Lakeland might say?²¹

I will look first at the thought of the Belgian Catholic priest-theologian Gustave Thils, who in the 1940s proposed an incarnational "theology of earthly realities" that would significantly influence *Gaudium et spes*; for Thils the opus Dei is more, but never less, than human activity in its fullest scope: the arts, culture, economics and political life, even sports—all ordered to divine transformation and glorification. Second, I will examine the French Oratorian Louis Bouyer's eschatological approach to Christian humanism, which emphasizes, from within the universal call to holiness, the centrality of the Cross and the necessity of asceticism; for Bouyer, the opus Dei is the praise of God that, paradoxically, redounds to human salvation and cosmic transformation. Third, I will conclude by raising some questions, concerns, and unresolved issues that emerge from this discussion of Thils, Bouyer, and *Gaudium et spes*. 2018 is neither 1965 nor 1946, but (1) we will not understand 2018 without understanding the past, and (2) we will understand more fully 1946 and 1965 only by looking at them from the perspective of today.

I

Gustave Thils was born in Brussels in 1909 and entered the seminary for the Diocese of Malines-Brussels in 1926. After his priestly ordination in 1931, he was sent to Louvain for advanced work in theology. He completed his doctorate in 1935 with a thesis on the catholicity of the Church in modern theology, followed by the degree of *magister* of theology two years later, with a massive dissertation entitled *Les Notes de L'Eglise dans L'apologétique catholique depuis la Réforme*. Upon completion of his training he returned to the seminary to teach, surprisingly, moral theology and later Scripture. After nearly ten years of teaching there, he was called to assume a chair of fundamental theology at Louvain, where he remained until his death in 2000.

The atmosphere at Louvain was fertile. Leo Suenens was the vice-rector from 1940 to 1945 (giving the imprimatur for several of Thils' works), when he was ordained

²⁰ Joseph A. Komonchak, "Le valutazione sulla *Gaudium et spes*: Chenu, Dossetti, Ratzinger," in *Volti di fine concilio*: 115–53; Ruggieri, "Delusioni alla fine del concilio. Qualche atteggiamento nell'ambiente cattolico francese."

²¹ It would be fascinating to compare, say, the respective understandings of secularity in Escrivá's "On Passionately Loving the World" and Lakeland's *The Liberation of the Laity*.

bishop; Suenens, who would become one of the four cardinal-presidents at Vatican II, would remain a lifelong ally and confidant, later inviting Thils to serve as a conciliar *peritus*.²² No less striking was the quality of his Louvain colleagues: the biblical scholar Lucien Cerfaux, the systematians Charles Moeller and Gérard Philips, the latter of whom would serve as the chief editor of *Lumen gentium*. It is from this seedbed of biblical, historical, systematic, and ecclesial renewal and retrieval that Thils published a broad array of books and articles—over 500—on Scripture, morality, spirituality, priesthood, ecclesiology, and ecumenism. Each was marked by Louvain’s characteristic attentiveness to history and contemporary realities, as well as by his “intellectual acuity and openness, matched only by his quiet goodness and availability” to all people of good will.²³

But, it was in 1946 that Thils published the book that was to exercise a deep influence upon Vatican II and especially *Gaudium et spes: Théologie des réalités terrestres*.²⁴ At the beginning of that book he writes:

Nothing is more fiercely discussed [today] than this intervention of the Gospel and the Church in the world. [...] In the gigantic swirling of ideas that concern temporal life: governmental reform, the improvement of family life, the organization of the trades, the direction of the centers of culture, the valorization of work and technology, the ennoblement of the fine arts, Christian theology must have a word to make heard in the name of the Most High God.²⁵

Responding both to the call of papal social encyclicals to establish a just social order based on Christian principles and to the Marxist-Communist critique that religion undermines social commitment, Thils set out in this work to articulate a social and worldly theology that would overcome the dualistic separation of God and the world, by means of a cosmic vision of a world elevated and transformed in every dimension by the presence of God’s triune life. As he puts it:

To distill down to unity the dualism which separates the world and God, to reestablish a new and sane harmony between Christ and humanity, to restore the union of religion with life: such seems to be the first and fundamental meaning of the effort which is

²² See Leo Declerck, “Le rôle joué par les évêques et periti belges au concile Vatican II: Deux exemples,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 76 (2000): 445–64, at 455–56.

²³ Camille Focant, “Hommage à Mgr Thils,” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 31 (2000): 467–73, at 472. Joseph Famerée likewise notes Thils’ “openness of mind” and the “remarkable breadth of [his] universal vision”; see his “L’oeuvre théologique de Mgr G. Thils (1909–2000),” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 31 (2000): 474–91, at 491, 488.

²⁴ Gustave Thils, *Théologie des réalités terrestres I: Préludes* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1946).

²⁵ *Théologie des réalités terrestres*: 7. Original: “Rien n’est plus âprement discuté que cette intervention de l’Evangile et de l’Eglise dans le monde.... Dans la gigantesque brassage d’idées qui interesse la vie temporelle: réforme de l’Etat, assainissement de la vie familiale, organisation de la profession, orientation des foyers de culture, valorisation du travail et de la technique, ennoblement des beaux-arts, la théologie chrétienne doit avoir une parole à faire entendre au nom du Très-Haut.”

accomplished today in the trajectory of a theology of earthly realities.²⁶

Three strands—the thought or “spirit” of Aquinas, a theology of culture, and theological anthropology—intertwine and build up such a vision, and it is to these that we now turn.

