

VII

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The Christian Marxism of F. Hastings Smyth and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth was marked by a commitment to work in critical solidarity with Communists in practical political action. For Smyth and the Cambridge oratory, this action reached its height in the late thirties and early forties. With Smyth's more critical view of Marxism after 1948, the practical action shifted to the S.C.C. cells, particularly Montreal. Despite pressure from within and without the Society, Smyth and the S.C.C., even in the fifties, never renounced cooperation with the Communist Party or other Marxist groups in practical political action, whether in relation to the local, national or international scene.

The basis of this practical cooperation was a common dialectical or revolutionary analysis of history, including the present reality. Smyth and the S.C.C. accepted the fundamental Marxist premise that meaningful historical change is basically revolutionary, motivated by the material needs of humanity. They accepted an economic class analysis of human society and were committed to the revolutionary overturn of situations of social injustice and oppression. Smyth and the S.C.C. initially supported the Soviet Union as a

socialist model of the benefits of revolution. They supported revolutionary struggles in China and other post-colonial situations. They sought alternative Marxist models of revolution in Europe. They sought revolutionary changes in the situations in which they lived and worked -- in economic and political life in the U.S., Canada, England and Japan, in domestic life, in labour unions and factories, in the peace movement and in the church. Despite discouragement with the Soviet Union, they never renounced their commitment to revolution.

However, much of the commitment of Smyth and the S.C.C. to Marxist analysis and revolution was rooted in a Christian faith that saw itself as fundamentally revolutionary. Smyth's theology of Metacosmesis saw the Incarnational process as revolutionary, a dialectical relationship between God and humanity. It saw the Eucharist or Anamnesis, the primary and essential vehicle of Metacosmesis, as revolutionary. It saw Eucharistic offertory, sacrifice and Transubstantiation as all part of a revolutionary process in which the human material order is taken into the divine for its own and the world's transformation. Such a deep commitment to a revolutionary Christian faith kept Smyth and the S.C.C. open to a positive view of revolutionary movements in the world.

Indeed, the revolutionary typology of Smyth's theology required (at least before 1948) more than simply open-

ness to secular revolutionary movements. Given the theology's dialectical integration of the human and the divine, it required a positive integration of human and divine revolution. Smyth's conviction that Marxist dialectical analysis provided a true description of human society only reinforced the movement towards critical integration. In the integrating process, Incarnational Christianity and Marxist theory and practice inform one another. Smyth's use of materialism, dialectics, and the revolutionary cell are all part of this process. His use of Marx's critique of religion to reject defective forms of Christianity and use of Metacosmesis to reject Marxism's atheism are both part of this integrating process.

From Smyth's Christian perspective, the Incarnational process is always primary -- it takes up and completes Marxism. But completion is not destruction or rejection. Because of the ongoing dialectical relationship between the human and the divine, Marxist analysis continues to be necessary for the divine to work through Christians in transforming the world. That Christianity needs Marxism as much as Marxism needs Christianity is clearly the theme of the last chapter of Discerning the Lord's Body. Because of its serious attempt to integrate critically Christianity and Marxism and its strong assertion of their interdependence, the theology of Smyth and the S.C.C. can clearly be regarded

as a Christian-Marxist theology.

In evaluating the theology and practice of Smyth and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth one must, of course, be aware of the development in Smyth's theology that I have traced in previous chapters. I shall concentrate on the period of Smyth's greatest rapprochement with Marxism, 1938-49. This period includes Manhood Into God, early editions of the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth handbook, Discerning the Lord's Body, the Anamnesis, Western Christianity's Whence and Whither, the "Dialectics for Christians" manuscript and the 1949 Allocution, "Catholic Sacramentalism and Marxian Materialism". However, much of my evaluation also applies to Smyth's later theological writings, including Sacrifice, insofar as these continue basic earlier themes, modified only by Smyth's rejection of Stalinism and the Communist Party in the U.S.

A major strength of Smyth's theology is its strongly dynamic and transformational character. Faith in the Incarnation as a revolutionary process is seen as unequivocally committing Christians to acting on the world for its transformation. All the doctrinal elements of Metacosmesis point in this transformational direction -- the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Christ, the formation of the church as the Incarnationally reordered community, the establishment of the Eucharist or Anamnesis as the ongoing vehicle of the church's and the world's transformation.

Likewise, all the philosophical elements point in the same transformational direction -- the dynamic re-interpretation of Thomism, the use of Marxist dialectical and materialist theory, the Marxist critique of "extricationalist" Christianity. Again, the revolutionary core of Smyth's theology demands the transformation of the world by Christians.

A strength closely related to the transformational character of Smyth's theology is its commitment to revelation as process. Ultimately, for Smyth, this is rooted in the triune nature of God. Doctrinal revelation (Incarnation and sacrament), structures (church and ministry) and truth itself are processes. Thus, there is always openness to including new insights (science, philosophy, Marxist analysis) into the ongoing process of Christian faith. That he moved beyond both traditional Thomism and the orthodox Marxist concept of dialectical materialism is a witness to Smyth's commitment to process.

