



Sacred Heart
UNIVERSITY

Sacred Heart University
DigitalCommons@SHU

Mission and Catholic Identity Publications

Office of Mission and Catholic Identity

12-2-2011

The Journalist as Theologian: A Tribute to Gregory Baum

Michael W. Higgins

Sacred Heart University, higginsmw@sacredheart.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/mission_pub

 Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Higgins, Michael W. "The Journalist As Theologian." *Commonweal* 138.21 (2011): 12-18.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Mission and Catholic Identity at DigitalCommons@SHU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mission and Catholic Identity Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@SHU. For more information, please contact ferribyp@sacredheart.edu.

The Journalist as Theologian

A Tribute to Gregory Baum

Michael W. Higgins

Their number is not legion, and it continues to dwindle. The few remaining Second Vatican Council Fathers alive today are in their nineties, and their able theological experts—the *periti*—not far behind. But at least one in this august company is not going quietly into the good night of retirement: Gregory Baum, mathematician, theologian, ex-Augustinian friar, celebrated dissenter, and pioneering sociologist of religion.

Baum is a genial man perpetually surprised to find himself at the center of controversy. It is a sign of either enduring naïveté or dauntless optimism that he has never fully realized how provocative candor from someone in his position can be. Take, for instance, the 1996 interview in which he diagnosed the Roman Catholic Church as suffering a governance crisis of staggering proportions. Well before the clerical sex-abuse scandal, the controversy of Benedict XVI's Regensburg address, and the divisive rehabilitation of dissident Lefebvrist, Baum likened the church to "a company that becomes so big that it can't be run anymore." Any management consultant, he asserted provocatively, would take one look at the Catholic Church and "even without any highfalutin spiritual liberal ideas...[he] would say, 'This is simply impossible. You have to decentralize, you have to delegate. You need a different system.'"

Such convictions would seem to befit a professionally trained sociologist looking at the Roman Catholic Church as an institutional entity shorn of its mystery and mystique. Gregory Baum, however, is a theologian—albeit one bent on engaging the claims of the social sciences in a way that serves the truth of the gospel. A former professor of theology and sociology at the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto, and currently Professor Emeritus of Theological Ethics and the Sociology of Religion at McGill University, Baum defines himself

Michael W. Higgins, former president of both *St. Thomas University* and *St. Jerome University* in Canada, is the author of many books, including most recently the *Catholic Press Association First-Prize Book Award for 2011*, *Suffer the Children Unto Me: An Open Inquiry into the Clerical Abuse Scandal*, co-written with Peter Kavanagh. He is vice president for mission and Catholic identity at *Sacred Heart University* in Fairfield, Connecticut. Funding for this article was provided by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation.

not as a theological shaper or foundational thinker, but as a journalist following his curiosity wherever it leads him. To Baum, one should note, "journalist" does not betoken a scribbler with a deadline, but rather someone inexhaustibly fascinated with ideas, intellectual trends, and currents. His career has balanced the Good News with news in pioneering proportions.

Fittingly, I first met Gregory Baum when I interviewed him for a newspaper over thirty years ago. As a seminarian in 1968 I was sent, as part of an experiment in formation, to the wilds of Nova Scotia, to study at St. Francis Xavier University. The Scarboro House of Studies was still under construction, so we were billeted with the Augustinians at their monastery some forty-five minutes from campus. In keeping with the new formation plans, we students were encouraged to participate in undergraduate life. I joined the staff of the university paper, the *Xaverian*, and my first assignment was to interview Baum, who was scheduled to give a retreat at the monastery.

I saw Baum regularly at the monastery and noted how respectful he was of the old ways—courteous, deeply communal, and generous with his time when dining with the senior (and mostly German) monks of his order. He was especially kind with me, a novice reporter, neither dismissive of, nor impatient with, my tentative and awkward questions. He answered forthrightly and at length, as if each question deserved a mini-lecture, and prefaced his remarks by asking me if I would be comfortable if he didn't wear his habit to the interview. It was 1968 after all.

