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Hommage à Gregory Baum

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Article abstract

This article explores Gregory Baum's contributions both as an editor and as a theologian to the journal The Ecumenist, which he founded in 1962. It explores the original orientation that he set for it of forwarding ecumenism, then how this changed in the 1970s, when The Ecumenist became a journal devoted to critical theology. It then examines the contributions Baum made to this journal through his own writing. This provided a critical Christian witness that sought to keep pace with the changing faces of evil in Western societies and churches and to relate Jesus to these in liberating ways.

Gregory Baum's Contribution to *The Ecumenist*

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Gregory Baum edited and wrote for the Canadian theological journal *The Ecumenist* from October 1962 until his death in October 2017. Gregory Baum was *The Ecumenist* (Lynch 1991, 1)¹. He founded it. He determined its orientation and set its editorial tone². He was its most frequent contributor. In his theological autobiography, he described it as “a small review,” adding this:

I have often said to my friends that editing the *Ecumenist* has been a major source of my mental health since whenever I was frustrated by events in the church or society – and this happened very often – I would study the issue, write an article on it, and publish it in my own review. The articles I wrote for the *Ecumenist* over five decades constitute a record of the evolution of my theological thought. (Baum 2017a, 5)

What follows will examine Baum's contribution to *The Ecumenist*, and through it to theology, the Roman Catholic Church, the Christian Church in general and Canadian society. We will first look at his contribution as its editor and then as an author.

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¹ Kevin Lynch was associate editor of *The Ecumenist* from its inception up until the Spring 1991 issue, when it ceased publication for the first time. *The Ecumenist* ceased publication twice in the 1990s, each time for two or three years.

² David Seljak noted that in 2010 “Gregory Baum stated with some embarrassment that he edited *The Ecumenist* ‘with his left hand’. In other words, he worked alone to choose the articles, generally approaching people whom he heard to submit an article. Otherwise, he simply wrote an article himself, usually at least one per issue. The point is that he had total editorial control” (Seljak 2010a, 15, n6).

1 Gregory Baum's contribution to *The Ecumenist* as its editor

As its editor, Baum made *The Ecumenist* a forum for ideas and discussion, first in the area of ecumenism, then later in what he called critical theology. His opening editorial in the first issue stated that the journal was intended "to support and advance the ecumenical movement" (Baum 1962, 1). It informed people of developments, ideas, events, and publications pertaining to ecumenism and interpreted their meaning. This was the journal's orientation for its first seven years or so. Commenting on Vatican II's *Constitution on the Liturgy*, he described ecumenism as a sign of the times that "recalled the victory of Christ" and that could lead the churches to greater obedience to Jesus (Baum 1964b, 3). Four years later he explained this by arguing that "the questions we ask today mainly deal with friendship and reconciliation across conflict" (Baum 1968a, 125). In this context "we experience God today as unifier and reconciler, as initiating us into friendship and consequently self-appropriation" (Baum 1968a, 125). He concluded that "the ecumenical movement, the coming together of Christians from different traditions, with different historical experiences, yet reaching beyond this to experience the Gospel together – this is in itself an experience of God as he manifests himself to us today" (Baum 1968a, 125). For Baum at this time, the ecumenical movement was paradigmatic of God's work to overcome isolation and opposition between people and create greater human community. It was a central locus of God's redemptive activity that Christians were called to participate in.

During this period Baum published articles, mostly by Roman Catholics and Protestants, as well as church documents, news, and book reports pertaining to the ecumenical movement. Most of these discussed and assessed the proceedings of Vatican II. He also published panel presentations as well as letters responding, sometimes critically, to what he and others had written. This made *The Ecumenist* a forum for genuine dialogue among participants in the ecumenical movement. As such, it contributed to the ecumenical movement's efforts to overcome ignorance and promote communication between Roman Catholics and Protestants in Canada and the United States. This helped create a greater unity among these churches and integrate Roman Catholicism into the Anglophone cultures of both countries.

From 1969 to 1971 Baum studied sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York. This began the journal's second stage in which its orientation shifted to what he later called critical theology³. The way for his turn to sociology and critical theology was prepared by developments in his thought that followed a discovery he made while involved in pastoral ministry in the late 1950s.