That this process is dialectical -- bringing into dynamic and transformational relationship realities that oppose or are different from one another -- is certainly another strength of Smyth's theology. I have already mentioned the Christian openness to secular revolution that Metacosmesis encourages. Such a strongly dialectical theology also enables a high level of integration of reality to take place. It is to Smyth's credit that he attempted to

integrate Christian faith (catholic doctrine, worship and practice), Marxism (dialectical materialism, revolution), philosophy (realism), science (physics and biology) with action and relation in the world.

Another positive quality of Smyth's theology is its strongly Incarnational or embodied character. The primary focus and vehicle of divine revelation and action is creation itself. There is no room for pietism, gnosticism, dualism or an inordinately pessimistic view of human nature. One sees a strong theology of both creation and redemption, while not underestimating human sin. The doctrinal roots of Smyth's embodied theology are in the historic creeds, scripture, patristic and medieval theology and the Anglican Lux Mundi tradition of Incarnational theology. The positive use of Marxist materialist philosophy to interpret sacramental actions such as the Eucharistic offertory (human labour "materially congealed" in the bread and wine being offered) and the Marxist critique of religion to reject non-Incarnational Christianity strengthens and develops the theology's Incarnational character. Writing in an era of Barthian and Niebuhrian pessimism, Smyth offers hope that the divine can be embodied in creation, including in human society.

A further strength of Smyth's theology is its unequivocal commitment to Christianity as corporate and its rejection of individualism. Despite rejection by it, Smyth continued to maintain a very strong theology of the church.

The centrality of liturgical action, the formation of a religious community, the corporate decision-making process of the Society and the establishment of cells (including the development of cell solidarity and economic commonwealth) all point to the fundamentally social character of Christianity in Smyth's theology. This corporate faith does not reject the significance of the individual; rather, it asserts that the individual comes to his or her maximum potential in the corporate. In a note written in 1943, Smyth comments, "The Sacramental Crowd is the only crowd which saves & fulfills each complete individual as one of its components." Secular crowds submerge the individual.

But the sacramental crowd, being the organic social extension of Our Lord is on an infinitely higher level, morally, than that attainable by one of its individuals apart from the whole!¹

The doctrinal roots of this corporate view of Christianity are in Smyth's catholic theology of the church and the liturgical movement. The Marxist vision of corporate revolutionary action leading to a socialist order and the Leninist vision of the small revolutionary vanguard further reinforce Smyth's strong commitment to Christianity as corporate and social.

Smyth makes very creative use of Christian tradition, providing continuity with earlier visions of a redeemed social order. He moves beyond conventional or stereotyped interpretations of the historic creeds, doctrinal

formulations and, indeed, scripture. (While Manhood Into God can be faulted for insufficient attention to scripture, one must remember that Smyth saw it as a sequel to Conrad Noel's thoroughly scriptural Life of Jesus.) Smyth's perfectly orthodox interpretation of creed as "symbol" rather than philosophical formulation frees him to use the tradition imaginatively.

One also sees strengths in the commitment of Smyth and the S.C.C. to the unity of theory and practice. This commitment is rooted, of course, in both the Christian and Marxist dimensions of Smyth's theology. Despite religious, cultural and personal differences, Smyth tried very hard in 1938-49 to work in practical solidarity with the working class -- through support of the labour movement, the anti-fascist Popular Front, the Soviet Union and the Communist left. The Oratory became practically involved in strikes, labour and community organizing and political action. Smyth sought to bring the support and blessing of the church to these movements. That this attempt brought Smyth marginalization in the church did not stop him.

The imaginative experimentation in community and ministry in the Canadian and English cells is also a tribute to this commitment to the unity of theory and practice. The formation of strong intentional communities with a high level of reflection and self-criticism, the establishment of

an economic commonwealth, practical work in community, labour and political organizing and the rejection of the parish priesthood for the model of the worker priest ministering in solidarity with the working class (John Rowe in London, Dan Heap in Toronto) all point to an unequivocal commitment to the unity of theory and practice.

Smyth's theology of Incarnation as dialectical process, however, was not without its weaknesses. That the Society was not able to survive the sixties suggests that the theology's capacity for dialectical integration of new experience was, indeed, limited. Needless to say, any critique (whether positive or negative) of Smyth's theology draws on several decades of Christian experience and reflection, including radical theologies of the sixties, political theology, third world liberation theology, the growth of base communities, feminist theology, renewal of lay ministry, advances in liturgical scholarship and many other developments.

One general area of difficulty with Smyth's theology lies in its method. In much theological reflection since the sixties, there has been a movement towards human experience and action rather than doctrinal formulations as the starting point of theological reflection. Typically in Latin American liberation theology, a group of Christians actively engaged in a struggle for liberation reflect upon their own revolutionary action in light of Christian scripture. Actu-

ally being engaged in liberating action is a sine qua non of authentic theological reflection. Indeed, their own experience and action enables them to critique scripture and the Christian tradition. Yet because both the action and reflection are done with faith that Christ's teaching is truthful, reflection upon scripture is transformative. Christians return to their action to transform the world with renewed vision and strength. The circle begins again with new theological reflection on new action. This action-reflection model is a frequent feature of theologies of liberation, including many that use Marxist or feminist analysis.