Over the subsequent decades Baum and I have run into each other at lectures and conferences; we have met on academic stages, in broadcast studios and editorial rooms, and now, for the first time, in a living room at his Montreal apartment. Baum at eighty-seven is much slighter of build than when we first met, and his characteristically frantic gait has slowed. But he remains cordial and hospitable, in his slightly courtly way. There is a touch of melancholy about him; he still grieves the loss of his wife, Shirley, who died in 2007. He has somewhat relaxed his schedule since "retiring" at eighty, but only slightly, and as we settle down to the interview I am reminded of a former graduate student of Baum's who marveled at his "seemingly endless supply of biological energy." Baum has published a raft of books, articles, and essays, and retains a dizzying array of writing and

speaking commitments, especially concerning issues associated with the Second Vatican Council, its legacy and spirit.

Looking back at his service as a theological expert at the council, Baum tells me he worries that the work of the council has been “put in a deep freeze”; in particular he is distressed by the confounding volte-face of Benedict XVI on the issue of episcopal collegiality. In a paper delivered before the Canadian Catholic Historical Association in June 2010, under the title “The Forgotten Promises of Vatican II,” he addressed the pope’s mystifying change of view, noting that Joseph Ratzinger, in his 1966 book *Highlights of Vatican II*, had praised the “beneficial pastoral and ecumenical consequences” of collegiality. (See also John Wilkins, “Ratzinger at Vatican II,” *Commonweal*, June 4, 2010.) The pope who addressed the Roman curia on the same subject four decades later, however, took another position altogether, as Baum in his paper noted with dismay:

The difference between Pope Benedict’s brief summary of the achievements of Vatican II in 2005 and the account of these achievements by the theologian Joseph Ratzinger right after the council is astounding. The young Ratzinger was certainly not a radical. The interpretation he offered in *Highlights* was widely held among the bishops and theologians I met at the council.

Baum’s choice of the word “astounding” is typical of a man who is direct in betraying surprise and consternation, yet never cynical or spiteful. It is a quality of Baum’s personality much admired by colleagues, peers, and critics alike—his disinclination to personalize debate, his generous eagerness to ascribe the best of motives to those who disagree with him. This authentically sunny generosity may help explain why Baum finds it “difficult to believe that there are people who dislike me.” He is continually startled to encounter people eager to denounce him, to question his credentials as a Catholic, even to consign him to the deepest circles of hell.

And yet more than a few have done so. Baum’s positions on various hot-button issues place him squarely on the progressive wing of Catholic theology—an “arch-liberal,” as one blogger recently called him. A May 2011 news story described him as a “dissident...infamous for his long opposition to the Catholic Church on issues such as contraception, homosexuality, and priestly celibacy...[and] particularly notorious for helping rally opposition to Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae vitae*.” Opponents over the decades have responded to Baum’s critique of that encyclical with a vehemence approaching vilification. Msgr. Vincent Foy of the Archdiocese of Toronto, a canon lawyer and pastor, repeatedly, indeed almost obsessively, criticized Baum in the pages of Canada’s leading newspapers. Anne Roche Mug-



You will step into one of America’s premier Catholic universities and carry on a rich tradition of ministry when you join the team of men and women who serve as rectors of 29 single-sex residence halls at the University of Notre Dame.

Under the direction of rectors, residence halls become communities of faith and learning, where students discover how to integrate the intellectual, spiritual, and social dimensions of their education.

The University of Notre Dame is an EEO/AA employer

Rectors
make a difference.