The conviction grew in me at that time that there was not much difference between Christians and non-Christians. The same inner and outer drama seemed to go on in all the people I met. What I observed in myself and in others were the same fears, the same hopes, the same struggles, the same loves. (Baum 1975a, 21)

Through encounters with the thought of Karl Rahner and Maurice Blondel, he conceptualized this observation into the idea that "if the divine mystery is present in man's discovery of herself as situated in the human world, and is operative in man's ongoing creation of her future, then God is not extrinsic to human life but the gracious presupposition of man's humanity" (Baum 1975a, 23). Thus God is present wherever people strive to be fully human and in all areas of life in which this striving occurs. In light of this, the "task of the theologian [...] is to detect how human life is threatened by destruction and to discern the powers of healing which, miraculously, are already at work among men" (Baum 1969a, 34). This meant that theology "must extend its dialogue partners, traditionally confined to philosophy, to include the sciences, the humanities, the arts, and the social sciences" (Seljak 2010a, 6; Baum 1969a, 35). Baum described this as a dialogue with the secular world, the world where God is redemptively at work summoning and enabling people to realize their divine calling and destiny within history (Baum 1967b, 88). He first turned to dialogue with psychotherapy during the 1960s, becoming involved with a therapeutic movement called Therapeutics while he was still an avid ecumenist⁴.

Baum explained that he studied sociology in order to gain insight into why the reforms of Vatican II failed to take root in the Roman Catholic Church (Baum 1969b, 1). However, already in 1967, he lamented

³ This orientation continues under the journal's new name, *Critical Theology*. See Schweitzer 2018a and 2018b

⁴ (Baum 1975, 26-31). This dialogue culminated in his book *Man Becoming* (Baum 1970b).

that the Church had “hardly any theology of the social realities” (Baum 1967b, 86). It had attended mainly to the person in separation from their environment and had “as yet no clear idea of what the social involvement of the Church means” (Baum 1967b, 86). He discovered that sociologists like Max Weber and Emile Durkheim could help overcome this lacuna. Sociologists “spent most of their time studying, describing and, if possible, measuring concrete social phenomena and analyzing the factors involved in them” (Baum 1969b, 4). What he valued about sociology was its empirical orientation (Baum 1969b, 4), its attention to the concrete realities of society and social movements, and the way the work of sociologists like Weber and Durkheim was guided by a moral passion. Sociology attended to dimensions of social life that the philosophy that Catholic theology had traditionally been in dialogue with did not. It provided ways of understanding social realities and the dynamics of social change that could help theologians interpret the meaning of the Gospel in relation to society (Baum 1969b, 4). In his view, the dialogue with the social sciences – sociology, psychology, and anthropology – could help one “discern the hidden presence of the paschal mystery in human life” (Baum 1970c, 74).

2 The shift to critical theology

Sociology also contributed two insights that helped move Baum's editorial orientation toward critical theology. The sociology of knowledge revealed that all forms of knowledge, including theology and church doctrine, are marked by self-interest – that is, shaped by a community's concerns and preoccupations. This may give rise to an ideology that distorts a community's worldview and harms others. The sociology of knowledge also revealed that theology also always has a political dimension in that it supports some movements within church and society and opposes others (Baum 1970a, 26). These sociological insights meant that theology's quest for truth must be concerned with its latent and explicit political meaning, and this required that theologians submit their work and the church's beliefs to ideology critiques from various perspectives (Baum 1970a, 28-31). Through his work on Jewish-Christian relations, Baum had already noted, without using the term, that there was an ideological dimension to the Church's traditional teaching about Judaism. The conciliar teaching on

Judaism at Vatican II, which Baum helped write, subjected this traditional teaching to an ideology critique and corrected its distortions⁵.