Two elements stand out in this theological method. First, actual participation in liberating action is the necessary starting point for truthful theological reflection. The method cannot be pursued on a theoretical level detached from action. Second, the method is largely inductive. It derives truth from human experience and seeks confirmation and expansion of it in Christian scripture and tradition. In analyzing these, it begins with the truth already known from action and experience. On the basis of this truth, scripture and tradition may be found liberating or oppressive.

The method gives rise to a Christian theology, insofar as it still requires a basic commitment to the truth of a Christian revelation, no matter how it has been deformed

by scripture or tradition. The Christian gospel continues to be transformative of groups of Christians who turn to it in faithful reflection. However, a sophisticated level of social analysis and Biblical and historical criticism is often necessary to discover the liberating core of the gospel. In situations of political oppression, scripture is more accessible than tradition so that reflection on scripture is often the primary mode of theological reflection. For women, scripture is sometimes more problematic than tradition so that reflection on suppressed elements of the tradition is also common. In either case, traditional Christian dogmatic formulations tend to be seen as seriously limited by the Hellenistic philosophical context in which they were formulated and tend not to be the subject of positive or transformative theological reflection.

From this action or praxis-based theological perspective, Smyth's theology of Metacosmesis at first appears hopelessly old-fashioned in its methodology. It appears to start with doctrinal formulations about the Incarnational process. Once these are accepted in an act of faith, the new Incarnational Christian goes on to action. Indeed, the doctrinal formulations seem complex, if not eccentric, and appear to carry with them much philosophical and cultural baggage.

There is much truth in this criticism, particularly of Smyth's writings after 1948. However, the situation is

less simple than it seems. The Metacosmic cycle of Smyth's theology of Incarnation as process bears a very strong resemblance to the circular action-reflection model of many liberation theologies. Incarnational Christians come to the Eucharist having reflected on their concrete revolutionary action to bring liberation to the world. They offer this action in the bread and wine. Through the scripture and homily (which Smyth regarded as crucial and which often included a high level of social analysis), they further reflect on their action in the world. They return to the world, strengthened both by reflection (which often also followed the Eucharist, again with social analysis) and the sacrament to new liberating action in the world. The cycle then repeats itself. The basic model is not dissimilar to action-reflection models of liberation theologies, though it is broadened by the inclusion of sacramental action. Action or praxis is the starting point of theological reflection.

In both cases, the process of theological reflection on liberating action is more important than the entry or conversion point into the process. Some initially enter from the action side, some from the reflection side. How one enters may, of course, influence one's later action but the basic point is that once one is committed to and begins participating in a truly liberating action-reflection model of Christian faith, how one initially entered the process is

not so significant. Latin American Christian revolutionaries have come to their positions from lives of both action and reflection. S.C.C. members came to the theology of Metacosmesis out of both the Communist Party and the conventional church. It is the participation in the action-based process that is basic.

The priority of praxis to theory is a theme of the Anglo-Catholic socialist tradition to which Smyth belonged. Charles Gore, in his Essex Hall lecture of 1920, Christianity Applied to the Life of Men and of Nations, began by denouncing the title of the lecture:

It suggests that Christianity is something which can be conceived of as existing prior to its application to life -- a philosophy or system of ideas, which can be accepted intellectually, and subsequently applied to life. But this is a fundamentally false way of thinking about Christianity. It is not first a philosophy or system of ideas. It is a life.²

It is a way of life, Gore continues, that precedes theological reflection:

But at this moment it is the order of the two elements of practice and theory that I am insisting upon. I insist that what [Jesus] offers to men is not first a doctrine about God and the unseen world to be apprehended by the intellect, and afterwards, it may be, applied to life. It is the opposite. It is a life which He teaches, a way of living to which He points men, which involves or is based upon a theology.³

Gore roots the primacy of the Christian way of life over doctrinal formulation in scripture and the early church and sees it as the root of Christian socialism.

Smyth's view follows Gore, reinforced by Marxist

commitment to the unity of theory and practice. Smyth argues that Christians are not active in the world because it is an "implication" of their Christian doctrine. The 1945 edition of the S.C.C. manual strongly rejects "implicationism" as veiled idealism:

[This Society] rejects all "purely spiritual" and non-Sacramental idealism; for apart from functional Sacramentalism, the only connection of ideals with man's material state rests tenuously and abstractly in what are called the "practical implications" of religion. Implicationism is veiled idealism. The Society rejects idealism as the most subtle and deadly enemy of the Sacramental Religion of the Incarnation.⁴

In a "functional Sacramentalism" which assumes the full unity of theory and practice, revolutionary action is essential for faithful theological reflection and participation in the Eucharist. Much of Smyth's opposition to protestant social gospel theology was centred on its "implicationist" model of social action. Similarly, Smyth commends a praxis-based model of theological education in a letter to Elmer Smith in 1946: "Instruction must be integrated with action, rather than trying to cast about for some sort of action to fit with instruction."⁵

Because Smyth came to a praxis-based theological perspective from a strongly dogmatic Thomistic Anglo-Catholicism, he carried much theological, philosophical and liturgical baggage into theological reflection. Over years of action and reflection, pushed by his own Marxist analysis and the experience of S.C.C. members, Smyth modified much of

this. Some conservative ethical positions, such the opposition to divorce and birth control in Manhood Into God, disappeared very quickly. Metacosmesis itself was, of course, a major turn away from conventional Thomism. The decision to found a revolutionary religious community was a significant move to a critical ecclesiology. Smyth's theology developed out of critical reflection based on action in support of revolution.