For application materials for the academic year 2012–2013 and a more complete description of the RECTOR position, visit the Office of Student Affairs website at osa.nd.edu.

geridge, daughter-in-law of the prominent British convert and journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, made Baum the object of furious broadsides, denouncing him as the epitome of liberal clerical disloyalty to the magisterium in a pair of fiery polemics, *Gates of Hell: The Struggle for the Catholic Church* and *The Desolate City: The Catholic Church in Ruins*. The sharpest establishment critique came from Gerald Emmett Carter, a Council Father who, in a sermon in the late 1970s at St. Peter's Cathedral in London, Ontario, denounced the alleged disobedience rampant in various Catholic circles, singling out for reprimand New York's Jesuit advocate for gay rights, John MacNeil, and Toronto's own Gregory Baum. "What I say, I say without apology," Carter thundered; "it is the teaching of the church." *Roma locuta est!*

That Baum might run afoul of church teaching makes for a hard irony in the story of a man whose life has been a singular journey toward finding a spiritual home in Catholicism. Born in Berlin in 1923 to a family of Jewish and liberal Protestant ancestry, Baum lost his father in infancy, and was largely raised by his mother, a woman whose passion for medieval art took her on extensive travels to explore Gothic and Romanesque architecture—and provided her son with an early exposure to Catholic churches and monasteries. In 1939, imperiled by Nazi race laws, Baum escaped to England, and from there pushed onward to Canada, where he was interned for two years in a detention camp with other German émigrés. He used the enforced time to study—something he discovered he was quite good at—and after his release undertook studies at McMaster University, graduating in 1946 with a degree in physics and mathematics. The same year Baum converted to Catholicism, following a close reading of St. Augustine's *Confessions*. After winning a graduate degree in math at Ohio State University, he joined the Order of St. Augustine and began his career, not as a mathematician but as a theologian sent by his order to the University of Fribourg, where he received his ThD in 1956.

Baum modestly dismisses his dissertation, on the subject of the popes and Christian unity, as a "poor thing, which was very superficial." Yet it proved a career-maker. Published in 1958 under the title *That They May Be One: A Study of Papal Doctrine (Leo XIII–Pius XII)*, it came to the attention of the German Jesuit Cardinal Augustin Bea and the Dutch priest Johannes Willebrands, president and secretary respectively of the newly established Secretariat for Christian Unity. They admired the book, and in due order Baum found himself

appointed to the Secretariat, where he would help prepare for the council announced by Pope John XXIII in 1959.

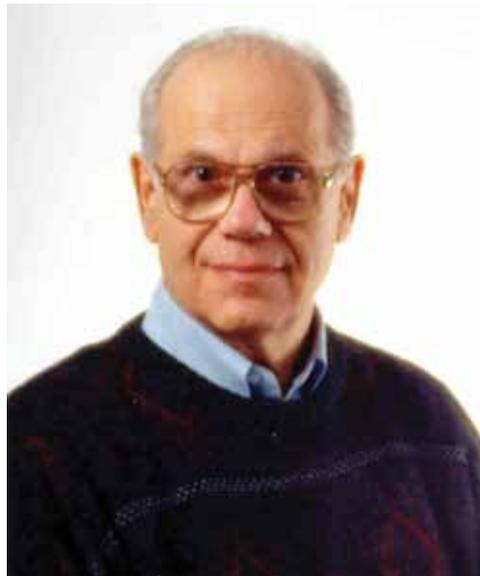
The council was the making of Gregory Baum. He thrived in its intellectual hothouse, delighted to find a new set of coworkers inspired by the best in Catholic thinking. He served in various capacities on the commissions charged with preparing documents on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*), and religious liberty (*Dignitatis humanae*). Beginning his work in November 1960, he concluded it with the council's end in December 1965, an apprenticeship that culminated in his writing the first draft of *Nostra aetate*. Characteristically, Baum downplays his role. "John XXIII wanted a document on the Jews because he was profoundly scandalized by the anti-Jewish rhetoric in the Christian tradition," he recalls. When Cardinal Bea asked for a volunteer to write the first draft, "I came forward after everyone left and said I had some experience in this area."

Indeed he did, having published in 1961 a book called *The Jews and the Gospel: A Re-examination of the New Testament*, which at the time of Cardinal Bea's request had been reissued under the highly germane title, *Is the New Testament Antisemitic?* Bea accepted his offer, and Baum went to work, penning a draft that had a crucial role in Vatican II's declaration on non-Christian religions.