Secondly, Baum argued that sociology and other social sciences, along with the French, American, and Industrial revolutions, had helped give rise to a new political imagination that did not exist before the Enlightenment (Baum 1978, 87; 1986b, 51). Society is now seen as a communal project that people shape through their collective decisions and actions. Further, sociology enables one to see how one's actions may contribute positively to the shaping of society even if one belongs to a small countervailing social movement. As well, people's beliefs and actions may have unintended detrimental effects on society. Sociology enables people to become aware of these and so take responsibility for them. For these reasons, dialogue with sociology is necessary for theologians "to understand the historical context in which they operate (and this for reasons that are properly theological, according to Baum)" (Seljak, 2010b, 16). It enables theology to come of age in the modern world. From 1969 on, one of Baum's major contributions as editor as *The Ecumenist* involved publishing articles by himself and others that focused on the dialogue between theology and sociology, the contribution the latter can make to the former, and how theological values should shape theology's participation in this dialogue.

While all this prepared Baum to embrace and contribute to critical theology, until the end of the 1960s he remained, "without knowing it, a liberal – that is, I was for openness and dialogue and goodwill without analyzing the forces of destruction" (Kline and Seljak 2018, 3). He came to adopt a critical perspective on church and society as a result of the influence of Rosemary Radford Ruether, Latin American liberation theology, and the protests of society's victims. Baum would later define critical theology as "the theological reflection of middle-class Christians in the North listening to the voices of the excluded and exploring the emancipatory dimension of the Gospel" (Baum 2003b, 13). At the end of the 1960s, coinciding with his turn to sociology, Baum had an intense friendship with Ruether, who also contributed to *The Ecumenist*. Ruether criticized Baum's trust in dialogue and good will. She argued that society

⁵ (Baum 1966, 27). In his last interview Baum said that he didn't learn what ideology is from Karl Marx, but from his study of the Roman Catholic Church's anti-Jewish rhetoric; (Kline and Seljak 2018, 3).

must be analyzed in terms of its conflicts and forces of oppression and that one must side with its victims. Baum later wrote that, although he at first resisted her analysis, she “opened my eyes to the oppressive, structured inequalities of society and made me hear, in the promises of Jesus, the liberation of men and women from the institutional powers of darkness” (Baum 2017a, 77-8; Kline and Seljak 2018, 3). Also, in 1968 the Latin American Bishops at their conference in Medellin, spurred on by the early writings of Latin American liberation theology, adopted a similar social and theological analysis. A third influence was the irruption of protests by society’s victims, the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed, that began in the late 1960s and continued into the 1970s. These three influences shifted his editorial focus from ecumenism to critical theology.

The reasons for this shift were outlined in a remarkable article entitled “Survival of Canada and the Christian Church” (Baum 1973a, 23-8). Here, Baum argued that many oppressed groups – Jews, Blacks, women, minorities around the world, and the poor of the global South – “whose oppression is woven into the very fabric of the dominant culture, have decided to protest against these injustices and wrestle against the ideologies of their oppressors” (Baum 1973a, 23). This had created a cultural crisis in which the crucial question facing churches was “how to respond to the emerging contradictions of culture and society and to the claims of the people striving for greater liberation” (Baum 1973a, 23). This in turn had created a trenchant divide between Christians who defended the existing social order and those willing to recognize the injustices being protested and identify with the victims of society and their demands for justice. In Baum’s view, by this time the ecumenical movement had lost momentum (Baum 1973a, 23). It had become institutionalized and was no longer a sign of the times challenging the churches to greater faithfulness. In fact, in the context of this cultural crisis it took on a negative meaning.

Baum argued that in the cultural crisis created by the irruption of the victims, the significant differences between Christians no longer ran along denominational lines, but now passed right through all the churches. Christians who sided with society’s victims in this crisis experienced “spontaneous solidarity and brotherhood beyond their confessional differences” (Baum 1973a, 24) in their pursuit of justice. He concluded that “it is the task of the Christian Churches in Canada to reveal the injustices present in Canadian society and apply Christ’s promises and