Yet, despite years of theological reflection informed by action, Smyth (like Gore) was clearly unwilling to give up or modify in a major way the extensive Christian doctrinal system which he brought to the reflection. Indeed, he developed his own dogmatic theology. Here Smyth clearly saw himself in the revolutionary orthodox tradition of Conrad Noel. He stands in strong contrast to his Christian-Marxist contemporary, John Macmurray, whose reflection caused him to jettison major portions of the Christian doctrinal and liturgical tradition. From the perspective of contemporary liberation theologies, which are often closer to Macmurray than Smyth, one can question whether Smyth regarded certain doctrinal formulations as immune from critical reflection. If this is the case, his theology begins to move in a more deductive direction and against an action-based model.

From Smyth's perspective, a high level of doctrinal formulation was necessary to ensure the transformational and

revolutionary nature of Christianity. Smyth was very critical, for example, of the American liberal-protestant social gospel tradition, arguing that it provided no theological base for revolutionary action and constantly pulled its advocates towards evolutionary social change and political liberalism. Smyth did not see past or present doctrinal formulation as external to Christian experience but a fundamental part of it. In the catholic tradition, he saw major elements of the Christian creedal and doctrinal tradition as preceding scripture and therefore very significant references in theological reflection. Smyth was happier to root revolution in Christian revelation than be at the mercy of revolutionary ideologies. Likewise, the Incarnational doctrinal core of Smyth's theology prevented any move towards gnosticism or dualism that reflection on experience might sometimes suggest.

The point is that if liberation theologies and Metacomesis are both Christian theologies, they both require as primary some revelatory Christian witness -- whether approached through scripture, tradition or doctrine -- outside of one's immediate experience and action. Otherwise, they are simply human reflection on action and experience without particular reference to Christianity and it is difficult to regard them as Christian. The decision to refer to the Christian witness is an act of faith.

The difference between Metacosmesis and most theologies of liberation is not so much structural or methodological but in the complexity and nature of the revelatory witness. Smyth's is more complex, relies heavily on a broad range of Christian doctrine and tradition and is subject to further philosophical development. Indeed, one can argue that Smyth's is simply too complex, encumbered with extraneous, arbitrary and even oppressive doctrinal and theological formulations. The revelatory witness of most liberation theologies is usually much simpler, approached through scripture or discrete portions of tradition. However, the approach to this witness also becomes complex as social and historical analysis accumulates around it.

It is the complexity and nature of the revelatory witness or core of Smyth's theology that is its greatest weakness. Smyth was committed to the integration of different kinds of truth -- religious, philosophical, scientific, dialectical -- rather than the necessary reduction of any one to another. Such an approach has much to say for it. However, the result was an increasingly complex theological and philosophical core which became the reference point of all theological reflection on action. As I have indicated, its content changed over the years. In the end it came to include Metacosmesis (including the Anamnesis), philosophical realism and dialectical analysis. These are all seen as compatible with (indeed, following from) scripture and the

church's traditional doctrinal formulations, which are also, in effect, included in the core.

But also included are a variety of doctrinal and liturgical beliefs and practices which for many contemporary Christians now seem strange or questionable -- the Immaculate Conception and Virgin Birth, the very high value placed on the celibate religious life, Elizabethan over contemporary English in the liturgy, the eastward position at the altar, the superiority of baroque to gothic vestments, etc. While many of these items are clearly not crucial to the central witness of his theology, Smyth, because of his strong tendency to integrate everything, attached the items to the core and promulgated them as following from Metacosmesis. The result was a heavy, complex and hierarchical revelatory witness that seemed to require less and less reflection from outside itself and, indeed, less and less action.

The hierarchical character of Smyth's theology is particularly troublesome. The Thomistic ordering of reality, the vision of redeemed human society as hierarchical (for example, in Manhood Into God) and the deep commitment to ascending order in ministry and worship all make it clear that for Smyth Christian revelation includes hierarchies. Most contemporary liberation theologians, with their roots in people's liberation movements and feminism, reject such a

view as oppressive. S.C.C. members challenged Smyth on this issue -- for example, John Wild in his existentialist critique of Smyth's theology, Marjorie Powles and Isabel Rowe in their espousal of women's ministry and John Rowe in his advocacy of the westward position at the altar. Smyth resisted such efforts, convinced that the hierarchies that he advocated were not oppressive.

Here Smyth's classical education, his deep commitment to human order and reason, his aesthetic sense and his personality all came into play. Certainly one can assert hierarchies in which good is above evil or liberation above oppression. Likewise, one can assert different functions and levels of power. But Smyth's hierarchies are strongly theoretical, very specific and clearly rooted in the classical western theological and philosophical tradition though, of course, modified by Marxism. Until 1948, Smyth's Marxism was equally authoritarian and hierarchical.

