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AGONY, ART, AND COMMUNITY IN THE THEOLOGY OF  
MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND JOHN MACMURRAY

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of  
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MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO, DIETRICH BONHOEFFER AND JOHN MACMURRAY

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BOM= *Bailie, Oman, and Macmurray: Experience and Religious Belief*

CS= *Creative Society*

CTH= *The Clue to History*

DBW= *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*

JMRP= *John Macmurray's Religious Philosophy*

LPP= *Letters and Papers from Prison*

OC= *Obras Completas*

PIR= *Persons in Relation*

PIW= *Peace in War*

SC= *Sanctorum Communio*

SRR= *Search for Reality in Religion*

TSAA= *The Self as Agent*





## Introduction

The Christian dream of heaven with its sexless angels and insipid harps betrays the most appalling lack of imagination, moral and aesthetic...they would trust enjoy their heaven while the mass of mankind suffers ceaseless torments. Some trust that the spectacle of endless tortures will increase their bliss, while others, priding themselves on their greater sensitivity, feel quite certain that their ecstasy in heaven will preclude any remembrance of the sufferings of the damned.<sup>1</sup>

“Only in the chorus might a certain truth be found”<sup>2</sup>

In the ‘Prologue’ to his work *Tragedy and Philosophy*, Walter Kaufmann wonders whether the most strongly-held Christian images hold up to the times in the context of suffering, fear and pity. One might see it as a particular challenge for Christian thought and practice—particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century context—to take seriously the query: what do our aesthetic resources say about how we view ourselves as Christian community, our connection to past, present and future, and our relationship and responsibility to the world? Do our artistic resources accurately portray something of the human condition which our sense of mission calls us into?

Miguel de Unamuno, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and John Macmurray are three male, European theologians who were concerned with the problem of impersonality which revealed itself in the critical transformations of 20th century society. The sensitivity of the arts—the practice of the arts, the perception of the arts and the experience of the arts — is central to their pursuit to cultivate a personalised sense of Christian meaning, and thus an embodied Christianity. This dissertation seeks to consider their engagement with theology and the arts and how Christian community is perceived in this engagement. Their deliberate proximity to the demise of Christendom and the precariousness of the 20<sup>th</sup> century world, make their philosophical and theological perspectives particularly relevant to understanding the value of finding meaning in the traumas of history. Particularly in the Christian imagination—that is, theology’s conversation and convergence with the world — these thinkers represent the aesthetic tasks of not merely describing the Christian meaning, but Christian aesthetically relevant to the construction of meaning theology and as of human action and reflection.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Kaufmann (1968), *Tragedy and Philosophy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, xx.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Kafka, quoted in S. Corngold (ed. R. Felski 2008), *Rethinking Tragedy*. Baltimore: JHU Press, 236.

They might be loosely characterised as the *bohemian* theologians: the Basque Unamuno seeks to re-imagine the essence of Christianity in opposition to the stronghold of Spanish Catholicism, whilst Bonhoeffer's Christianity has as its basis the post-pietistic German Reformed liberalism, and Macmurray's more eclectic spiritual journey begins within a staunch Calvinist Presbyterian background and concludes within the Society of Friends. Though their spiritualities vary, they share a consensus in emphasising the centrality of "art" in the construction of community and the "personal" reflective life.

Unamuno's philosophy and literature affirms the tragic as recognition of a trans-historical reality, where the sufferings, jealousies and anxieties of human consciousness persistently pierce at the soul, challenging one's relation to God. Bonhoeffer struggles to imagine Christianity after Nazism as offering a redemptive reservoir in a "worldly" rather than pietistic context; but rather than presenting dogmatic alternatives, he offers musical metaphors and the experience of music as *instruments* of celebrating the dark qualities of the human spirit and, thus, brings to view a more honest, and revitalised Christian faith. Macmurray's philosophy of "personal relation" depends upon the power of art to shape the emotions and *creative* rather than idealist religion as a prime reserve for thought and action, shares as we will argue, affinities with the development of the tragic idea in 20<sup>th</sup> century religious consciousness.

### **Personalism**

A crucial thread in understanding these three and their relation to one another is their proximity to the personalist turn in theological thought in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The theistic exploration of reality in light of the unity of relations, and thus a liminal self lived 'in community' went by the name *personalism*. In the West, the personalist 'project' found a conversation partner in the more notable Jamesean pragmatic philosophy of personal identity, grounded as the both are not by the presence of a "soul" but in the sequence of one's experiences guaranteed by memory.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. Crawford (2011), *The Battle for the Soul: A Comparative Analysis in an age of doubt*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 159.

Macmurray describes the religious dimensions of personalism in his most aesthetically inclined work, *Reason and Emotion*: "...shall treat personality, and the relations of persons in love as sacred and to be revered, and nothing else. Whatever is impersonal must not be revered or treated as sacred. . . .To do so is to be idolatrous, to worship as God what is not God. And to treat what is personal impersonally is to pollute a holy thing."<sup>4</sup> Personalism's proximity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was not in the academy alone: it was the inspiration in many nations for social change in an era in which an alternative to Empire and the economics of Progress at best necessitated a poetic framework for articulating the meaning—for 20<sup>th</sup> century purposes at least—of what it means not only to be human, but a creative human being *in community*. With this in mind, I would still like to take seriously the personalist project and to further understand the aesthetic relevance of personalism to how we make meaning in our artistic resources.

### **The Arena of Agony**

Within the personalist universe, 'The Tragic' takes on an integrative role in that human nature is not merely poetic mimicry; it is representative of real human existence. A satisfactory definition of tragedy has been called the "Holy Grail of literary theory".<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the idea of the tragic has had an elusive existence throughout Western history—one moment a signifier of a chaotic society and, as a result, a provider of ethical reflection; the next moment, it is a piece of pessimism from the past with little meaning for a society "at peace".

For a religion whose central acts of practicing and symbolising its central principles include wine and bread as sacraments, cultivating and sustaining the hospitality of community, and a yearning for a dialogue with the world (which sometimes has meant a domination of that world "for Christ"), that Christian faith and practice has been seen as incompatible with the arena of tragedy is perhaps surprising to a 'worldly', 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian. The consensus has been that Christianity is an inherently anti-tragic view of the world, often offering dogmatism and triumphalism as responses to a world in crisis. The idea of the tragic further loses intrigue in a "postmodern" context where almost everything

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<sup>4</sup> Macmurray, Introduction to *Reason and Emotion*, p.xv.

<sup>5</sup> H. Brenton, "Freedom in Chaos". *The Guardian*, 21 September 2002.

‘pathetic’ or unfortunate is denoted as tragic or, at its most banal, ‘the end of the world as we know it’—from a global economic meltdown to the untimely death of a child, or the death of a drug-poisoned celebrity.

The arena of tragedy, however, is much broader than the scenery of ‘the pathetic’ could interpret. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers such as Max Scheler and A. N. Whitehead affirm the tragic as rooted in the world’s makeup and thus, as crucial to theological reflection and reformation. Scheler, from whom Bonhoeffer gleaned a developing theory of personhood, understands that a full assessment of the tragic takes for granted that its presence can be found in all artistic products: “We see the tragic only when in one glance we embrace both the causality of things and the exigencies of their immanent values...the result is a clear insight into the independence of these two things. It is here that we may see the formal ‘background’ of all tragedies.”<sup>6</sup> Whitehead, who adds a third to the “trinity” made of pragmatism, personalism and process, as well as one of Macmurray’s philosophical allies, sees the tragic, at best, as a process of maturity:

At the heart of the nature of things, there are always the dream of youth and the harvest of tragedy. The Adventure of the universe starts with the dream and reaps tragic Beauty. This is the secret of the union of Zest with Peace—that the suffering attains its end in a Harmony of Harmonies. The immediate experiences of this Final Fact, with its union of Youth and Tragedy, is the sense of Peace. In this way the world received its persuasion towards such perfections as are possible for its diverse individual occasions.<sup>7</sup>

“Tragedy” (*goat song* in Greek) is draped with religious meaning in classical thought.<sup>8</sup> The term suggests ritual sacrifice, the celebration of grape harvest — all civic activities of Ancient Greece.<sup>9</sup> The drama of the tragic play was at once an imitation of the spectacle of fate, and an encounter by the community as both spectators to the drama and agents of the

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<sup>6</sup> Scheler, quoted in V Lambropoulos (2006), *The Tragic Idea*. London: Duckworth, 115-116.

<sup>7</sup> Whitehead (1933), *Adventures of Ideas*. Cambridge: University Press, 296.

<sup>8</sup> T. Eagleton (2002), *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*. London: Blackwell, 274.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

world around it.<sup>10</sup> Athenaeus of Naucratis suggested that it was under the “consequence” of wine and the public spectacle that comedy and tragedy were first intertwined.<sup>11</sup> Carl Jung affirmed, with Nietzsche, that tragedy represents the reconciliation of *reality from a distance* (Apollonian philosophy) with a complete *immersion into reality* (Dionysian philosophy). Unlike Nietzsche, however, Jung insisted that tragedy was not an aesthetic issue only, but a response to a trauma which was existential and religious in nature.<sup>12</sup> I pursue this study of Unamuno, Bonhoeffer and Macmurray with the assumption that one can still find space for conversation in the meanings inherent in hospitality and community as ritualistic practices.

The role of the chorus, as a collective voice of the deeper complexity of ethical decisions, reveals tragedy as a moral exercise, an “imitation of action” which relates thought and character to experience.<sup>13</sup> As Goldhill has asserted, in the ancient tragic consciousness, “the theatre was a space in which all the citizens were actors—as the city itself and its leading citizens were put on display.”<sup>14</sup> It is a person-centred art-form where the whole of human experience are bound in the inspiration of “fear or pity”.<sup>15</sup> Here the chorus are not placed in the drama for mere “rhythm”, but are actively important in the sequence of events; they are both “spectators” and “protagonists”.<sup>16</sup>

One thinks of the tragic drama and imagines a scene not unlike cultures for whom Shrove Tuesday are opportunities to be part of the actions of the day. Beyond this, to what extent is Christian practice, whether in worship or service to the world, preserving something of the spectacle of community? The concern for community and personhood which Unamuno,

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<sup>10</sup> R. Felski (2008), *Rethinking Tragedy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 128-129.

<sup>11</sup> “It is in consequence of wine that both comedy and tragedy were discovered in Icarium, a village of Attica; and it was at the time of the grape harvest that these inventions were first introduced, from which comedy was first called τραγωδία.” Athanaesius (trans. C D Yonge 1857), *The Deipnosophists, or, Banquet of the Learned of Athenaeus*. London: H G Bohn, 65-66.

<sup>12</sup> T. van den Berk (2012), *Jung on Art: The Autonomy of the Creative Drive*. London: Routledge, 69.

<sup>13</sup> T.R. Henn (1956), *The Harvest of Tragedy*. London: Methuen, 1.

<sup>14</sup> S Goldhill (ed P. Easterling, 1997), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge University Press, 56.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle’s *Poetics Book IX*, quoted in Henn, *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

Bonhoeffer and Macmurray give support to the pervasiveness of the tragic which renders it a place in the experiences of community and social transformation.

## **Chapter Outline**

I will begin with Miguel de Unamuno's agonistic Christianity in the historical context of post-imperial Spain. An important theme in Unamuno's thought is the nature of identity beyond "ontological security". Torn between the materialist meaning of religion and a quest for "immortality", his ideas of the liminality of history frames his theological exploration of identity and belief. "The man of flesh and bone" is characterised by the one who dares to go on a journey of individuation or meaning lives, in anguish, to decide how one shall endure. He ultimately suggests an active resignation which will not only embrace inward struggle as the essence of personhood but will recognize the same anguish in the lives of other people. I aim to weave his religious philosophy with his novels—not always understood in concert with each other—to provide a basis for his sense of the tragic.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 'theological angst' is interrelated to his well-informed interest of aesthetics and how central a role both have in shaping Christian witness as well as culture. Because of his bourgeois upbringing and in spite of it, Bonhoeffer's writings also an understanding that the crisis of Art is linked with the crisis of Religion, in any context. He will provide a clear understanding of the "prophetic" nature of the tragic and how tragedy relates to understanding Bonhoeffer's Christology and aesthetic. Bonhoeffer's engagement with African American culture was not simply cursory, but it served as a space where he could engage honestly with the underpinnings of art and Word. Ultimately the prevalence of a 'polyphonic' theological aesthetic over a bourgeois neo-classicism underpins his pursuit, even in prison, for a Christian imagination which best represents a "mature", "worldly" Christianity.

We shall then explore John Macmurray's view of the centrality of religion in light of "personal relation" and how it relates to tragic consciousness. He reflects on the conversation between the spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic selves as problematical, but necessary for the cultivation of communion. Early in his thought Macmurray is interested in the meaning and relation of art as part of a conversation of conflicts between itself, science and religion. Art is concerned with the exhibition of values and, in relation to action, with the choice of ends. It is

an education of emotion and training in judgement. The cultivation of the arts—that activity where we take the world as matter of fact for granted but go on to contemplate it from the standpoint of its intrinsic value—is crucial for educating and maturing one’s emotions. The thread which brings Macmurray’s logic together is his ‘familial’ metaphor which he called *the rhythm of withdrawal and return*. Though not influenced directly by him, Macmurray shares with Martin Buber an understanding of the fellowship of difference which is traumatic and inevitable. It is in the encounter with fear that one comes to discover freedom.

Having developed the influence of tragic consciousness in the vision of Unamuno, Bonhoeffer and Macmurray, in the concluding chapter I will suggest the implications for dialogue between the tragic sense of life and the Christian imagination in light of a “postmodern” climate tempered by the persistent re-enactment – mimesis – of the traumas of human experience.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Unamuno and Agonic Christianity**

One night there lowered into my mind one of those dark, sad, and mournful dreams which I cannot banish from my thoughts, even during moments of happiness during the day. I dreamed that I was married, that I had a child, that this child died, and that over its body, which seemed to be made of wax, I said to my wife: “behold our love! Shortly it will decay: this is the way everything ends.”<sup>1</sup>

Ordinarily what I dislike most in others are the same qualities I dislike in myself, and if I am wounded by the barb of a fellow man, it is because the same barb is stabbing my own insides.<sup>2</sup>

The disturbing dream told above in a letter to his future wife Concepcion a short while before their marriage in 1891, is not only an ominous foretelling of Miguel de Unamuno’s personal future; the later trauma in the death of his third son in 1897 would eventually deepen his embrace of death as more than historical or political—but intrinsically spiritual. Unamuno’s ‘dream’ also serves as an early manifestation of the imminent question in his broad aesthetic language: “what is to become of consciousness after each one of us dies”<sup>3</sup>.

Later, and unlike most of his literary and artistic contemporaries — famously known as “The Generation of 1898” — the crisis of religion and the resolve of an interpersonal, active resignation would be a haunting theme of Unamuno’s philosophical, poetic and literary output. Initially concerned about the particular transformation of Spanish culture after the last throes of imperial might had manifested itself, Unamuno ultimately considers the essence of tragic existence an issue in the broader context of Western crisis of authority and the collapse of European colonialism. At the time he wrote that chilling letter to his “Chonca”, he was a

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in A. Lacy (1984), “introduction” in *The Private World: Selections from the Diario Intimo, 1890-1936*. Princeton, NJ: University Press, xxxi.

<sup>2</sup> “Sobre la Soberbia”(1904), *OC 1*: 1205.

<sup>3</sup> Unamuno (1905), “Solitude” in *Ensayos*.



fledgling University lecturer with more of a commitment to science and positivism than toward religion.<sup>4</sup>

However, Unamuno's aesthetic and philosophical emphasis on the tragic "sentiment" in human existence is a response to the context of the increasing reliance on a 'positivist' ideology in European thought, and the obsolescence of Catholic dominance in post-imperial Spain. "The childish confidence that it is granted to us to discover truth", he says, "has long since disappeared; as we progress we become aware of the difficulties that lie in the way of its discovery and of the limitation of our powers."<sup>5</sup> Unamuno's discovery of the problem of consciousness in the context of immortality will serve as the uniting feature in his thought, and aggravate the tensions between faith, history, and materialist thought which guide his writings. By attacking what was the nerve centre of Spanish culture in the Catholic Church, Unamuno refused to imagine Spanish life without religion; rather, his pursuit was to explore the existential 'trauma' caused by the "neat simplicities"<sup>6</sup> of orthodoxy, and the limitations of modernity which this existential trauma reveals. In the end, he concludes that the "dream" of faith—to wish to "possess" rather than be detached from God— is expressed in the tragic union of love and suffering.<sup>7</sup>

The 'theological' perspective to Unamuno has can best be expressed as "religious philosophy"; this is the designation A.R.C. Duncan<sup>8</sup> gives to the thought of John Macmurray. For Unamuno, the philosophical, political and aesthetic enterprise of his thought includes religion as a pivotal concern.<sup>9</sup> Unamuno cites Kierkegaard as a philosophical "brother" in a time when the Dane's work was just recently being discovered. Yet whilst Kierkegaard

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<sup>4</sup> Lacy, xii-xiii.

<sup>5</sup> Unamuno (1912, trans. C. Fitch), *Tragic Sense of Life*. New York: Dover, 145.

<sup>6</sup> Lacy, xxiv.

<sup>7</sup> *TSL*, 218-19.

<sup>8</sup> As noted in E. McIntosh (2011), *John Macmurray's Religious Philosophy: What it Means to be a Person*. London: Ashgate, 5.

<sup>9</sup> "...whereas the logical analysis of a philosophy of religion can be carried out without necessitating any personal religious experience or belief." *Ibid*.

insists that the aesthetic, ethical and religious worlds as stages on one's existential journey, with religion serving only God and with a lack of concern for the social manifestation of faith,<sup>10</sup> Unamuno's agony is how "social Christianity"—that is, an imposed religion on society—limits the human "hunger" for God, not as "irrefragable truth, but as a working hypothesis".<sup>11</sup> As Weinstein observes, Unamuno's thought, which takes the shape of many spheres of human life and religion as a significant sphere intersecting all the others, represents an inquiry of the spiritual 'costs' of modern life.<sup>12</sup> This chapter is an attempt at taking a cursory glance through a selection of Unamuno's religious philosophy and novella of his perspective of the proximity of the sense of the tragic integral to Christian faith.

### **Unamuno and Realism**

Born in the Basque country, Unamuno described his aesthetic universe as the consequence of a series of "spiritual crises". He was 10 years of ages during the bombardment of his hometown Bilbao during the Carlist War of 1873-74, the national crisis which signalled the beginning of the end of Spanish imperialism. 21 February 1874 was recalled by Unamuno: "before that date, I keep only fragmentary memories; after it comes the thread of my history."<sup>13</sup> The explosion of a Carlist bomb and the smoke in the air came to symbolise the first tension in Unamuno's sense of the tragic, "that it was possible to talk about 'the others'—the ones belonging to another faction—while acknowledging that these 'others' were no less Spanish than themselves".<sup>14</sup>

Unamuno placed Catholicism to the side in University whilst developing a positivist and scientific point of view. Unamuno's early years were described as a combination of both deep, personal examination and philosophical searching. "Deeply emotional and

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<sup>10</sup> O.A. Fasel (1955), "Observations on Unamuno and Kierkegaard" in *Hispania* 38:4, 443, 448.

<sup>11</sup> M. Nozick (1971), *Miguel de Unamuno*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 65.

<sup>12</sup> M.A. Weinstein (1976), "Unamuno and the Agonies of Modernisation" in *The Review of Politics*, 38:1, 40.

<sup>13</sup> A. Lacy (1983), "Introduction", *Peace in War*. Princeton University Press, xi.

<sup>14</sup> J F Mora (2003), *Three Spanish Philosophers: Unamuno, Ortega and Ferrater Mora*. Albany, NY; SUNY Press, 21.

intellectually curious... Sometimes, he cried without an explanation; on others, he would fall sleep with a book in his hands.”<sup>15</sup>

Unamuno came of age when the political idea of *Dos Espana* was most heightened, almost as a form of security against the inevitable end of imperialism. These ‘Two Spains’ were, on the one hand, the movement of the ‘traditionalists’, the casticistas, who sought to maintain the purity of Spanish culture and religion, in particular keeping Spanish Catholicism untainted by Modern influence throughout the continent.<sup>16</sup> The other Spain was that of the Krausian progressives’, with Julian Sanz del Rio’s (1814-1869) interpretation of the work of late- Enlightenment thinker Karl Friedrich Kraus (1781-1832) being the most radical import to Spanish universities in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> These progressives and their thought, known as “regenerationismo” sought to broaden religious ideals as informing all practical effort rather than settling into religious dogma and revelation.<sup>18</sup> This perspective of religion for the progressives was a reaction against the political powers of the Church, powers that dogma justified and made the practice of religion little more than formality.<sup>19</sup> Although a strong emphasis on ethics, a cosmopolitan vision for Europe and its resonance if not a call for a reclamation of Catholic moral ethics (i.e. an organic vision of society, a concern with social rights and a belief in God) caught the attention of Iberian culture and its colonies, traditionalism ultimately won the day.<sup>20</sup>

A growing third way interrupted the two nationalities, these two perceptions of how Spain was conceived in the minds of the intellectuals and artists. European positivism parallels the presence of realism in art, which ultimately shapes much of the Generation of ’98. Realism

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<sup>15</sup> K B Fagan (2004), “The Teenage Dissent of Newman and Unamuno: Conscience as a Safeguard Against Coercive Manipulation” in *Cultic Studies Review* 3;3.

<sup>16</sup> M. Nozick, *Unamuno: The Agony of Belief*. New York: Twane Publishers, 1971, 79.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Carlos Stoetzer (1998), *Karl Fredrich Krause and his Influence in the Hispanic World*. Cologne: Boehlau Verlag.