power to the movement that seeks to overcome them” Baum 1973a, 24). This analysis was carried further in another article originally presented to the North American Academy of Ecumenists in September 1974 (Baum 1974, 5-9). For Baum, the ecumenical movement was a sign of the times during the 1960s because it was a force for evangelical renewal transforming churches through dialogue with each other (Baum 1963, 4). Now, he argued, it functioned in the opposite way. Instead of transforming churches, it now legitimated their existing beliefs and practices and protected “their collective life from serious criticism” (Baum 1974, 5). Ecumenism’s focus on Christian unity failed to grasp the division this cultural crisis had created within churches. It tended to “overlook the significant conflicts in the Church, neglect the theological message implicit in the critical movements, and strengthen the dominant structures in the imagination of the faithful” (Baum 1974, 8). Over against ecumenism’s focus on unity, which was *The Ecumenist*’s original editorial focus (Baum 1962, 1), Baum posed a focus on church renewal, which he defined as “attempting to renew ecclesiastical life according to the demands of present misery and interpreting the Gospel as the message of salvation addressed to people of this age” (Baum 1974, 8). He concluded that what counted now, “more than ever before, therefore, is the promotion of the critical movements – their interaction, their theological foundations, their mutual support, and their visible presence in groups and centers of various kinds” (Baum 1974, 9). He described this as “the weaving of the web of renewal” (Baum 1974, 9; McKenna 1998, 630). This was *The Ecumenist*’s editorial focus henceforth.

It has been suggested that this shift in focus was not a change from one sphere of interest to another but more accurately reflects a development that happened within ecumenical theology itself, as ongoing ecumenical reflection began to focus less on formal dialogue between different Churches and more on social justice⁶. A later review article by Baum looking back on *The Ecumenist*’s first 20 years presented this change in editorial orientation more as an evolution than a choice between alternatives (Baum 1983, 17-19). Here, Baum recounted the hopes that the ecumenical movement began with and judged these to be partially fulfilled. Ecumenism had “succeeded in transforming the Churches’

⁶ This was suggested by an anonymous reader of this paper.

historical reality" (Baum 1983, 17). Widespread cooperation in theological research and discussion and in the churches' ministry, wherever it transcended the level of the local congregation, had become the norm. However, what interested Baum now was the spontaneous cooperation between Catholics and Protestants wherever the churches' mission was understood "not so much as the promotion of individual conversions but as a faithful service to God's approaching reign" (Baum 1983, 18). Baum argued that this mission, defined as service to the human family and especially to the oppressed, was key to increasing ecumenical church unity. Only as Christians pursued it would they relinquish "the elements of their traditions, acquired from past identification with the powerful, which now keep them apart" (Baum 1983, 18). He added that ecumenical "dialogue remains abstract unless it flows into common witness" (Baum 1983, 18). By "common witness" he meant the joint ministry to society by Christians of different denominations which linked Christian faith to the quest for social justice. He noted that over the years *The Ecumenist* had changed its editorial focus. He concluded that *The Ecumenist's* orientation remained "the promotion of Christian unity in the Church's mission" (Baum 1983, 19). But that mission was now understood as pursuing social justice rather than seeking organic church unity.

3 *The Ecumenist as a forum for critical theology*

In 1991 Baum looked back on when this change in editorial policy occurred and judged it a time of cultural optimism when structural social change towards greater justice seemed possible (Baum 1991,1). The First Gulf War (2 August 1990 to 28 February 1991) signaled for him the end of this era. A new politico-economic orientation had become globally dominant, in which a privileged minority sought to defend and enhance their well-being, by military force if necessary, regardless of the cost in human lives, while marginalizing the rest of the world's population (Baum 1991, 2). Christians whose faith was linked to seeking social justice now found themselves in the wilderness, with no discernible possibilities for radical social change. Still, when *The Ecumenist* re-appeared in the 1990s, it retained its orientation towards "weaving the web of renewal" (Baum 1974, 8), in which Christian faith was linked to social justice. Baum's understanding of how minority social movements may contribute to

change in society, derived from Max Weber's sociology, enabled him to defend this as a meaningful posture. *The Ecumenist* retained this orientation until Baum's death in 2017. It continues in the journal's new format as *Critical Theology*.

Beneath this shift in editorial focus was an underlying continuity, "an open and questioning stance" on Baum's part, a determination to remain "attentive to the 'signs of the times'", and to follow these even in "unanticipated directions" (Jamieson 2010, 16). Early in *The Ecumenist's* history Baum had written that the "search for truth and fidelity continues in the Church" (Baum 1964a, 101), and that this helps make the Church a dynamic reality. It was Baum's participation in this search that changed *The Ecumenist's* editorial focus. An ecumenical concern did continue in the new focus. While *The Ecumenist's* weaving the web of renewal was centered in Roman Catholicism, it connected "with similar movements in Protestant and Anglican churches, and, significantly, also in the midst of Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian dialogue" (Jamieson 2010, 16).