The conciliar years proved personally transformative for the young theologian. In Rome, Baum met many of his peers and began collaborating with them; he had continuous and direct exposure to the bureaucratic maneuverings and stratagems that define the Vatican's system; and he discovered the enormous potential and power of the media, reporting

(like Xavier Rynne for the *New Yorker* and Robert Blair Kaiser for *Time*) on the council for various publications, including *Commonweal*. This experience contributed to his appreciation of the critical role of the journalist, showing him how important it is for the church to be in meaningful dialogue with the world—to see new ideas, movements, and modes of engagement as opportunities for effective evangelizing and not occasions for summary condemnation.

After the council, Baum immersed himself in teaching and writing, doing his bit to disseminate the new thinking in the church, working to find innovative ways to translate the enduring message of the gospel to contemporary society. Though not combative by nature, and disinclined to controversy for its own sake, he found himself drawn into the first big theological cause célèbre following the council: the Charles Davis Affair. Davis, a British priest, theologian, *peritus*, and editor of the prestigious *Clergy Review*, was also



Gregory Baum

Compassion

Living in the Spirit of St. Francis

Ilia Delio, O.S.F.

Compassion guides us through the life of Francis tracing his growth from a selfish, materialistic young man to the humble, holy saint beloved by millions. With this book as your guide, you can do simple things every day to discover a more compassionate, open, fearless, and loving life—just as St. Francis did.
Item #B36162 | \$14.99 | ISBN 978-1-61636-162-4

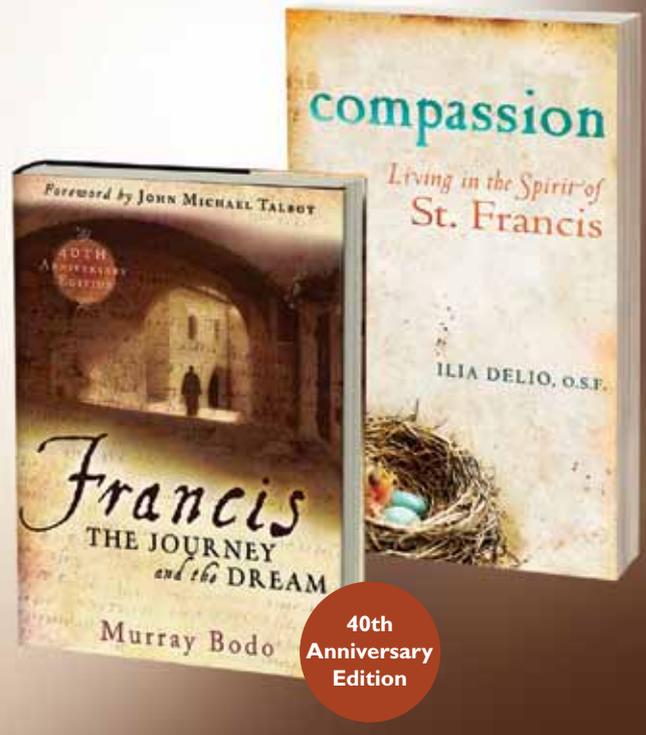
Francis

The Journey and the Dream

Murray Bodo; Foreword by John Michael Talbot

The story of Francis of Assisi, says Murray Bodo, connects in a marvelous way with the problems we all face, with our longing for love, and our need for meaning in our lives. It is a story for all ages because it is the story of the quest for God, a story that plumbs the depths of the human heart in search of its own deepest possibilities.

Item #B36064 | \$24.99 | ISBN 978-1-61636-064-1
Hardcover edition: Limited quantity available!



ST. ANTHONY MESSENGER PRESS

1-800-488-0488 Catalog.AmericanCatholic.org

the author of the 1967 ecclesiastical shocker, *A Question of Conscience*. Very publicly the previous year, he had left the Roman Catholic Church, and in his apologia he posed the question: “Is the church a zone of truth and thus the embodiment of faith?” *A Question of Conscience* went on to articulate, autobiographically and theologically, the many reasons for Davis’s negative response.