<sup>19</sup> R. Gott (2002), *Karl Kraus and the Ideological origins of the Cuban Revolution*. University of London Institute of Latin American Studies, 4-6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

and the Realist novel seeks to provide a fictional model of the real world, replicating the laws, conditions and circumstances of the common world. Fantastical illusions are intrusions for a realist method of imagination. John Macklin describes the consequences of aesthetic realism for religious experience:

For the deeply religious person, this world may be merely a simulacrum of a supernatural reality, which itself must be accepted as part of the real...Realist writers are generally critical of bourgeois society, the very audience for whom they write. This could, and usually did, involve criticisms of conventional morality and usually the main theme of such fiction was the clash between individual aspiration and the constraints of society. It is not for nothing that a very characteristic theme is the woman taken in adultery, for this theme highlights not only the role of women in a patriarchal society but also society's repression of individual desire.<sup>21</sup>

### **Intrahistoria**

An understanding of these “traditions” of thought and their manifestations in the Spanish consciousness is crucial to understanding how Unamuno is interested early on in the interpretations of history and how the human consequences of them. Thus, he first introduces in his series of 1895 essays *En Torno al Casticismo* (On Authentic Tradition) a process of paradoxes which he calls *intrahistoria*, *intra-consciente*, and *la tradicion eterna*. Through these terms he seeks to establish the depths of authenticity in light of the decadent and ultimately disastrous route of the Spanish nationalistic consciousness before and after the loss of her Empire. He uses the metaphor of the sea, “upon whose surface the waves rise and fall and succeed one another.”<sup>22</sup> This image permits the development and decay of an idea, a ‘discreet impression’ which serves only to give a moment of continuity. Life is, then, a series of deaths, and one is has to decipher the overwhelming reality of the compound narratives, what he calls *the legacy of the ages*.<sup>23</sup> It is the difference between what occurs and what

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<sup>21</sup> J. Macklin, “introduction” in translation of *Abel Sanchez*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

<sup>22</sup> Unamuno, “En Torno al Casticismo” in *Obras Completas, Vol. I*. Madrid : Turner : Fundación José Antonio de Castro 814.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 793.

history records, the contrast between the lived experiences against the unreal picture of history by the cultural dominants of a generation.

In *El Torno*, Unamuno criticises the Spanish national consciousness as driven by disassociation and lacking in cohesion and continuity of values.<sup>24</sup> The reality that history can be controlled by overt and conscious purposes cultivates a tradition of intellectual slothfulness. As Unamuno says of his own people in this narrow historical context, “Like the individuals who comprise Spain, our society is characterised by its lengthy reaction time; in spite of a superficial impressionability, which is really nothing more than an irritation of the epidermis, the Spaniard is difficult to stimulate”<sup>25</sup>. A narrow historical consciousness, in Unamuno’s view, creates a cultural vacuum. Thus, the idea of traditionalism as both a political construct in Spain and as a cultural and spiritual expression is scrutinised as archaic, exclusive and triumphalist. Tradition doesn’t define history, but rather history as a continuing saga in time, which defines tradition.

A distinguishing feature of Unamuno’s intrahistoria is in how Unamuno imagines unconscious personality as linked with the sea and the universal feminine. “Woman is the foundation of tradition in organised societies, she provides calm in the midst of turbulence, peace in times of conflict.”<sup>26</sup> For this many have associated Unamuno with his contemporary Jung.<sup>27</sup> So if agony does have a place in intrahistoria, it is part of a liminal process of the inner life.

It was the Krausian influence in Spanish life that prompted Unamuno to make sense of the conflicts between religiousness and secular society. As the title of his most well-known philosophical enquiry suggests, his concern is to express the centrality of the ‘tragic

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<sup>24</sup> T. Mermall (1993), “En torno al casticismo” and Unamuno’s Rhetorical Evolution” in *Anales de la literatura española contemporánea* 18; 2, 282.

<sup>25</sup> OC 1, 859-60.

<sup>26</sup> OC 1, 787.

<sup>27</sup> See Jurkevich (1995), *The Elusive Self: Archetypal Approaches to the Novels of Miguel de Unamuno*. Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press.

sentiment' in human existence. Though there have been many attempts to emphasise his philosophical output in concert with the forebodings of existentialism, the intention in all of his philosophical writings is to find synergy with his literary output, most specifically in the development of the modern novel or, for him what he coined the *nivola*.

In the introduction to the last edition of *Mist* published in his lifetime, Unamuno distinguishes the *nivola* from the novel, likening the latter to a huge piece of historical architecture. "Basilicas make themselves, jumping over any plans thought out in advance, using the workers' very hands as their tools in self-creation."<sup>28</sup> The grandness of the novels' world imposes itself upon the reader and the author. Unamuno envisioned the *nivola* as a writing process similar to biblical narrative. It is not a realist world, with dates, times and a metanarrative of major 'heroes' and omniscient narrators, but a world likened to the narratives of faith in which "Lucifer and Satan, and later Adam and Eve, impose themselves on Jehovah".<sup>29</sup> They do not seek to give a picture of the entire world to the reader; rather, *nivolas* are concentrated on the "tragic agonisers"<sup>30</sup>, the ironies and paradoxes which are imposed not simply on the larger world, but the spiritual, psychological, and cultural self—the multiplicity of one's' identity.

### **Peace in War**

His first and most conventional novel, *Peace in War* (*Paz in la Guerra*, 1897), is Unamuno's first literary manifestation of *intrahistoria*. In it he depicts the struggle of personal loyalties during the Third Carlist War, which historically sealed the end of Spanish imperial rule and likewise disastrous and lasting effects on the Spanish psyche. A work which anticipates Erich Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1928), it is not history in a sense that it depicts the major characters essential to the fixed idea of history, but rather

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<sup>28</sup> Unamuno (February 1935), "Introductory remarks" to *Mist*. Last modified July 2006, [http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca\\_virtual/literatura/niebla/indice.html](http://www.antorcha.net/biblioteca_virtual/literatura/niebla/indice.html).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> "What mattered in a novel was exactly the same thing that mattered in 'reality': the fact, namely, that it dealt with 'real beings'—or, as Unamuno often wrote, with 'tragic agonisers' (meaning, of course, 'fighters'). J. F. Mora (2003, edited by J.M. Terricabras), *Three Spanish Philosophers: Unamuno, Ortega, and Ferrater Mora*. Albany: SUNY Press, 85.

details the experiences of those associated only from a distance, but caught up in the overwhelming, ‘agonic’ political, cultural and religious narratives which ultimately scar for life.

Ignacio Antonio, the tragic main character, is compelled away from a modest small town life of people fulfilling their civic expectations, of which military service is one, into fighting for the Carlist Army. His motivation for entering the army, to defend traditional values and hope to be part of a “great battle”,<sup>31</sup> is ultimately challenged when he realises that the life of military “discipline”—mass drills even in the “free mountains”<sup>32</sup>—did little to prepare them for the courage needed on the battlefield. The journey of war, through “ancient rocky causeways” and “old riverbeds”<sup>33</sup> was further complicated by the conflicts of ideas which meet the army along the war journey: contradictory reports of the progress of the war, the spectacle of propaganda, the momentary union between Republicans and Carlists<sup>34</sup>—all amounted to a conflict of loyalties. Like the many causeways and riverbeds they are passing through, life and war begins to “resemble one another” for Ignacio.<sup>35</sup>

The zenith of Ignacio’s cause for reflection in the battle occurs in the campaign against a guerrilla army led by a local priest. With the sight of “Pious crusaders with pure souls” led by the idiosyncratic personality of a “warrior-priest...devout general...terrorist priest...military man who believed in rosary beads”<sup>36</sup>, Ignacio realises that those whom he must fight with and fight against—whether aristocrats or peasants, religious or secular—form a true tragic unity.

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<sup>31</sup> Unamuno (trans. A. Lacy, M. Nozick, and A. Kerrigan), “Peace in War”, in *The Selected Works of Miguel de Unamuno*. Princeton: University Press, 270.

<sup>32</sup> *PIW*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> *PIW*, 131.

<sup>34</sup> *PIW*, 131-133.

<sup>35</sup> *PIW*, 131-132.

<sup>36</sup> *PIW*, 141.

They together form “the stilled voice of dead centuries of ancient feuds”,<sup>37</sup> the unresolved tensions which collide in the field of any battle.

That whole popular movement surging out of the depths of the people, out of that formless and protoplasmic mass from which nations are made, all that movement rising up out of a people—would it be possible to mould that mass into a military pattern...to systematise those armies which had grown out of the forging of nationalities? Would it be possible to subject that mass to the disciplinary hierarchy, to a subordination from grade to grade, without a single gap in the order? To turn those bands into an army, to make a well-defined program out of their inarticulate aspirations?<sup>38</sup>

On the battlefield, “Principles” were nothing more than “bait” luring a mass of people into a mission which was vague; “once in action, everything had been turned into movement,” and ones’ ideas were nothing until “transformed” into agency.<sup>39</sup> But even action, particularly collective action where one is part of a whole, can mislead. When alone, away from the monotony of the nomadic life,<sup>40</sup> Ignacio can further reflect on the blurred “dream” of combat.<sup>41</sup>

The agony and struggle of Ignacio’s reassessment of values and surroundings parallels the “marches and counter-marches”,<sup>42</sup> the frequency of ‘scores’ which this war is purported to settle: the rustic and the man about town, between the man of the mountain and the man of

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<sup>37</sup> *PIW*, 142.

<sup>38</sup> *PIW*, 143.

<sup>39</sup> *PIW*, 142.

<sup>40</sup> *PIW*, 145.

<sup>41</sup> *PIW*, 157.

<sup>42</sup> *PIW*, 164.



the sea and his greed”.<sup>43</sup> The loud struggle for ideas in the face of human suffering amounted to a paradox of scepticism.<sup>44</sup>

When Ignacio finds himself alone and exposed to enemy bullets, his mind is finally invaded with thoughts of death, moments before he is shot and killed:

...abandoned by everyone like someone shipwrecked, with no one to stretch out a friendly hand. People were killing each other without wanting to, killing out of the fear of death...in order that some men might annihilate others...Death was reaping its harvest, distributing the blows of its scythe by sheer chance.<sup>45</sup>

Ignacio dies ingloriously as the War rolls on, eventually proving itself to be a pointless undertaking. The deluge in which the siege of Bilabo occurs (both the setting of the novel and Unamuno's native city), with all the horror and grotesque apocalypticism the real experience engendered. With the people of the city “reduced to eating cats and rats, swayed by rumours, holding on to hopes soon shattered, caught in endless discussions about taking sides and sides against a mysterious brotherhood of masons, free thinkers and anti-Christ”—Pachio reflects on his brothers' death, and is now left to him to understand the meaning of massacre whilst others around him lament only the material ramifications.

His chief mortification, comforting and distracting him at the same time, was the battle waged inside himself against the evil enemy...He remembered the idea that men cannot know whether or not they are in sin, that it is not we ourselves but sin within us that commits mortal sins...The truth was that his inner life was endless in its variety and never bored him. How could all that talk about war which so much concerned other people compare to the intimate battle in his soul, sustained by Grace against the

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *PIW*, 171.

<sup>45</sup> *PIW*, 293.

Tempter of Men, what were all those other battles that filled the newspapers worth?<sup>46</sup>

The parallels in *Peace in War* to Tolstoy's *War and Peace*<sup>47</sup> have been well discussed. The core of Tolstoy's narrative is the pairing—almost caricature—of the historical personalities of Napoleon and the Russian commander Kutuzov, and the role of nature as depicted in the realities of the Russian winter. “In sum, it is the triumph of intrahistory over history... Tolstoy seeks at every turn to impress upon his readers the supremacy of all that is historical, and the futility of the merely historical.”<sup>48</sup> However, Unamuno's conception of intrahistory requires a relationship with history<sup>49</sup>; that is, a need to draw from unending conflict a sense of tranquillity.<sup>50</sup>

### **Active Resignation**

So Unamuno is obsessed with the clash or encounter between personal desires and the ‘threat’ of otherness to the self. This ‘tragic sense of life’ is more than ‘theodicy’ for Unamuno; it is a “tragic consolation”<sup>51</sup> sought after by the eternal essence of love's union with suffering. “The consciousness that everything passes away, that we ourselves pass away, and that everything that is ours and everything that environs us passes away, fills us with anguish, and this anguish itself reveals to us the consolation of that which does not pass away, of the eternal, of the beautiful.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *PIW*, 316-317.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Nozick also cites as inspiration the works of Proudhon, Alfieri's drama *Saul*, and the historical novels of Galdos.

<sup>48</sup> Round (ed. 1989), *Re-Reading Unamuno*. University of Glasgow Department of Hispanic Studies, 103.

<sup>49</sup> *Re-Reading Unamuno*, 104.

<sup>50</sup> Nozick, 141.

<sup>51</sup> *TSL*, 203.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

Unamuno's "hunger for immortality" is an aspect of what Round calls "ontological security."<sup>53</sup> The need to be fully secure in one's own being is in significant part based on Unamuno's own personal yearnings for security, a thread which, as some scholars of Unamuno turning to the psychological implications of his thought suggest, stems from his growing up without a male influence, and the search for individuation and liberty from a maternal dominance.<sup>54</sup> The other dimension which gives weight to this need for ontological security is the way the presence of conflict in human life deconstructs absolutisms. Abstractions and systems, such as those which produce narrow-minded historical references, cannot resolve immortality because consciousness itself—a "sickness" unique to, and universal among mankind—brings about the tension, the feeling that "whole peoples" and every individual feels: the tragic sense of life.<sup>55</sup> Indeed consciousness—the tragic sense of life itself—is the middle term that makes each and every 'man of flesh and blood' what he is:

For the present let us agree on this intense suspicion that the longing not to die, the hunger for personal immortality, the striving to persevere indefinitely in our own being, all of which is, according to the tragic Jew [Spinoza], our very essence, constitutes the affective basis of all knowledge and the personal inner point of departure for any and all human philosophy wrought by man for his fellows. And then we shall see how the solution to this inner affective problem, a solution which may amount to a despairing renunciation of any attempt at a solution, is something that colors all the rest of philosophy. Underlying even the so-called problem of knowledge there is nothing more than this human feeling, just as underlying the inquiry into the why, into the cause, there is simply the search for the wherefore, for the end purpose. All the rest is either self-deception or a wish to deceive others by way of deceiving one's self. And this personal and affective point of departure for all philosophy and all religion is the tragic sense of life.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> N. Round (1974), *Unamuno: Abel Sanchez* (Critical guides to Spanish texts). London; Grant and Cutler, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Jurkevich intimates the relation of Unamuno's insecurity in his masculinity as part of the larger issue of masculinity in Spain after the end of empire. *The Elusive Self*, chapter 4).

<sup>55</sup> *TSL*, 17-18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Unamuno begins *Tragic Sense of Life* by reworking Terence's assertion, "I am a man; nothing human do I deem foreign" into, "I am a man, no other man do I deem a stranger."<sup>57</sup> One cannot go more quickly to the core of Unamuno's thought than to understand his insistence that *nihil humani*, properly understood, ought to read: *nullum hominem*, for there is no "mankind", there are only human beings. He took great attention to the debt he owed historical circumstances that gave rise to his works and emphasized them at every opportunity. So when he speaks of the great influences to his thought, he regards them not by their 'systems' of thought but by their relation to the larger picture of common human life—thus "the man Socrates", "the man Kant", "the man William James", "the tragic Jew from Amsterdam [Spinoza]".

Each philosopher—each man—stood, as we all do, as the middle term in the dialectical interplay between mortality and immortality. As such, Unamuno's own personality intersects with the desires and journeys of meaning of these other human beings; but, rather than taking for granted the supremacy of reason in human thought, understands its great complexity. Reason is an indispensable tool for coping with the world and at the same time, at its worst, it is the enemy of life. "The man of flesh and bone" is the one who dares to go on a journey of individuation or meaning lives in *congoja* (anguish), in the depths of the abyss. Various responses are possible—ignore conflict, to despair altogether, or to resign himself and endure it.

To be sure, a typical Christian response, particularly in the Protestant tradition which Unamuno venerated, is to endure, but Unamuno seems to ask how shall we endure? He ultimately suggests an active resignation which will not only embrace inward struggle as the essence of personhood but will recognize the same anguish in the lives of other people. "Human beings aflame with a burning charity towards their neighbours are thus enkindled because they have touched the depth of their own misery, their own apparentiality, their own nothingness, and then, turning their newly opened eyes upon their fellows, they have seen that they are also miserable, apparential, condemned to nothingness, and they have pitied

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<sup>57</sup> *TSL*, 1.

them and loved them.”<sup>58</sup> This active resignation becomes manifest later, in *Saint Manuel, the Good Martyr*.

Those who seek the answer to immortality through dogmatic Christianity alone are confronted with the dilemma that faith must be rationalized and when rationalized, becomes dogma. Immortality is a hunger for security that is perpetually attacked by ones doubts.<sup>59</sup> Unamuno notes the presence of the sense of the conflictual elements in Christian thought as much as he does those aspects of Christianity which venerate more dearly a linear conception of history. For Unamuno, the attempt to ‘prove’ the existence of God suggests a ‘system’ of belief which is in the end very limiting and not at all suggestive of a “guarantor of full ontological security”.<sup>60</sup>

When Unamuno places God qualitatively beyond the limitations and errors of doctrine, he not only suggests that what matters is ones attitude toward God, but also that the ‘idea’ of God cannot be contained in any one system. Unamuno, then, suggests that theology in the classical sense is a basic contradiction in itself since there can be no compatibility between theos and logia. The being of God is not in question; it is the human capacity for self individuation and awareness which is in question. The search, then, is not for the answer to an abstract question but for the experience of relationship and religious experience which can transform doubt into a “creative condition” in which the human life is affirmed. As ones devotion to God lifts them above interpretation, they escape the traps of fanaticism and supremacy and learn, in Unamuno’s words, to “live off the struggle”; to live an authentic existence comes in assuming the reality of contradiction in existence.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *TSL*, 136.

<sup>59</sup> *TSL*, 52.

<sup>60</sup> Round, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Macklin, ‘Introduction’ to *Abel Sanchez*, 7.

## **Abel Sanchez**

The struggle over the human reaction to existential contradiction feeds directly into Unamuno's "passion" novel, *Abel Sanchez*. This complex commentary on the pride and envy inherent in Spanish life, as well as Unamuno's own, continues the fashion of intra-historia, and develops further as he did with a previous novel, *Mist*, the concept of the nivola. The priorities of the classic novel in Unamuno's perspective do not speak to the complex nature of personality; he does not think of personality as something which can be reduced to a set of qualities. His critique of the realist novels of 19<sup>th</sup> century Spain was that it was lacking in the true, eternal reality, the reality of personality"<sup>62</sup>. Realism for Unamuno could become more real when the inner conflicts of the personal reality are emphasized in art. The stressed placed on human personality in relationship and an awareness of human limitations are the essence of the nivola. The concept of nivola not only envisions a departure from the depth-lacking realism of Spanish Krausianism, but also the primacy of multiple dialogue, rather than description.<sup>63</sup>

The novel itself is about two persons, connected to each other almost at the hip, yet representing different systems of thought: Joaquin Monegro, the rationalist who becomes a scientist, and Abel Sanchez, an intuitive who becomes an artist. As they quarrel early in the novel (Chapter I) about the nature and merit of their respective professions, it is evident that Abel is the more clever and popular of the two. Later (Chapter XI), when the quarells become more intense and the sense of division is imminent, Joaquin calls Abel a "scientific painter", whilst Abel retorts that Joaquin is an "artistic doctor". Abel further points out that putting names to paintings is too "literary", for art should be able speak for itself. Here Unamuno returns to the paradoxes which intra history seeks to navigate; namely, the conflicts between science and art.

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<sup>62</sup> *Amor y pedagogia* (1934), *OC II*, 311-12.

<sup>63</sup> As Round describes, "rounded-out, many dimensional portraits of men and women as social beings with a history of their own; people with appetites and moods and a way of life; people whose motives, even when highly problematic, are always displayed for the reader who cares to take notice—these are not to be found in the world of the nivola." Round, 18.

It is a mutual affection for Helena, Joaquin's cousin, which signals the beginning of the end of their relationship. Helena, indifferent to Joaquin, eventually marries Abel and they have a son together. Eventually, Joaquin too marries Antonia, described as a devout gentle girl who sympathises with his melancholy. However, it is jealousy and envy, the desire for what is Abel's, which broods in Joaquin's psyche. Even the birth of his daughter is not enough to cultivate a sense of peace within.

When Abel, who is preparing a painting of the story of Cain, lends him Byron's Cain, Joaquin identifies strongly with him, and begins to wonder if his own soul is identical with his hatred of Abel. When he read of Lucifer declaring to Cain that he was immortal, he began to think with terror that if he were immortal himself then the hate within him must also be immortal. Since he would have a soul, his soul would be possessed of hate. He concluded that it could not be otherwise, since hate could not be a function of his body. A corruptible organism could not hate as he did. Lucifer aspired to be God, and since his childhood, Joaquin had aspired to displace others. Yes, hate would be immortal in the soul of the one possessed by it.<sup>64</sup>

Joaquin tries to suppress his envy by using what he has: his power of rationality. He sucks up his pride enough to make a speech at a dinner in Abel's honour; later he embarks on a return to religion. None of these are sufficient to frustrate his inner destructiveness. When Joaquin asks Father Echeverria why he was born, the priest replies that the right question is rather "for what" are we born. That is to reiterate an essential aspect to Unamuno's thought, that reason alone will never answer the question of why, and that life must be directed towards some ultimate aim. Joaquin simply cannot believe in a God of redemption; he is more fixated on blaming God for his own tragic existence. He gives up on freewill, and in a succession of events comes to discover—or rather rationalize—that envy is universal.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> H. Culpepper (1961), "Immortality and Modern thought: A Study of Miguel de Unamuno" in *Review and Expositor* 58:3.

<sup>65</sup> Nozick, 150.

Ultimately, the text shows how Joaquin's painful emotions of envy, jealousy and hate towards Abel render his existence and sense of self completely dependent on Abel's life and success.<sup>66</sup> The two men's children grow up, and in a twist of circumstances, Abelin (Abel's son) and Joaquin's daughter, Joaquina, eventually marry as a consequence of Abelin's decision to become a doctor like Joaquin and because of his distant father. So Joaquin becomes a new father figure for him, to both Abelin and Joaquina's pleasure. Again Unamuno is keen to show the desire for individuation and security through these characters.

The marriage brings Joaquin a temporary relief; until the moment that Abel comes to see him before the marriage. Joaquin begins to set down a 'Confession', a record of his passion and of his general sense of human depravity. It can be seen as Joaquin's attempt to impose his personal interpretation of his life upon all the other interpretations, and illustrates another concern of Unamuno, the relationship between narrative and history, between fiction and life. The Confession reveals the many selves of Joaquin: the husband, the father, the doctor, the orator, the writer and he has other selves in the eyes of others, from Antonia's "a man who suffers"<sup>67</sup> to Helena's description of Joachim as "unbearable"<sup>68</sup> together with other adjectives such as "envious",<sup>69</sup> "good, honourable"<sup>70</sup> or a "soul on fire"<sup>71</sup>. Other definitions are contained within Joaquin's perceptions of others' perceptions. No one definition fully defines him, though the relationships between these various definitions may go some way to defining the complexity that is the self. In the end, however, the self is ultimately elusive. This being so, one cannot expect to encounter in the narrative traditional forms of characterization, just as we cannot expect other determinants of character which fiction usually employs.

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<sup>66</sup> F.Larubia-Prado (2002), "Lethal Emotions: the Will as imagination in Unamuno's Abel Sanchez" in *Revista Estudios Hispánicos* 36, 373.

<sup>67</sup> AS, 67.

<sup>68</sup> AS, 41.