In this second stage, *The Ecumenist* remained a forum for dialogue, but church and conference statements on social justice issues, reviews of books, and reports on conferences dedicated to social justice, replaced those on ecumenism. For example, Jewish and Palestinian voices were now given space regarding the Palestinian-Israel conflict. Academics in various fields were invited to contribute articles related to critical theology. Inter-religious dialogue with a social justice bent and the acceptance of other religions as having a place in salvation history (Baum 1973b, 46) extended the journal's ecumenism. Articles on the environmental crisis extended its social justice orientation. It now included often critical dialogue between theologians and bishops, the magisterium and the Pope over the legacy of Vatican II, and related issues. In this second stage, Baum's editorial direction made *The Ecumenist* a unique forum mediating between "the academic world and the world of social justice and its ethics of solidarity" (Jamieson 2010, 16). For the victims of society and those who cared about them, during the dark years of neoliberalism it contributed a hopeful realism, rooted in Christian faith but buttressed by sociological analysis. "Prominent in nearly every issue of *The Ecumenist* since its appearance in 1993 is the broad narrative of finding hope in dark times" (Kline 2010, 20). As a forum for critical theology, it provided illumination and insight for Christians and others whose faith involved seeking justice.

4 Gregory Baum's contribution to *The Ecumenist* as an author

Baum's contributions as an author to *The Ecumenist* were immense. For over 50 years he provided a steady stream of insightful, accessibly written analyses of conferences, church documents, events, ideas, and, explorations of signs of the times, like the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Baum 2002b, 1-2), the election of Donald Trump (Baum 2017b, 1-3), and the mass shooting at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City on January 29, 2017 (Baum 2017c, 18-19).

Two contributions that he made through his articles in *The Ecumenist* were his many dialogues with others and his reflections on dialogue as a theological method. In such articles, Baum dialogued with the magisterium, with other Christian theologians, with the disciplines of psychology and sociology, with thinkers as diverse as Allan Bloom, Judith Butler, and Edgar Morin⁷, and with religious thinkers in the traditions of Judaism and Islam. Through these dialogues he expounded his own thought and that of others, illuminating both, and often advancing his own to new insights. Baum also explored the nature of dialogue and advocated it as a theological method. He argued that we come to be persons "through dialogue with others" (Baum 1967a, 33-4). Dialogue for Baum was not only constitutive of a person, but also potentially transformative, a source of growth and transcendence (Wells 2018, 7). He described this as follows:

Dialogue is more than an exchange of information: it is a trusting conversation where partners try to understand the faith of the other, including the difficulties and aspirations of the other. Dialogue changes the partners. They are liberated of their prejudices, they learn from the experience of others, and they reread their own tradition and discover in it riches of which they were previously unaware. Dialogue fosters 'the conversion' of all participants, each turning to the most authentic values of their own tradition. (Baum 2001a, 17)

⁷ Allan Bloom was an American professor of philosophy who taught at the University of Toronto during the 1970s. His 1987 book *The Closing of the American Mind* was a bestselling attack on liberal university education. Judith Butler is an American Jewish philosopher critical of unquestioning Jewish support for certain policies of the state of Israel. Edgar Morin is a prolific French polymath.

For Baum, dialogue with others is a means by which God challenges people to transcend the limits of their understanding and empowers them to do so. God transforms persons and communities through their dialogues with each other (Baum 1967a, 34). The need for such transformation never ends in history (Baum 1970-71b, 18). Therefore, the need for dialogue with others is ongoing.

While dialogue was a more prominent theme for Baum when he focused on ecumenism, he continued writing about its transformative power and engaging in it after his turn to critical theology. This turn was precipitated partly by the recognition that dialogue could become ritualized and used to defend the status quo (McKenna 1998, 616), but he did not abandon dialogue as the core of his theological method. He turned to critical theology because of a change in his dialogue partners, from non-Roman Catholic ecumenists and psychology to critical thinkers like Rosemary Radford Ruether, sociology, and the victims of society (Wells 2003, 459; Wells 2019, 8).