The first—the influence of Thomas Aquinas—structures the entirety of *Théologie des réalités terrestres*. Above all, Thils finds in Thomas a unifying spirit: “the big idea that dominated his life [was] the vision of establishing a harmony between two enormous opposing values: in the thirteenth century, these values were called reason and faith, philosophy and theology; today, they are called God and the world, heaven and earth.”²⁷ Thils sees in Thomas a theology that is at once cosmic, trinitarian, theandric, natural, and psychological. Aquinas invites us to contemplate the whole of reality as it appears to the eyes of God. This God is triune and the creator of all being, and all of the created order has a threefold relation to God: dependence, attraction, and “information.”²⁸ Such essential dependence makes all of created reality—even culture, society, beauty, and art—vestiges and images of the Trinity. God, however, is not simply the efficient cause of this created order, but also its final cause, and thereby draws all of creation to completion in Him. This attraction is an essential part of every creature; all creatures desire, as Thomas writes, the common good that is God.²⁹ Furthermore, having been created by God and drawn to him, all creation has the potential to be taken up into the divine life:

To this immense attraction, the Trinity responds with the superabundance that characterizes every divine work. Not content to communicate itself as an object of knowledge and of love, it communicates itself personally to the human person and unites itself to him or her, by the sending of the Spirit, whose seal in us is sanctifying grace. God himself becomes the “form” of our higher faculties and of our person: because St. Thomas also connects formal causality to the supernatural work of God in creation: “nature is perfected by grace, just as matter is by form.”

But, in the perspective of the Thomist synthesis, it is in no way the human person alone who is assumed in God: all of nature, the whole order of creation maintains matter-form type relationships

²⁶ *Théologie des réalités terrestres*: 29. Original: “Réduire à l’unité le dualisme qui sépare le monde et Dieu, rétablir une nouvelle et saine harmonie entre le Christ et l’humanité; restaurer l’union de la religion avec la vie, telle semble être la signification première et fondamentale de l’effort qui est accompli aujourd’hui dans le sens d’une théologie des réalités terrestres.”

²⁷ *Théologie des réalités terrestres*: 131. Original: “Avoir l’esprit de saint Thomas, c’est d’abord retrouver la grande idée qui a dominé sa vie: la vision d’une harmonie à établir entre les deux valeurs gigantesques en présence: au XIII^e siècle, ces valeurs s’appelaient raison et foi, philosophie et théologie; aujourd’hui, elles ont pour nom Dieu et le monde, le ciel et la terre.”

²⁸ *Théologie des réalités terrestres*, 118.

²⁹ *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 3, cited in *Théologie des réalités terrestres*, 119.

with the supernatural: all of creation should be Christian in Christ, spiritual in the Spirit, adopted children of God the Father.³⁰

In the case of humanity, the influx of divine presence creates a synergy, even a quasi-theandric reality. Thils sees in Thomas a deep harmony and indwelling between God and humanity; the Christian God is the one who becomes the life-principle of his people, who gives his people the gift of being a cause, who respects their independence and integrity. Moreover, this “information” extends into the natural and the psychological as well. Drawing upon the French Dominican Antonin Sertillanges, Thils comments upon Thomas’ “naturalism,” which he derived in part from Aristotle and which stands in contrast to a “pernicious mysticism” that would absorb the human person into the divine and consider him or her as bodiless.³¹ So, too, does such transformation extend into psychology and the entire expanse of human activity and culture; nothing of worth is to be excluded from God’s transforming presence. In Thomas, then, Thils finds a vision of God’s triune abundance and the potential of all creation—humanity especially, but no less nature and culture—to be transformed and taken up into the divine, trinitarian life. The fundamental Thomistic harmony between God and humanity is the foundation of Thils’ project, and it enables him to articulate an expansive theology of culture.

Second, Thils’ theology of culture begins with the question of the worth of earthly realities—e.g., economics, art, science, sports—in light of the Gospel: do economic reform and works of literature, for instance, have an intrinsic place in religion and theology? He excludes from the outset what I would call the transcendent and dualist options. The former worries that an emphasis upon earthly matters will distract one from God and heavenly contemplation, while the latter falls prey to a kind of Manicheism or “Satanocracy,” a term that he borrows from Jacques Maritain.³² In place of these, Thils proposes a fundamental continuity between the world and the Gospel, which, while acknowledging the reality of sin and evil, nonetheless sees earthly activity and culture as susceptible of being ordered to God and of prefiguring

³⁰ *Théologie des réalités terrestres*, 120. Original: “A cet immense attrait, la Trinité répond avec la surabondance qui caractérise toute oeuvre divin. Non contente de se communiquer comme objet de connaissance et d’amour, elle se communique personnellement à l’homme et s’unit à lui, par l’envoi de l’Esprit, dont le sceau en nous est la grâce sanctifiante. Dieu même devient comme la ‘forme’ de nos facultés supérieures et de notre personne: car saint Thomas aussi rapproche de la causalité formelle l’oeuvre surnaturelle de Dieu dans la création: ‘natura perficitur per gratiam, sicut materia per formam.’”

“Or, dans les perspective de la synthèse thomiste, ce n’est point l’homme seul qui est assumé en Dieu: toute la nature, l’ordre total de la création entretient avec la surnature des relations du type matière-forme: tout le créé doit être chrétien dans le Christ, spirituel dans l’Esprit, enfant adoptif de Dieu le Père.”

³¹ *Ibid.*, 117. In words that prefigure John XXIII’s statement that Vatican II would address the “whole human person,” Thils repeatedly speaks (e.g., pp. 65–68) of the “whole person” or the “concrete person”; embodiment and earthly existence are essential to Thils. See, for instance, pp. 67–68: “One can never repeat it enough that it is the whole human person, with the ensemble of components that constitute his entire, current, and concrete existence, who is the object of theology.”