The following year, Baum produced *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis*. An unabashed exercise in apologetics, the book defended the church against Davis’s methodical dissection of its credibility but did not resort to *argumentum ad hominem*. Refusing to demonize his interlocutor, Baum instead took Davis seriously. “My thesis,” he wrote, “is that Charles Davis has described in the Catholic Church the social pathology that threatens every institution.” Baum acknowledged that the Catholic Church was not immune from the social and institutional toxins that afflict other historical bodies. He went on to advocate, as a credible response to Davis’s charge that the church’s mission had been compromised by institutional mendacity, the notion of an open church—not “a spiritual replica of the political society” but “a movement, visible at the institutional center... [which] will eventually demand an adaptation of the church’s sacramental and collegial structure.”

There is little evidence that the papacy viewed an open church as either realizable or desirable. But the fresh think-

ing involved in crafting his counter-apologia to Davis allowed Baum to explore new theological terrain; and from these forays would come one of his most important books. *Man Becoming: God in Secular Language* (1970) addressed the work of the French Catholic thinker Maurice Blondel, and in the process revealed a postconciliar apologetics that would sustain Baum as a theologian for decades to come. The book assessed Blondel’s rejection of the traditional theology that (in Baum’s words) cast God as “a divine being facing humanity from beyond history, and divine revelation [as] the communication of heavenly truths to humans caught in their own limited, earthy knowledge.” Blondel had referred to this traditional approach—in which, as Baum described it, “the world remained the place where wisdom and holiness were not at home”—as “extrinsicism,” and discarded it in favor of the view that “in Christ the whole of humanity is divinely graced.” Baum termed this new acknowledgement of God’s redemptive presence in human history “the Blondelian shift.” It proved to be Baum’s Copernican revolution. Henceforth his writing, research, teaching, and activism would be shaped by Blondel’s views: his theological anthropology; his rejection of the church’s negative valuation of the secular; his belief in the ubiquity of grace; and—to be anachronistic—his open advocacy of the controversial Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx’s incarnational mantra, “God is the Good News that humanity is possible.”

It was not a big step from Baum's adoption of Blondel's inclusivity to his realization that God is mediated by all kinds of things besides the institutional church, including the humanistic sciences. It was not surprising, therefore, that he would turn for inspiration to a Catholic psychoanalytic commune. Therafields, the largest urban commune in Canada—at its peak it had 900 members living at thirty-five houses and four farms in the Toronto area—represented a 1960s and '70s mélange of psychotherapy and communitarian counterculturalism. A thriving home for seekers eager for collective therapy and frustrated by the constraints of conventional religious life, it was founded by a charismatic leader, Lea Hindley-Smith, whom Baum describes as a spiritual eminence with a theology neatly encapsulated by one of her favorite sayings: "When I say God I think of someone smiling over my shoulders." Therafields was very much a creation of its time, and ultimately could not survive the demise of Hindley-Smith, beset by diabetes and depression over financial and sexual scandals. But Baum's involvement with this enclave proved long lasting, and to this day he retains contact with some of its offshoots, especially its Institute for Psychotherapy.

Some of Baum's critics—the Heidegger scholar Thomas Langan and the Newman expert James M. Cameron notably among them—have labeled him a mere experimenter and dilettante, a Catholic theologian with an unhealthy interest in evanescent trends. The charge is inaccurate, but you can see why one might be tempted to make it. Baum's Blondelian passion, journalistic curiosity, and personal earnestness have sparked enthusiastic commitments to a number of causes and people over the decades—indeed, the insights of Hindley-Smith and the theological openness of Maurice Blondel continue to interest him today. But Baum has never abandoned the Catholic camp. To be sure, he has wandered toward its edges; yet he has never thought of himself as anything other than a Catholic theologian doing his work at the heart of the church.