Related to his emphasis on dialogue was the critical consciousness that Baum brought to *The Ecumenist*. Like dialogue, critical thought was intended to move one towards greater truth and justice. In a programmatic essay published in 1970, he argued that one of theology's tasks was "to liberate itself more and more from the ideological trends induced by ecclesiastical institutions, secular society and the university establishment" (Baum 1970a, 30-1). This need for a critical consciousness in regards to church and society remained a theme in his writings throughout the years that he contributed to *The Ecumenist*. As part of this, Baum's writings repeatedly reflected on the ambiguity of religion, how it can be a source of woe and of healing for people and communities. Baum's writing established that a willingness to offer reasoned criticism of church teaching and decisions and surrounding society was orthodox, rooted in the substance and dynamics of Christian faith and a necessary part of faithful discipleship.

Yet Baum's writing was rarely simply critical. In a programmatic article emphasizing the need to overcome ideological trends instilled by ecclesiastical institutions and the university establishment (Baum 1970a, 25-30) he noted that this was for the purpose of renewing these institutions and keeping them effective. He concluded that we "do not want to forget that without these theology cannot exist at all" (Baum 1970a, 31). The goal

in such writings was “to move beyond critique and suspicion to dialogue, healing, and truth” (Jamieson 2010, 16). For Baum critique should almost always be dialectical, concerned to negate what is wrong and destructive and to retrieve what is good and beneficial. Critique is generally a form of dialogue predicated on an underlying respect for the person, institution, culture or theoretical approach being discussed. The goal of critical thinking is “to detect how human life is threatened by destruction and to discern the powers of healing which, miraculously, are already at work among men” (Baum 1969a, 34).

Directly related to Baum's emphasis on dialogue and critical thinking was his analysis in several articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s that showed how Roman Catholic teaching had changed at Vatican II and how it could change under the impress of the Spirit (Baum 1967b, 92; 1970-71a). Through dialogue and attention to signs of the times, Christians may come to understand a key term like “brother” (Baum 1967b, 92) differently from the church's traditional teaching. A second step of re-reading Scripture in light of this both tests this new understanding in relation to Scripture and may also produce a new understanding of Scripture's central message. This, in turn, may lead to a third step, reformulating the meaning of the Gospel in terms of this new understanding so that the Gospel addresses church and society more efficaciously. In this way, the Holy Spirit may lead the church through dialogue and critical thinking to a new understanding of the faith. Baum argued that this is what began at Vatican II. He developed this innovative understanding of doctrinal change into a theory of dialectical doctrinal development based on the revelatory role of the Holy Spirit in his book *The Credibility of the Church Today* (Baum 1968b, 151-176).

This dynamic aspect of Vatican II, which introduced changes in Roman Catholic teaching was formative for Baum. Again and again his articles in *The Ecumenist* discussed Vatican II in relation to subsequent developments in the Church. Through this, he contributed to *The Ecumenist* a dynamic understanding of the Church as open to the leading of the Spirit, able to adapt to changes in society while remaining faithful to the Gospel. He also helped prevent from being forgotten doctrinal changes that occurred at Vatican II and the fact evidenced here that the Catholic Church can change its teaching.

Baum's emphasis on constructive critical thinking eventually distilled into a theological approach that he called critical theology. Following the approach of Latin American liberation theology, he argued that critical theology is a second step following upon a prior act, a "political commitment of solidarity with the oppressed" (Baum 1981b, 77). This is an act of love, modeled on the preferential option for the poor demonstrated in the Gospels by Jesus. This act of solidarity involves a critical listening to the poor and a negation of society, an acknowledgment of its injustices. The second step, carried out in light of this solidarity and listening, is "an analysis of present oppression and the decoding of the distorted cultural consciousness" (Baum 1981b, 77). This includes analyzing one's own complicity in the oppression of the poor. The third step is to re-read the Scriptures in light of this analysis. The fourth is to formulate the meaning of the Gospel, derived from this re-reading, as good news to the poor. By laying out this methodology, Baum equipped *The Ecumenist's* readers to develop their own critical theologies.