The complexity and nature of the revelatory witness or core of Smyth's theology was the major theological reason why the S.C.C. was unable to survive its founder's death and the turbulent theological developments of the sixties. While still alive, as primary theologian of Metacosmesis, Smyth was able to integrate a great variety of action, experience and reflection, both his own and that of members of the Society, into Metacosmesis. Theological reflection moved inward from members of the Society to Smyth, who worked on

theological integration and formulation for the whole Society. Smyth saw this work as a central task of members regular of the Society. However, once Smyth died, the centripetal direction of the Society's theological reflection turned fiercely centrifugal.

Without Smyth at the centre doing the work of integration, S.C.C. members were left only with his very complex theological formulations. These continued to be a stepping off point for the theological reflection of individual members in their very different situations. However, as S.C.C. members began to struggle with the radical theological developments of the sixties -- existentialism, demythologization, the death of God movement, the "new morality", critiques of metaphysical theology -- very different views developed among S.C.C. members about simplification and revision of Smyth's theology. Some totally rejected the developments in the sixties, others were deeply changed by them. Some opposed any simplification of Smyth's theology, others sought simplification and revision. The result was a centrifugal movement in which Smyth's theology of Metacosmesis developed into a variety of theologies. This movement contributed to the disintegration of the Society.

Simplifying the revelational witness or core of Smyth's theology is not an easy task and some argued that it could not be done without destroying it. The classical Thom-

ist view of the nature of God, the strong distinction between human and divine nature, particularized incarnation, Transubstantiation and classical philosophical realism are not easily modified without simply eliminating them. All of them are theological concepts that make Smyth's theology difficult today.

However, it should be noted and it is to the credit of Smyth's theology of Metacosmesis, that many of the S.C.C. members made the transition to the action-reflection liberation theologies of the seventies and eighties with little difficulty. They simply shed large elements of Smyth's theology, subjecting it to stronger analysis and reflection. Given the strongly hierarchical character of much of the theology, feminist analysis is particularly important here. Most S.C.C. members have followed Smyth in retaining the Eucharist as an essential part of any Christian life of action and reflection.

Not unrelated to the theological and philosophical complexity of Smyth's theology are some difficulties with its praxis. When Smyth asked Vanson Ronco, an organizer with the United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers (CIO), in 1947 if he would join the S.C.C., Ronco replied,

The matter of offering myself as a postulant in your society is of a serious nature. I was of the fear that I could not meet the necessary requirements. Somehow I was of the opinion that one had to be the erudite type to qualify for membership. It seems the society was saturated with intellectuals and the intelligency that I was of the opinion that it was one of the requirements for

membership.⁶

Ronco joined the Society but his impression was shared by many labour and other working-class people.

Although Smyth and the S.C.C. made every effort to work in solidarity with the working class and the Communist left, the oratory's aesthetic and intellectual ethos separated it in a major way from the people whose liberation it sought to promote. The onus for the oratory's ethos lay squarely on Smyth. His privileged background, cultural values acquired in Italy and England, an intellectual approach to Christian faith, an Incarnational theology that strongly affirmed the material order, including beauty, all contributed to the oratory's atmosphere.

Indeed, Smyth did not see the oratory's aesthetic quality as a weakness but a prefiguring of the redeemed social order. He defends the ethos to a Communist working class inquirer, Russell McKeon, in 1941:

The interior aspects of a house like this, its very furniture and arrangements, should present to the eye an order, a beauty, a sense of serenity and balance, a kind of substantial 'sureness', a sense of peace and quietness in the midst of a chaotic and tumultuous world. I am not envisioning this as a 'refuge', but, instead, as a small prophetic area, a kind of material foretaste of the beauty and order which shall⁷ (God helping us) spread to embrace the lives of all men.

Such order, Smyth concludes, should be neither aestheticism nor personal luxury. Smyth integrated the Spanish and Italian baroque decor and ethos of the oratory into Metacosmesis.

Smyth and the S.C.C. were more sensitive to the perception that their theology was excessively intellectual. It was a frequent charge of Canadian and English members in the fifties. Discerning the Lord's Body was at least partly an attempt to simplify and popularize Manhood Into God. In the fifties, Helen Ray and Robert Wild both produced tracts that tried to simplify S.C.C. theology. But in the end, Smyth concluded that theological reflection required complex analysis and formulation and that simplification and popularization would not solve the problem. Liberation theologians today face a similar problem with the complex level of social analysis necessary for theological reflection.

However, despite any theological or practical justification of the oratory's aesthetic and intellectual ethos, it is clear that the Cambridge oratory was culturally separated from working-class Cambridge. Working-class converts to the Society, such as Ronco and McKeon, found themselves in a very unfamiliar cultural environment. Indeed, so did many middle-class converts. Society members in Canada, England and Japan tried to alleviate the problem by conforming themselves much more closely to the local working-class situation. However, even if Smyth had done the same in Cambridge, the religious (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish) and cultural (Irish, Afro-American, Portugese, Armenian) characteristics of the local working class might have defeated the

effort anyway. Brothers Paul and Francis, who left the oratory to live in simplicity in Roxbury, tried but with limited success.