³² *ibid.*, 156. For some of Thils’ intellectual debts, see Dries Bosschaert, “Gustave Thils’ *Théologie des réalités terrestres* in Dialogue with Marrou, Maritain, and de Montcheuil: Louvain Theology at the Crossroads of Christianity and Culture.” *Cristianesimo nella Storia* 36 (2015): 65–83.

the heavenly city;³³ there can be, for Thils, no question of an *a priori* opposition between God and the world. This is neither cheap confluence nor a concession to modernist tendencies nor an ill-conceived apologetics,³⁴ but rather is based on (1) a (Deutero-) Pauline and Thomistic universalism of grace and (2) the human person's call to a double love of God and neighbor, and that anything which builds up such love is to be commended and commanded. Moreover, in words which will find an echo in *Gaudium et spes*, Thils writes:

It belongs precisely to a theology of earthly realities to show that the authentic Christian conception of life and the human person calls for an effort of transfiguring the created order, an effort which, far from being halted by the divine life, finds in it an unequalled demand for temporal action.³⁵

Not only do “divine” activities not conflict with “human” ones, they in fact provide the justification for, and stimulus to, such earthly tasks. In constructing this more integrated vision Thils devotes in the final part of *Théologie des réalités terrestres* five chapters to human society, culture, technology and science, the arts, and work (a method that would be echoed by the five chapters of Part II of *Gaudium et spes*). In each instance he draws out the implications of the God-world relationship sketched earlier in the book and demonstrates how human cultures and societies build up the Kingdom and image the Trinity.

Third, all of this is commendable, if relatively unexceptional, to our contemporary ears. However, it is telling that his study culminates with a chapter on human work and its relation to creation and redemption. Here, Thils' book clearly reveals itself not only as theology, but also as anthropology. And, one might consider this anthropology to be the heart and apex of the book—everything converges here. Drawing upon Aquinas' understanding of the interaction between God and humanity and an essentially harmonious view of the God-world relationship, Thils sets forth a vision of humanity as empowered by God to work as collaborators with God in the work of redemption, a work that is already realized in part here on earth. He insists that work is not simply punishment for original sin, but rather a divine grace and vocation.³⁶ In fact, work is a primary way in which a creature imitates God:

³³ See *ibid.*, 136: “La fin ultime ne se substitue donc pas à la fin immédiate: elle la rend plus parfaite, au contraire, en l’orientant vers un terme supérieur et absolu. La béatitude ne vient pas remplacer une saine distraction dominicale; mais elle rappelle aux mortels qu’une distraction n’est vraiment ‘saine’ et ‘humaine’ que si, loin de contredire la fin dernière de l’homme, elle demeure en harmonie avec elle.”

³⁴ *ibid.*, 91.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36. Original: “Mais il appartiendra précisément à une théologie des réalités terrestres de montrer que la conception chrétienne authentique de la vie et de l’homme appelle un effort de transfiguration du créé, effort qui, loin d’être arrêté par la vie divin, trouve en elle une exigence d’action temporelle sans égale.”

Compare with *Gaudium et spes*, no. 34: “There is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting them from building up the world or making them disinterested in the good of others: on the contrary it makes it a matter of stricter obligation” and no. 39: “Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectation of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

God is action and work: a being resembles God, therefore, to the degree that it acts and works. God is a goodness that communicates himself: a creature resembles God to the degree that it imitates God. [...] *What is most divine for a creature, is to participate in divine causality* [italics added]. [...] In collaborating, in whatever manner it may be, with the Creator, the human person is truly the image of God.³⁷

Such likeness between God and the human person leads, in turn, to a conception of theology as theological anthropology, properly understood, for any treatment of the human person will lead inevitably to God. A theology of earthly realities has its origin and extension in the theological consideration of the human person in all of his or her concreteness and relationships.³⁸ In the light of faith and revelation, the person is a “marvelous being, small ‘god’ of the universe, who has been created by God and called by Him to live a deiform life.”³⁹ Everything that he or she does and is, is capable of being caught up by God and in-formed by his grace.⁴⁰ Intelligence, will, body, soul, and culture all belong properly to theology. In Thils’ anthropology, God meets the whole human person in grace and raises natural goods to new, divine levels. God is not in competition with his creation, nor vice versa, but rather brings all of creation to its completion. For humanity, the opus Dei, the work of God embraces the full scope of human activity, sacred and secular, all ordered to the glorification of God.⁴¹ This is, in short, what a theology of earthly realities, an incarnational humanism is all about. Earth, we might say, has everything to do with heaven.

II

Writing at the same time as Thils, the French priest-theologian Louis Bouyer offers an alternative, and perhaps complementary, approach to the Belgian’s theology of earthly realities. Born in Paris in 1913, he was ordained a Lutheran minister in 1936 and served as such until his reception into the Catholic Church in 1939. Ordained a Catholic priest for the Oratorians in 1944, he taught for several decades at the Institut Catholique in Paris, as well as in the United States and elsewhere. The scope of his scholarship and publications is staggering: 49 books, including two massive theological trilogies; over 120 articles; and even four novels (written pseudonymously). He contributed to the preparation and implementation of Vatican II, particularly concerning liturgy, and served as an inaugural member of the Vatican’s International Theological Commission from 1969 to 1974. In the late 1960s, he declined Pope Paul VI’s offer to become a cardinal, claiming that in such a position his controversial opinions on the state of the Church would be even more divisive; the red

³⁷ *ibid.*, 186, 188. Original: “Dieu est Action et Opération: un être lui ressemble donc dans la mesure où il agit et rayonne. Dieu est une Bonté qui se communique: une créature lui ressemble dans la mesure où elle l’imite. [...] Ce qu’il y a de plus divin pour une créature, c’est de participer à la causalité divin. [...] En collaborant, de quelque manière que ce soit, avec le Créateur, l’homme est véritablement image de Dieu.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 65.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁰ In this regard Thils is fond of quoting Aquinas’ statement, “Totum quod homo est, et quod potest et habet, ordinandum est ad Deum” (*ibid.*, 68).