It was in this spirit that Baum in the early 1970s chose to study for two years at New York's New Institute for Social Research, acting on the firm conviction that it is "a good and necessary thing that a theologian read the classical sociological texts." From his reading of those texts emerged a classic of his own, *Religion and Alienation* (1975), in which he argued that "the crucifixion of Jesus by empire and the religious and secular elites supporting it—the *memoria passionis Christi*—should prevent Christian theologians from...overlook[ing] the suffering inflicted on people by powerful economic, political, and military institutions." With such reflections Baum effectively advocated for social justice, but his goal was even larger—namely, to urge upon his fellow theologians a "dialogue with sociology," with the goal of helping them "learn to take into consideration the social implications of their own discourse."

Through just such a dialogue, in the mid-1970s Baum es-

tablished his personal and professional agenda for the decades to come. *Religion and Alienation* was his foundational text, a work Stephen Sharper—one of Baum's former doctoral students, and currently associate professor of environmental ethics at the University of Toronto—credits with bringing sociological perspectives to mainstream Christian theology, and doing so "in a clear, lucid, and engaging way." The book, says Sharper, "remains a wonderful resource for all those who want to begin to understand the social and economic architecture of religious ideas."

Essential to Baum's thinking in the book was his notion—a notion that still governs his writing—of a "critical theology." He traced such a theology to the Enlightenment and its broadening and galvanizing effect on ideas and institutions. What Baum advocated was

the critical application of the various theories of alienation to the self-understanding in faith of the Christian church. This critical method may lead theologians to discover elements of false consciousness in their perception of reality and thus produce a significant change of mind and heart.

Far from smothering theology in sociology, Baum hoped to enrich it, giving it "a new and important role in the life of the church." A more expansive, sociologically informed theology, he believed, could help Christian theologians "discern the ideological and pathogenic trends in their own religious tradition and then, by opting for a wider meaning of the promised salvation, interpret the Christian gospel as a message of deliverance and reconciliation." Not all would welcome Baum's hope. The critical method put forth in *Religion and Alienation* carried a clear indebtedness to Marx, Freud, and the various liberation theologies gathering speed at the time in the developing world. Baum's fearlessness in harnessing such ideas would bring him into further conflict with ecclesiastical authorities.

That conflict reached its crisis in the late 1970s. Baum remained an Augustinian priest at a Catholic federated university, and though he managed to survive the many controversies that swirled around him—his frequent media appearances and high profile as a guest speaker made him an easy target for conservative Catholics—the mounting pressures from Rome and the Archdiocese of Toronto could not be overlooked. Under orders from Rome, the Augustinians at Marylake Monastery, Baum's canonical community, summoned him to return and live in community. Baum refused, and decided to seek exlaustration. Around that time, in a follow-up to a piece on sexuality he had written for the university's student newspaper, he criticized papal sexual ethics as "unacceptable" for failing to "take into account the development and growth of the human person in various cultures and situations." Such comments led to the withdrawal of his priestly faculties by the local bishop—none other than Gerald Emmett Carter, Baum's old critic. Years later, in an address he delivered as archbishop of Toronto,

Carter would indicate only too clearly what he thought of Baum. After the council, Carter opined,

it became popular and profitable to dissent. The great theologians of the council, the Rahners, the Congars, the de Lubacs, the Lonergans, were replaced in the public eye by the dissenters, some of whom we would never otherwise have heard of. *Humanae vitae* produced Charles Curran; sociology produced Gregory Baum; popularization produced Charles Davis, and so on. Not that they did not have their value, but they were dissenters first and theologians second.

As the object of public scorn from high places, Baum felt caught in a vise. In his Montreal living room he recounted to me the immense pressures of that time. Following Baum's public dissent from the Vatican's 1976 "Declaration on Sexual Ethics," with its strictures against homosexuality, Toronto's Archbishop Philip Pocock announced that "Fr. Baum's published reactions are contrary to official Catholic doctrine and may not be followed as either the teaching or the practice of the Catholic Church." Baum was approaching a momentous choice. "I went to Fr. John Kelly, the president of St. Michael's College, and asked him outright if I could continue to stay at the college should I choose to leave the Augustinian Order. He said that I must remain, but not spring a wedding on him until at least after one year." Obediently, Baum waited just over a year to spring the wedding—and then, in early 1978, married Shirley Flynn, an ex-sister of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Loretto Sisters).