This criticism of Smyth raises broad theological questions about relations of solidarity and friendship across class, cultural and racial lines. Smyth clearly lacked a certain kenotic or self-emptying quality with regard to the culture he brought to Cambridge in 1936. However, he also recognized that full identification across class, cultural and racial lines is very difficult and that solidarity and friendship do not require the full rejection of one's own history. Yet one can argue that S.C.C. members who were more kenotic in their approach -- worker priests in England and Canada, missionaries in Japan -- better exemplified Smyth's Incarnational theology despite the frustrations they experienced. Indeed, they found it a deeply enriching experience.

Another area of Smyth's praxis that requires critical examination is the place and role of women in the S.C.C. Smyth's closest emotional ties were with men rather than women. In the initial years of the Clinton and Cambridge oratories, he directed his ministry almost exclusively to male students. However, when women friends of male students associated with Smyth began attending the Eucharist at the oratory in the early forties, Smyth was welcoming. The participation of women, Smyth wrote in 1942, "works out very

well and is a distinct gain it seems to me."⁸ Shortly after the move to Washington Avenue in 1946, Reed Pfeufer, an artist member of the Society moved her studio into a room of the new oratory.⁹ When parish clergy began joining the Society in some numbers after the war, Smyth encouraged wives to join with their husbands. When the Montreal cell asked permission for women members to serve at the Anamnesis in 1949, Smyth approved.¹⁰ There was discussion of the ordination of women in the Bulletin and Newsletter in the early fifties and the Montreal cell, then without a priest, considered seeking ordination for Margaret Assels. However, Smyth was less than enthusiastic about the ordination of women and Johnston strongly opposed.¹¹ In the early sixties there was discussion of the admission of women to the regular membership and Nadine Pendleton briefly tried her vocation with a women's community in England.¹² Smyth respected the intellectual and theological competence of women such as Margaret Assels, Jane Van Meter and Marjorie Powles within the Society and Vida Scudder and Mary van Kleeck outside. Smyth clearly lacked the misogyny of his early colleague, Sir Almroth Wright, whose Unexpurgated Case against Woman Suffrage was virulent in its anti-feminism.

However, the ethos of the S.C.C. remained overwhelmingly male and clerical. This tendency increased as Smyth moved from encouraging lay vocations to clerical ones. Women

members tended to be marginalized in this process. While Smyth encouraged wives to join the Society, often his attention focused on male clerical members. As a result, conventional female roles fell to the women. Also, in his attempt to develop the regular membership, Smyth sometimes found himself in rivalry with male secular members' women friends and fiancées. Some of the male secular members' wives regarded Smyth as a threat or simply disliked him; they refused to join the Society and sometimes forced their husbands to quit. In some of these cases, the wives were more politically conservative than their husbands. The sexual politics of the S.C.C. were at times quite complex. In the end, one can say that Smyth clearly respected women but that on feminist issues the S.C.C. did not move very far beyond the culture in which it was situated. However, by the early fifties, some signs of Christian feminism were beginning to appear in the Society.¹³

A third weakness of Smyth's Christian-Marxist theology of Metacosmesis is as much the fault of the Marxist theory and practice with which he related than of Smyth himself. While today's Christian Marxists have a great variety of "Marxisms" to utilize in social analysis and theological reflection, at least until 1948 Smyth related only with orthodox Marxist-Leninism as promulgated by the Soviet Union under Stalin and the Communist Party in the U.S. He rejected the Trotskyite option and for reasons of solidarity was

reluctant to move away from positive engagement with the ideology of the Communist Party to any alternative Marxist ideology. Here Smyth again differed from Macmurray, who translated the early Marx into English and quickly broke free from dialectical materialism.

Therefore, the focus of Smyth's theological reflection on Marxism in the thirties and forties is fairly narrow, namely dialectical materialism. For contemporary Christian Marxists who have rejected dialectical materialism in favour of other Marxist formulations, some of Smyth's theological reflection may seem dated by its Marxism. However, one must also remember that dialectical materialism remains a dominant Marxist ideology in the world today and cannot be ignored.

After 1948, however, Smyth moved beyond dialectical materialism to his own formulation of Marxist dialectics. This was a creative period of Christian-Marxist reflection for Smyth and deserves attention. However, always an independent thinker, he made the move without major reference to the alternative developments in Marxist theory then emerging in Europe and Asia. The result was a more imaginative but more isolated Christian Marxism than in the days of engagement with dialectical materialism. Because many Christian Marxists today turn to the European and Asian Marxist theoreticians whom Smyth largely ignored (for example Antonio

Gramsci and Mao Tse-tung), Smyth's theory after 1948 comes across as isolated and eccentric. However, on the positive side, it is clearly an example of an indigenous American Christian Marxism and has strong creative elements.