⁴¹ On glorification, see *Ibid.*, pp. 66–68, 90, 137–38, 140, among others.

hat went instead to Jean Daniélou, with whom he had a difficult relationship. Along with Henri de Lubac, Hans Urs von Balthasar, and Joseph Ratzinger, he was a co-founder of the journal *Communio* in 1972. Afflicted by Alzheimer's Disease late in life, he died in 2004 and was buried at the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Wandrille in Normandy, the same abbey where he had become Catholic 65 years earlier.

Bouyer's theological range is astonishing: liturgy, Scripture, spirituality, historical studies ranging from Athanasius to Erasmus and Thomas More to Cardinal Newman, dogmatics from Trinity to eschatology; he was one of the last great generalists in Catholic theology. I will focus here, though, on what he called "Christian humanism" and its conception of the relationship between earth and heaven. And, I want to begin in a perhaps odd place: monasticism. The opening lines of his 1950 *The Meaning of the Monastic Life* provocatively state that "[The monastic] vocation in the Church is not, and never has been, a special vocation. The vocation of the monk is, but no more than, the vocation of the baptized man. But it is the vocation of the baptized man carried, I would say, to the farthest limits of its irresistible demands."⁴²

Ten years later, in his 1960 *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, Bouyer makes a perhaps even more provocative claim: what troubles modern Christians, even the most fervent, about monasticism is that it is "without any question a flight from the world." "Is not," he continues, "[this flight] opposed to the Christian ideal of the salvation of the world?" Some people go even further and accuse monasticism of a "hatred of the world opposed to the love (so fundamentally biblical) of the world as a divine creation."⁴³ That hatred of the world is, in turn, more neo-platonic or even Manichean than Christian. In this view, monasticism is thus the quintessence of a deadly flight from, and contempt of, the world. Monasticism would seem to be antithetical to Christian humanism and even Christianity itself.

Bouyer, whose earthly life as a Catholic began and ended at the same Benedictine abbey, unsurprisingly rejects this rejection of monasticism, arguing that it flows from a refusal of a fundamental Christian paradox concerning the world: the Christian is called both to love the world and to hate the world. St. John, he notes, captures that tension "more frankly" than anyone,⁴⁴ when he writes both that "the whole world is in the power of the Evil One" (1 John 5:19) and that "God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten son, so that anyone who believes in him will never perish but will have eternal life" (John 3:16). The world is both beloved and sinful; it proceeds from, and is implacably opposed to, God. Every Christian is called to flee the world precisely in order to save it: "[W]e must hate the world as it is precisely because we must love the world as God willed it. Only thus can we give it the witness of that saving, re-creating love with which God has never ceased to love it. The slaves of the world, by their love which is mere spineless adulation, can only complete its ruin."⁴⁵

Bouyer proposes, instead, an anthropology and eschatology rooted in the Cross and in asceticism. He emphasizes that the Cross is not optional or extrinsic to Christian humanism and life, but rather utterly central:

⁴² Louis Bouyer, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*, trans. Kathleen Pond (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1955 [1950]), ix.

⁴³ Louis Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, trans. Mary Perkins Ryan (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics/Ave Maria Press, 2013 [1960]), 237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 238.

The redemption has meaning only as restoring and perfecting the creation, in line with God's original and immutable plan for it. The Cross, therefore, with its culmination in the Resurrection, is not just something for which a place must, of course, be found in human life, but which is not to be allowed to permeate it through and through, for fear of the work of creation being retarded; quite the contrary, it has become a necessity for the creation. Apart from the Cross, the creation is doomed to failure, and only by the Cross can it be saved, recovered, and brought to its true end.⁴⁶

The Cross and creation must not be seen as competitive, zero-sum realities. Bouyer dismisses "a kind of pseudo-theology of material realities, a so-called spirituality of the laity claiming to consecrate the earthly sphere as it actually is."⁴⁷ Such perspectives lament a supposed fixation on the Cross that leads to the denigration or even rejection of creation. These views, however, get matters exactly backwards; the Cross and the resurrection are "greatest proof that the Creator has not abandoned his creation."⁴⁸ With sharp irony he states, "While the early heretical gnostics exalted the God of the redemption over against the God of creation, our modern gnostics, by a singular inversion, always tend to exalt the Creator by contrast with the Redeemer."⁴⁹

This centrality of the Cross necessitates asceticism for all of the baptized, each according to his or her vocation. Asceticism is "the effort a Christian must exercise in the battle waged against those things, both those from within himself and from without, that oppose the realization of the ideal of Christian perfection."⁵⁰ The "most serious error" in this regard would be to suppose that there are purely "creative" vocations (e.g., the lay person in the world) in which the Cross has little or no place and "redemptive" ones (e.g., religious life, especially monasticism) in which the Cross is dominant.⁵¹ The laity are no less called to the asceticism of the Cross. The choice, then, is not "between asceticism and humanism, between the cross of the Christian and humanity's self-development."⁵² The dilemma posed by the original French title of *Christian Humanism—Humain ou Chrétien?*—is an intentionally false one. True, full humanity is found only in the death of the old self and the putting on of the new self.⁵³ The Cross is the key to Christian humanism.

Bouyer notes that there are many different forms of the Christian life, but "only one Catholic spirituality worthy of the name: that of the Gospel as the Church

⁴⁶ Louis Bouyer, *Christian Humanism*, trans. A.V. Littledale (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1959 [1958]), 101. One may also note how Henri de Lubac concludes his *Catholicism* with a brief reflection entitled "Mysterium Crucis." The expansive sense of catholicity set forth by de Lubac is not contradicted, but brought to completion, by the paradoxically narrow and expansive way of the Cross, wherein Jesus stretches out his arms to embrace all peoples and to unite heaven and earth.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁰ Louis Bouyer, "Ascetic, Asceticism," in *Dictionary of Theology*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (New York: Desclee, 1965 [1963]), 42.