<sup>69</sup> AS, 51.

<sup>70</sup> AS, 41.

<sup>71</sup> AS, XIII.



Towards the end of the Abel Sanchez, another degree of separation is introduced with the birth of Joaquin—and Abel’s—grandchild. When reading Byron’s *Cain*, Joaquin had found the suggestion that if Abel had left children, their marriage to Cain’s children might have alleviated the hatred Cain bore in his soul. With his grandchild, Joaquinto, Joaquin envisions one more opportunity to be proved that there is a sense of justice and perpetuity for him. He desperately asks, “Who has he taken after...who does he look like...whose blood runs in his veins?”—a question which would be asked with vigour by a member of the Spanish traditionalists.

However, the grandchild in time moves toward Abel, the painter. In despair of this final act of, say, cosmic rejection, Joaquin confronts an already ailing Abel one last time to beg him to release his hold on the child, and in a scene of anger Abel shouts that the child rejects Joaquin because Abel is “poisoning him” with deceit. When he refuses to let the boy go, Joaquin rushes at him, grabs him by the throat, and because of Abel’s already frail health, suffers angina attack and dies. One can immediately assume that it was Joaquin who murdered Abel, but the history of heart problems, and the ultimate confession from Joaquin that “He was killing me for more than forty years...with his happiness and his triumphs.”<sup>72</sup> A year later on his own deathbed, Joaquin wishes for total oblivion, to be wiped from the memory of both the family and, ultimately, God. Antonia, who is committed to Joaquin’s consumed suffering<sup>73</sup> to the end, is dealt perhaps the most tragic blow emotionally, when Joaquin confesses that he didn’t love her this entire time, and that the choice to do so, in retrospect, would have saved him. “I could have loved you and that would have been my salvation, but I didn’t love you.”

The role in which confession as the foundation of this *nivola* framework plays is particularly important for at least three reasons. First is the obvious interplay with Catholic tradition, the role it has in traditionally Catholic nations like Spain, and Unamuno’s methodical aim of making religious and secular language heard in concert with each other. Second, for the sense of and need for honesty which Unamuno employs in his philosophical writings. The argument might be that one does more harm suppressing one’s feelings than

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<sup>72</sup> AS, XXXVII.

<sup>73</sup> “...tisis la alma.”

giving reign to them.<sup>74</sup> Joaquin is obsessed with his own paradox of desiring to be remembered through his work, his Confession and particularly his Memoirs. Yet during the course of the nivola, when someone confronts Joaquin with his personality, his response is to silence them—a way of keeping the appearances of peace when there is none. Another theme is built upon the theme of immortality and how one's identity is recalled by others. As Macklin sums the work up, "the pain of the branded protagonist is so strong, his self-condemnation so pitiful that, for all its awkwardness, its bombast, and its lamentations, *Abel Sanchez* is a curiously moving confession of a man bound to his own rack, and its nakedness may be accepted as the proper counterpart of the rawness of Joaquin's wounds."<sup>75</sup>

### **The Agony of Christianity**

*Tragic Sense of Life* and *Abel Sanchez* represent Unamuno's wrestling with the complexity of personality as they encroach themselves within a holistic existential framework. As we have seen, religion in Unamuno's perspective is not divorced from issues of being. Although Unamuno first realizes the hypocrisy in theology, in *The Agony of Christianity* (1924) and his last nivola, *Saint Manuel the Good, Martyr* (1930), he seeks to develop something of a theology beyond traditional religion. Unamuno believed that the "agony" of modern Christianity was as unalterably personal as it was universal, for throughout Europe he found the same spiritual hunger, a hunger, he declares, that often turned into an "anti-Christian fury".

The historical seeds of *La agonía* lie in his essay "Pascalian Faith" written in the beginning of his first exile in 1923, and which ultimately becomes Chapter nine of *la agonía*. Unamuno attacks the "pedagogical industry" of the anti-mystical Jesuit education which dominated Reformation-era Spain and France. The existence of God and its proof was central to this education. The mathematician Pascal, in his fights with the Vatican Council, drew the contrast between pure religiosity and the casuistry of Jesuit pedagogy, thereby killing the agonistic life of Christianity. Yet, Pascal's paradox is that without the accommodations of

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<sup>74</sup> Macklin, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Macklin, 152.

Jesuitical casuistry, a moral secular life could not be sustained.<sup>76</sup> So for Pascal struggle was a necessary part of religious experience. Unamuno points out Pascal's call to abdicate (*abêtissement*) reason. This abdication is ultimately a personal task, for one can commit the suicide of reason only for oneself, never for others, though this is certainly what the Jesuits try to do.

In the story of Pascal's struggle with Religious pedagogy, Unamuno saw the conflict within Christian faith between material and spiritual values where orthodoxy saw the triumph of Christianity over the flesh, the material, and the social. He saw the misfortune of Christianity in terms of its conflict between the opposing idea of immortality and eschatology in its Jewish roots and its Hellenic social thought. Two irreconcilable differences—the Judaic, Pharisaic, psychic hope of resurrection of the flesh and the Platonic idea of immortality of the soul.<sup>77</sup> As a State-sanctioned tradition linked with an idea of the self in society,<sup>78</sup> can the idea of immortality serve both spiritual and material ends?

Unamuno saw the Jewish idea of immortality as a social condition to be more understanding of the cultural finalities of human experience than the Hellenist-centred Christian formalism, "which emphasised God over the history-bound individual"<sup>79</sup>. Whilst he appreciates the 'angst' of Judaism over the formalism of orthodox and evangelical Christianity, he also appreciates the angst out of which was born the first century Church. As a Jew, Unamuno suggests that Jesus may have believed in the resurrection of the flesh rather than Platonic immortality. But in the Passion and Resurrection of Christ, the agony of Christianity was born: The struggle between the Jewish and Platonic visions of eternal life<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Nozick, 64.

<sup>77</sup> Ilie, 230.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Ilie, 231.

<sup>80</sup> Nozick, 62.

The lack of a sense of agony and wrestling with contradiction in Spanish Catholicism is only a microcosm of the widespread problem with Christianity itself, a faith which no longer struggles and agonises but dies in her own ignorance. The value of the Church is that she unifies belief for the communicative and collective effect of Faith which, if left unhandled, may encase each person in himself, with Faith being the projection of their own compulsions and desires. However, the Church too bound by dogma, much like the Catholicism of the Reformation era, reduces absolutes to the sphere of relative knowledge and blurs the incommensurability of the eternal. “Evangelical Christianity”, Unamuno surmised, seeks eternal life outside of History, whereas the Fundamentals of Judaism oriented its ideals around the fate of the society and for the living of life. So a Christianity born not out of State affirmation or a sense of abstract notion of eternity but rather in the tension between the incommunicable knowledge of God and collective truth should not be dissolved, because “so long as struggle prevails in life there is life, and death is fended off”. It is not “struggle for life”—survival—but struggle as the very image of life itself<sup>81</sup>.

*The Agony of Christianity* is an important document of Unamuno’s approach toward ‘theology’ in that it positions his ‘existentialism’ in the light of social values, or more importantly, the re-evaluation of social values. There are interpreters of Unamuno, such as Paul Ilie, who think that Unamuno suggests the absurdity of ‘social Christianity’, that when it comes to Faith in its social manifestation, he is more akin to Nietzsche in that his quest for immortality manifested in material life is the development of what Ilie calls an “evolutionary utopianism”.<sup>82</sup>

### **Saint Manuel the Good, Martyr**

The isolation of Unamuno’s exile years, and the disappointment with the pro-traditionalist (and church-sponsored) dictatorship of Miguel Primo de Rivera leads him, after the radical spiritual vision of Agony, to take the webs of fatality in his thought further to a resigned

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> P. Ilie (1967), *Unamuno: An Existential View of Self and Society*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 187-88.

activism in his last novel *Saint Manuel the Good, Martyr* (1930)<sup>83</sup>. Inspired by the legends in Valverde de Lucerna (his place of exile and the town in the novel) of a mythical predecessor village in which Christ returned as a beggar and destroyed it because he was refused alms,<sup>84</sup> Unamuno creates a parable of a very human Christ figure<sup>85</sup> in the guise of what essentially was representative of his most virulent detractors during Rivera's regime: a Catholic priest. Unamuno's 'enemies' would ironically have him, and Saint Manuel, as a source of support in the disastrous years of the Republic.

Don Manuel is being remembered by Angela—who at her death passes her story to Unamuno—and her brother Lazaro (Lazarus), in preparation for Manuel's canonisation as a saint. Angela remembers her priest as “helper, conscience, lay confessor and ‘mother’”<sup>86</sup>. For Lazaro, Manuel is the one who turned him from absolute rationalism to faith. However—and Unamuno reveals again the motif of tragic silence on which we commented in Abel Sanchez—Don Manuel had lost his personal belief in immortality—thought it seems not of God<sup>87</sup>—long ago. Yet he never publicly exposes his community to his lost belief; indeed; he never preaches a ‘tragic’ Gospel heterodox to faith. In the fashion of Christ, who remains faithful to his religion whilst at the same time giving new vision to faith, Don Manuel's own sense of mission comes not in the conventional social construct where faith and order are fixed narratives and the rule is not to disturb them. It is rather in the ‘intrahistorical’ pastoral relationships Manuel makes with people like Angela, in whom Manuel's influence costs her a job as a teacher early in life. Yet in Manuel, Angela sees the second of “two Christs—the one of this earth and the one of this village”<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> J. Butt (1981), *Miguel de Unamuno San Manuel Bueno, martir: Critical guides to Spanish Texts*. London: Tamesis Books, 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Nozick, 160.

<sup>87</sup> Butt, 21. He raises the question of Manuel's disbelief in immortality as interchangeable with a disbelief in God. “The experience of God...is a personal confrontation with the absurdity of existence without him.”

<sup>88</sup> Jurkevich, 136.

For Angela, Manuel's secret agony of faith is a surprise to her, as Lazaro's own connection with him has revealed. At first Lazaro accuses Manuel of hypocrisy; after the death of his and Angela's mother, however, he begins to go to Mass and begins taking Communion. Manuel saw his task was to let his congregation "dream that they are immortal, and not to kill them". This is what he encouraged Lazaro to do for, as he told him, "Truth may be something terrible, something unbearable and deadly. Simple people could not live on with it. There is no one true religion; any religion is true in so far as it allows its adherents to live spiritually and consoles them for being born in order to die". This type of 'simplicity' is most characterised not by the congregation, but by the local layabouts; Blasillo, who is able to accept the fundamentals of classic Christianity without question ("la fe del carbonero")<sup>89</sup>. It is this "el bobo" who is Manuel's alter ego, or ahistorical self, as Jurkevich notes, because Blasillo reinforces Manuel's desire, however unrealised, to "stultify reason in faith"<sup>90</sup>, or to become bound to the foolishness of faith.

Lazaro's interaction with Manuel, however, reveals that he had to resist a longing to drown himself in the town lake, thereby liberating himself from the lie by submerging himself in the "lake of mystery" which reflects the "mountain of eternity"<sup>91</sup>. Manuel reveals throughout the novel the importance of maintaining the "dream" of the afterlife, to "make them dream they are immortal", even while Manuel himself has rejected the idea; or rather, traded a theology meditating on the afterlife for meditating on death and suffering. It is this focus of going against the grain of what is expected by a priest that he is able to make "victims" of the people in the town and abroad of this "stupendous deception" called immortality.<sup>92</sup> Ultimately Manuel finds his "cross" in distributing to his people "the dream" of faith, consoling himself as he consoles the people<sup>93</sup>. Manuel's final words to Lazaro and Angela, who take Don Manuel to the church for one last sermon as he dies: "Listen: take care of these poor sheep, that they are consoled with life, that they believe what I have not been able to believe. And you Lazaro, when you are about to die, die like me, as our Angela will die, in

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<sup>89</sup> Jurkevich, 138.

<sup>90</sup> Jurkevich, 137.

<sup>91</sup> Nozick, 161. This is noted in light of his image of intrahistoria in *About Tradition* as water.

<sup>92</sup> Butt, 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

the bosom of the Holy Mother Catholic Apostolic Roman church, of the Holy Mother Church of Valverde de Lucerna of course. And until never seeing more, since this dream of life ends...”<sup>94</sup>

Upon Lazaro’s own death, Angela is left to wonder whether these two “holy men” as she describes, had died in the conviction that they had not truly believed, and yet they had believed. Don Manuel had converted Lazaro to learn to live through the reality and struggle with death. Angela’s own conversion through the piety of this so-called nonbelieving priest reveals the depth and truth of his faith. What matters most to Unamuno, it seems, is the “dream-meaning of life” a common theme he shares with the Generation of 1898: that “from memory only the gift of evoking dreams is valid”.<sup>95</sup> Manuel is a final manifestation of the interchangeability of faith, life, doubt and death; much like the flow of the sea, the acts of reconstitution and resurrection involved in the dynamics of hope serve to reconstruct rather than destroy tradition.

As Unamuno states at the end of *Saint Manuel*<sup>96</sup>, this novel is essentially about ‘nothing’; nothing more than the flow of life between belief and doubt, between active participation in life and the need for silence, and the need to express the agony which binds the pieces together. Unamuno’s construction of the sense of the tragic in *Saint Manuel* is a mimic of Don Quixote’s spiritual quest and external sense of commitment, but it is also a supplement and extension to his philosophical investigation of the meaning of faith. At once it is pseudo-autobiographical; at the same time it is a final statement on a major theme in Unamuno’s

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* Chapter 21. <http://www4.gvsu.edu/wrightd/SPA%20307%20Death/SaintManuelBueno.htm>.

<sup>95</sup> “De toda la memoria solo vale/ el don preclaro de evocar los sueños”. From Antonio Machado, “LXII” of *Galleries* (1901). Quotes in *Tragic Sense of Life*, 457. The translation is mine.

<sup>96</sup> “I am well aware that no action takes place in this story that I tell. But I hope it is because everything remains encompassed in it, like the lakes and the mountains, and the blessed simple souls gathered beyond faith and desperation, sheltered in the lakes and the mountains, in a divine novel, beyond the fringes of history.” *OC 2*: 1154.

sense of tragedy: the ambiguity of what death means over and against the meaning of immortality, or “survival”.<sup>97</sup>

### **The Problem of Personality**

The generation which read *Saint Manuel*—once and for all embittered by the intrusion of the Church in political life—read the novel as if it were a final indictment on religion in society, “an indictment not against the tortured priest who embodied a lie out of love for the people, but against the many others who tried to keep the Spanish villages submerged in dark ignorance because it guaranteed the power of their organisation.”<sup>98</sup> In spite of his major works on philosophy and Christianity as well as *Saint Manuel* being banned as reading in the Roman Catholic Church<sup>99</sup>, Unamuno uses as a point of departure for all of his works a pursuit of what are to him principles which are definitively Christian: Immortality, the resurrection, and the personality of God.

In making these principles particularly Christian points of departure, Unamuno seeks a remedy for the “original sin” of assumed Christianity—that is, the presence and power of orthodox Christianity without an investigation through experience of its validity or social relevance. Blanco-Aguinaga calls it the condemnation of the Idea to time, “existence without self-consciousness”.<sup>100</sup> But the central characters in most of Unamuno’s fiction move from this ‘condemnation’ to the deeper conflict; the problem of human continuity in light of survival. “What poisoned them all”, he recalls the characters in the prologue to *Saint Manuel*,

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<sup>97</sup> J. Marias (trans. F. M. Lopez-Morillas 1966), *Miguel de Unamuno*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 139.

<sup>98</sup> A. Barea (1952), *Unamuno*. Cambridge, UK: Bowes and Bowes, 54.

<sup>99</sup> “The Catholic Church recognised from the very beginning the heretical teachings of Unamuno and down to this day has kept on the Index two of the most important books that Unamuno wrote: *del sentimiento tragico de la vida* and *La agonía del cristianismo*.” J R Barcia (1967), *Unamuno: Creator and Creation*. Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 9.

<sup>100</sup> C. Blanco-Aguinaga (1967), “‘Authenticity’ and the Image” in *Unamuno: Creator and Creation*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 52.



“was the awesome problem of personality, if one is, and will continue to be, what one is.”<sup>101</sup> A true exploration of specifically Christian principles is for him liberation from an enforced, uncreative faith. That liberation, however, moves one to encounter the heretofore un-embraced spirit. This “exquisite pain”<sup>102</sup> is what sets one free.

Lacy suggests that Unamuno’s paradoxical and ambiguous aesthetic language—the pursuit to create wonder in faith in the midst of the obsolescence of orthodoxy—shares synergies with the theological development of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In speaking of the conflict in which traditional dogmatic categories have created a preserved dissonance between the Church and society, Bonhoeffer comes to a conclusion—ambiguous in itself—which echoes of Don Manuel:

“In the traditional rite and ceremonies we are groping after something new and revolutionary without being able to understand it or utter it yet. That is our own fault. During these years the Church has fought for self-preservation as though it were an end in itself, and has thereby lost its chance to speak a word of reconciliation to mankind and to the world at large. So our traditional language must perforce remain powerless and remain silent, and our Christianity today will be confined to praying for and doing right by our fellow men.”<sup>103</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The aesthetic religious philosophy of Unamuno is characterised by an active resignation to the quest for spiritual authenticity. The elements of tragedy, death, envy, and doubt in Unamuno’s exploration of identity, faith, and immortality bring him to the conclusion that to be authentically human means facing the “disease” of consciousness and avoiding the evasion of mortality. God is the premise—the working hypothesis—from which the human

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<sup>101</sup> P. Williams (1989), “Beyond Don Quixote: Rethinking the ‘Problem of Personality’ in Light of Changing Gender Roles in Unamuno’s ‘Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr’” in *The Journal of Religion* 69:3, 344.

<sup>102</sup> “Dolor sabroso”, St Theresa, quoted by Nozick, 66.

<sup>103</sup> Lacy, “Introduction”, xxii-xxiii.

contradictions of faith and doubt collide. For Unamuno, Christianity is never based upon the presumptions of 'tradition', but based upon the extent that Christianity can speak and act for the interests of "the man of flesh and bone". The density of Unamuno's theological thought comes from the perspective of an artist whose concern with faith as the centre of his nations' future and the world. Yet, he does not permit one to follow a fixed idea of theology's relation to culture. As Barea notes, "His search, not his results, was supremely important to him...Those problems were his own, but he conceived them also as problems of other Spaniards, of his country as a whole, and of humanity...by following his monologue, or rather his interior duologue turned into written words".<sup>104</sup>

Bonhoeffer, as we have briefly examined, shares similarities with Unamuno in the readjustment of the language of faith. In the next chapter we want to examine the development of his aesthetic language, largely inspired by music, and the implications for the 'tragic' sentiment within what he calls a "worldly Christianity".

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<sup>104</sup> Barea, *Unamuno*, 8.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Bonhoeffer's Theological "Angst"**

..nothing tortures us more than longing...Substitutes repel us... We have to suffer unspeakably from the separation, and feel the longing till it makes us ill. That is the only way, although it is a painful one, in which we can preserve unimpaired our relationship with our loved ones...There is nothing worse in such times than to try to find a substitute for the irreplaceable.<sup>1</sup>

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theological angst is at once a plea for those values of genuine Christian community which are "irreplaceable" and which, not simply survive in a Nazi prison, but in a "world come of age" as he famously retorts. His angst is also an important instrument in understanding how his well-informed interest of aesthetics shapes his journey toward discovering the roots of authentic Christian community. John de Gruchy notes that Bonhoeffer's innumerable references to music in his letters whilst in prison are evidence to the extent music and aesthetic inquiry played in this theological reflection.<sup>2</sup> His theological development early on, as well, is informed by his concern for culture. Trained as a classical pianist, Bonhoeffer's early period was focused on developing a critical approach to theology and philosophical enquiry and, thus concerned about the aesthetic elements of Church community. Bonhoeffer's aesthetic concern for depth and reality in the representation and interpretation of the Christian faith is an important foundation in understanding the nature of Bonhoeffer's theology as a whole.

In his later work his comments on the relation of art to faith and society become distinctive points of departure for his critique of the Church and his conception of the future of the Church. A theology increasingly reinforced by musical metaphor relate to the 'fragmentary' atmosphere of Bonhoeffer's Christianity in a "world come of age". Bonhoeffer's bourgeois upbringing collide with a fixation on death, anxiety, and the role of the prophetic impulse in Christianity. Robin Lovin notes that, more than his Reformed contemporaries, Bonhoeffer

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<sup>1</sup> D.Bonhoeffer (E. Bethge, ed. 1953), *Letters and Papers from Prison*. London; SCM, 84-85. Hereafter *LPP*.

<sup>2</sup> De Gruchy, 145. "Indeed, his theological thought in prison develops in tandem with his reflection on musical concepts."

saw himself theologically and culturally as a child of Inter-war Europe and Weimar Germany, so it was natural for him to see these events as part of the shaping of his life rather than an invasion of the order of life as it may have seemed to Barth or Brunner.<sup>3</sup>

As Bonhoeffer develops a way toward a ‘worldly’ Christianity, he envisions the artistic elements culture and Divine revelation equally liberated from the strictures of the order of society. German Christianity suffered from bourgeois pietism and ultimately a reactionary dogmatism detached from the connections between power, action, and creativity. Christine Schleisser has recently discovered the inconsistencies and ambiguity of Bonhoeffer’s conception of guilt and the influence of the idea of the tragic.<sup>4</sup> In *Ethics* he identifies the essence of Greek Tragedy as bound within a “clash of incompatible laws... by which humans are destroyed”.<sup>5</sup> This incompatibility is a thread which runs throughout his early and later work, born out of his own attempt (as with Unamuno) to develop an alternative to dualism. Yet, in *Ethics* it seems that he becomes torn between the contradictory nature of tragedy and the possibilities of an “untragic unity” as inspired by Luther’s doctrine of ‘Two Kingdoms’.<sup>6</sup> This is a struggle Bonhoeffer tries to overcome by emphasising the relevance of reconciliation and the unity of God with the world.<sup>7</sup>

I seek in this chapter to consider Bonhoeffer’s aesthetic reflection—with respect to visual art, literature and especially music— and the extent to which it tempers his theological and practical expression. I shall explore how a lucid theological landscape and a vision of for an aesthetically imagined ecclesiology is rooted in a theology of ‘the person’. As he comes to consider the idea of the tragic in view of suffering and guilt, Bonhoeffer’s aesthetically expressed theology is complicated. I see similarities between Bonhoeffer and Unamuno

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<sup>3</sup> R. Lovin (1984), *Christian Faith and Public Choices: The Social Teachings of Barth, Brunner, and Bonhoeffer*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 126. W. Floyd (2009), “Introduction” to *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBW)* 2, 7.

<sup>4</sup> C Schleisser, *Everyone who Acts Responsibly Becomes Guilty: The concept of guilt in Dietrich Bonhoeffer*.