The marriage capped a series of events that changed his life dramatically. Indeed, so controversial were these events that their sequence—the question of whether Baum resigned the priesthood and was laicized, or was automatically excommunicated under canon law following his marriage—remains fodder for battling bloggers even today. Baum, now an ex-Augustinian and a married man, decamped to McGill University in Montreal, where he became a social ethicist and prominent member of the faculty of religious studies, and threw himself into a rigorous study of papal social teaching. Baum's departure from the Toronto scene, where he had been a major fixture for over two decades, was greeted with alarm by Catholic thinkers of the Canadian left—and quietly celebrated by those of the right.

But Toronto's loss soon became Montreal's gain. Baum was sixty-three when he arrived in Quebec—far from fluent in French, and like most Anglo-Canadians largely ignorant of the markedly volatile political sensibility of a province still rife with separatism. In this new setting he would once again, as former student and St. Jerome's University professor David Seljak nicely phrases it, "translate his blessed restlessness into another personal reinvention." This reinvention was in fact many reinventions,

Dean

School of Theology and Religious Studies The Catholic University of America

The Catholic University of America invites applications and nominations for the position of Dean of the School of Theology and Religious Studies (STRS). The school was founded in 1889—the oldest of the University's 12 schools.

For a complete position description and its requirements, please visit <http://trs.cua.edu/news/dean.cfm>.

Review of applications will begin immediately and continue through Dec. 15, 2011. The appointment will be effective on or about July 1, 2012. Applicants should submit a curriculum vitae, statement of application, and names and addresses of three to five references to:

Rev. Robert J. Kaslyn, S.J.

The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC 20064
Email: Dean-Search-TRS@cua.edu

The Catholic University of America was founded in the name of the Catholic Church as a national university and center of research and scholarship. Regardless of their religious affiliation, all faculties are expected to respect and support the University's mission. The Catholic University of America is an Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity Employer.



THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA

Celebrating 125 Years

and soon Baum was reading widely in both the Frankfurt School of critical theory and the writings of the Hungarian economist Karl Polanyi, as well as crafting—in conversation with his colleague the theologian and minister Douglas Hall—a uniquely Canadian liberation theology. The books poured forth: *The Church in Quebec* (1992); *Essays in Critical Theology* (1994); *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics* (1996); *Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics* (2001). In a sweetly ironic development, Baum—no longer a priest and no longer teaching in a Catholic faculty of theology—now became North America's most rigorous and vocal defender of John Paul II's social-justice teaching. Writing on the pope's concept of "structural sin," Baum discussed what it meant for Catholics to accept responsibility for the sins of the past, irrespective of personal involvement. "Our common heritage and spiritual solidarity with our community," he wrote,

demands that we assume the burden of past transgressions. While not guilty by personal implication, we soon come to feel that as a community, as a culture, and even as a church, we are in need of conversion. We must say we are sorry, for without such mourning we shall not encounter the grace of renewal. The notion of structural sin enables us to say without contradiction that the church in which the Holy Spirit dwells is a repentant church.

The pope who presided over the rite of reparation for the sins of the past on the eve of the millennium could not have said it better.

In 1987 Baum was named the Massey Lecturer, chosen to deliver a series of talks aired prominently on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *Ideas* program. Baum's contributions, organized under the title "Compassion and Solidarity: The Church for Others," represented his best ecclesiological thinking, drawing on the history of the church's self-understanding as affected by the work of the Second Vatican Council, the liberationist theologies and their innovative biblical exegeses, and the social doctrine espoused by John Paul II. The lectures revealed deep ambivalence over John Paul's papacy. Although keen on Karol Wojtyła's social thought, Baum felt dismay at what he viewed as a ham-fisted governance style, discerning in John Paul II's rule a mode of leadership that refused to acknowledge such realities as the democratization of governance structures, the emergence of an enlightened and well-educated laity, and the proportionate and legitimate power of the Petrine office.