⁵¹ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 210.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 206–07.

⁵³ Bouyer, *Christian Humanism*, 110.

proclaims it to us, that is, as it came from Christ himself through the apostles, ‘the same yesterday, today, and forever.’”⁵⁴ That common spirituality, moreover, is fundamentally baptismal. Baptism, as inseparably commitment to Christ and renunciation of the Devil, is the basic form of all Christian existence.⁵⁵ It initiates one into the great mystery that Bouyer placed at the heart of his thought: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).⁵⁶ Bouyer was ahead of his time in affirming unambiguously the universal call to holiness.

It remains, though, that Bouyer privileges monasticism.⁵⁷ Why? It is at once both exceptional and common. It is exceptional simply for the obvious reason that few Christians are monks or nuns, as well as for the more substantial reason that it involves a radical renunciation of earthly goods not required immediately of the laity and even the clergy. On the other hand, Bouyer holds, as we have seen, that monasticism is the basic form of all Christian existence.⁵⁸ The monastic is distinguished from other Christians not by a higher call to holiness but by an upfront acceptance of the renunciations that all believers must face by the end of their lives.⁵⁹

The monastic thus lives the Gospel with particular intensity and radicality. In the first place, the monk or nun is the one who, according to the *Rule of St. Benedict*, seeks God above all: “[T]his search and this alone constitutes the meaning of the monastic life and justifies its renouncements.”⁶⁰ All Christians are called to seek God, but the monastic does so with an urgent desire that leads to the abandonment of everything else.

Second, the monastic is fundamentally a nomad. While all consecrated life is based upon the evangelical counsels, Bouyer holds that monastics are differentiated from other religious by the conviction that, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, they are “strangers and pilgrims” who have no “lasting city” on earth but seek that city “whose foundations are eternal.” The monastic is inherently an exile, wandering and on exodus to the “heavenly sanctuary, the very presence of the Father.”⁶¹

⁵⁴ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, x.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁵⁶ In his introduction to *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, Michael Heintz notes that Bouyer refers to this passage at least sixteen times in that book.

⁵⁷ See Marie-David Weill, *L'Humanisme eschatologique de Louis Bouyer: De Marie, Trône de la Sagesse, à l'Église, Épouse de l'Agneau* (Paris: Cerf, 2016), esp. Chapter 6, “La vie monastique, un humanisme radicalement eschatologique.” Weill notes that “Very early on, Father Bouyer presents monasticism as the only true humanism, an integral and radically eschatological humanism” (347). I am grateful to Professor Keith Lemna of St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology for bringing Weill’s book to my attention. See also Jean Duchesne, *Louis Bouyer* (Perpignan: Artège, 2011), 13–15.

⁵⁸ See Pope John Paul II’s comment in his 1995 apostolic letter *Orientalis lumen*: “[I]n the East, monasticism was not seen merely as a separate condition, proper to a precise category of Christians, but rather as a reference point for all the baptized, according to the gifts offered to each by the Lord; it was presented as a symbolic synthesis of Christianity” (No. 9).

⁵⁹ See, for instance, Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 224, 238–39, 242–43. For an insightful reflection on monasticism and marriage as “twin forms of the ascetical vocation” (117), see David W. Fagerberg, *Consecrating the World: On Mundane Liturgical Theology* (Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2016), 115–44.

⁶⁰ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 246. See *The Rule of St. Benedict* 58:7.

⁶¹ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*: 245.

Third, such exodus implies that the monk and nun are called to live in the desert, which is, paradoxically, the only place in which the monastic can be at home for no permanent dwelling is possible there. The desert is the dwelling-place of demons and so the site of spiritual combat. The desert is also a place of solitude, where the monastic can do final battle against evil and be truly, definitively possessed by the Holy Spirit.⁶²

Fourth, monasticism is an angelic life, which means not so much disembodied purity as prayer and heavenly worship. It is “life in the presence of God, wholly consecrated to the glorifying of that presence.”⁶³ Such glorification—witnessed to in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Book of Revelation—consists of the seamless weaving of divine praise and mutual love:

The community of monks grouped around the altar, in all that it does and primarily at the [Divine] Office, but not only at the Office, is the community of praise, the church of the divine praise: *ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*. This is to say that the monastery should be, as it were, the earthly incarnation of that divine *Agape* that the choir of angels reflects directly from the Holy Trinity. There one must be able to sing in very truth: *Ubi caritas et amor, ibi Deus est*. It is indeed in fraternal love consummated, and there alone, that God is willing to dwell. It is by that alone that he wills to be praised. Is he not himself the unchanging perfection of a mutual love?⁶⁴

In this way, the monastery is meant to be the “apex of the pilgrim Church [...] the anticipated realization of its eternal destiny. And it is so because, like the heavenly city, it is essentially a choir of adoration, a liturgical society.”⁶⁵

Fifth, monasticism culminates in spiritual fatherhood and motherhood, manifested in wise counsel and a spiritual power that exceeds that of the “most zealous apostle” and so transforms the world beyond all merely human hopes. Bouyer sums up monasticism thusly:

We do not leave the world to abandon our brothers but to give ourselves wholly to God. In other words, we do not leave the world for the sake of leaving it, but for the sake of finding what it prevents us from finding.