<sup>5</sup> *DBW* 6, 264.

<sup>6</sup> C. Schleisser (2006-8), *Everyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty: Bonhoeffer’s concept of accepting guilt*. London; Westminster John Knox Press, 170, 176.

<sup>7</sup> *DBW* 6, 266.

which may be able to link him with a ‘tragic’ theology and help us further develop our thoughts on the theme.

### **The Barriers of the Personal**

Although figures such as Karl Barth factor as an academic influence on Bonhoeffer almost in a sole capacity, it is the burgeoning Personalist interpretations of Christianity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century which anchors his revolt against a dualist universe. *Sanctorum Communio* suggests the substantial relationship to consciousness and community. He insists that the ‘spirit’ of a social structure (i.e. family, university, and nation) is a *sui generis* reality. Individuals do not act without affecting one another. Interactions between people, then, begin to take shape based on the character and behaviours of each.

It is our view that there would be no self-consciousness without community – or better, that self-consciousness arises concurrently with the consciousness of existing in community. Second, we assert that will is by its nature oriented toward other wills...God does not desire a history of individual human beings, but the history of the human community. However, God does not want a community that absorbs the individual into itself, but a community of human beings. In God’s eyes, community and individual exist in the same moment and rest in one another.<sup>8</sup>

This sense of being and becoming, I and Thou rationality, is crucial to what Paul M. Harrison calls the “dramaturgical” effect of religion: the trans-personal play between the public and “primal” selves.<sup>9</sup>

Bonhoeffer critiques the thought of his teacher Max Scheler, whose philosophy of value, to him, is in danger of taking away the value of human beings “as God’s creatures” and thus acknowledging them as a ‘means’ to an end. Double autonomy between the individual person

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<sup>8</sup> DBW 1, 70.

<sup>9</sup> P.M. Harrison (1977), “Toward a Dramaturgical Interpretation of Religion” in *Sociology of Religion* 38:4, 389-390.

and the communal, where the 'saint' has the highest ethical standing in the community. As the Christian 'person' originates in the medium between God and humanity, any idea of ultimate value, "even when it regards the value of the person as highest value, is in danger of taking away the value of persons as such, as God's creatures, and acknowledging them only insofar as the person is the 'bearer' of objective, impersonal value."<sup>10</sup> This very idea feeds into Scheler's idea that values such as 'beauty', 'the good', and 'the holy' possess a unifying power:

...What does Scheler mean by 'unifying'? Evidently he means the possibility of gathering several people around one object at a time...To say that the 'realm of the spirit, or the 'holy', would by nature be more likely than the sensory sphere to provide such a possibility is correct, but devoid of content...The flaw in Scheler's argument lies in the fact that in the idea of the holy [or of the beautiful or the true] is that he proceeds from a metaphysical notion of value that in its absoluteness remains inaccessible to us.<sup>11</sup>

Scheler's personalist idealism presents for Bonhoeffer a "static" picture of humanity where one knows what they ought to do, and with precision. "Where is there room", says Bonhoeffer, "for distress of conscience, for infinite anxiety in the face of decisions?"<sup>12</sup> One enters the realm of the social, says Bonhoeffer, the moment the intellect of the "I" is confronted with a "fundamental barrier". To conceive the barrier is to go beyond it, finding The Other as one who becomes the catalyst for ethical meaning and decision. "...the metaphysical concept of the individual is defined without mediation, whereas the ethical concept of the person is a definition based on ethical-social interaction."<sup>13</sup>

Unity is not the same thing as community or individuality for Bonhoeffer, and he felt that the Christian idea of equality should be understood from a broader perspective; not simply as

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<sup>10</sup> DBW 1, 49.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> DBW 1, 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> DBW 1, 49.

a binding through “affinity of souls”, but through the very real “dissimilarities” between individuals. Conflict of wills is the nature of communication in community<sup>14</sup>; Personality is found within the noticeable boundaries.<sup>15</sup>

It is quite possible, and even necessary, to acknowledge that, from a Christian perspective, there are some who are strong and others who are weak, some who are honourable and others who are dishonourable, some who are from an ethical and religious perspective, exemplary and others who are inferior; and then, of course, there are obvious social dissimilarities. But this insight can exist only within the confines of the very idea of equality before God that is beyond our perception. This equality must now also be realised within the framework of what is possible in principle, in that strength and weakness, honour and disgrace, morality and immorality, piety and impiety exist together and not just in isolation.<sup>16</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s favour of the essence of true spiritual relationship against an idealist relationship is crucial for our discussion on the tragic for several reasons. Bonhoeffer’s pursuit in SC to bring ‘light’ and ‘dark’ into an understanding of the Church community corresponds to Unamuno’s understanding of consciousness as ‘participated knowledge’; this relationship of human beings to each other and to the world is, in itself, the tragic sense of existence in a detached world. On the rejection of an idealist idea of community Unamuno and Bonhoeffer would be in agreement, vying instead for a Christian community in which the ‘primal unity’ of the world is reflected and embodied. Ultimately this is crucial for understanding how his reflections between the ‘ominous’ and the ‘fanciful’ in musical styles—both in the Church and in music—serve to develop a more personalist interpretation of music in the Christian experience.

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<sup>14</sup> *DBW 1*, 80. “The universal conception of God does not think of people as isolated human beings, but in a natural state of communication with other human beings.”

<sup>15</sup> *DBW 1*, 50.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Beyond Bourgeois sensibilities**

Bonhoeffer's initial interest in theology was less motivated by the ethical consequences of discipleship as it was on an "existential concern to meet the scepticism of the 'cultured despisers of Christianity'."<sup>17</sup> Theology was initially a course of exploring epistemological issues than a moral conviction for Bonhoeffer; however his bourgeois upbringing (namely his devout mother<sup>18</sup>) developed in him the Lutheran emphasis on music as second priority to theology, even in music's poetic 'hiddenness' in theology.<sup>19</sup> Here Bonhoeffer suggests Luther's assertion that "spiritual things" gather into the diversity of community.<sup>20</sup> As a result, his writings also reveal an understanding that the crisis of art is intertwined with the crisis of religion.

As an example of Bonhoeffer's disagreement with Scheler's disconnect between value and reality, one notices in *Sanctorum Communio*<sup>21</sup> his early criticisms of neo-classicism which essentially defined the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and was manifested in the work of sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen (1770 – 1844) and the composer Felix Mendelssohn (1809 – 1847), who, whilst a composer of Jewish heritage, gained popularity through a revival of the Baroque tradition and, in a sense provided the 'soundtrack' to Romantic European life and art. These to Bonhoeffer are indicative of the cultivation of 'bourgeois' value in a Christianity which serves a multiplicity of personalities:

One simply has to take a look at the pictures hanging in Christian education facilities and church fellowship halls, or think about the

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<sup>17</sup> M. Rumscheidt (deGruchy ed., 2006), *The Cambridge Companion to Dietrich Bonhoeffer*. Cambridge University Press, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Rumscheidt, 51.

<sup>19</sup> A. Pangritz, "Point and Counterpoint—Resistance and Submission: Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Theology and Music in Times of War and Social Crisis" in Holness and Wustenberg eds.(2002), *Theology in Dialogue: The impact of the arts, humanities and science on Contemporary religious thought*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 28-29.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Hereafter noted as SC.



architecture of churches of recent decades or the church music of Mendelssohn and others—it seems to me to betray a complete ignorance about the essentially social nature of the church. It would be an interesting task for a sociology of the church to undertake a historical examination of what the church produced in the artistic field.<sup>22</sup>

The goal of such an examination in Bonhoeffer's view is with the goal of bringing "the proletariat" into the church, thus ensuring this diversity and tension which cultivates 'The Holy' in Christian community.<sup>23</sup> The artistic expressions of the church in a church-community defined by diversity rather than bourgeois sensibilities will not be best expressed by "Thorwaldsen and Mendelssohn"...but rather Dürer, Rembrandt, and Bach". In Bonhoeffer's assessment of the relation to aesthetics to Christian thought, it is interesting to note his affinity for darker works which present, for him, an expression of 'inner beauty' as well as 'outer beauty'. Although he understands full well that the latter artists as being of bourgeois heritage,<sup>24</sup> he emphasises them for a certain quality of 'dark' and light' which is most representative in their work, and represents more honestly the times in which they lived.

It has been widely asserted in recent scholarship that Bonhoeffer's first encounter with American culture during his time at Union Theological Seminary in 1930-31, and with the African American church particularly, is a significant bridge for the development of the cosmopolitan impetus which came to ground his theology.<sup>25</sup> It was not necessarily in this context only that Bonhoeffer "discovered a theology by way of aesthetics<sup>26</sup>". It is more accurate to say that his immersion in the African American religious experience and American liberal theology 'liberated' him to make connections between what he gained from bourgeois German culture—a love of music and the ability to 'think' reasonably about the

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 273.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, in parentheses ("they too belong to the bourgeoisie").

<sup>25</sup> Clifford Green suggests that "studying the black community and involvement in it was Bonhoeffer's major extracurricular activity in 1930-31." "Editor's Introduction" in *DBW 10*; 28.

<sup>26</sup> S. Holland, "First we take Manhattan, then we take Berlin: Bonhoeffer's New York" in *Cross Currents 50*;3 (2000).

process and product of music and art in particular, but also an understanding of the role cultural inclusivity has in the development of society.<sup>27</sup>

As for Union Theological Seminary, from his letters he seems to have been wary of the pragmatism he found there,<sup>28</sup> and even more unimpressed by systematic theologians and the “frivolous” state of preaching in Euro-American churches. In Reinhold Niebuhr’s course “Ethical Viewpoints in Modern Literature” he was introduced to African American thinkers like WEB DuBois, James Weldon Johnson and the thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance<sup>29</sup>, an artistic and philosophical movement which has its roots in a conception of ‘African American’ personalism. In his notes for the course he seems to have appreciated Johnson’s thoughts on the relation to oppression and laughter, quoting him that “the salvation of the American Negro is the laughter”.<sup>30</sup> Bonhoeffer’s observation can be paralleled with Mary Ellison’s account of the development of slave songs as a subversive artistic expression: “Acceptance of oppression was never a state of mind that the majority of slaves subscribed to. Even during those constraining years of slavery, black people retained their sense of independence and individuality, and refused to be mere property.”<sup>31</sup> It is in this act of rebellious inner “refusal” that the comic and the tragic of African American experience converge. On the whole Bonhoeffer engages the conflict within African American literature of the double-consciousness of being human—a being with thoughts, feelings and a desire to be recognised in the wider community community— and ‘black’—being part of a “suppressed and offended race.”<sup>32</sup>

It is obvious that Bonhoeffer’s engagement with African American culture was not simply cursory, but it served as a space where he could engage honestly with “the climate of human

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<sup>27</sup> Though much has been made of his criticisms of ‘liberal Christianity’, in a prison letter (3 August 1944) he asserted that he “still carries within himself the heritage of liberal theology.” *LPP*, 378.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>29</sup> Holland.

<sup>30</sup> *DBW 10*, 421-422.

<sup>31</sup> M. Ellison (1989), *Lyrical Protest: Black Music’s Struggle against Discrimination*. New York: Praeger, 21.

<sup>32</sup> *DBW 10*, 422. He no doubt had read in this course DuBois’ seminal work the *Souls of Black Folk* (1903).

relations”<sup>33</sup> in America as well as the relation of culture to word. Whilst he could find no great cloud of witnesses within the Euro American Christian community,<sup>34</sup> in spaces like the Abyssinian Baptist Church, where he taught bible study, he received an introduction to the Social Gospel both within the ‘liberal’ American theological context and the marginalised African American context.<sup>35</sup> Through the sermons of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., Bonhoeffer acquired a language which would best suit what he would later call ‘worldly Christianity.’<sup>36</sup> Powell’s culturally engaged sermons blended the artful rhetoric and congregational, non-creedal style of the black Baptist church with the best of American social pragmatism.

Not only did Bonhoeffer experience the ‘poetry’ and sense of suffering inherent in African American music and proclamation, but he was also able to preach at least once within this climate. As a reminiscence by Rudolf Schade explains:

One Monday morning Bonhoeffer called him out of the library so that “he could share the previous day’s experience with him...Bonhoeffer conveyed the thrill and joy of having had members of the congregation respond to his message. They expressed their support and agreement with his points by punctuating his sermon with ‘Amens’ and ‘Hallelujahs.’<sup>37</sup>

It is inconceivable to think that Bonhoeffer’s encounters with the African American religious community ended within the walls of the church. The area surrounding Abyssinian Baptist Church was a window into the cultural and spiritual experience of a repressed racial minority. Through an African American colleague at Union Theological Seminary named

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<sup>33</sup> Roberts, *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power*. Louisville; Westminster John Knox, 46.

<sup>34</sup> “I have rarely had this much trouble getting into the Christmas spirit....then there is the situation of the church here, which, without suspecting it, is now only smiling in desperation. The almost frivolous attitude here is unprecedented, and my hope of finding *a cloud of witnesses* [Hebrews 12:1] fulfilled here has been bitterly disappointed.” *DBW 10*, 261.

<sup>35</sup> Holland. “First we take Manhattan”.

<sup>36</sup> It is now agreed that phrases such as the problem of “cheap grace” in the bourgeois American church, doing ministry in a “world come of age”, and even the usage of musical metaphors was characteristic of Powell’s preaching. Holland, *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> C. Green, “Editors Introduction” to *DBW 10*: P. 31-32.

Frank Fisher<sup>38</sup> that he first came into contact with Abyssinian. Bonhoeffer was so inspired by the music there that he took back to Germany recordings of spirituals and piano arrangements by James Weldon Johnson, given to him by Fisher.<sup>39</sup>

His attraction to the spirituals was not cursory, either; Bonhoeffer felt it expressed something of the worldliness within religious experience. As another Harlem Renaissance philosopher he came across—Alain Locke—assessed years later the ‘sorrow songs’, behind the “broken language, childish imagery, and peasant simplicity was an epic intensity and a tragic depth of religious emotion for which the only equal seems to have been the spiritual experience of the Jews, and for which the only analogue is the Psalms.”<sup>40</sup> To use an adage within the African American church relating to the spirituals, and as Bonhoeffer would have acutely observed, the spirituals are unrepentantly ‘bad grammar’, but behind the poetry is ‘good grace’.

J. Deotis Roberts asserts that, with Fisher as a partner, Bonhoeffer experienced the sacred and secular aspects of life in Harlem.<sup>41</sup> At Union he experienced the literary and philosophical edge of the Harlem Renaissance; by night he experienced the culture of the Harlem Renaissance. Bonhoeffer began to learn jazz improvisation and the pathos of the blues.<sup>42</sup> Then there was the night life: the dancing, heavy drinking and smoking, definitely prostitution or consumption of illegal substances, and a form of making music he might have only experienced if the classically-trained pianist-turned-pastor had ever visited any of Berlin’s burgeoning cabaret clubs in the 1920’s. But he also saw a type of community one would not have seen outside the walls of the Cotton Club: whites and blacks found together in the same place dancing. In the United States, where racial segregation was a tradition

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29. Years later, teaching in exile for the Confessing Church, he would play the spirituals to the seminarians.

<sup>40</sup> A. Locke (1936), *The Negro and his Music*. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat, 12.

<sup>41</sup> J.D. Roberts (2005), *Bonhoeffer and King: Speaking Truth to Power*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 47.

<sup>42</sup> Roberts, 46.

within and outside the Church,<sup>43</sup> the sacred and the profane mingled reflexively. In the thought of Locke and duBois, it was the intensity of consciousness which signalled the genius of ‘organic’ jazz and blues (as opposed to the commercialisation of jazz which cheapened its effects).<sup>44</sup> It was where religiously devout musicians like Duke Ellington could, almost in the same breath, make a musical commentary on the ominous quality of love found in the blues, the “lust” of love in ballads, and the “divinity” of love in what came to be called his “Sacred Music”.

Holland suggests that Bonhoeffer was able to take away a mode of spiritual development that could serve as an alternative to the *Gefühl* (religious feeling) which characterised pietistic German Christianity.<sup>45</sup> An increasing number of scholars suggest that it is in this environment that Bonhoeffer found a potent manifestation of a community formed and framed “from below”, an essential expression of the “community of saints”.<sup>46</sup> Living in New York during the German church’s reassessment of Luther<sup>47</sup>, the “Protestantism without Reformation” which he admired in the social witness and culture of African Americans no doubt became a sign of the worldly Christianity he saw as rooted in the “this worldliness” of Luther’s faith.

Bonhoeffer was often warned against being too ‘adventurous’ with his theological discovery in America by those close to him at home—namely his father Karl-Fredrich and Karl Barth. Barth’s displeasure of Gandhi’s distinctive religious difference resulted in Bonhoeffer cancelling an otherwise-desired trip to study non-violent resistance in India in the 1930’s—he also missed what might have been a life-altering trip to New Orleans, the

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<sup>43</sup> A familiar quote by American theologian Benjamin Elijah Mayes from the 1940’s characterises this reality: “11 o’clock Sunday morning is the most segregated hour in America”.

<sup>44</sup> P.A. Anderson (2001), *Deep River: Music and memory in Harlem renaissance thought*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 161-165.

<sup>45</sup> Holland, *Ibid*.

<sup>46</sup> Bonhoeffer (edited and translated by C. Nesson and R. Wind), *Who is Christ for Us?* Minneapolis; Fortress Press (2002), 7-8.

<sup>47</sup> P. Frick (ed. 2008), *Bonhoeffer’s intellectual formation: theology and philosophy in his thought*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 54.

undisputed birthplace of jazz.<sup>48</sup> Before Harlem, Bonhoeffer may or may not have ever heard jazz in Germany, for there it was early on associated with “nigger culture”, a culture in no association with what was classified reactionary German conservatism as ‘High German art’. In spite of this label, composers like Kurt Weill had popularised jazz consciousness in the waning days of the Weimar Republic, syncretising it with the opera, lieder and orchestral traditions with which Germans were most familiar. Jazz was also linked with the liberalising politics of Weimar and other Jewish composers like Arnold Schoenberg, Paul Hindemith, and Ernst Krenek, who advocated a post-war internationalism.<sup>49</sup> It was because of these associations that jazz music and that of all the others was promptly banned when the Nazis came to power.<sup>50</sup> Whether he had ever experienced the Weimar-era jazz scene or not, these were Bonhoeffer’s first experiences of organic jazz where it initially was popularised. He was very taken by jazz—and her ‘mother’, the Spirituals of the African American Church.

My exploration into Bonhoeffer’s interest in jazz is a further development on the tendency in Bonhoeffer’s thought toward art which speaks honestly to the boundaries between light and dark, beyond the essence of simply giving comfort. In learning jazz improvisation Bonhoeffer could have discovered not only the relationship between black music and European music, but also the sense in which music—like Christian discourse in a world come of age—is an unfinished or fragmentary experience, dependent on what the pianist Bill Evans called a “introspective” perspective of performance rather than blueprint model.<sup>51</sup> Being free from a prospective way of creativity is not liberating when one has nothing to say—musically or theologically—and especially when one has not mastered the foundations of the instrument or the language. Music created spontaneously in this context runs the risk of losing relevance, not being musical at all no matter how tonal and in tune it may be. As we move into

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<sup>48</sup> Holland, *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> E. Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*. London; Macmillan Press (1994), 3-8.

<sup>50</sup> M. H. Kater makes the point that the racism which fuelled the Nazi regime was born not only of the classical tradition of Anti-Semitism in Western Europe, but also of the equally classic Negrophobia. Both are seen as a consequence of Hegelian interpretation of Race as ‘nation’. Kater (1995), *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany*. Oxford University Press, 20-25. S. Bonetto (2006), “Race and Racism in Hegel—An Analysis”, *Minerva* 10, 35-64.

<sup>51</sup> Gridley (1991), *Jazz Styles*. Edgewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 302-303.

Bonhoeffer's larger world of aesthetic inspiration, the conflict between light and dark, foundational and fragmentary will be emphasised.

### **Revolt from Neo-classicism**

His particular appreciation for jazz taken for granted, Bonhoeffer in contrast had harsh sentiments for the nineteenth century Neo-classicism which for the most part served as the inspiration of the conservatism of imperial and fascist Europe. As we have already mentioned, as early as SC he possessed an aversion to neo-classicism as an intrinsic part of the worship culture in German churches. For him these expressions of a purism and, as he would call it later, a “noble simplicity”<sup>52</sup>, took away from the real social situation of the church: it maintained the status of the church as the spiritual community of the bourgeoisie. Yet he often possesses a contradictory sentiment between music which is meant for human expression and the worship of God.

As pastor of the German-speaking church in London, he introduced that congregation to the Hymnal for German parishes abroad<sup>53</sup>, a hymnal noted for its variety of sources, not just in German hymnody but also the continental Reformed tradition and divergent theological sentiments.<sup>54</sup> In the dedication sermon for the hymnals on Cantate Sunday, 1934<sup>55</sup> Bonhoeffer focused on the diversity of expression in German church music. One can presume that he is very aware by this time of how central a place music is in shaping the culture of the Third Reich, and He begins by painting a picture of one's first experience of music in some Reformed churches, with the centre piece being the “thunderous sound of the organ” and the contradicting element in sacred music. It is an experience of “turmoil” which inspires within the listening feelings of awe, fear and an inward drawing into the sacred space, the presence of God.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> DBW 8; 295.

<sup>53</sup> *Gesangbuch für die deutschen Auslandsgemeinden*.

<sup>54</sup> DBW 13; 303.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 29 April 1934.

<sup>56</sup> DBW 13, 305

Bonhoeffer contrasts this turmoil with the experience of people in other Reformed traditions which do not utilise music in the church as it may take precedence over the Word. The first experience of organ music can cause, even in them “a quiet anxiety and horror”.<sup>57</sup> In this sermon he seems to be warning against music as being utilised for its “outward beauty at the expense of true ‘inner beauty’”.<sup>58</sup> Bonhoeffer’s query is whether music divorced from The sacrament of Word (theological language) and ethical context can truly speak to human experience.

Another contrast Bonhoeffer makes is on music which expresses the contradictory sufferings and loves of humanity and nature, against music which specifically expresses the depth and worshipfulness of God, in God’s own pain and suffering. “How near is it to blasphemy”, he says, “to take the man in a carpenter’s smock, with his plain, clear, simple, functional words, and celebrate him with such a rich and splendid human work of art that it makes us forget the poverty and humility of Jesus Christ.”<sup>59</sup> Here again, he lifts up the influence of neo-classicism in church aesthetic culture, with an emphasis on beauty rather than on the depth found in real spiritual experience.