When one examines the particular emphases, strengths and weaknesses of Smyth's theology, it is clear that one area where it can make a major contribution to Christian-Marxist theological reflection today is the relationship between Marxism and the Eucharist. It is striking to see Smyth's Marxist analysis of the bread and wine in the offertory appearing, probably quite independently, in Latin American liberation theologians' writings on the Eucharist. For example, the Colombian theologian, Rafael Avila, writes in Worship and Politics,

That Christ is also in the bread and in the wine implies that he is not only human, but also "the fruit of human labor," by which human being humanize nature and also humanize themselves. This implies further that the process of elaboration of this fruit-of-labor is not alien to the process of christogenesis, and that in it Christ places (offers, proposes) himself before us as the fruit of our "gestation," obligating us to evaluate our offering and the human process that precedes and defines the offering -- that is, the social relationships of production hidden under the appearances of bread and wine.
[Avila's italics]

The materialist analysis of the offertory and the necessity of critiquing the social and economic structure that produced it is identical with Smyth. Avila continues,

The real is not only the material (a piece of bread), but also what is produced. The source of the bread (as a cultural product) is human labor.¹⁴

Here Avila is very close to Smyth's concept of historical substance contained ("ensubstantiated") in the bread and wine of the offertory.

However, Avila is unusual among Latin American liberation theologians in writing extensively on the Eucharist. Quite accurately, these theologians have seen the sacramental tradition in the Latin American church as fundamentally oppressive -- keeping people passive in situations of injustice, a form of social control, magical, otherworldly. Very few, if any, Latin American liberation theologians see the sacraments as an important starting point for liberation or even a crucial part of the process. Instead they have turned to social, political and economic change, the establishment of base communities and Biblical reflection. Camilo Torres' decision in the early sixties to quit celebrating the Eucharist to join an armed revolutionary movement, for reasons which also relate to the offertory, set the tone for later theologizing on the sacraments.

Juan Luis Segundo's volume on the sacraments, The Sacraments Today, in A Theology for Artisans of a New Humanity, is typical in arguing for the necessity of good praxis for the efficacy of sacraments. Segundo urges Christians to distance themselves from the sacraments of the institutional church and instead work for the transformation of society in basic Christian communities. In these liberated communities a new authentic sacramental life will emerge. Liturgical

renewal will not solve the church's problem, Segundo argues. What is needed is the renewal of Christian community. In a renewed community, even a traditional pre-Vatican II mass can be charged with life and meaning.¹⁵

The difficulty with Segundo's position is a certain discontinuity between the revolutionary struggle and the sacraments. The transformation of society is primary; the sacraments are secondary, providing a sign of the redeemed community's unity and support for its continuing revolutionary struggle. Smyth and Avila, on the other hand, integrate revolutionary struggle and the Eucharist through the offertory. The Eucharist, as a sacrament, is a part of the created human and material order in need of revolutionary transformation. Bread and wine contain the oppressive or liberated social and economic structures which produced them. The Eucharist requires the revolutionary transformation of an oppressed world. The Eucharist is not simply a sign of unity and encouragement; it cries out for revolutionary change. When revolutionary Christians participate in it with this understanding, it becomes part of the revolutionary process.

Segundo's position is closer to the protestant social gospel sacramental tradition and reflects elements of Vatican II Eucharistic theology. However, Segundo's position is not nearly so difficult as uncritical versions of either Tridentine or Vatican II sacramental theology. One cannot

doubt the general accuracy of liberation theologians' rejection of the Tridentine sacramental tradition in Latin America as fundamentally oppressive in practice. The sixteenth century canonical exclusion of indigenous people from receiving or presiding at the Eucharist was perhaps the most shocking sign of this oppression.¹⁶ It is clear that Smyth would agree with such an analysis from his frequent characterization of pre-Vatican II Roman Catholicism as a fascist "remnant thesis" of feudalism.

However, as Avila points out in Worship and Politics, the Eucharistic theology of the Vatican II constitution on the liturgy ("Sacrosanctum Concilium"), including its later development in liturgical practices and formulations, is not without its difficulties. This theological perspective is also ecumenical and reflected, for example, in the World Council of Churches Lima Liturgy. In this view, the Eucharist is seen as primarily a sign of Christian community and the incorporation of the faithful into the paschal mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Christians come to the Eucharist from a variety of situations (different social and economic contexts, different cultures, different degrees of oppression and liberation) to assert their loving relationship with one another, to celebrate their community (including its particular cultural elements), to learn from scripture, to receive forgiveness of sins and to be strengthened by receiving the sacrament.

In practice, because this Eucharistic theology lacks any dialectical, dynamic or revolutionary element, the effect is to bless the status quo. It is to bless the fellowship or community (no matter how superficial or oppressive) that exists in the situation. It lacks any primary impetus to political or economic analysis. Avila points out that while it may appear to give support to previously oppressed cultural groups (for example, through the inclusion of indigenous cultural elements such as song and dance in the Eucharist), by avoiding political and social analysis of the situation of oppressed cultural groups, this Eucharistic theology still blesses oppression. However, it now also appropriates cultural elements into it to discourage deeper analysis and revolutionary action.¹⁷ Given such an uncritical endorsement of community, Segundo and others are quite right to question participating in the institutional church's sacraments, even if their theology is rooted in Vatican II, when the community is based on violence and oppression. Smyth would clearly agree with Avila's analysis since he faced the same difficulty in his relations with the Episcopal church.