When we have found this, we need not hesitate to return to the world or, still better, like the Baptist, we draw the world irresistibly to the desert.⁶⁶

At this point, with so much talk of “abandonment” and “exile” and “deserts” and “angelic life,” one may be forgiven for wondering what all of this has to do with Christian humanism, with grace at work in the world! Is not Bouyer’s commendation of monasticism as the basic form of Christian life the very antithesis of an incarnational appreciation of grace at work in and through the world, in and through earthly realities? Are monastics and laity enemies? Does Bouyer’s vision represent a retreat from Thils’?

Marie-David Weill has noted, for example, the significant “dissonances” between Yves Congar and Bouyer on the lay-monastic relationship. Where Bouyer sees

⁶² Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*: 244, 258–62.

⁶³ Bouyer, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*: 38.

⁶⁴ Bouyer, *The Meaning of the Monastic Life*, 39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁶ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 266.

monasticism as disclosing to the laity the greatness of their own vocation, Congar holds that centuries of a clericalized monasticism largely hindered an appreciation of the laity's rightful mission in the world; the monk, in this view, is "a man wholly uninterested in earthly realities, cut off from the laity and disengaged from his responsibilities."⁶⁷ Likewise, where Congar criticizes Bouyer's "eschatological dualism," Bouyer sees in the incarnational humanism of Congar, Chenu, and others the "possible resurgence" of Modernism.⁶⁸

Weill sees a possible rapprochement in Bouyer's and Congar's common rejection of a "rigidified, clericalized monasticism, estranged from its roots," and thus ill-suited for "fulfilling its true mission in the Church and the world of today."⁶⁹ Bouyer instead sought a true renewal of monastic life through a rejection of antiquarian restoration (such as he perceived in the reforms of Prosper Guéranger) and a concomitant return to the sources of the monastic tradition. Such a *ressourcement* emphasizes that the monastic is not uninterested in, but rather properly detached from, the world. This detachment, respecting the authentic vocation of the laity, helps the monk and the layperson alike avoid succumbing to a cult of efficiency, profit, and human glory; it helps foster a deeper appreciation of gratuity, the "one thing necessary," and the primacy of being over doing.⁷⁰ Likewise, the layperson must:

believe that he is collaborating in the coming of the kingdom of God. But he must believe at the same time that the achievements which at first seem the most brilliant may reveal themselves as the most fragile and even the most deceptive, just as he must be convinced that the failures which seem the most irremediable enter into the plan of God and its infallible realization. It is here that he finds his cross, the cross which is his own: not aside from his work, but deeply within it.⁷¹

In this sense, the monastic and the layperson are not enemies but friends, united in their common baptismal vocation to divine glorification and human sanctification.

In sum, for Bouyer, paradox abounds in Christian humanism. Monks and nuns are against the world precisely for the sake of the world. They are "alone" (*monachos*) for the sake of their brothers and sisters.⁷² Their liturgical, heavenly opus Dei is their surest and highest contribution to the transformation of the world. This is the paradox of Bouyer's thought for both monks and laity: we properly value the temporal only when we see it in the light of eternity, the earthly city flourishes only when it keeps its sight fixed on the heavenly city. In this sense, heaven has everything to do with earth.

III

Thils and Bouyer, then, both propose visions of Christian humanism, the human person's relationship to earth and to heaven, but they clearly have different approaches. Both seek the transformation of the world, but Thils emphasizes the *continuity* of that

⁶⁷ Weill, *L'Humanisme eschatologique de Louis Bouyer*: 408.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 402.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ See Weill, *L'Humanisme eschatologique de Louis Bouyer*, 408–09.

⁷¹ Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 219.

⁷² See Bouyer, *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, 247–250.

transformation—grace perfecting nature—and Bouyer emphasizes its *discontinuity*—the old self must die so that the new self may live. I do not want to collapse this tension, prematurely or at all. We need to let ourselves feel, deeply, the pull of both Thils and Bouyer, to feel the attraction and the tension of each. We likewise need to confront the possible weak spots of their thought: for instance, Thils' susceptibility, in the judgment of Yves Congar, to conflating the spiritualization of earthly realities with the Enlightenment ideal of unhindered, continual progress;⁷³ the early Bouyer's possibly contrastive-become-dualistic conception of the Church-world relationship.⁷⁴

Over fifty years since the close of Vatican II, nearly sixty years since Bouyer's *Introduction to the Spiritual Life*, and over seventy since Thils' *Théologie des réalités terrestres*, our contemporary situation, though, is both similar to and different from 1946 and 1965. I want, by way of conclusion, to address three topics that the legacy of Thils and Bouyer, as well as of Vatican II, raise for us today: the vocation of the laity, an eschatological imagination, and the doxological character of Christian humanism.

First, the laity. It is a commonplace that Vatican II developed, after centuries of atrophy, a robust theology of the laity. *Gaudium et spes*, *Lumen gentium*, and *Apostolicam actuositatem* are foremost in this regard, but a renewed appreciation of the identity and mission of the laity pervades the conciliar documents as a whole. To my mind, no one in the English-speaking world has spoken more eloquently, intelligently, and directly about the Catholic laity than the American journalist and churchman Russell Shaw. Shaw has criticized the deadening passivity and comfort that clericalism produces in laity and clergy alike. Clericalism, the belief that "clerics not only are but also are *meant* to be the active, dominant elite in the Church, and laymen the passive subservient mass,"⁷⁵ discourages the laity from assuming their responsibility for evangelization, from influencing secular society, and from "cultivating a spirituality that rises above a rather low level of fervor and intensity."⁷⁶

Drawing heavily upon Vatican II—and *Gaudium et spes* in particular—Shaw argues for a recovery of the universal call to holiness and the distinctively "secular" way that the laity live out that call. The entire Church has a secular character-mission (*Gaudium et spes*, 40, 43), but the laity are those whose "special characteristic" is to be secular (*Lumen gentium*, 31). The "secular," for Shaw and Vatican II, is not to be opposed to "religious" matters, but is the primary way in which the vast majority of the Christian faithful encounter and foster the "religious."