As far as expressing the “beauty” in sacred music, whatever adornment expresses itself in the aesthetic experience of worship comes out of the creation of something that will allow the Word of God’s “own beauty [to] shine even more gloriously”.<sup>60</sup> The aim of music for worship, so Bonhoeffer intimates Luther,<sup>61</sup> is not to mimic nature solely but to express without “ornamentation”, or artifice, the relationship between suffering humanity and a suffering God. He likens the authentic relationship between the Word of God and humanity as a relationship between a harpist and harp strings:

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<sup>57</sup> DBW 13, 354.

<sup>58</sup> De Gruchy, 138-9.

<sup>59</sup> DBW 13, 354

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>61</sup> It was Luther who described music as equal in importance to theology; like theology, music produces “a calm and joyful disposition”, which the devil flees from as the devil flees from the word of God. DBW 13; n13, 356.



...the human soul is a harp and the word of God, as it touches the soul, is the harpist. It is the purity of the harp strings and the extent to which they are well tuned that makes the melody sound pure and clear as it comes forth from the soul in praise of the harpist. And how often the strings are out of tune, how often they produce discord, how often what comes out of our mouths sounds as though all the strings are broken, and only a wild, wailing, tormented, discordant screech comes from our lips. Certainly it can also happen that a storm sweeps across the strings and makes them sound—a storm of passion, of rebellion or outrage against one’s fate, or perhaps a quiet moaning and crying—and then the song, the music that is heard is rather a glorification of ourselves, our passions, our love, our hate, our despair, our grief, our sense of power.<sup>62</sup>

Bonhoeffer takes notice of the strong “contrast” between God and the human condition reflected in Reformation-era hymns versus the emphasis in pietist (pre-enlightenment era) hymns which he saw as equivalent to neo classicism in its individualism and in its stirring of artificial feeling.<sup>63</sup> Music in which the focus is on “the glory, power, love and grace of God” rather than the greatness of human beings cultivates and uncovers the depth in one’s relationship with God.<sup>64</sup> He closes by reflecting on the meaning of singing a “new” song unto the Lord. It is the sound which awakens one into the presence of God, and suggests that this is best experienced “in the night of our lives, of our suffering and our fear, in the night of our death.”<sup>65</sup> The “new song” in Bonhoeffer’s mind is “the purest, sweetest, hardest, and most violent of all songs” perhaps because it calls one not simply to look upon one’s humanity but also upon one’s relationship, conflicting as it is, with God.

In his assessment of composers, Bonhoeffer reveals one inconsistency. In speaking of the difference between God (“the harpist”) as the centre of music against “human-centred”

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<sup>62</sup> DBW 13, 356.

<sup>63</sup> DBW 13, 356-7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> DBW 13, 357.

music, he points to Bach's signatures at the end of his music (solī deo Gloria-To the glory of God alone or Jesu juva-help us, Jesus), whereas the music of Beethoven "seems to be nothing but the eternal expression of human suffering and passion."<sup>66</sup> This is why Tolstoy felt that Beethoven should not be heard by "good people" as it would inflame their passions.<sup>67</sup> We have already seen that he just as well leaves room for criticism of Bach as he does to praise his work. With Beethoven it is no different; in prison (27 March 1944) he reminisces on listening to Beethoven's C minor Piano Sonata, stating that he is coming toward an "existential appreciation" for his music. Exactly a year in prison now,<sup>68</sup> Bonhoeffer speaks of the art of listening inwardly to music: "When one listens with the inner ear alone and gives oneself up to it utterly, [music] can be almost more beautiful than when heard physically. It's purer, all the dross falls away, and it seems to take on a 'new body'."<sup>69</sup>

In *Ethics* Bonhoeffer describes the relation of the world to Christ within four fundamental "mandates: labour, marriage, government, and the church."<sup>70</sup> In *Letters and Papers from Prison* he considers the misplacement of art in the fundamental "mandates" of German life (marriage, labour, state and church). He suggests that *bildung* (culture, education) is a broad category, much maligned as an area of labour, nevertheless crucial as it is subsumed within culture, education, even religious life. He suggests that the church should be included in this area of *spielraum*, as in, 'room or space to play', but just as easily can be translated as 'freedom' or even 'margin'. He also criticises the notion of art in the Third Reich as relegated to "a museum piece", and asserts that cultural and intellectual life (*geistige existenz*) has become a "torso"<sup>71</sup>, an incomplete body thus misplaced by the dominant society. As an aspect of the sphere of free play, surrounding the ethical sphere, culture and education gains a new freedom with respect to the Word.

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> As father Karl-Friedrich mentions in his letter to Dietrich on 26 March 1944. *DBW* 8; 333.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>70</sup> *DBW* 6;

<sup>71</sup> De Gruchy, *Ibid.*, 140.

## **Fragmentariness**

In prison, Bonhoeffer adapts what Pangritz calls a “new theological status of music”<sup>72</sup> through an examination of these mandates and particularly through the fragmentariness of music. Biblically speaking, for Bonhoeffer music has been a product of Cain’s impetus toward labour and civilisation.<sup>73</sup> The city, as a microcosm of “the city of God”, needed music in order to see God. For Bonhoeffer this perspective disregards the imperfection of the human condition,<sup>74</sup> and music so taken as only serving the word of God. Bonhoeffer, however, conceives music within the notion of “free play”: not art asserting an ethical standpoint but rather “surrounding” the ethical sphere.<sup>75</sup> Music, then achieves freedom by its foundation within the revealed divine Word. The integrated work of labour, however, is imperfect for the crisis it presents, namely that it is “the race of Cain that is to fulfil this mandate, and that is what casts the darkest shadow over all human labour.”

Bonhoeffer sees the incompleteness of Bach’s *The Art of Fugue* – a work begun both at the end of Bach’s life (and left hauntingly unfinished) and within the context of severe crisis in the culture of the Reformed Germany — in parallel to Germany’s current situation and future: “The longer we are uprooted from our professional activities and our private lives, the more we feel how fragmentary our lives are, compared with those of our parents.”<sup>76</sup> Bonhoeffer laments that, because of the disappearance of intellectual depth in education, “our cultural life remains a torso. The important thing today is that we should be able to discern

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<sup>72</sup> Holness and Wurstenberg, 36.

<sup>73</sup> “The mandate of labour confronts us, according to the Bible, already with the first man. Adam is “to dress and to keep” the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:15). Even after the Fall labour remains a mandate of divine discipline and grace (Gen 3:17-19). The labour which is instituted in Paradise is a participation by man in the action of creation.... From the labour which man performs here in fulfillment of the divinely imposed task there arises that likeness of the celestial world by which the man who recognizes Jesus Christ is reminded of the lost Paradise. The first creation of Cain was the city, the earthly counterpart of the eternal city of God. There follows the invention of fiddles and flutes, which afford to us on earth a foretaste of the music of heaven....Through the divine mandate of labour there is to come into being a world which, knowingly or not, is waiting for Christ, is designed for Christ, is open to Christ, serves Him and glorifies Him.” *DBW* 6, 70-71.

<sup>74</sup> “...it is the race of Cain that is to fulfill this mandate, and that is what casts the darkest shadow over all human labour.” *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Holness and Wurstenberg, 36.

<sup>76</sup> *LPP*, 71.

from the fragment of our life how the whole was arranged and planned, and what material it consists of.”<sup>77</sup>

In speaking of fragmentariness Bonhoeffer is not referring to the fragment as a genre, praised by some romantic theories of art in contrast to the classical idea of perfection. He speaks of the lives of a generation which have, by the pressure of outward events, been “split...into fragments, like bombs falling on houses.” Following the reflection on *The Art of Fugue* he recalls Jeremiah 45, noticing its fragmentary quality: “Here, too, is a necessary fragment of life—‘but I will give you your life as a prize of war’.

According to Holness and Wurstenberg, Adorno regards Bach’s attention to memory, crucial to understanding and performing any of Bach’s fugues, as an act of resistance to the rising commercial subjectivism which were threatening the arts in Prussia.<sup>78</sup> So the *Art of Fugue* in particular represents not only Bach’s reflections on the end of life, but a final social statement to the convention of the time, a *piece de resistance* in its fragmentariness; against the growing capitalist forces in musical culture. Historically and theologically, then, Bonhoeffer finds relevance in the comparison between the situation of his generation and the fragmentariness of *The Art of Fugue*. Bonhoeffer notices what Adorno would assess later,<sup>79</sup> that in fragmentariness new meaning forms:

If our life is but the remotest reflection of such a fragment, if we accumulate, at least for a short time, a wealth of themes and weld them into a harmony in which the great counterpoint is maintained from start to finish, so that at last, when it breaks off abruptly, we can sing no more than the chorale, ‘I come before thy throne’, we will not bemoan the fragmentariness of our lives, but rather rejoice in it.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Holness and Wurstenberg, 38.

<sup>79</sup> “in the present situation every important product in art and philosophy was condemned to fragmentariness” quoted in Pangritz, *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> DBW 8

After becoming acquainted with the Prussian composer Heinrich Schutz through his friend Eberhard Bethge,<sup>81</sup> he reflects substantially in his prison letters on Schutz's *Kleine Geistliche Konzerte* (Little Sacred Concertos). Schutz had composed his settings of the Psalms during the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), which proved devastating for Germany's cultural life<sup>82</sup> as many artists fought and were killed during this long conflict with the Holy Roman Empire. Schutz's desire for producing large-scale works was cut short because of the lack of musicians around. Schutz seems to be the musician of a cultural dark age in the German states of the seventeenth century, all the more so adamant on bringing to light the *musica poetica* of the Psalms; that is, through the intense relationship between word and 'notation'.

The relevance of Schutz's music for Bonhoeffer's context was not lost on him at all, and one can assess that the music forged not only a bridge between Word and music/art which Bonhoeffer has alluded to in, say, his Cantate Sunday sermon of 1934, but also a sense of the inner and outer trauma of human experience, a mourning for those who have suffered, mourning for the sufferer, and mourning for that which brings vitality but which suffers with the artist. In the case of Bonhoeffer, that source of vitality is art as well as the Church. As Pangritz suggests,<sup>83</sup> and Bonhoeffer intimates,<sup>84</sup> the memory of the Schutz's settings retain a prominent place in his 'inner ear':

In the setting of Psalm 3 the line "I laid me down and slept," descending to the extreme depth and contrasted by rapidly ascending melodic leaps on "I awakened"; in the same setting the fiercely dentated melodic figure on "thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly"...Bonhoeffer cites [in Augustine's hymn "O sweet, o kindly, o good Lord Jesus"] the ascending melodic figure of seven notes on occasion of the exclamation "o," languishing for union with Christ, in the line "o how my soul longs for you"...the language of the

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<sup>81</sup> *DBW* 16, 139-40.

<sup>82</sup> See quotes from Schutz on the devastating effect the Thirty Years' War had on the "liberal arts" in A. Pangritz, 30-31

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>84</sup> *DBW* 8; 81.

hymn is coloured by erotic associations, when it continues, “My helper, you have ensnared my heart/ With your love/ That I yearn for you without end...”<sup>85</sup>

It is Schutz’s music which shows Bonhoeffer’s devotion to the music of the late Middle Ages. Unlike the “worldliness” of the Renaissance or of the Enlightenment, the worldliness of the Middle Ages was thoroughly Christian. Thus this worldliness was biblical because it did not separate human nature into inner and outer spheres, but sought to understand human life for its wholeness. It is here, before the Renaissance retrieved classical values, “the fundamental concepts of humanism—humanity, tolerance, gentleness, and moderation” were present and more accessible. This was important for Bonhoeffer because, as he states, he wanted to “start from the premise that God shouldn’t be smuggled into some last secret place, but that we should frankly recognise that the world, and people, have come of age, that we shouldn’t run man down in his worldliness, but confront him with God at his strongest point.”<sup>86</sup> That is why Bonhoeffer questions whether the classics provide the only foundation for education. A “mature worldliness,” requires much more than an elitist retrieval of classical antiquity; it requires both a return to the biblical understanding of human wholeness and a much broader perspective of the world that comes through an appreciation of diversity.

### **Polyphony and Discipleship**

Though he mentions it on a few sparse occasions in his prison writings, Bonhoeffer’s conception of “polyphony of life” is greatly representative of the impact of music on his theology and the deep expression of diversity and community which he seeks to manifest; not merely the aesthetic experience of music or for the general enrichment of human experience. By the time he is in prison, although he admits he has never really distanced himself from all of the liberal fragments which gave him a foundation, he has effectively distanced himself from the bourgeois social order. By “polyphony of life” he recognises that the practice and process of music-making are directly related to the Christian imperative of discipleship to which he has referred since SC. The multidimensional Christian community in the world, a spiritual community shaped and transformed by the primal boundaries individuals share calls

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<sup>85</sup> Pangritz, 32-33.

<sup>86</sup> *DBW 8 (LPP)*.

the church, as Bonhoeffer states, to “make room in ourselves, to some extent, for God and the whole world”.<sup>87</sup> The practice of repentance serves to create within us a more “wholly present” life in the reality that we experience this life in fragments. Within the “fragmentariness” of our lives, the being present in the human struggle between “the beauty and troubles of the world and the “fragmentary and incomplete nature” of our existence in it, God is weaving the “mosaic” of a new human community.”<sup>88</sup>

I think that there is a relation between the tragic chorus and Bonhoeffer’s ecclesiology in a way which gives a broader understanding to his understanding of worldly discipleship as a life of polyphonic interaction. A polyphonic Christian community shares similarities with the classic idea of the “tragic chorus” in that the Christian community, performing the faith in witness, worship and struggle in the world are not mere citizen-spectators; the tragic chorus are characterised as people who are able to discern the tragic reality of the situation at hand, providing a warning and alternative to the world of the tragic hero. As Bushnell states, the chorus is “socially and ritually rooted in the spatio-temporal context of dramatic action...geographically and culturally decentred” for the sake of giving meaning to an action.<sup>89</sup>

The activity of Christ within the Church community is embodied by that community’s participation in the awareness of suffering through the being of Jesus.<sup>90</sup> Mature this-worldliness for Bonhoeffer means “living unreservedly in life’s duties, problems, successes and failures, experiences and perplexities.”<sup>91</sup> This-worldliness calls for the acceptance of the provisional—rather than static—quality of all human creations and institutions.

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<sup>87</sup> *LPP*, 310.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> C. Calame, “The Tragic Choral Group: Dramatic Roles and Social Functions” in R Bushnell (ed., 2005), *A Companion to Tragedy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 229-230.

<sup>90</sup> R. K Wurstenberg (2008), *Bonhoeffer and Beyond: Promoting a Dialogue between Religion and Politics*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 17.

<sup>91</sup> *LPP*, 202.

Bonhoeffer's movement away from Christianity as a system leads him into the paradox of multiplicity and stability. He asks how we can move beyond compartmentalization—“[reserving] some space for God”<sup>92</sup>—with its rigid order and beyond a boundless fragmentation that has no order. As the metaphor of polyphony suggests, a polyphonic understanding of the meaning of Christianity allows one to work at the intersection of situations and structures:

I wonder whether it is possible (it almost seems so today) to regain the idea of the church as providing an understanding of the area of freedom (art, education, freedom, play), so that Kierkegaard's 'aesthetic existence' would not be banished from the church's sphere, but would be re-established in it. I really think that it is so, and it would mean that we should recover a link with the Middle Ages.<sup>93</sup>

Here, he envisions a cultural dynamic where all above 'areas' of freedom and free-thinking are complementary and engaging with one another, and where the delusion of romanticism—that aesthetic pleasure alone can “heal the brokenness of our lives”<sup>94</sup>—is countered by a creative imagination which comes to terms with “ethics, guilt, suffering” and the transience of time.<sup>95</sup> Bonhoeffer wants to step out of the ethical binary of right and wrong and into a kind of thinking that embraces the ambiguity of engaging in community. The relation of ones love for God and the diversity of loves that shapes the rest of human life.<sup>96</sup>

It is a life of 'worldliness' – not the worldliness of the secularist, denying God, nor the worldliness of a certain kind of aesthete, fleeing responsibility,

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<sup>92</sup> *LPP*, 282.

<sup>93</sup> *LPP*, 59.

<sup>94</sup> J. Begbie (2006), *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the world of music*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 158.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “What I mean is that God wants us to love him eternally with our whole hearts-not in such a way as to injure or weaken our earthly love, but to provide a kind of cantus firmus to which the other melodies of life provide the counterpoint. One of these contrapuntal themes (which have their own complete independence but are yet related to the cantus firmus) is earthly affection.” *LPP* (20 May 1944), 150.



but a fully down-to-earth kind of Christian life that can include free, ‘aesthetic existence’ (friendship, art, etc.) while also being ethically alert and responsible.”<sup>97</sup>

In all of the musical images Bonhoeffer encounters—from learning jazz improvisation in Harlem to his reflection on Bach and Schutz—he seems to be searching for the impact of polyphonic devices on the music and on how it places into perspective for Bonhoeffer his situation. It is polyphony after all, not structure, which makes the music potent enough to be explored and improvised beyond monophonic chant. As Pembroke asserts, a pastoral perspective based on polyphony challenges a dualist way of theological reflection because it embraces the complexities of space and distance.<sup>98</sup> To Bonhoeffer, this polyphonic idea serves as an alternative to the idea of the fixed structures of established Christianity. He does not negate the utility of an ecclesiastical *cantus firmus*—a set melody and therefore set dogma and tradition. Yet melody is what is called for in order to keep the music truly expansive. A Church with a healthy and melodious *cantus firmus* retains an interest in her “melody”, yet expansive enough to create space for other innovations in the collective voice.

Discipleship then becomes an exploration in foundation and instrument, substance and form. By moving away from Christianity solely as a “formula for negotiating life”<sup>99</sup> without thought and for addressing the world around us, he deliberately suggests the inevitability of conflict with one’s interpretation and practice of the set melody.

### **Tragedy and prophetic pathos**

Bonhoeffer’s discussion of Greek Tragedy in *Ethics* is crucial because it is in *Ethics* that one finds the heart of Bonhoeffer’s deliberations concerning guilt. It is here that he coins an idea that has been at the heart of his writings all along, namely “acceptance of guilt” and the problem of knowing about the righteousness of one’s actions. Even in his discussion of tragedy here, he seems to be conflicted about the essence of it. Bonhoeffer finds the essence

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<sup>97</sup> Begbie, 161.

<sup>98</sup> Pembroke, N. (2004) “Trinity, polyphony and pastoral relationships” in *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 58: 4, 351-362.

<sup>99</sup> C.M. Jones (September, 1995), “Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s Letters and Papers from Prison: Rethinking the Relationship of Theology and Arts, Literature and Religion” in *Literature and Theology* 9: 3, 243-259.

of tragedy in unity of irreconcilably contradictory laws; Christian life, however, is characterised by a unity “which is not tragic at all.” Because of the reconciliation of the world with God in Christ, reconciled life is not marked by the inescapability of guilt but by simplicity, for Christ alone makes possible human action that does not lose itself in endless irreconcilable conflicts of principles.

One wonders if Bonhoeffer really means what he says, for whilst speaking of a transcendence of tragedy through Christ, Bonhoeffer also describes the situation of the *Grenzfall*. He refers to the possibility of a conflict between the observance of the formal law of a state or any other thing and the inevitable necessities of human life. Here, Bonhoeffer states, one becomes inevitably guilty—either by acting against a formal law or by not acting in free responsibility—and in either case one can rely on God’s grace and forgiveness. The implications for accepting guilt seem obvious; however, whilst his critique of Greek Tragedy can be based on Bonhoeffer’s analysis of the Third Reich’s strong Hellenist influence, he does step over this aversion in some places. For instance, his section on freedom argues that responsible action “must decide not simply between right and wrong, good and evil, but between right and right, wrong and wrong.” This renders the choice of irreconcilable alternatives in the sense of Greek Tragedy not only a tangible possibility but even an inevitability.<sup>100</sup>

The most significant clue Bonhoeffer gives us that he does not completely dismiss the sense of the tragic in a church community wrestling with a “world come of age” is his earlier perspectives on the Hebrew prophetic phenomenon.<sup>101</sup> His 1936 lecture entitled “The Tragedy of the Prophetic and Its Lasting Meaning” is the first of three 1928 lectures during his associate pastorate in Barcelona. With the title of the series being “Crisis and Hope in the Contemporary Situation”,<sup>102</sup> this first lecture focuses on the “profoundly contemporary” implications of the poetry and charisma of Hebrew prophetism. He begins by addressing the

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<sup>100</sup> Schleisser, 177.

<sup>101</sup> C. Green indicates Bonhoeffer’s usage of the German term ‘Prophetentum’ translates to mean “the office or phenomenon of prophethood. *DBW 10*; 325.

<sup>102</sup> The other two being “Jesus Christ and the essence of Christianity” and “Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic”.

crisis of identity—even in 1928—within global society. It must be noted at first glance that the crisis he describes is not specifically a “German crisis”, but rather one which is best expressed from a more cosmopolitan perspective. The centre of the crisis as he sees it is, once again the “bourgeois parquet floor” which has been pulled out, leaving more questions and fewer answers.

Who among us dares to answer unequivocally the question about the meaning of Europe’s contemporary fate? Or who can claim to have found the right path, the one and only appropriate path? Who dares to make blanket judgements about the burning problems of ethics, the question of the right to wage war, the problem of economic competition, concerning the new social order, the education of the new generation, or the mysteries of sexuality?<sup>103</sup>

It is for a congregation of ex-patriots—not theology students but many young Germans—Bonhoeffer in passionately simple language suggests that in order to retrieve a sense of “traces of God”<sup>104</sup> a recovery of the “mood” of the Hebrew prophets and the parallels between biblical history and the present.

The “convulsive moment” where someone who has “wrestled with God and with their own age” becomes taken over by the calling of God “and now cannot help but go out among the people and proclaim God’s will” is the genesis of the prophetic phenomenon. This is the tragedy of course: Bonhoeffer consistently refers to the sense of the “terror” in the life of the prophet, the poetry born out of the reality that speaking the Word of God to one’s own time may lead “to his own undoing or ultimately to his own death.” After reciting Amos 3: 4—8, Bonhoeffer commentates in a way that resembles one of his sermons:

Amos lay out in the distant steppe; he had heard of the wickedness and injustice of life in the city. The one day, as he looked out across the infinite steppe in the searing midday sun, God Yahweh frightened him in a vision. He saw a terrifying, threatening cloud coming, and when it was

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<sup>103</sup> DBW 10., 326-7.