At the heart of this approach was the preferential option for the poor, which Baum took from Latin American liberation theology. Baum published a number of articles in *The Ecumenist* exploring the preferential option in depth: its historical and biblical roots, its characteristics, its import for theology, and its reception by various bodies in the Roman Catholic Church, and defending it against critics⁸. He noted that it involves analyzing society in conflictual terms, that it links Christian faith to struggles for justice, and that it is appropriate for the Canadian context. For Baum, adopting the preferential option made it impossible to discuss any theological topic without "the commitment to justice and mercy, without taking sides, without being politically responsible, without scandalizing the defenders of the status quo, without making some enemies, without discipleship" (Baum 1984, 85-6. Baum's analysis of the preferential option for the poor presented in these articles remains unsurpassed in clarity and insight.

The articles on critical theology that Baum contributed to *The Ecumenist* expanded traditional notions of sin and salvation to include a social dimension. His dialogue with sociology provided analytical tools, such as the logics of mission and maintenance (Baum 1986a, 25-9), by

⁸ Baum 1981c; 1983; 1984; 1985; 1986c; 1987b; 1989.

which to understand tensions, conflicts, failings, and advances within church and society in relation to the social dimensions of sin and salvation. He advanced a complex social analysis that recognized the economy and culture as distinct but inter-related sphères (Baum 1988, 70). He also argued for expanding the notion of truth to include a pragmatic criteria, "the kind of world knowledge helps to create" (Baum 1975b, 83). In these ways, he contributed tools for understanding the social meaning of the Gospel to *The Ecumenist* and through it to church and society.

Baum contributed to *The Ecumenist* a distinctive theological vision. Early on, he described God as a "the supreme 'insider' who frees men to create their own future" (Baum 1969a, 33). This happens through God's Word revealing to humanity its sin and disclosing the possibility of a grace-filled future. The Spirit opens one to receive this good news and empowers one to pursue it. God transcends history in that God's compassion cannot be tamed. No self-achievement or social establishment is ever permanent because God continually calls individuals and communities to greater transcendence. In Baum's critical theology, this transcendence was increasingly understood as greater justice and peace. God is also the consolation of those who weep over sin and suffering or who are broken by the forces of evil as they work for healing and justice. God is present to humanity in every dimension of life. God's Word is expressed definitively in Jesus Christ, but comes to people also through dialogue with others, through protests by the oppressed, or through an inner call in the stirrings of one's conscience. God is a mysterious presence, a miraculous source of hope, comfort, and power to resist evil.

Jesus Christ, God's definitive Word, comes as judgement revealing humanity's sins and as grace that enables people to repent and struggle for greater wholeness, justice, and peace. In this way, Christ creates newness in humanity "on the personal and social levels" (Baum 1987a, 23). In Baum's early theology, Jesus was a source of personal growth and wholeness who called churches to seek greater unity. In his later critical theology, Jesus Christ is "the ground of our solidarity with the entire human family, beginning with the poor and oppressed" (Baum 2004, 11). Amidst the Islamophobia triggered by the attacks of September 11, 2001, Jesus called his followers to "honour and respect the members of other religions" (Baum 2002a, 11). Baum's fullest exposition of Jesus in *The Ecumenist* is found in his article "Resisting Empire" (Baum 2005, 9-12).

Here, he argued that while Jesus was not a politician, his preaching of God's coming reign moves people "to create an alternative society, at odds with empire and domination, defined in terms of justice, co-operation, peace, and the simplicity of life" (Baum 2005, 10). As the risen Christ, Jesus remains in solidarity with "the great masses in today's world" (Baum 2005, 11). His cross reveals their condition. His resurrection reveals their future, giving hope, an inner peace, and inspiring people to work for social change.

The Holy Spirit makes God's Word in Jesus Christ present in history explicitly and in hidden ways. Through dialogue and critical thinking, it purifies traditions, enables religious people to work together despite their differences and stirs up individuals and movements that work to rescue humanity from its self-destructive tendencies (Baum 2002a, 11). The Spirit disrupts established social orders and settled routines in order to make way for greater justice, peace, and reconciliation. It leads people, despite their privilege or poverty, to "yearn and reach out for an alternative society in keeping with God's will" (Baum 2005, 11). Wherever there is love, God's Spirit is present.