Consider the following passages from *Gaudium et spes*:

There is no question, then, of the Christian message inhibiting them from building up the world or making them uninterested in the good of others: on the contrary it makes it a matter of stricter obligation. (No. 34)

Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectation of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the

⁷³ Yves Congar, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 33 (1949): 462–63.

⁷⁴ See Thomas-Georges Chiffot, "De l'eschatologie considérée comme un des Beaux-Arts." *La Vie intellectuelle* 10 (1948): 39–52.

⁷⁵ Russell Shaw, *To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain: Clericalism and the Catholic Laity* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 13. See also his *Catholic Laity in the Mission of the Church: Living Your Personal Vocation*, New Expanded Edition (Chartwell Press, 2014).

⁷⁶ Shaw, *To Hunt, To Shoot, To Entertain*, 14.

body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. (No. 39)

The council exhorts Christians, as citizens of both cities, to perform their duties faithfully in the spirit of the Gospel. It is a mistake to think that, because we have here no lasting city, but seek the city which is to come, we are entitled to evade our earthly responsibilities; this is to forget that because of our faith we are all the more bound to fulfill those responsibilities according to each one's vocation. (No. 43)

One easily sees here the congruence between *Gaudium et spes* and Thils' theology of earthly realities. Heaven and earth are complementary, not competitive.

Richard Gaillardetz and others have rightly criticized conceptions of the laity that would assign *tout court* laity the "world" and clergy the "Church."⁷⁷ It remains, though, that the laity's secular vocation is not a consolation prize for those not called to clerical or consecrated life, but is precisely the ordinary way that most laypeople fulfill the universal call to holiness. The late Cardinal Francis George of Chicago said that the "greatest failure of the post-Vatican II Church" is its failure to form adequately the laity for their mission in the world.⁷⁸ That failure has had disastrous consequences in civic, political, economic, familial, and ecclesial life.

That said, I wonder whether *Gaudium et spes*' insistence on the interpenetration of the Church and the world, and the consequent recognition that faith does not lessen but actually stimulates worldly engagement, have been interpreted or received in ways that have sometimes obscured or even excluded the sense that we have no lasting home here on earth. The "signs of the times" in 2018 are not the same as they were in 1965. Is it not the case that, if *Gaudium et spes* was particularly concerned to respond to the Marxist-Communist critique that religion is the opiate of the people, promising "pie in the sky" and discouraging earthly activism, that today a greater danger is more that of a consumerized, technologized indifference in the face of (and yet a latent hunger for) heaven, the eternal? That is, what happens when the so-called enemy is no longer Communism but what the sociologist Christian Smith has called "moralistic therapeutic deism" and what Pope Francis has called a "throwaway culture"? One can conceive of the Church's mission as "humanization" in such a way that completely immanentizes salvation or even puts it aside as irrelevant. The Church can become either an NGO or a vehicle for the satisfaction of personal desires. If an earlier age sometimes so stressed heaven that it forgot or simply devalued earth, what are we to do in an age where earthly commitments threaten to crowd out a sense of our eternal destiny—to the detriment of heaven and earth alike?

This immanentist constriction, so to speak, then raises a second point: the need for a renewed eschatological imagination. The Reformed theologian Hans Boersma, who has written so insightfully on the mid-twentieth-century theological world in which Thils and Bouyer moved,⁷⁹ has argued in recent years for what he calls a

⁷⁷ See Richard Gaillardetz, "Shifting Meanings in the Lay-Clergy Distinction." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64 (1999): 115–39.

⁷⁸ Francis Cardinal George, *The Difference God Makes: A Catholic Vision of Faith, Communion, and Culture* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2009), 180.

⁷⁹ Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

“ressourcement of heaven,” a “retrieval of a theology of heavenly participation.”⁸⁰ Modernity, Boersma claims, is marked by a constricted vision that limits us to the here-and-now and severs the sacramental bond between earth and heaven; earth has become radically desacralized and disenchanting. That disenchantment—literally and figuratively—has been disastrous, wounding both Church and world: a “radically autonomous natural realm”⁸¹ has been cut off from heaven and deprived of any inherent meaning or purpose. Human willfulness then reigns supreme; creation is no longer seen as a divine gift, as having an irreducible “givenness” to it, but is seen as so much raw material to be exploited, manipulated, and mutilated at will. Heaven and earth are put asunder and become “two essentially unconnected stories in which the bottom half at best vaguely resembles the top half. Such a separation can only end up in a tug-of-war between heaven and earth.”⁸² And, Boersma warns, in a secular, contemporary age, heaven will not win that pulling contest.

Contemporary Western theology, however, has been complicit in this marginalization of heaven, and instead “focused on the here-and-now than on the there-and-then.”⁸³ What is needed in this situation is an expanded, opened-up eschatological imagination that looks not only forward into history, but, most importantly, “upwards.”⁸⁴ Our modern “horizontal” view, which emphasizes the historical embeddedness of truth, needs to be complemented by a retrieval of a “vertical” view. A modern, reductive “1-D” view of reality, limited to physical realities, must give way to a renewed “3-D” view in which heavenly realities are central.⁸⁵

Boersma holds that a renewed vision of sacramental participation—what I would call an eschatological imagination—is the only answer to that deadening, cramped modern secularism.⁸⁶ He argues for a recovery of a sacramental view of reality, of an awareness of earthly participation in heavenly realities. “Heaven is our home,” he baldly states; it is our origin, our present dwelling, and our goal.⁸⁷ In a sacramental-eschatological vision, then, heaven and earth are not opposed, but connected sacramentally. In fact, Boersma argues that “it is only other-worldliness that guarantees an appropriate kind of this-worldliness.”⁸⁸

To what degree, though, does contemporary Catholic worship reflect and embody such heavenly awareness, and to what degree is it immanently self-referential and lacking in transcendence? How aware are present-day Latin Catholics—I exclude here Eastern Catholics—that our earthly worship is, as Vatican II clearly affirms (LG, 50; SC, 8), a participation in the eternal heavenly liturgy? To what extent do our churches and other places of worship make visible, make sacramental—in paint, stone, wood, and glass—the heavenly liturgy, the communion of saints?