<sup>104</sup> DBW 10, 327.

close to him he saw that it was a cloud of locusts descending upon the fields and decimating them. Amos fell to the ground and cried out, O Lord our God, forgive, I beg you! How can Israel stand? He is so small!” Twice more Amos is startled by visions. In one, he sees a man striding with a shower of fire amid lush grain fields, and again Amos falls down with the cry, “O Lord God...” in the next vision, he sees a man with a plumbline standing on a fallen wall and measuring the uneven places; Amos hears Yahweh say that just as he has destroyed this fallen wall, so also will he destroy the people of Israel. This is Amos’s calling. He rushes away toward the city, where he emerges as a prophet of Yahweh; and he proves himself to be a genuine prophet—this is an important point—by delivering a message of disaster, misfortune, and judgement.<sup>105</sup>

With Amos as well as Isaiah and Jeremiah he describes the duty of the prophet to embody Divine pathos<sup>106</sup> not simply for God’s sake, but for the people’s. After all, prophets are both “the most ardent patriots imaginable—and yet know that he is speaking to deaf ears; indeed, even worse, his own prophesy will increasingly provoke the evil itself, make it even more evident, and in so doing bring the day of judgement ever closer. Hence the prophetic calling itself already spins the thread to its end and clearly determines his path beforehand.”<sup>107</sup>

As Bonhoeffer has detailed the ‘tragic’ cause into being of the ‘poor soul’ called to deliver God’s message, he also describes or proposes the Divinely inspired effect: that it exposes the “demons” in the human psyche.<sup>108</sup> To utilise a theme most common to Bonhoeffer’s thought, the many-layered tragic sense of the prophetic interchange is a personal project. “God causes the tragedy of the prophetic life so that in this human defeat the power, claim,

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<sup>105</sup> 329.

<sup>106</sup> 330.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> He quotes a saying about Luther, “His spirit is the battlefield of two worlds; I’m not surprised he sees demons!” 332.

and burden of the divine demands can be seen in the full light of day.” The tragedy of the prophetic is ultimately ones “unavoidable undoing”.<sup>109</sup>

Bonhoeffer’s reference in the lecture to two of the great tragedists of different points of Germanic Romanticism—Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso*<sup>110</sup> and Stefan Zweig’s play *Jeremias*<sup>111</sup>-- are small, but significant enough to get a sense of the kind of connections Bonhoeffer wants to make with tragic in the aesthetic sense and in the biblical sense. Goethe’s historical tragedy based on the life of the Renaissance poet Tasso, whose epic 1580 poem *La Gerusalem Liberata* told primarily of the “intrapersonal” moral conflicts surrounding the wars of the First Crusade, was the beginning of the revival of tragedy for the Romantic era, becoming a centre of influence in the works of the likes of Byron and the opera composer Donizetti. Goethe’s narrative, similar to Unamuno’s plot in *Peace in War*, is a story of Tasso’s “personal fate”<sup>112</sup> as the Pope’s ‘poet laureate’<sup>113</sup> in a time of war, rather than the larger political situation. Goethe’s vision of the poet as the radical who refuses the life of luxury and being “at the beck and call” of impatient tyrannical aristocrats<sup>114</sup> must have stuck out to this young pastor wishing to deconstruct bourgeois impassiveness. The prophet for him can be seen distinctively as an non-conformed artist; or, to use the title of a sermon by Martin Luther King, a “conformed non-conformist”.

Zweig, a Jewish contemporary of Bonhoeffer and a librettist for Richard Strauss, completed his dramatic depiction of the Hebrew prophet in 1917 as one of the few examples

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Bonhoeffer quotes from Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso*: “When in their anguish other men fall silent/ A god gave me the power to tell my pain”. *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>111</sup> “...Stefan Zweig has Jeremiah say the following: ‘Oh, but you do not know the terrible one, he who has torments and tortures no mortal can imagine. The living soul subjected to god’s tortures no longer fears the pains suffered by the body....I have known the divine torment, and the torture of death is blessedness itself compared to the torture of life, and human torment pleasure compared to divine torment.’” *Ibid.*, 333.

<sup>112</sup> H. Reiss (2003), “Goethe’s *Torquato Tasso*: Poetry and Political Power” in H. Bloom (ed.), *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*. Broomhall, PA: Chelsea House Publishers, 89.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

of art actually created during World War I. Rather than being a post-war pacifist message representative of much of inter-war literature,<sup>115</sup> *Jeremias* comes across as another story which tells of the individual lives who live in the thick of the conflict, as a consequence of the bigger picture. As Bonhoeffer describes the role of the prophet as a “patriot” imprisoned by the angst of God, so Zweig seeks to portray the tension within “the person who loves his land, his child, his brother-human, and that other person who at any opportunity forgets his natural inclination for peaceful labour and quiet joy, and becomes wild and blood-thirsty, baring his wolfish teeth.”<sup>116</sup>

The prophets as bearers of the Divine pathos do not hold a prominent presence in Bonhoeffer’s body of work. Yet the genius of this particular lecture is revealed further when seen in association with the other two in the series. Though they seem to be dealing with distinctive categories in Christian thought—the second lecture being the more well-known on Christology and secularisation whilst the third are initial ideas Bonhoeffer later develops in *Ethics*—it is difficult to read them in the unity that they were meant to be heard and not get a sense of how the prophetic phenomenon—relates in Bonhoeffer’s mind to the aesthetic, Christological and ethical necessities of Christian community.

The second lecture, which shows appreciation for Harnack’s work,<sup>117</sup> asserts that the essence of Christianity is found in its message about the sovereign God, “removed from the world”, using the ground of God’s being to emphasise “the infinite worth of that which is seemingly worthless and the infinite worthlessness of that which is seemingly valued.” It is once again against the disjointedness of enlightenment thought and culture to which Bonhoeffer seeks to save Christianity from. The union of body and spirit—which he again emphasises as a Jewish idea<sup>118</sup>--is important because of the way in which this perception of

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<sup>115</sup> Yisroel Shtern (1930, trans. From Yiddish by Renata Singer, 2006), “A Book which Fights against War—Stefan Zweig’s *Jeremias*”. See <http://www.yisroelshtern.org/essays.html>.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *DBW 10*, 8.

<sup>118</sup> *DBW 10*, 355.

human life peers into the depths of human experience; or as he calls it, “the tragedy of” human life:

Christianity is neither congenial to culture nor does it have faith in progress. It has peered too deeply into the two deepest realities of life. The trembling fear of death and guilt has seized Christianity too powerfully. The seriousness of having to die and of having to bear guilt—this universal human fate is too frightening to allow any hope in solutions deriving from human initiative. Christians see a terrible rift running through the world, a rift that is utterly irreparable through recourse to any human initiative; and they see this rift—thus the tragedy of their lives—still or even for the first time in its full scope precisely at the heights of human initiative, that is, in culture itself.<sup>119</sup>

The third lecture on ethics can be seen as a further development on his image of the prophet as a “patriot” who answers the call from God after reflecting historically when he states, “ethics is a matter of blood and a matter of history...it is a child of the earth and for that reason its face changes with history as well as with the renewal of blood, with the transition between generations.”<sup>120</sup> This transitory nature of moral investigation is very much akin to his opening statements in *Ethics* about the nature of a Christian ethic being dependent on how best to participate in “the indivisible whole of God’s reality.”<sup>121</sup>

### **Worldly Christianity as existential tension**

Bonhoeffer and Unamuno share synergies on their conception of the nature of history as fluid and transitory; Bonhoeffer’s understanding of the ethical consciousness of the Hebrew prophet draws parallels with Unamuno’s concept of intrahistory as an investigation into the collective unconsciousness. For Unamuno, history should be interested in the routes whose principle leading roles are played by its peripheral actors; that is to say, the paths followed by

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *DBW 10*, 360.

<sup>121</sup> *DBW 6*, 51.

those men who make history in an unconscious manner, by those who do not aspire to the title of heroes. And so the writer places his bets on the "living tradition", the paradoxical tradition of the present.

Bonhoeffer views the maturation of the 'collective consciousness'—"the world come of age"—as indicative of the rhythm of God's presence. Instead of a god whose presence is made known in archaically 'pious' ways, the community is forced to look more deeply into the reality of the human suffering that is too often veiled in artifice. As the aesthetics of a 'wholesome god' are eclipsed by a 'worldly' faith, the church comes to express a God who is indeed 'true and living':

...we cannot be honest unless we recognise that we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur*...<sup>122</sup> So our coming of age leads us to a true recognition of our situation before God. God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross.<sup>123</sup>

His usage of Grotius' famous phrase is interpreted in the context of his plea to develop a conception of ministry, not in the normal spheres of morality, politics and science, but in a context where the Church is able to cultivate and transform her "mental integrity" honestly.<sup>124</sup> The "divine death" in Bonhoeffer's work is not absolute; it is the death of "a false conception of god" hereafter abolished by the "world come of age". In this sense Bonhoeffer is wary of a blind "Quixotry":

The will to be good exists only as desire for the reality that is real in God. A desire to be good for its own sake, as some sort of personal goal or life

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<sup>122</sup> "as if God were not there."

<sup>123</sup> *LPP*, 196.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*



vocation, falls prey to an ironic unreality; honest striving for good turns into the ambitious striving of the paragon of virtue. Good as such is no independent theme for life. To take it as such would be the craziest Don Quixotry.<sup>125</sup>

The modern popularity of Quixote in Spain was witnessed by Bonhoeffer whilst pastoring in Barcelona. It is not known to what extent he understood the diversity of interpretations of Latin “Quixotism”; but he did see a film version, acquiring Cervantes’ novel soon after.<sup>126</sup> For the Spanish thinkers like Unamuno, of course, Quixote was the paradigm of the tragic soul who has, in a sense, lost his mind for seeking ancient things. For Unamuno, faith, history, immortality are everlasting dominants. Bonhoeffer, however, longs for a Christian faith deeper than the ancient. Thus he cannot agree with a popular interpretation of being ‘good for the sake of it’. In other words, the former spheres of life within which Christianity possessed power and from which the powers that be sought to pervert and exploit can no longer be tolerated. One can, however, gain from Quixote a sense of mental and spiritual suffering:

The perennial figure of Don Quixote has become contemporary, the ‘knight of doleful countenance’ who, with a shaving basin for a helmet and a miserable hack for a charger, rides into endless battle for the chosen lady of his heart who doesn’t even exist. This is the adventurous enterprise of an old world against a new one, of a past reality against a contemporary one, of a noble dreamer against the overpowering force of the commonplace...In the second part....the author takes sides with the mean world, laughing at its hero. It is too cheap to deride the weapons that we have inherited from our ancestors, with which they achieved great things, but that are not sufficient for the present struggle. Only the mean-spirited can read the fate of Don Quixote without sharing in and being moved by it...Only the person who combines simplicity with wisdom can endure.”<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> DBW 6, 50-51.

<sup>126</sup> DBW 10, 125.

<sup>127</sup> DBW 6, 80-81.

Although Bonhoeffer takes the ‘absurdity’ and antiquity of Quixote as something of a risk factor in establishing a worldly Christianity, it is at any community’s own expense that one fails to see the simple wisdom of history. This is why he comes to the conclusion that 1.) The confrontation of the Christian community with the world - “action in accordance with Christ” – always involves a conflict of wills,<sup>128</sup> and 2.) That Christianity Owes more to Greek philosophy and art than she would like to admit.

In the early church and the Middle Ages, tragedies do not exist. But even the most recent Protestant ethics still portrays the intractable conflict of the Christian in the world, coloured by a dark pathos. In its claim to depict ultimate realities, there is certainly no doubt that Protestant ethics is firmly under the spell of antiquity without being aware of the fact. It is not Luther but Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides who have given human life this tragic aspect. Luther’s seriousness is completely different from the seriousness of those classical tragedians. What must ultimately be taken seriously in the view of the Bible and in Luther’s view is not the conflict between the gods as expressed in their laws, but the unity of God and the reconciliation of the world with God in Jesus Christ; not the inevitability of becoming guilty, but the plain and simple life that flows from reconciliation; not fate, but the gospel as the ultimate reality of life; not the cruel triumph of the gods over the perishing human being, but the election of human beings as children of God in the midst of the world reconciled by grace.<sup>129</sup>

Bonhoeffer is not saying that there is no Christian tragedy, but that the tragedy the Christian encounters is one which is not based on laws any “number of laws”.<sup>130</sup> The only things that counts is the gospel and the commensurability of human beings through God. Our real conflict lies in our decision as to what type of Christian people we will become – Bonhoeffer notes two: “different forms of secularism”<sup>131</sup>, one of which Bonhoeffer would have recognised as the secular Christianity with which he has a conflicted relationship, the

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<sup>128</sup> DBW 6, 264.

<sup>129</sup> DBW 6, 265-6.

<sup>130</sup> DBW 6, 264.

<sup>131</sup> DBW 6, 264

other being “religious enthusiasm”, a grotesque version of which he saw in the Nazi-supported Christianity and theologians. However, reconciliation causes a conflict in itself as our actions, in accord with reality, are limited by our “creatureliness”. We are bound by our surrender to God, and at the same time limited by history and the future, as well as the emotions, behaviours, and responsible action of other people: after all, reconciliation can only be apprehended in community.<sup>132</sup>

For Bonhoeffer it is not responsible to stand completely on the side of resistance or submission without the wisdom to know the difference. So the boundaries between resistance and submission can’t be determined as a matter of principle, but “both must be there and both must be seized resolutely.”<sup>133</sup> The problem of resistance and submission is a quality Bonhoeffer saw as the defect of his own bourgeois background. There, the aristocratic community, pantheons of high culture and intelligence that they were, had resembled the extreme form of what Unamuno called “Quixotism”.

...it is still a moot point whether it is ethically more responsible to behave like Don Quixote and enter the lists against a new age, or to admit one's defeat, accept the new age and agree to serve it. In the last resort success makes history, and the Disposer of history is always bringing good out of evil over the heads of the history-makers. To ignore the ethical significance of success is to betray a superficial acquaintance with history and a defective sense of responsibility. So it is all to the good that we have been forced for once to grapple seriously with this problem of the ethics of success. All the time goodness is successful we can afford the luxury of regarding success as having no ethical significance. But the problem arises when success is achieved by evil means. It is no good then behaving as an arm-chair critic and disputing the issue, for that is to refuse to face the facts. Nor is opportunism any help, for that is to capitulate before success. We must be determined not to be outraged critics or mere opportunists. We must take our full share of responsibility for the moulding of history, whether it

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<sup>132</sup> *DBW 6*, 267-9.

<sup>133</sup> *DBW 8*; 303-4.

be as victors or vanquished. It is only by refusing to allow any event to deprive us of our responsibility for history, because we know that is a responsibility laid upon us by God, that we shall achieve a relation to the events of history far more fruitful than criticism or opportunism. To talk about going down fighting like heroes in face of certain defeat is not really heroic at all, but a failure to face up to the future. The ultimate question the man of responsibility asks is not, How can I extricate myself heroically from the affair? but, *How is the coming generation to live?* It is only in this way that fruitful solutions can arise, even if for the time being they are humiliating. In short it is easier by far to act on abstract principle than from concrete responsibility. The rising generation will always instinctively discern which of the two we are acting upon. For it is their future which is at stake.<sup>134</sup>

It was on the watch of fledging republican democracy, which implicitly fought stubbornly against change, that Germany had fell into the passions of right-wing extremism. Perhaps Bonhoeffer's own shame and guilt were framed by the reality that he was born of the *Bildungsbürgertum* which ultimately "lost their heads and their bibles".<sup>135</sup> However, Bonhoeffer also believed that if faith was to reappear out of the dung-heap of Nazism, it was not enough to have a reversal of class power, as was in theory the motive behind National Socialism. The secret as Bonhoeffer describes above was what A.N Whitehead described as the "dream of youth and the harvest of tragedy" at interplay. That is, ontological dynamic of life as untouched by tragedy, innocence and the absence of choices and discernment, and life as lived having made choices and facing consequences. Macmurray will make a synergy with this ontological dynamic in his rhythm of withdrawal and return.

The most poetic evidence of Bonhoeffer's understanding of a tragic trajectory in Christian reflection comes in the form of his fragmented and unfinished *Fiction from Tegel Prison*,

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<sup>134</sup> DBW 6, 42. Italics are mine.

<sup>135</sup> J. Moses (2004), "Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Fiction from Tegel Prison* 1943-45: His Reflections on the Dark Side of Cultural Protestantism" in *The Dark Side: Proceedings of the Seventh Australian and International Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference*. Sydney: RLA Press, 92.

begun in his first year as there. In a series of fictional anecdotes characteristic of the stereotypes and anxieties of German cultural Protestantism, he paints a picture of what bourgeois Christianity looks like. In the section entitled *Drama*, the dignity and honour of wounded soldiers are perverted by the insults of hooligan elements in broad daylight.<sup>136</sup> In the section entitled *Story*, an eighteen year old recipient of the Iron Cross for bravery is imprisoned and chained for desertion.<sup>137</sup>

The section entitled *Novel* focuses on the spiritual journey of a bourgeois family, the Brakes, and the corrosive spirit of Christianity. A depressed Frau Brake leaves church on Sunday distressed about the sermon. An acquaintance from the church greets her and speaks positively about the sermon. She could not recall the content but the sermon was absolutely wonderful. For whatever quality of eloquence the sermon possessed, the aristocratic wife knew that she had not heard the Gospel.<sup>138</sup> This was Bonhoeffer's critique of the anti-intellectual culture of his Germany and the general lack of prophetic substance therein.

Meanwhile, the two Brake children are confronted with a bad tempered young forester "in a kind of uniform wearing inappropriately striking yellow boots".<sup>139</sup> Threatening the grown men with violence for trespassing in his 'neck of the woods', "Mr. Yellowboots"<sup>140</sup> is finally confronted by the owner of the estate, a retired army major, who chides the young militant, while confessing that it is his class which has made people like the forester possible.<sup>141</sup> Bonhoeffer here not only makes a point to characterise the image and attitude of the average extremist, or the complicated personality of the retired major, a refined gentleman for whom blood is on his hands. This is also a message that the powerful have no conception of what true authority is or how it can be practiced.

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<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>138</sup> *Moses*, 96-7.

<sup>139</sup> *Moses*, 97.

<sup>140</sup> *Moses*, 98.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

Between the major and the Brake boys they realise they share common ground not simply on class grounds: their father and the major were close friends during the First World War. The relation between the two elder gentlemen and the two boys signify a tragic trajectory, a “conflict of wills”. Where the *Fiction* ends is perhaps adequate enough for closure on Bonhoeffer’s tales. The point he is trying to make about the corrosion of cultural Protestantism is brought home by one of the sons, Christoph<sup>142</sup>:

And who is responsible for this whole calamity? None other than the classes that set the tone, the so called upper class, whom everybody sees as a model for success in life. And this upper class is for the most part already a bunch of rotten, obsequious lackeys; they combine bootlicking towards those above and brutality towards those below, lots of rhetoric on the outside and decay on the inside. And a few decent individuals and families who could play a significant role withdraw into themselves because they're repulsed by this vacuous, conceited society.... That is where the problem lies. We need a genuine upper class again; but where are we going to find one?<sup>143</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Bonhoeffer’s theology understood the pervasiveness of the tragic sentiment in Christian faith, even as he attempted to look beyond it. “Tragedy” is part of the Christian consciousness for him, as it is most evident in a world which no longer necessitates Christian consciousness. Even if God was a hypothesis, God is most real one in a post Christian context for Bonhoeffer. Instead of subscribing to an ‘active resignation’, Bonhoeffer asserts the future-minded encounter of resistance and submission—in themselves, tragic decisions. With Bonhoeffer one can conclude that God doesn’t change; human evaluation of God does change as we encounter the reality of existence. This is expressed in the best of war-inflicted

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<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Moses, 100.

<sup>143</sup> *DBW* 7, 106.

art, literature and music; they are expressed and honoured best within the context of religious revival: life in the Christian community beyond the ruins.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **John Macmurray and the problem of the Personal**

I have, indeed, rejected much that is often considered a part of religion; even a necessary part. I have thought it possible that we do not know very clearly what religion properly is. I have sought some means to distinguish false religion so that I might reject that. But to think of religion as such, and in every form, is illusory and pointless has always seemed to me as preposterous as it would be to think the same of music.<sup>1</sup>

Self-understanding...involves a long detour through narratives and encounters with others, with self-consciousness as the final destination, not the starting point.<sup>2</sup>

The complete picture of existence which guides the philosophy of John Macmurray may be read as too positive—an optimism more in line with Emerson<sup>3</sup>—without an understanding that a central ‘antagonist’ in his thought is the place of ‘fear’ in what Macmurray often calls ‘personal relation’. Perhaps it was fear itself which prevented Macmurray from aligning himself with a particular Christian community until formally joining the Society of Friends in the 1950’s. With this in mind, I would like to argue that Macmurray’s vision of the unity of reflection in art, science and religion is, in the end, not a positive unity at all, but a consequence of Christianity in conflict with her original nature. Macmurray sees Christianity as infected with the dualist impulse which Unamuno and Bonhoeffer has similarly explored. As a result, the Church has been unable to come to full consciousness as a community of faith. Macmurray’s vision for Christianity, conceived out of the Hebrew tradition rather than the Roman tradition, is important for the recovery of the character and meaning of

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<sup>1</sup> Macmurray (1965), *Search for Reality in Religion*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 2.

<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Burke commented in his review of Macmurray’s *Reason and Emotion* that his represents a “comfortable” rather than “tragic” assessment of human experience, specifically with art, and that “one may feel its insufficiency in omitting the problems of anguish, sacrifice, militancy and crime from its discussion of ethical adjustment.” “Reason and Emotion by John Macmurray” Review by: KB (1936). *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 283.

<sup>3</sup> See ‘Introduction’ of this dissertation.



Christianity in the world. “To understand Christianity”, he says, “it is completely necessary to ...reconstruct the story of the development of the Hebrew religion.”<sup>4</sup>

I want to read John Macmurray’s exploration of “the problem of the personal” in light of the impact of agonistic existence which has been the ‘needle’ weaving this dissertation. Though Macmurray does not explicitly detail this problem of “preserving and extending a sense of community”<sup>5</sup> as tragic, his philosophy of paradox parallels with Martin Buber, who spoke himself of his well-known I-Thou dynamic as revealing a basic tragedy of human existence. Buber’s dynamic is the very thing which Macmurray states as part of the problematic of personal relations. Martin Friedman noted in his definitive study of Buber’s thought that, rather than John Macmurray being influenced by Buber, was one of a few Christian thinkers (along with Ebner, Marcel, and Rosenstock-Hussey) whose thought was significantly paralleled.<sup>6</sup>

I first want to explain his idea of unity in reflection between art, religion, and science and the role of religion as not itself a ‘mental’ activity, but a symbolic action which is communal. However, as my concern here is with the relation of art to religion, I will not go into detail with Macmurray’s relation of science with art and religion. I will then examine the role of fear, death and spontaneity in his philosophy of personal relation. Art is crucial for the education of the emotions and, with religion, cultivating the spontaneous life and inspiring what ought to be. Macmurray’s conception of “the Hebrew consciousness”, founded upon the problematic human need to exist and express in community requires an interplay love and fear in personal relations. It is crucial then to emphasise the relation of Macmurray’s theory of “Withdrawal and Return” to Buber’s famous “bipolarity” of human existence, his I and Thou. For Buber, an understanding of faith in a tragic sense was integral to religious faith, for it is in “the tragedy of contradiction”, the “decisive turning” which through which one learns

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<sup>4</sup> SRR, 41.