The concentration of power in the papacy, an ancient trend in the Catholic Church, has been further intensified in recent centuries. As in all aristocratic societies, the people play only a passive role in matters of ecclesiastical teaching and polity. Political modernization has generated a new ethic of governance. Modern men and women have ethical objections against an exercise of authority that is not open to dialogue and participation and not limited by checks and balances.

If such checks and balances went missing during the reign of John Paul II, their absence during the pontificate of Benedict XVI is more obvious and painful still. Baum laments much in the church today: the inflexibility of its laws; its ready application of proscriptions; its indifference to the new insights provided by the social and natural sciences concerning human behavior; its reliance on anonymous accusations; and its demand of an unreflective obedience to institutional authority as a mark of religious fidelity. His voice rises in intensity when he discusses the hierarchy's inconsistency on morality—specifically, the pretense that while Catholic social teaching is based on ideals, Catholic teaching on sexuality is based on unalterable laws. As early as the 1930s and '40s, he points out,

Jacques Maritain and Cardinal Charles Journet spoke and wrote eloquently of a credible sexual morality articulated in terms of ideals rather than as practical and inflexible proscriptions. They understood that we are called to be perfect, that we aspire to perfection, and that a moral code that does not distinguish between aspiration and concrete, lived reality is inhuman.

For decades, Baum's opinions on sexuality have remained outside the orbit of acceptable opinion—at least as far as many prelates and moralists are concerned—and have earned him a place of special opprobrium in the eyes of traditionalists. But Baum has remained serene amid the storm. His equanimity is fed by many things, including his clear-headed honesty, the knowledge that he has experienced human love, and an abiding certainty that his contributions to the church remain in the end those of a believing theologian—"I remain a theologian," he insists, "even when speaking as a social analyst and activist." Baum told me that he lives "a marvelous life surrounded by an active Catholic Left of about three hundred people, all grey-haired, of course, but full of energy. They constitute my spiritual home, a Eucharistic home, committed to community and social justice." Politeness, ingenuousness, and collegiality are the personal as well as professional qualities that have defined his life and vocation no matter the setting—university, chancery, parish hall, retreat house, or activist cell.

The University of Toronto's Stephen Scharper provides a generous assessment of the Gregory Baum legacy. Not only does his mentor possess "an amazing work ethic," says Scharper, but also "a sterling and unremitting compassion for the poor and dispossessed, a beautiful ability to synthesize and situate any philosophical, religious, or sociological movement in a fair-minded and readable way, a remarkably brilliant mind, a quest for new ideas that continue to deepen well into his late eighties, and a wonderful commitment to friendship." Anyone paying attention to Baum's life will see what fruits these virtues continue to yield: the publication in 2009, by the University of Notre Dame Press, of *The Theology of Tariq Ramadan: A Catholic Perspective*; an ongoing solidarity with the marginalized in Montreal; and the affection of countless former students who celebrate his work in *festchrifts*, rally around him at academic conferences, and invite him regularly to their campuses. Not bad for someone approaching his tenth decade of life.

As we rise to leave his apartment for dinner, I ask Baum if he still regards his days in the Rome of the Second Vatican Council as a theological Camelot—or if the energy of that time and place has been dissipated by ideological wrangling, and the intellectual openness of the time permanently foreclosed. He stops in his tracks and recounts an exchange he had while in Rome with Shirley, early in the pontificate of John Paul II. "We were visiting a dear friend and former general of the Irish Augustinians," he says, "and he told my wife and me that 'every day they give you an injection, and something dies in you.'"

With a smile, Baum briskly leads me out of his apartment and down the hall to the elevator. Some quality in that smile makes it clear that he will allow no such injection to be administered to him, and that possibly, just possibly, this might be the beginning of a new book. ■