⁸⁰ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 3

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 186.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁴ Boersma, *Sacramental Preaching: Sermons on the Hidden Presence of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), xxiii.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xix.

⁸⁶ Boersma, *Heavenly Participation*, 16.

⁸⁷ See *Ibid.*, 3–5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, x. See also, 5: “Participation in heaven changes life on earth: paradoxically, only otherworldliness guarantees proper engagement in this world.”

Ironically, the Church's earthly-secular mission will fall short if the Church and its worship fail to respect the ordering set forth in *Sacrosanctum concilium*: "in [the Church] the human is directed toward and subordinated to the divine, the visible to the invisible, action to contemplation, and this present world to that city yet to come, the object of our quest (see Heb. 13:14)" (No. 2).⁸⁹

This mention of liturgy brings me to a final point. Both Thils and Bouyer, despite their differences, see human existence as culminating in the praise and glorification of God. Christian humanism, not least as the work of grace in the world, is originally and ultimately doxological. Vatican II, for its part, speaks of the priestly character of every Christian life in every dimension: work, prayer, family life, leisure, sufferings and joys, "ordinary" life—all summed up and offered in the Eucharist (LG, No. 34). The much-neglected seventh chapter of *Lumen gentium* likewise says that the Church's "deepest" or most "intimate" [*intimae*] nature consists in the mutual love of believers and the praise of the most holy Trinity (No. 51).⁹⁰

This doxological ecclesiology generates, perhaps surprisingly, the deepest, most fruitful Christian humanism. In a 2008 address to the French "world of culture," Pope Benedict XVI spoke about the monastic origins of western culture.⁹¹ He noted that those monks and nuns did not directly intend to create or preserve such a culture, but sought something more fundamental: God. However, a culture of the word, of singing,

⁸⁹ The importance of this "ressourcement of heaven" may also be seen in the post-conciliar redaction of the 1970 Roman Missal. See, for instance, Lauren Pristas, "Theological Principles that Guided the Redaction of the Roman Missal (1970)," *The Thomist* 67 (2003): 157–95. Pristas argues, based on a comparison of the 1962 and 1970 Missals, that the revised Missal tends to downplay "opposition between heaven and earth" (174, 176), to "present the things of this world in a neutral or wholly positive light" (191), to offer a conception of the Christian life in which "nothing threatens well-being in Christ or casts a shadow of any sort" (191), to excise "actual and potential difficulties of Christian life" (191), and to minimize human insufficiency and the need for divine grace (182, 192–93).

Such emphases raise for Pristas the following questions: "[W]hether the Fathers of Vatican II actually modified Church teaching about the Christian's relationship to the things of this world in a way that required amendment to our liturgical texts, and, if so, whether the actual changes made to the prayers implemented the revised teaching with appropriate nuance" (192).

A quote from Thils on *Gaudium et spes* may be apposite in this context: "The Second Vatican Council, like any council, is a moment in the life of the Church. It therefore necessarily bears the mark of an era, of an intention, of a will. In fact, the [Council] Fathers wanted a council with a pastoral spirit, open to life, attentive to discovering qualities and values from which a dialogue could be begun. In short, its fundamental vision of the human person, of the world, is resolutely optimistic. Because it is practically impossible to put in full light, at the same time, all of Christianity's aspects, it is possible that the reality of the Cross, of suffering, of the evil in existence has not been evoked in the conciliar decrees with all desirable power and acuity. It will therefore be necessary to be vigilant, and not to sin through cerebralism and a lack of realism, when commenting on pages as beautiful as this [third] chapter on human activity." Thils, "L'Activité humaine dans l'univers," in *L'Église dans le Monde de ce Temps*, Yves Congar and M. Peuchmard eds. (Paris: Cerf, 1967), 279–303, at 295–96.

⁹⁰ See Christopher Ruddy, "'In my end is my beginning': *Lumen gentium* and the Priority of Doxology," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 79 (2014): 144–64.

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, "France Visit: Address on Culture," *Origins* 38 (September 25, 2008): 248–53.

of labor, grew out of their search. Reflecting on Benedict's address, Rémi Brague has argued that culture is a "by-product" of praise. As he puts it, "You can hardly paint something, whether a landscape or a portrait, without implicitly affirming that it is good. [...] In the last analysis, there can be culture if and only if we are convinced that, in the teeth of evil, that which *is* is intrinsically good."⁹²

The paradox of Christian humanism, then, is that it flourishes best when it is not sought directly:

Our job, as Christians, is not to produce cultural goods, any more than it was the purpose for which men built monasteries centuries ago. Our task consists in making culture possible in the first place. Culture is a by-product of praise, and what's needed today are words of praise—songs of praise.⁹³

In this context, would it be too puckish to conclude by proposing that the work of God, the opus Dei, most needed in the world today is praise? Praise of the human person, praise of creation—*Laudato si'*!—and, above all and in all, the God of Jesus Christ, whose grace and glory fill heaven and earth?⁹⁴

⁹² Rémi Brague, "From What Is Left Over," *First Things* 275 (August/September 2017): 39–44, at 43, 44.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁴ I would like to thank the Rev. Robert P. Imbelli, for comments on an earlier draft.