As defective as it was theologically and liturgically, one strength of the Tridentine theology of the Eucharist was its revolutionary potential. Sacrifice moved beyond ordinary human realities. It brought offerers face to face

with the divine, offering hope of radical healing and renewed social relationships beyond human oppression. One can argue that it was precisely because of this revolutionary potential that oppressed people in Latin America and elsewhere were forbidden from receiving the Eucharist or presiding over it for so many years. One can argue that it is precisely this revolutionary hope (along with that of the indigenous folk religions that so often merged with it) that drew and still draws oppressed Latin Americans to the Eucharist with such fervour and devotion. Smyth argued that the revolutionary potential of Tridentine Eucharistic theology was weakened because it ignored the offertory and over-emphasized a narrow view of Transubstantiation. In the end, Metacosmesis incorporated and developed both.

However, the point is that since Vatican II, both catholic and protestant Eucharistic theology have moved away from revolutionary concepts and doctrines such as offertory, sacrifice and Transubstantiation towards more evolutionary concepts and doctrines such as reconciliation, unity and growth. For many Christians today, especially in the first world, the kiss of peace is a far more significant moment in the Eucharist than the offertory or consecration. The rediscovery of these themes has been an important contribution of the liturgical movement that culminated in Vatican II. It has also been a positive contribution of ordained and lay women in the church who have seen community-building and

reconciliation as liberating alternatives to powerful and oppressive patriarchal hierarchies.

Smyth's theology, however, points out that the church also has a revolutionary vocation and that the Eucharist has a crucial role in that vocation. If Christian revelation is itself fundamentally revolutionary (as many liberation theologians would agree), all its primary signs in the world -- the church, the sacraments, the word -- surely share in its revolutionary nature. Through Eucharistic offertory and sacrifice, Christians are led to necessary participation in revolutionary struggles for justice in the church and the world. Smyth challenges static or exclusively evolutionary views of social change. The Eucharist is more than a sign of a united or liberated community, a source of encouragement or a celebration of culture. Because its primary elements, the offertory of bread and wine, contain the oppression of humanity, the Eucharist requires Christians to participate actively and strongly in the effective and rapid transformation of the suffering and oppressed world into a just social order. The Eucharist (Anamnesis) is not only a graceful sign of revolution to the world; it necessitates, indeed, cries out for revolutionary action in the world.

Finally, is it possible to give any evaluation of the significance of F. Hastings Smyth and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth in the history of the church? Smyth

was a very creative theologian, deeply committed to social justice. He drew on a variety of theological, scientific, and philosophical traditions and disciplines. The result was an original and creative theological vision, complex and nuanced, but not without its difficulties. It remains a resource for the future. Yet Smyth and the S.C.C. had little dramatic impact on the church, particularly in the U.S. Smyth was marginalized in the church and the Society virtually unknown. Yet, on the positive side, Smyth attracted a group of people who were both intelligent and deeply committed to social justice. They had and continue to have an individual and corporate impact on the church, particularly in Canada and Japan. They include Christian feminists, a variety of social activists, parish and worker priests, a member of the Canadian parliament, academics and national and diocesan church committee members. Though few realize its source, Smyth and the Society of the Catholic Commonwealth have left a mark on the church, moving it further along the path of social justice and, indeed, revolution.

Notes

¹SCC papers, K-4-46, FHS notes, May 16, 1943.

²Gore, Christianity Applied to the Life of Men and of Nations, pp. 5-6.

³Ibid., p. 16.

⁴[Smyth], Society of the Catholic Commonwealth, second edition, [1945], pp. 7-8.

1946. ⁵SCC papers, B-5-48, FHS to Elmer Smith, April 30,
1947. ⁶SCC papers, E-4-45, Vanson Ronco to FHS, March 30,
1941. ⁷SCC papers, B-21-66, FHS to Russell McKeon, Nov. 3,
1942. ⁸SCC papers, H-2-233, FHS to Dick [], Sept. 4,
- ⁹SCC papers, E-3-49, FHS to John [Russell], April 10, 1946; Pfeufer interview, op. cit.
1949. ¹⁰SCC papers, B-31-26, FHS to John Wagland, Nov. 4,
- ¹¹Marjorie Powles, "Women Too Have Vocation", Bulletin and Newsletter, I, No. 3 (Dec. 1953), [1-2]; Isabel Rowe and Sherry Rowe, "Who Only Kneel and Scrub", Bulletin and Newsletter, I, No. 4 (Jan. 1954), [5-6]; Don Johnston, Jr., "Comment on Thesis 4", Bulletin and Newsletter, I, No. 2 (Nov. 1953), [6]; interview with Marjorie Powles, Toronto, Jan. 23, 1987.
- ¹²Elmer Smith and Nadine Pendleton interviews, op. cit.
- ¹³This discussion of the role of women in the S.C.C. has drawn on interviews with a full range of S.C.C. members and their spouses, particularly Marjorie and Cyril Powles, Alice and Dan Heap, Margaret Assels, Dora and Russell McKeon, Isabel Rowe, Sherry Waldon, Nadine Pendleton and Henry Veatch as well as the S.C.C. papers.
- ¹⁴Avila, Worship and Politics, p. 95.
- ¹⁵Segundo, The Sacraments Today, p. 40.
- ¹⁶Neill, A History of Christian Missions, p. 173.
- ¹⁷Avila, Worship and Politics, pp. xvi-xvii.