<sup>5</sup> A. Hood (2009), “Rediscovering John Macmurray” in *Expository Times* 120: 7, 332.

<sup>6</sup> M. Friedman (1955), Martin Buber: *The Life of Dialogue*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 268.

to live their faith without depersonalising community or God.<sup>7</sup> This chapter will conclude that Macmurray's religious philosophy includes a dimension which challenges the illusory society *and educates the emotions on the necessity of community*.

### **Art, Religion, and Science**

In contemporary studies of Macmurray, the political implications<sup>8</sup> of his philosophy of religion are duly noted as well as the connections he makes between political community and religion.<sup>9</sup> However, it is interesting to note that his spheres of reflection ultimately do not include politics as a force in itself, but rather as growing out of the central spheres of reflection. Aesthetic reflection alone, as an education of emotion and training in judgement, cannot provide rules for the choice of ends because this is a matter of intuition and feeling, not of discursive thought. Art, in contrast to science, particularises, both the object contemplated and the contemplator.<sup>10</sup> Science refers to that activity where we are concerned with the world as stuff to be manipulated, as means to our ends. Science generalises, sees things as instances of a kind and as matters of fact. It has nothing to say about value.<sup>11</sup>

At the heart of religion, however, there lies an activity of communion or fellowship. It is proper to speak of Christianity as a "religion" rather than to speak of a "religionless" Church, because true faith is concerned with the whole man.<sup>12</sup> All members of the community are united in the same symbolic action, which is an expression and realisation of personal

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<sup>7</sup> "This movement from revelation, from the moment of encounter with the eternal *Thou* to the forms and images and concepts of religion, is ever the way for us in our human condition." D.J. Moore (1996), *Martin Buber: Prophet of Religious Secularism*. Fordham University Press, 253.

<sup>8</sup> See F.G. Kirkpatrick (2005), *John Macmurray: Community Beyond Political Philosophy*. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>9</sup> In particular Adam Hood (2003), *Baillie, Oman and Macmurray: Experience and Religious Belief*. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing.

<sup>10</sup> *SRR*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> Macmurray (1961), *Religion, Art and Science: A study of the reflective activities in Man*. Liverpool University Press, 27-28.

<sup>12</sup> Macmurray discusses the idea that Christianity is not a religion arises from the "dualism of spiritual and material." *SRR*, 64-65.

relationship. There is a universal, immediate awareness of the need for human fellowship, and it is this awareness which gives rise to Faith. Religion establishes human relationship, in particular through what he calls “religious performance”<sup>13</sup>, and “it is only through the confusion with science or art that the validity of religion can be doubted.”<sup>14</sup> Ultimately it is out of the “problematic of personal relations” that religious reflection can be of any validity. This chapter seeks primarily to explore how fear drives the conflicts of will in Macmurray’s thought, and, in conversation with our other ‘subjects’ (Unamuno and Bonhoeffer) how they may share similarities about the nature of the tragic in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century religious landscape.

### **Fear, Death and Spontaneity**

As Macmurray continuously made mention throughout his life, his service in the First World War, which interrupted his study at Balliol College, Oxford, dramatically affected the future shape of his philosophy. His developing assumptions about the limitations of orthodox theology in the evangelical Calvinist tradition and “the notion of a theology developing by self-criticism”<sup>15</sup> banished forever in him the “childish nonsense” of idealism<sup>16</sup> and the “bad faith” inherent in organised Christianity.<sup>17</sup>

In *Search for Reality in Religion* he details his experiences of war—first as a nurse, then wounded at the battle of Arras in 1918—as a lesson in the human proximity of “the fear of death”.<sup>18</sup> One notes that he italicises the word as to emphasise that the “familiarity of death”<sup>19</sup> and fear as a symbol of what is “destructive of reality”<sup>20</sup> is a central subtext to his thought, found throughout his work. As long as the theme of death pervades within human experience,

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<sup>13</sup> *SRR*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> *SRR*, 69.

<sup>15</sup> Macmurray (1965), *Search for Reality in Religion*. SCM Press, 15.

<sup>16</sup> *SRR*, 19.

<sup>17</sup> *SRR*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> *SRR*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> *SRR*, 17.

<sup>20</sup> *SRR*, 18

a religion which seeks to maintain a “purely spiritual” and thus “imaginary”<sup>21</sup> approach to its relationship with the world, it fails to possess a transformative element. Fear, he states later, “is not an instinctive emotion which appears with the immediate threat of danger [i.e. the “here and now” fear of animals], but a pervasive attitude, referring to the whole range of possible danger which the foresight of rational knowledge reveals to consciousness.”<sup>22</sup>

Macmurray describes death as “the natural suppression of the activity” in which life consists. It is a universal reality which forces inactivity. Fear is the presence in a living consciousness of the suppression of the life activity.<sup>23</sup> Spiritual death, is significantly a continuous dominance of a rational consciousness by fear, the pervasion of the mind by the death principle in life itself. It is the sense of constraint which reveals the loss of freedom and the sense of isolation which represents the loss of communion.<sup>24</sup> When one lives with an overwhelming sense of the fear of life, life itself becomes inauthentic, illusory and devoid of activity. The fear of death is, in fact, the fear of life in which death is the ultimate danger. By representing death as life and life as death, rather than seeing these things as they actually are, one is robbed of the opportunity to grapple with new forms of fear which are due to the extension and deepening of the knowledge found in human progress.<sup>25</sup> Fear reasserts itself as the fear of the unknown and is met, in pseudo-religion, by the assertion of the reality of the familiar and the established.<sup>26</sup>

The suppression of life and the profession of creeds which are based on illusion is for Macmurray a crucial factor in recognising true religion from Pseudo-religion.<sup>27</sup> The greatest

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<sup>21</sup> *SRR*, 27.

<sup>22</sup> Macmurray (1935), *Creative Society: a study of the relation of Christianity to Communism*. London: SCM Press, 45-46.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *CS*, 46-7.

<sup>25</sup> *CS*, 51-2.

<sup>26</sup> *CS*, 53.

<sup>27</sup> *CS*, 49.

ideological casualty in this hijacking of faith, in Macmurray's view, is immortality because the denial of death implies an escape from fear:

The affirmation of this may be an affirmation of the triumph of human life over fear, or it may be the expression of its retreat from fear to illusion...If the fear of death is the universal symbol of all human fear, one way of dealing with that fear and its effects must be to deny the reality of that which is feared...to deny the reality of death...is, in fact, the fear of life in which death is the ultimate danger.<sup>28</sup>

Macmurray argues that the suppression of human life by fear is a consequence of "a state of mind in which spontaneity has been overcome by fear and is held within it subservient to the defensive purposes of fear."<sup>29</sup> This is a reality in the Christian community because the experience of the Holy and the expression of the Holy are not always in conversation. When the experience of the Holy is suppressed, one can have the semblance of creative energy, but the reality is that it is far from creative or transformative.<sup>30</sup> Later, we shall see Macmurray's understanding of 'withdrawal' in personal relations characterised by fear which develops a view of the world which is 'negative' and 'impersonal'.

The motive of fear can be either aggressive or acquiescent. When it is aggressive, individuals oppose, and sometimes even dominate, the object of the fear. They attempt to subordinate the object thereby "forcing" a "pragmatic" relationship that is incompatible with reflection.<sup>31</sup> When the fear motive is acquiescent, individuals withdraw into themselves thereby becoming isolated from the dynamic relations within the world through which alone they can attain freedom.<sup>32</sup> As it is the "synthesis" of all reflection, the "problematic" of

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<sup>28</sup> CS, 49-51.

<sup>29</sup> CS, 100.

<sup>30</sup> CS, 101. Bonhoeffer makes a similar, though more concrete conclusion with his discussion on the aesthetic styles of the Church in SC. See Chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> Macmurray (1961), *Persons in Relation*. London: Faber and Faber, 175.

<sup>32</sup> "We should notice that it is acquiescence in dualism that is the real issue, not the fact of dualism." Macmurray, *PIR*, 172.

authentic religion, which lies in cultivating an integrated life, results in a “moral and spontaneous, and consequently, free” action.<sup>33</sup>

Christianity’s association through the ages with idealism has made Marxism understand the irrelevance of Christianity’s abstractions of “freedom and community in the absence of reality”<sup>34</sup> This is why, early in his philosophy, Macmurray felt that Communism, under his insistence that Marx “would have been justified in calling for the reform of religion but not for its rejection”,<sup>35</sup> was a creative re-construction of an integrated life. As for the change in the nature of religious experience—the question “What is Christianity”,<sup>36</sup>—as Macmurray comes to reject the Greek - Cartesian Idealist world, he cannot completely accept Kierkegaard’s radical individualism as an answer to the question, which whilst it cultivates a more autonomous being, does little for building community; One might argue, for Kierkegaard’s sake, that radical individualism did little to completely relieve him of fear. However, whilst Macmurray says the shape of his philosophical problem was shared with Kierkegaard, he links himself with Buber’s constructive existentialism.<sup>37</sup> In speaking of the difference between good/bad faith and good/bad religion as the difference between a fear-based life and a reflective life, he transcends Kierkegaard’s image of fear as “the dizziness of freedom”, by which human innocence is lost and the spontaneous life inherent in freedom succumbs.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *PIR*, 172.

<sup>34</sup> *SRR*, 57.

<sup>35</sup> *SRR*, 26.

<sup>36</sup> *SRR*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *SRR*, 25.

<sup>38</sup> “Anxiety may be compared with dizziness. He whose eye happens to look down into the yawning abyss becomes dizzy. But what is the reason for this? It is just as much in his own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Hence, anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs to dizziness... He who becomes guilty in anxiety becomes as ambiguously guilty as it is possible to become. Kierkegaard (trans. Walter Lowrie, 1944), *The Concept of Dread*. London: Oxford University Press, 61.

## **Art and Perception**

Elizabeth “Betty” Campbell, Macmurray’s childhood sweetheart whom he eventually married on a brief leave from the battle of the Somme,<sup>39</sup> was herself an accomplished musician and artist. It is with significant interest then that one of his earliest published work was a result of a symposium on aesthetics and the ‘chicken or egg’ question of apprehension or expression in art.<sup>40</sup> Thus the first statement he makes on the reflective activities in human consciousness are on the assessment and appreciation of the experience of art, which he pleads to take inspiration from the “activity of the artist...in production”. It is not in the theoretical, abstract and disjointed questions of perspectives of what accounts for “beauty”, but rather in the essential “power” inherent in the artist’s activity:

Is it that he is dowered with a more exquisite sensibility than ordinary mortals, through which he can perceive in the world around us wonders to which the mass of men are blind or deaf? Is it that he can teach us to see and hear what he sees and hears, to appreciate what he appreciates, to apprehend what he apprehends? Or is it rather that his apprehension is much the same as ours—a little keener perhaps by virtue of his training in observation, but essentially the same—yet that he is possessed of a magic gift whereby he transforms the common world which he shares with us into something finer and more satisfying? Does he show us the world of reality as it is, or does he recreate it for us as we should like it to be?<sup>41</sup>

Art, for Macmurray, is “expression” which grows out of “apprehension”. In visual art—“that artistic activity [which] might seem most easily to be a matter of apprehension”—the painter or sculptor, etc. hardly ever constructs what they see in true reality or real time. “Ordinary perceptual experience”<sup>42</sup> defies the real experiences of the one who lives in that experience. With subjective art, “There could not be a musician who was born deaf [or] a

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<sup>39</sup> J. Costello (2001), *John Macmurray: A biography* Edinburgh: Floris Books, 77.

<sup>40</sup> Macmurray (1925), “Is art a Form of Apprehension or a form of Expression?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society (PAS)*, 173.

<sup>41</sup> *PAS*, 175.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

painter who was born blind.” From the perspective of the Artist, “there are certain elements of the world which are more satisfying to perceive than others, directly and immediately, whether rightly or wrongly. In apprehending the world perceptually certain things are discovered to be more satisfying to perceive than others.”<sup>43</sup> The artist, as they tend not to be “easily satisfied with the world as [the artist] finds it”<sup>44</sup>, has the potential to conceive more than the real world or the merely “informative” aspects of the world, but rather to penetrate one’s perceptual experience by creating “indifference” to reality.

We recognise that it [a work of art] does represent a landscape or a person. Yet we are indifferent, and the artist is indifferent, to the particular landscape or the particular person depicted. We are content to know that it represents, without being concerned to know whether it represents something actual. We treat the picture, and the artist means us to treat it, as a hypothetical object of perception.<sup>45</sup>

The subject-matter or theme which arrests the attention of the producer of art is crucial to take notice of because, especially in cases where the ‘model’ is a “class-concept”, the goal is not a perfect duplication, but “away from an apprehension of actual imperfection.”<sup>46</sup> The producer of art knows whatever message they are sending out through their work, it does not tell the full story, but at best tells a story which will grab the attention of those willing to be converted into its sphere. This means the production of art, whilst it may immediately and initially appeal to a particular sense, further experience of production may come to appeal to a union of senses, whether those sensations designate a sense of happiness/pleasure, or revilement.<sup>47</sup>

The effects of experience on one’s apprehension are considered within music as well. The musician’s point of departure is the world of “sound-objects” which may or may not

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<sup>43</sup> PAS, 176.

<sup>44</sup> PAS, 177.

<sup>45</sup> PAS, 178.

<sup>46</sup> PAS, 182.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



represent something natural or even pleasurable. “The gulf that seems to separate the sounds of the normal world from that of a Beethoven concerto does not arise from any peculiarity of the artistic activity in the musician, but simply from the empirical peculiarities of the sense of hearing.”<sup>48</sup> Apprehension from our auditory senses can be deceiving because the process of making music or creating music to make is more “complex and confused”<sup>49</sup>, than, say, that which apprehends our eyes. However, the apprehension through “repetition” is important to consider in auditory apprehension; one can only apprehend through the experiences of a performance, not simply one sitting. “Thus”, says Macmurray, “the case of music is essentially the same as that of painting” in that the presentation of it rests on the producers apprehension of things by perception, and upon their ability (“power”) to permit people to return to this theme again and again.<sup>50</sup>

Macmurray perceives then, that because art is “perceptual, not imaginary”<sup>51</sup>, and because it aims at its best to “provide the possibility of a hypothetical individual”, the production and grasping of the meaning of artistic elements are a matter of experience and expression. In this sense one cannot help but to be concerned primarily, not with criterion of art’s success or failure, its relation to assumptions about beauty, but rather the nature of art’s production. The “expression” is the expression of an individual object for apprehension. The artist expresses in order to apprehend and encourage apprehension. The apprehension which the art and artist makes possible “is itself an apprehension only of the possible and never of the Real.”<sup>52</sup>

Macmurray elaborates on these reflections concerning the limitedness and necessary “fragmentariness” of art and the artist in *Reason and Emotion*:

Each artist is confined within the limits of his own acquaintance with the world, within his individual objectivity...Only the individuality of the

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<sup>48</sup> PAS, 183.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> PAS, 184.

<sup>51</sup> PAS, 188.

<sup>52</sup> PAS, 189.

personal can be expressed by art; and since the experience of the individual is but a fragment of personal experience, his art can only express a fragment of the personal...but because of the vital relation between the artist and the object, between first and third persons in art...the work of each artist is a collection of separate works, each of which is self-contained and exclusive of all the others. They have no unity among themselves...This is the main reason for the assertion that art is not bound by morality, that it is not concerned with assessing right and wrong, that a novelist's characters may all be vicious and feeble, that a painter's subject may be morally degrading, without any detriment to the artistic value that it possesses.<sup>53</sup>

When Macmurray speaks of 'theology', what he is most interested in 'theologically' is not on doctrine but on "the nature of faith" as history progresses. "Authority should be our guide and not our master; tradition should be our starting-point and not our resting place."<sup>54</sup> High Reason (knowledge/ judgement against faith) and mysticism (faith against knowledge) can at times be complementary forces, the abiding connection being ultimately the choice between the critical and un-critical comprehension of meaning. The instinctive (faith) explanation is not more likely to be correct than the argued judgement, because instinct is more prone to lack of accountability. However, judgement and instinct in unity best cultivates a creative, critical and deliberative mind.<sup>55</sup> Knowledge for knowledge sake is an empty thing. Faith, instead of being an impediment to judgement, in fact sets it free to make it "a servant of creation".<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, without the practice of Art in unity with knowledge and faith, "sketching the outlines" of what "ought to be",<sup>57</sup> the world retains a detached and dualistic conception of life. He, with Unamuno and Bonhoeffer, admires not only the unity of reflection found in the

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<sup>53</sup> Macmurray (1936) *Reason and Emotion*. London: Faber and Faber, 162- 64.

<sup>54</sup> Macmurray (1927), *Adventure: the Faith of Science and the Science of Faith*. London: Macmillan and Co., 28.

<sup>55</sup> *Adventure*, 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> *Adventure*, 40.

<sup>57</sup> *Adventure*, 42.

renaissance, but also the unity of reflection found which Darwin originally espoused as crucial to a revival interest of Renaissance thinking.<sup>58</sup> A progressive society is at best a morality of laws and tradition whilst at the same time being a time of knowledge contained within that morality. In the meanwhile, art takes the perspective of onlooker and as an escape from reality; and religion is not religion at all, but rather lost in the “theatre” created by judgement’s superiority from any other means of reflection and action, looking “for a role that it may usurp.”<sup>59</sup> Society cannot prevail on judgement alone or faith alone; faith is not knowledge, but without faith one loses “courage in the face of ignorance and insecurity, the refusal to be beaten by failure.”<sup>60</sup>

### **The Hebrew Consciousness**

The prophetic tradition best expresses for Macmurray, as it seems to for Bonhoeffer, the depth of the character in personal experience, more than individual experience but that sort of experience “built into the structure of humanity, which makes possible and necessitates “spiritual development”. Prophets cannot make good on their claims to have an objective knowledge of God; however, the truth of subjective experience in the prophetic tradition are representations of the instinctual nature of humanity, however less it can measure up to hard facts.

So long as the gap between the prophet’s conception of the divine nature and his knowledge of his own remains unfilled, so long religious belief must remain imprisoned in subjectivity. A concept of perfect personality which springs from the experience of imperfect personality and appeals in turn to the value-judgements of imperfect personality is a hypothesis which does not admit of verification. It must fall back, like its rival, upon the reiterated assertion of its origin in a divine revelation, which it in vain tries to indicate. But this is not enough. The opposition between the Law and the Prophets grows ever more radical. As the law increases its

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<sup>58</sup> *Adventure*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Adventure*, 45.

strangle-hold upon the actualities of daily life, losing touch with spiritual development, so the ideal world withdraws more and more from contact with the remote. The prophetic vision loses its footing in history, and from its own aesthetic resources generates the picture of another world, confessedly remote from the sphere of our sorrow...even in this last phase the need of religion for a footing in history expresses itself by projecting the necessity of spiritual development into a real though distant future.<sup>61</sup>

So the religious consciousness, and particularly for Macmurray the Hebrew consciousness, is a more complete source of reflection than, say, the Roman “pragmatic” consciousness and the Greek “contemplative” consciousness, as he discusses in *The Clue to History*.<sup>62</sup> It is the former ancient expressions of culture which have been expressed in European history and, thus, the dualistic tendencies of Western thought are largely the consequence of the distinctions between culture and art which have left the religious expressions of reflection and action in a race to ‘look for a place which it can usurp’.<sup>63</sup> In particular, Macmurray is concerned that the Greek consciousness—the conservatism of its politics, the empiricism of her philosophy, but much more so in the air of “completeness” in her aesthetics, has too naively been a dominating factor in the Modern consciousness.<sup>64</sup>

...it is in the world of art that the Greek consciousness finds its natural expression, and that in seeking to achieve an all-inclusive vision, it succeeds in raising questions which it cannot answer. A reality which is incapable of including action is a reality which is incomplete...Its picture of reality can only be achieved through the denial of the reality of action. For action demands incompleteness in the world.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-202.

<sup>62</sup> Macmurray (1938), *The Clue to History*. London: SCM Press, 21.

<sup>63</sup> *CTH*, 20.

<sup>64</sup> *CTH*, 25.

<sup>65</sup> *CTH*, 26.

For Macmurray, an understanding of the essential “Jewishness” of Christianity provides one with a “primitive” understanding of human consciousness as one built on ‘non-assertive’ notion of community. This primitive religious consciousness tends to break into classifications as religion develops; this is the very type history recorded, Macmurray notes, in the Old Testament. “We can understand the meaning of this by noticing that primitive society is religious in form precisely because the elements of culture which represent the origins of art, science, morality, law and politics, have no autonomy. They are contained in religion and remain aspects of it.”<sup>66</sup>

When the autonomy of one aspect of consciousness rules over the others, the completeness of the human experience is lost.<sup>67</sup> Macmurray makes clear that this does not mean religion is decidedly “totalitarian” but rather forms the “paradoxical” basis of human consciousness—“If a society (or an individual) has a religion it is not religious. If it is religious it cannot have a religion.” The point of religious consciousness is to provide such a ‘comprehensive’ way of understanding the world that would prevent an “atomising” and thus a distinguishing paradigm between reflection and action; rather, “the religious consciousness makes the life of reflection an essential element in action.”<sup>68</sup>

In Hebrew history, dualism presented itself in the development of the position of priests, and the prophetic tradition rises as a resistance of this atomising of human consciousness. The one “without social authority” is the inspiration for religious consciousness, the exponent of contemporary ‘meaning’ of this comprehensive primitive consciousness.<sup>69</sup> It is the “abnormal” consciousness, a conflict to society as it exists that is characteristic of the religious consciousness. In saying that “the belief in God is not in itself a criterion of the religious consciousness”, he counts Atheism not as a construction of a consciousness

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<sup>66</sup> CTH, 28.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> CTH, 29-30.

<sup>69</sup> CTH, 32.

completely separate from that of religion, but as an abnormal consciousness in itself and thus part of this primitive consciousness which seeks to revive a true sense of personhood.<sup>70</sup>

### **God as ‘Worker’**

Macmurray’s later development of ‘Person as Agent’ develops from his earlier conception of “God as worker”:

What is characteristic of Hebrew conception of God is that God is a worker. In the dualist forms of consciousness, God always appears as an aristocrat. As Creator, Jehovah works for six days in the making of the world...the primary closeness of the relationship between [God and humanity] made in God’s likeness, remains, is reinforced, and is constantly recovered in the prophetic movement. So, when Jesus asserts the fatherhood of God, and re-establishes the close relationship between God and man, that is the outstanding feature of his teaching about God, he is reasserting and deepening the traditional Hebrew conception, not breaking away from it. Nothing could express more succinctly the essence of the Hebrew conception of god in its full religious integrity, than the statement attributed to Jesus, “My father worketh hitherto, and I work.”<sup>71</sup>

One may deduce that this “worker” concept to God is heavily inspired by his interest—in the 1930s—of the moral and theological implications of communism. His intellectual involvement in the British communist movement in his early career may give too strong an impression that he was more interested in political philosophy than religious thought or aesthetics. But in his most important statement on Communism at this time, CS (1935), he makes clear that his interest in Marxist politics comes largely on what it supposedly achieves practically versus the “vague” focus in conventional Christianity of emotion and ideas.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> CTH, 32.