Individuals and societies have a propensity to evil, to self-destructiveness, to become self-enclosed. However, Baum believed that built into the human condition is an openness to and a desire for God. The fullness of redemption will never be reached in history. Yet the work of God's Word and Spirit may turn individuals and communities from isolation, self-aggrandizement, and destructive behaviour to seeking a greater good that includes others, to stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

This new perspective inspired Baum to address many forms of injustice and violence. He published articles on the nuclear arms race and the environmental crisis. He engaged concretely with the plight of Indigenous peoples in Canada, repeatedly highlighting their oppression as an injustice, demanding redress, and arguing that God addresses Canadian churches and society through their protests (Baum 1973a, 24; 1975b, 94-5; 1977, 13; 1981a, 52; 1982, 57). Already in 1973, he wrote in *The Ecumenist* sympathetically and in detail about the struggles and aspirations of francophone Quebec for autonomy and recognition (Baum 1973a, 24-6). His involvement with this intensified after he moved to Montreal in 1986 and joined the editorial board of *Relations*, a francophone journal

published by the Centre justice et foi⁹. This was reflected in his subsequent contributions to *The Ecumenist*. In response to Islamophobia, he engaged Muslim thought, writing in 2003 that we “must learn to honour Islam” (Baum 2003a, 2), and later that it “is the task of the Christian Churches, especially after September 11, to defend Muslims against prejudice and discrimination and to support the humanism implicit in Muslim traditions” (Baum 2006, 8). At this time, articles by Baum and others on Islam and Muslim thought and reviews of books on the same topics appeared frequently in *The Ecumenist*.

5 Conclusion

Both as editor and writer, Baum's contributions to *The Ecumenist* were never simply theoretical. He made it a forum for concrete engagement with issues where he believed the Holy Spirit was at work calling the Church to greater faithfulness, and he engaged these issues through the articles and reviews that he contributed. Through *The Ecumenist*, he provided church and society with informed and often prophetic commentary on substantial issues, keeping these in the public eye and frequently challenging prevailing views about them. In this way, he made an important contribution to the public sphere of Western churches and societies and was an ally of diverse victims of exclusion and oppression. Baum's articles frequently focused on Canadian churches and society. This provided Canadian Christians with high quality theological reflection on their concrete social and ecclesiastical realities. It also built bridges and critical understanding between francophone and anglophone Canadians.

Gregory Baum's editorial and authorial contributions to *The Ecumenist* made it synonymous with insightful, engaged theological dialogue and reflection intended to transform people, churches, and society. He made it a vehicle by which the Holy Spirit could move people closer to their divine destiny. His editorial approach and reflections on both the goals Christians should seek, how and where they should seek them, and how they should think about these encouraged and empowered the Church to be a pilgrim people. His contributions provided a critical

⁹ Baum 2017a. This produced numerous articles and book reviews in *The Ecumenist* and several books: Baum 1992; 2001b; 2014; 2015.

Christian witness that sought to keep pace with the changing faces of evil in Western societies and churches and to relate Jesus to these in liberating ways.

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Résumé

Cet article explore les contributions de Gregory Baum à la fois en tant qu'éditeur et en tant que théologien à la revue *The Ecumenist*, qu'il a fondée en 1962. Il explore l'orientation originale qu'il lui a donnée afin de faire avancer l'œcuménisme, puis comment cela a changé dans les années 1970, lorsque *The Ecumenist* est devenu une revue consacrée à la théologie critique. Il examine ensuite les contributions que Baum a apportées à ce journal à travers ses propres écrits. Cela a fourni un témoignage chrétien critique qui a cherché à suivre le rythme des visages changeants du mal dans les sociétés et les églises occidentales et à relier Jésus à ceux-ci de manière libératrice.

Abstract

This article explores Gregory Baum's contributions both as an editor and as a theologian to the journal The Ecumenist, which he founded in 1962. It explores the original orientation that he set for it of forwarding ecumenism, then how this changed in the 1970s, when The Ecumenist became a journal devoted to critical theology. It then examines the contributions Baum made to this journal through his own writing. This provided a critical Christian witness that sought to keep pace with the changing faces of evil in Western societies and churches and to relate Jesus to these in liberating ways.