<sup>71</sup> CTH, 33.

<sup>72</sup> CS, 23.

Marxist historicism, which makes one “feel himself to be an instrument through which [the process of history] is here and now achieving its purpose of creating a true and universal society in the world,” is, at least, a fair definition of the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ on earth for Macmurray. Communism achieves something that the Christianity of Macmurray’s day failed to: essentially create and cultivate a “faith” in unity not marked by professions but by action.<sup>73</sup> Rather than accepting an absolute Communist position based on an absolute atheism—which as we have seen above Macmurray never thought possible because atheism is at best an expression of the abnormal consciousness necessary to revive faith—Macmurray suggests that Communism too is a ‘wake-up call’ to the consciousness of faith, a call away from “the fear of isolation”. “Pseudo-religion”, in contrast to the fundamental aspects of religion, atheism and Communism, signifies the pervasive development of fear and isolation.<sup>74</sup> This, then, permits the suppression of action in the name of ‘religion’.

After the horrors of the Stalin-era became revealed, Macmurray only edited a few of his works, including *Reason and Emotion*, thus developing further the conception of “person as agent” beyond a pro-Soviet thought, yet still unashamedly inspired by the Marxist attack on idealism and popular religion as the essence of idealism.<sup>75</sup> Macmurray was more interested in Marx’s critique for distinguishing real from illusory religion. He felt that the spiritualism and pietistic sympathies which popular Christianity adopted was bereft of the sense of collective responsibility, which was at best theoretically manifested in Marxism:

A purely spiritual religion is necessarily an idealist religion, and so unreal. For the purely spiritual is the purely imaginary. It seemed, indeed, that modern Communism might well be that half of Christianity which had been dropped by the Church in favour of an accommodation with Rome [empire], coming back to assert itself against the part that had been retained.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> *CS*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> *CS*, 46.

<sup>75</sup> *SRR*, 26.

<sup>76</sup> *SRR*, 27.

It was this same pietism from which Bonhoeffer withdrew himself, and from which Unamuno departed in his search for a more practical sense of ‘immortality’. And it can be adequately assumed through his use of the word “Religion” that he continues to view the Christian consciousness in concert with the Hebrew consciousness, though his focus on the unity of reflection is not as intrinsically marked with theological interpretation in his later works. This is perhaps because, rather than seeing unity of reflection and its problematic in the development of personality as an intrinsically theological quest, it is ultimately an ‘organic’ recovery of human consciousness in its most honest form. The process away from organic humanity is parallel to an “inartistic”, “impersonal”, “unreal” civilisation. For Macmurray, Modernity, rather than a signification of progress, was the uncovering of the real, “a loss of spiritual integrity, a slowing down of the pulses of the inner life” through an absolute emphasis on the outer life. This isn’t social development for Macmurray; it was the paralysis of civilisation.<sup>77</sup>

### **Withdrawal and Return**

The negative language abundant in Macmurray’s thought, of course, does not in itself reveal completely with his concern for the inevitability of conflict in human consciousness and community. The true sense of “unity” in life, and therefore Macmurray’s alternative to dualism is best represented in his living familial metaphor he calls “the rhythm of withdrawal and return” in his Gifford lectures. McIntosh makes clear that Macmurray’s alternative is not to be confused with a monist response to dualism, where mental phenomena are unified with physical phenomena.<sup>78</sup> Macmurray’s central assumption, according to McIntosh, is that he does not need to “prove” or propose the existence of physical and mental states, nor free will in order to come to his primacy of the practical. Like Unamuno and Bonhoeffer, for Macmurray a “system” is, at best, secondary to the wholeness of human experience.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> RE, 158.

<sup>78</sup> McIntosh, *JMRP*, 19.

<sup>79</sup> “Anyone who looks for a philosophical system, or demands a detailed and scholarly demonstration will be disappointed. Systematic scholarship is of the highest importance in philosophy; but it belongs to a later stage of the process which is here only initiated.” Macmurray (1961), *Self as Agent*. London: Faber and Faber, 203.



The relation between infant and parent—the “differentiation of the Other”—is the difference between the respective instincts of caring and the necessity of being cared for. The infant and the adult share status as an active ‘person’ with actual rationality, rather than mere “potential” actuality.<sup>80</sup> The first knowledge for the infant is knowledge of the personal Other with whom one is in communication, “who responds to my cry and cares for me.”<sup>81</sup> With this in mind, Macmurray asserts that in the unity between infant and parent by virtue of reason, there lies the contradiction in agency. He notes how the personality of the child is very simple and vulnerable, a life of “helpless dependence” in comparison with that of the Parent which is complex due to the development of Reason and that “this makes it easier to apprehend the universal form which distinguishes the personal from the organic.”<sup>82</sup>

The negative aspect—the withdrawal—of personal relation is the inevitability of fear and anxiety, when the Parent must relinquish control or care, thus diminishing the Child’s anticipation to be cared for. When this happens:

The constants of the Child’s experience of the world have disappeared; his anticipations have not been verified. His predictions are still, as it were, dogmas; he has not yet learned to treat them as hypotheses. The formula of his confidence is ‘this or nothing’. So he faces what is for him the ultimate threat to his existence—isolation from the Other by the act of the Other.<sup>83</sup>

The perpetuation of the withdrawal brings the child to discover the difference between them and the parent, and thus “self-assertion”—or as it has been commonly called, the Will—begins to develop. When the child’s needs and differences are discovered, self-consciousness and “personal individuality” and self-identity is cultivated.<sup>84</sup> Thus Macmurray’s primary idea

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<sup>80</sup> *JMRP*, 67.

<sup>81</sup> *Persons in Relation* (1961). London: Faber and Faber, 76.

<sup>82</sup> *PR*, 88.

<sup>83</sup> *PR*, 89.

<sup>84</sup> *BOM*, 23.

is that, in contrast to the “solitary” Cartesian self, human beings are born dependent on relationships. We start ‘thinking’ about it as we experience the problem of difference and become increasingly self-sufficient. From the point of difference and awareness, the child becomes more aware of the choices and possibilities for future action.<sup>85</sup> The positive motive—the return—develops in the child realising a need to be cared for in the world and embracing a certain “trust” in the Other.<sup>86</sup> This trust is at best a manifestation of the child’s awareness of being loved.

The consistency in action found between the positive and negative modes of motivation is ‘fear’ and ‘love’.<sup>87</sup> When fear and love are seen as a ‘unity’ rather than ‘enemies’, development is cultivated. Love needs fear in order to cause action; fear, at its best in communion with love, encourages reflection on possibilities, thus enabling “the most suitable course of action for the fulfilment” of intent.<sup>88</sup>

### **Macmurray, Buber and Tragic Consciousness**

The type of personhood to which Macmurray seeks to articulate in the world then is a conflict of wills. It is crucial then to emphasise the relation of Macmurray’s theory of Withdrawal and return to Martin Buber’s famous “bipolarity” of human existence, his I and Thou. Esther McIntosh affirms this conflictual rhythm: “...not only is the existence of the other a given when we start with agency, it is also a fact of human survival. From conception we depend on another person for our existence. As we grow to adulthood we do not become independent beings, but interdependent persons; we live as members of communities. This does not mean that the individual is obscured by the community; rather, the interdependent relation is one in which the other person acts both as a support and as opposition.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> BOM, 24.

<sup>86</sup> PR, 88.

<sup>87</sup> PR, 71.

<sup>88</sup> PR, 81.

<sup>89</sup> Esther McIntosh (2007), “The Possibility of a Gender-Transcendent God: Taking Macmurray Forward”, in *Feminist Theology* (15:2).

For Buber this call to human connection and relation was inclusive of plant and animal life. Thus, mutuality for Buber is dependent on whether an object is appreciated in itself or is appreciated only as a means to an end.<sup>90</sup> This was grounded in a sense of tragedy. Tragedy is the struggle toward the redemption from evil. Martin Friedman states that, for Buber, an understanding of faith in a tragic sense was integral to religious faith, for it is in “the tragedy of contradiction”, the “decisive turning<sup>91</sup>” which comes with the break through from I-Thou to I-It that oneness and freedom are recovered<sup>92</sup>.

Tragedy for Buber was the essential poetic representation of human dialogue, and thus tragedy is the essential form of drama. The transformative element of drama—the play of life—does not come into being without dialogue, and real dialogue cannot manifest itself without an audience, “the appearance of spectators. This appearance is not to be understood as something that took place all at once and unequivocally, but as the result of a long development, or rather entanglement. Each transformation play took place originally; indeed, not for its own sake but for the magical aim of achieving in the received form what the community needed.”<sup>93</sup>

Judaism’s impact on the world was not “that it failed to experience ‘the tragedy’, the contradiction in the world’s process, deeply enough; but rather that it experienced the contradiction as theophany”.<sup>94</sup> Coming to grips with the complexity of the world and of one’s experience of it is the essence of *Yihud*<sup>95</sup> --the risk of ordinary life—which “does not take

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<sup>90</sup> *JMRP*, 76.

<sup>91</sup> Friedman, 133.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>93</sup> M. Buber (trans. M. Friedman 1957), “Drama and theatre” in *Pointing the Way*. London; Routledge, 63-64.

<sup>94</sup> Buber (1946), *Israel and the World: Essays in a Time of Crisis*. New York: Schocken Books, 26.

<sup>95</sup> “*Yihud* means the ever-new joining of the spheres striving to be apart, the ever-new marriage of the “majesty” with the “Kingdom”—through man...God, in whose name and by whose command of creation the free *yihud* takes place, is his goal and end, with he himself turning not into himself but to God—not isolated but swallowed in the world process, not circular but the swinging back of the divine strength that was sent

place through creedal profession or magic manipulation, but through the concrete meeting of I and Thou by which the profane is sanctified and the mundane hallowed.”<sup>96</sup> Theophany by a sense of the tragic demands that one look Reality in the face without fear, affirming the tragic without sentimentality and working in it and through it.<sup>97</sup>

Similar to Buber, Macmurray asserts that it is in the negative moment in personal experience, the struggle between mother and child, action becomes necessary and the problematic of human experience becomes an opportunity for resolution and reconciliation.<sup>98</sup> There is the choice between egocentrism (when the relationship has not been resolved whether “forced back in to co-operative activity” or wilfully suppressed)<sup>99</sup> and reconciliation. In the “transformation” from thinking to action, one “restores the reference of thought to action, and in the result find that we are driven to conceive a personal universe in which God is the ultimate reality.”<sup>100</sup>

## **Conclusion**

John Macmurray, read through the lens of his contemporaries, conceives the problematic push and pull (withdrawal and return) between false Absolutes which can no longer sustain community, and the mutuality of personhood which helps to frame new conceptions of community and selfhood. Macmurray adds a third dimension to the problematic of personal relations by distinguishing the artistic element in reflection, ensuring that persons can actually “enjoy mutuality”.<sup>101</sup> Macmurray, in this instance, describes in this philosophy of

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forth.” Buber (1935) “The Spirit and Body of the Hasidic Movement” in A. Biemann (2002), *The Martin Buber Reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 69.

<sup>96</sup> M. Friedman (1955), 143.

<sup>97</sup> M. Friedman (1982), *Martin Buber’s Life and Work: The Early Years 1878-1923*. London; Search Press, 83.

<sup>98</sup> Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 98-99.

<sup>99</sup> Friedman, *MBLW*, 101-103.

<sup>100</sup> *MBLW*, 224.

<sup>101</sup> *JMRP*, 76.

personalism what has been the virtual tug and pull of international relations in a 20<sup>th</sup> century climate which had to create virtually from scratch new ways of being persons after the logic and sociality of an imperial dominated culture in Europe. Macmurray's personalism is a conception of 'emerging community' which all three thinkers we have studied here have been concerned with, sought to express and to be expressed in artistic elements of Christian community in particular. Ultimately is a concern for the sustaining and characterising the meaning and depth of community in a 21<sup>st</sup> century climate where the very idea of community, religious and otherwise, is under crisis and in need of re-framing. How best does the Christian community affirm the stage of personal relations reaffirming Mystery beyond "nonsense"?<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> D. Fox (1964), "Personal Logic and Christian Affirmation" in *Journal of Bible and Religion* 32: 4, 333.

## CONCLUSION

Who stands firm? Only the one for whom the final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all these, when in faith and sole allegiance to God he is called to obedient and responsible action: the responsible person, whose life will be nothing but an answer to God's question and call.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is. If an inferiority is conscious, one always has a chance to correct it. Furthermore, it is constantly in contact with other interests, so that it is continually subjected to modifications. But if it is repressed and isolated from consciousness, it never gets corrected.<sup>2</sup>

The vision which Unamuno, Bonhoeffer, and Macmurray share in their interpretation of Christianity is one in which their experiences of tradition are on an irrecoverably shaky ground, precipitated by the dramatic end of imperial Europe, the horror of war, and the pursuit of the identity in the midst of it all. It seems to be that it is in "the deafening" of the human spirit which occurs at the point of traumatic finality — that point of certain nothingness which gives rise to a recovery of the self — with which Unamuno, Bonhoeffer and Macmurray offer vision on the nature of faith in the state of war and the conflict of human relationships.

The departure of Unamuno, Bonhoeffer and Macmurray from the dualist perspective which dominated European thought until the First World War, and which threatened the move toward a holistic perspective to the self, is the perennial 'tragedy' which is the unavoidable encounter of human experience with "the deafenings unsaid" and which fear prevents one from encountering. Tragedy shares an affinity for the "telling of" suffering and

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<sup>1</sup> Bonhoeffer, *LPP*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> C. Jung (1938), "Psychology and Religion". In *CW 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East*. P.131

evil and the responsive action out of suffering and evil. Kathleen Sands suggests that tragedy be seen in light of the ‘trauma’ of history.

Tragedies are to history as trauma is to time. Traumas interrupt time; they are black holes, not just potholes, in the journey. This is their finality, the feeling of "the end" that circumscribes and sanctifies every profound loss. Yet traumatic finality, just because it feels so absolute, remains unfinished, a "lump in the spirit." It cannot be spun into the fabric of meaning, and so manifests itself as gap or silence. And because it cannot be integrated or expressed, trauma demands re-enactment... Tragedy ought to uncover the grief and the pleasure; ought to be, in other words, not a symptom of melancholia but a vehicle for its healing. And even for its detractors, tragedy tends to return, just as it returns in the lamenting of its loss.<sup>3</sup>

Whilst tragedy has had an elusive and subtle relationship to Christian thought, the work of Unamuno, Bonhoeffer, and Macmurray represent an ‘ecumenical’ view in the 20<sup>th</sup> century — contrary to their contemporaries — that far from being the stuff of antiquity or even of irrelevance to the nature of religious experience, the sense of the tragic very much epitomizes the struggle of Modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian imagination to act faithfully given the trauma of existence, decline in influence and doubt of the masses, and believing in hope and redemption, attempting to share our experience with a secular world. It has been important to emphasise war, the socio-political consequences of philosophical dualism, and theological triumphalism as a common backdrop these thinkers share as indicative of the precariousness of life. As war is a central ontological background, the experience of war also suggests how they in conversation help us to conceive of *a broader theology of personhood and creativity*.

The dominant Aristotelian idea of the ‘tragic hero’, the political figure brought down by his own immorality, was in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, eclipsed by the sense of ‘trauma’ inherent in inevitable existential encounter that is the fate of every human being. That this sense of

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<sup>3</sup> K.M. Sands, "Tragedy, Theology, and Feminism", 60.

existence has deeply spiritual implications is a phenomenon which Miguel de Unamuno was a forerunner. In the diversity of Unamuno's aesthetic language as novelist, poet and philosopher, the crisis of faith and the theological dimensions of the chaos of social breakdown are crucial to uncovering the liminality of existence. His concept of *intrahistoria*, then, is a central theme in his attempt at deconstructing fixed ideas of faith's relation to the personal and cultural dimensions of life, reconstructing in the process the "agonic" journey which comes in the practice of faith.

In the work of Bonhoeffer we discovered that the concept of tragedy was itself an unresolved theme in his ideas on suffering; his later reflections on Greek tragedy, which he sees as irreconcilable with a "transcendent" Christology, are juxtaposed with his earlier public lectures and sermons in which he reflects on the tragic nature of the Hebrew prophets, and how they relate to his historical context. In his reflection on music as well, Bonhoeffer thought it was important to distinguish between musical "artifice" and music which best represents "mature worldliness". Thus, Bonhoeffer's aversion to neoclassicism, the aesthetic of German Pietism, and a parallel interest in the music of the Renaissance and in the African American spirituals is an important resource for his theology, none the least because in a mature worldliness one approaches the Real in the unity of darkness with light, and the consciousness of the perpetuity of one's choices for subsequent generations.

As Bonhoeffer's development of a Christian perspective to the tragic included the confrontation with mutuality and responsibility, so Macmurray's as well asserts the problem of the personal. I have taken for granted that Macmurray, as a philosopher in the Christian tradition and as an advocate of the Hebrew consciousness inherent in Christianity, shares similar ideas to his contemporary Martin Buber. As Macmurray has emphasised, Greco-Roman thought was the cultural dominant of Western thought shaping not only the cultivation of ideas of community, but also giving a disproportionate glory to antiquity which shaped art and religion. It was this rejection of the tragic sense of Christianity which cultivated the 'determinist' language which is so dominant in orthodox Christian aesthetic. Thus Jesus Christ, the 'superhero' of classical Christian narrative and thus Western culture, could not be associated with the classical tragic figures of antiquity. In shaping a philosophy of human relations very much influenced by what he called the Hebrew consciousness,



Macmurray would readily be in concert Buber's understanding of the 'I-Thou' dynamic as the essence of a tragic trajectory in shaping community. As an alternative to the triumphalism of Western Christianity, the sense of the tragic is the essence of dialogue: the perpetual death of assumptions and fear, and the birth of redemption.

Unamuno, Bonhoeffer, and Macmurray represent the departure of a classical, dualist interpretation of Christian thought, one where Christianity has an intimate relationship to history and thus the creative contradictions which shape community. Rather than being a stumbling block to faith, this is a source for discovering the essence of 'mystery' in personal relation, or, as Martin Foss asserts, "the mystery and complexity of the human situation and man's embeddedness in a wider life."<sup>4</sup> Today, with the Church serving no longer as the prime mediator of culture, her theology and aesthetic must resemble an integrative trajectory where the drama of paradox is ever unfolding and being apprehended with integrity by people of faith.

Their understanding of the tensions between 'status quo' and the marginal are influenced by their embrace of the tragic, and a rather than being outside the box with no particular place to go, they sought to shape a new social order ready to be grasped when the trauma of the 'old world' passes away. The dialogue of faith with the world, for them, aims to embrace the tensions in the world without making Christianity subservient to the world—it is, in the words of Christ and the Apostle Paul, to 'be in the world but not of the world'.<sup>5</sup>

Through the shared vision of Unamuno, Bonhoeffer and Macmurray, we find that a sense of the tragic is crucial to the contemporary Christian imagination to confront the myths and the 'demons' which pervade the immediate assumptions of the "spectators" of faith and history. The century since the summer of 1914 and the spawn of 'The Great War' which affects us still today, continues to leave hard lessons for us to learn. There are, indeed, spiritual, cultural and ideological shadows which remain with us, and we are invited to be players and spectators. The agonistic from a Christian context can be cultivated by the constant

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<sup>4</sup> M. Foss (1966), *Death, Sacrifice and Tragedy*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 100.

<sup>5</sup> A paraphrase of the message found in John 17: 11 – 16 and 1 Corinthians 9: 19 – 23.

awareness that we are subject to what Iris Murdoch calls the sentiment of “void”<sup>6</sup>: forces which withdraw us from our immediate world, our own individual peace; the dark shadows.

The agonic within the “Abrahamic” faith—the faith narratives, dialogue and rituals which individually and collectively be exchanged between Jews, Christians and followers of Islam—can serve, for those subjected to it, is still a beautiful and ominous pedagogy for the world. Those who living within this Faith are often called upon to welcome the language of suffering and tragedy into our worship because of its proximity to us. However difficult and painful it is, it is never left without its meaning. We come to see that we, like all, are frail, vulnerable, needy. Virtue and “piety” is then known for what it is: pointless, yet genuine and creative. A theology where all things are “bright and beautiful” is not as realistic or as formed out of agony as is a theology which asserts “Steal away...I ain’t got long to stay here”.

Any story – whether written, spoken, sung, or created by hand, mind and heart – that would embody this thread of spiritual creativity must speak of the epistemic darkness, the precariousness of life, and the austere revelations of this moral journey. In Reformed Christian worship, this recognition is often expressed in a congregational “Confession”. The African American Churches in which I grew up and discovered ‘faith’ used individual “Testimony” in worship as a form of existential purging. The hope embedded in this is to recognise this sentiment of angst ad tragedy more readily as the nature of religious experience, and live in its value.

These were theologians set on living and expressing the story of their faith, in all its passion and agony. In an era where the western Christian community is more preoccupied with our relative decline, and remaining ‘open’ to the world (if not relevant), we may be more tempted on exploring the ‘sweetness and light’ side of our faith in effort to show a ‘radical welcome’ rather than confronting and being grounded by those negative emotions which will call a community to faithfulness and even healing of individuals and beyond. Martin Buber

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<sup>6</sup> I. Murdoch (1994), *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*. London: Penguin Books, 503.

recovers the tragic pervasiveness in Jewish thought as crucial to the “redemption of evil”<sup>7</sup>: “We cannot recover the soil of tragedy, but in real meeting we can reach the soil of salvation after the tragedy has been completed.”<sup>8</sup> The creative event which is the foundation of “Abrahamic” faith, Christianity in particular, warrants a constant re-evaluation of all that encompasses human experience. In taking seriously the need to re-affirm the meaning of community in yet another age of depersonalised human relations, where once again the future of democratic ideals are being questioned, a “reformed and ever reforming” practical Christian theology is obliged to take notice of the divergent manifestations of subversive human experience, draw beads from it, and discover and create motifs of spiritual transformation—even new orders of manifesting community — from them.

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<sup>7</sup> See M. Friedman (1955), *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*. New York: Harper and Co., 133-148.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Friedman, *Ibid*.

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